



# DEAD OF NIGHT MAGAZINE



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*A Nursery of Evil and Unreason:  
Tales From The Witch - Haunted Wildwood*



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# The Hunters Of The Wildwood

"Suddenly I stop, but I know it's too late....  
I'm lost in a forest..All alone"  
'A FOREST' THE CURE



## ONE

'Okay, okay, fella, I know yer really into this stuff. That much I've managed to get me head round,' the three-parts drunk, one part smart arse, (or should that be the other way around - Read on, and feel free take your pick) slurred, displaying all the warmth and charm of William Hague stuck on the toilet with a terminal case of the trots.

We were standing at the bar in 'The Three Stags.' It was a little after eight on a Saturday night.. I was waiting for my good friend Ritchie to turn up and had barely sipped my first pint. Oi! slobby-gob here, who'd wobbled over from the beer garden and was wearing a too-tight, out-of-date Enger-land footy shirt, looked like he'd just about polished off his first barrel.

I'd recognised him straight away, of course. It was impossible not to. Everyone in the pub knew him. Hell, you probably do yourself.

You've met him before.

Sure you have...

He's the one who shouts out those hideously unfunny jokes during the Tuesday Night Pub Quiz (Latest Example; in answer to the question; "Where do Badgers live?" he positively screamed out; 'In a big hole in the ground,' and cackled fit to bust at the sheer quality of his own acerbic wit).

He's the one who always hassles the DJ to spin 'Living Next Door To Alice' by Smokie, just so he can yell 'Alice, Alice, who the FUUUCCCKKKK is Alice?' at the top of his lungs during the chorus, before grinning madly into the faces of the people stood within earshot (at a rough guess, I'd say half the population of Merseyside) as though

he, and he alone were the comic 'genius' who'd dreamt up *that* veritable side-splitter.

He's the one who is always the first to volunteer to sing Barry Manilow's COPA COPBANA' at the Kareoke, or to pretend he's been hypnotised when Alan Bates is in town, just so he can get to have whipped cream spread all over his naked torso, or else get dressed up in the most over-the-top afro-wig, platform soles and big-pocketey flares on a Seventies theme night. Even when said night has long since been cancelled.

Oh, you know him, alright.

He's a case.

A card

A real character.

And he's also the one you try desperately to avoid making eye contact with, should be unlucky enough to be stood alone at the bar, mentally cursing absent friends.

On this early September evening, however, not long after Summer had run away for another year, my fortune had plum deserted me.

I glanced at the clock on the far wall once more. It was 8:10. Still no sign of Ritchie. And meanwhile, in a voice so dull it could turn a peacock's rainbow feathers grey, my unwelcome companion waffled on regardless...

'Aah, I know yer get yet kicks writin' all that crap about Vampires an' Werewolves an' that spaceship thingy that was meant to 'ave crashed in er, Wosrell, or wherever the frig it was. Oh yeah, man, I know all that. That's sorted. That's laughin' (At this point, he offered me a great big slobbering grin, just to show how 'laughin' it really was).

I rolled my eyes Heavenward, wondering in true Hoddle-esque fashion, just what sin I'd committed in a previous life to be forced to endure such punishment.

'What I wanna know is, though, he continued, what is it that frightens *you* the most?'

I afforded myself a world-weary sigh, as if to announce to the world the birth of a new martyr. And I make no apologies for having done so. One of the questions that I am most frequently asked when I've finally gotten round to finishing another (hopelessly) belated issue of the humble magazine your currently holding, has been repeated so often, it's getting to be more than a just a tad monotonous. Things have gotten so bad, that just recently, I've almost felt compelled to make like one of those religious fanatics who are always predicting that the 'End Of The World Is Nigh,' don a homemade sandwich board, and march up and down the streets of Merseyside with a nicely printed list of

## 'THINGS THAT SCARE THE BEJESUS OUT OF ME!!!'

People seem to think that just because I enjoy writing about the kind of material that would admittedly, likely give most folks a case of the screamin' meemies, I must have developed some kind of immune system; a failsafe protection that shields me from fears both known and unknown.

Well, I 've got news for you, guys 'n' gals. I'm just as prone to a dose of the horrors as the next person. I could fill a whole magazine with examples of these things (and hey, who knows, perhaps it might be a good idea if I did. At least then this rag would get out on time and I wouldn't have so many disgruntled subscribers threatening me with a fate worse than that suffered by Mel Gibson aka William Wallace, at the end of 'BRAVEHEART'), but I guess I'll simply make do with the answer I gave to your friend and mine, propping up the bar at 'The Three Stags' .....

'Let me ask *you* something first,' I began, more than aware that my unwanted companion was scarcely able to conduct a half-way coherent conversation, much less answer a question. The cerebral motorway between his brain and his

mouth was plagued with with a major set of roadworks. In fact, he looked just about ready to fall headfirst into the magical Land Of Noddy-Blinky. But I went right ahead and asked him anyway. 'Have you ever read any Nick Hornby?'

'Course I 'ave,' he looked at me with half-lidded eyes, and attempted what I took to be a snort of derision, although I suppose he could just have been stifling a mother of all burps. 'Course I 'ave. He's that fat, sarcastic Stoke City fan from *'THEY THINK IT'S ALL OVER'*

I didn't bother to correct him. I merely nodded in agreement. 'Yeah, anyway, one of the things he seems to love doing in his novels, is to compile top ten lists of things, like say, his All Time Top Ten favourite records. Or his Best Ever Movies, or Footy Stars. Or his Greatest Ever Shag Behind The Tennis Courts in New Ferry Park...You get the general idea.

A grunt, that may have been assent, was the only reply.

'Well, I don't suppose a big established author like him is gonna be too concerned if I take a leaf out of his book, so to speak, and recite you my own personal Top Ten Things That Give Me The Screamin Ab Daba. You sure you wanna hear this?'

'Yeah, yeah,' Oi' Slobby-mouth grinned wolfishly, and I'd been struck by the thought that God, what could possibly be more terrifying than the prospect of an entire evening spent in this drunken sop's company? The crazy urge to suddenly emit an unearthly yell and point out the source of my fears, like Donald Sutherland in the re-make of *'INVASION OF THE BODYSNATCHERS'*, was all but irresistible.

'Okay, I said casting another sidelong glance at the wall clock, and wincing when I saw it was only 8:15, 'In the immortal words of Forry J. Ackerman' "You Axed For It!" 'Reasons To Have Nightmares - Ten To One;

'Plastic dolls with blank marble eyes that gaze through the dusty windows of the antiques store opposite Bebington Station.

'The ice-cold water of a remote Scottish loch, coloured a deadly shade of black sewn with white seams.

'The ghost of the madly leering nun rumoured to haunt the graveyard of St Andrew's Church

'Cavorting circus clowns with garish greasepaint make-up and blood-red lips, parted in a mirthless grin.

'Taking a piss at the edge of a clump of thick bushes on the way home from the pub, and hearing someone chuckle, muffled, secret in the midst of the rank undergrowth before me.

'A redundant scarecrow standing at a rakish angle as the wind blows across stubbled fields in the cold belly of winter.

'The maniac laughter of the *'Master Butcher'* figure in St John's Market. The grinning head that forever ticks from side to side, alternately glancing at the meat fork in one hand and the cleaver in the other.

'The memory of the boiler room at my old Junior School...The pipes that carried hollow echoes and reverberating moans, as if some huge mouth were breathing into them from above.

'The Victorian buildings that line Hamilton Square...The long, door-studded corridors, the rows of offices, empty after nightfall...Save for one, behind the door of which a man dressed only in a yellow oilskin mack and a sou' wester, is standing staring at a photograph of his smiling six-year-old-daughter, whilst he hums a hideously tuneless rendition of *'Bye Baby Bunting, Daddy's Gone-A-Hunting'*, and checks his pockets to make sure the razor-sharp scalpel is still there....

'Answering the shrill, maddeningly insistent ringing of a telephone late at night, and hearing only the faint sound of someone breathing on the other end of the line.

'Awaking in the dead hours before dawn, certain that someone is standing by my bedside...It's face, not quite human, level with the light switch, so that when I reach out to turn it on, my hand makes contact with a set of teeth, all slick and slippery-cool.

'A Venetian dwarf dressed up as Little Red Riding Hood.

'The baleful beams of a Demon moon.

'Standing stones with milky, cyclopean eyes.

'The eternal silence of infinite space....

'Oops, it seem's I may have exceeded the limit here somewhat, but what the hell, who's counting? The fact remains that this week's toppermost highest new entry, is straight in there at Number One with a bullet...As a consequence of the imminent arrival to these shores of what is reputed to be the scariest movie EVER!!!; *'THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT'*, 'it just has to be the path, little more than a dirt track, that winds its way through an all-but impenetrable forest...The Wildwood, marching off to some invisible horizon.

'And on either side of that path, a winding sliver of humanity in the midst of The Dark Primeval, all manner of things may lie in wait...'

I paused for breath, and for a few precious moments, my companion seemed at a loss for words.

The silence didn't last long, though. A puzzled frown gradually creased his brow and then he waved his hands dismissively, exhibiting (if you'll forgive the slightly *too* coincidental metaphor) the dim impatience of leaves twisting away from an Autumn wind.

'Yer mean to say, yer scared of a bunch of friggin' stupid trees. *That's* what frightens yer more than anythin' else? Christ Almighty, I've 'eard it all now. Yer off yer head, mate.'

Before I had a chance to reply, he stormed off, shaking his head and muttering under his breath, plainly bemused (and not a little disappointed) at the answer I'd given him. I allowed myself a spot of inward congratulation at having shaken him off so easily, and made a mental note to deliberately waffle on about all things tree-like should he ever again try to bore me rigid whilst I'm stood at the bar. Of course, it would have been a complete waste of time trying to explain to such as he the reasoning behind my greatest fear. The truth is, I'm not even sure I can satisfactorily explain it to myself.

I could try and drum up a smidgeon of cheap, dime-store psychology, and in a pseudo-Jungian stylee, state that my dread of the Wildwood, has its (a, and if you will, hem) 'roots' firmly entrenched in an inherited race memory, passed on by our primitive ancestors, who had good cause to regard the woods with trepidation, home as they were to all kinds of dangerous creatures, both real and imagined. Either that, or it has its origins, like so many other adult fears, based in the formative years of childhood; the still-powerful memory of a thousand scary faerie tales, mixed up with the all-too-real darkwoods of Storeton, Eastham and those that (to my mind at least) remain nameless, standing on the edge of the various caravan sites we visited during our annual holidays in North Wales.

I could try...

But, to be honest, I'd sooner skip the theorising, and the search for a nice, clean, logical answer, in favour of embarking upon an (all-too) brief overview of the Wildwood in fact and fiction, and leave it to you, Constant Reader, to draw your own conclusions.

We're going into some dark places, now. Try and stay close together.

It's easy to get lost. You can hardly see your hand in front of your face beneath these midnight boughs, but I think I know the way.

Let's just stick to the path.

If we can....

# UNDER THE GREENWOOD TREE

The first series of horror stories that I ever encountered, had such an effect upon me that they very likely went a long way towards providing the inspiration for the magazine that you hold in your hands right now.

I must have been about five years old, in my first year at Church Drive Primary School, when I came across the tales during Reading Class. The teacher, an attractive young woman with a blonde beehive hairstyle and a penchant for 'Mary Quans' mini-skirts, named Mrs Chandler, assured the assembled pupils that during our lessons with her, we would be presented with some of the most popular Faerie Tales of all time, and that we should listen closely as we were in for a real treat.

As it turned out, she was dead right.

The circle of normally fidgeting, inattentive kids sat in near total silence, whenever she opened up the doorstep-thick collection of stories and began to narrate. It seems to me now, that they were quite simply enraptured, transported en masse from the familiar confines of the classroom to some magical mythical realm. And, for a little while at least, we were lost to the eternal fascination of the struggle between the twin forces of Good and Evil.



I think, as we get older, (and become increasingly blasé about the all-too-real-life horrors that daily assail us in the newspapers and on the television screen) we tend to quickly forget that the vast majority of these stories were 'graced' (if that's the right word) with exactly the sort of fiendish cast you'd expect to find in an adult horror novel; Evil Dwarves, Flesh-eating Giants, Wicked Stepmothers, Fire-breathing Demons, Malevolent Faeries and Murderous trolls.... The list is positively endless.

Of course, such stories left a lasting impression upon me (not to mention a whole welter of sweaty-aftermath bad dreams) and doubtlessly helped shape my consuming interest in the supernatural in both the worlds of fiction and what passes for everyday reality.

And perhaps, looking back, the one that had the most profound effect upon me, concerned a heady combination of Parental child abuse, Cannibalistic Witches, and, overriding all, The Primeval Forest...identical to the densely-packed, black-green boughs of a million fireside

tales, from the Pine Barrens of New Jersey, to the Mirkwood of Middle Earth, from the tree-topped mound of Chantonbury Ring, to the Black Hills of Burkdtsville, Maryland.

The story of Hansel and Gretel, who lived on the edge of the ubiquitous dark forest together with their poor but intrinsically honest father and their cold-hearted, inherently wicked stepmother, had me enthralled for what seems now to be like the entire space of my Primary School days, and maybe even beyond.

It's kind of hard for me to put my finger on what it was precisely that captivated me so. Perhaps it was the never-far-away fear exclusive to children born into a large family forever struggling to make ends meet, that one or both of our parents, despite all the evidence to the contrary, may not truly love us, or that even if they do, they may not always be able to afford to look after us. Perhaps it has something to do with the childish ingenuity in the face of despair shown by Hansel; the trail of shiny white pebbles cast from his pockets as their father leads them into the very depths of the woods, where he intends to abandon them.

Maybe it's the myriad eyes that peer from the edge of darkness, beyond the campfires flickering glow, or the silvers of bony moonlight that slant down through the trees, glinting on the trail of pebbles.

Maybe it's the growing feeling of dread the children experience when faced with the disappearance of the breadcrumbs, a secondary guide home that becomes instead an unexpected feast for the woodland birds, or else the kid's increasing sense of terror as they get themselves hopelessly lost, with no real prospect of ever finding their way home.

Maybe it's a combination of all the above, but I think it's likely that my fascination with the tale has more to do with the children's stumbling upon the Gingerbread-Candy House and the wizened old hag who beckons them in to stay for a while....

The Witch, for such she is, of course, who feeds on children and locks Hansel up in an iron cage with a view to fattening him up for a date with the oven, is suitably terrifying; wrinkled face, hooked nose, snaggle-toothed grin and cackling laugh. Her only weakness is her short-sightedness, which proves to be her undoing. (And by the way, Readers, isn't their more than just a teensy slice of sick satisfaction in Gretel shoving her headfirst into the roasting oven, jumping for joy as the Witch is burned alive).

There may well be those amongst you who are, at this point, bowing to the infatigable wit and wisdom of your friend and mine; 'Olde Slobby-Gob, The Bar-Room Philosopher Of The Three Stags,' and shaking your head at my waffling unceasingly about a damn fairy tale - Something that should have long ago been consigned to the dustbin of childhood memory along with games of Conkers, 'Action Men' toys and 'Scooby Doo' cartoons.

But, hell, where have you been hiding for the past two months or so?

Haven't you heard of a mildly famous film called 'THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT'?

Well, where do you think the basic idea for that little chiller came from?

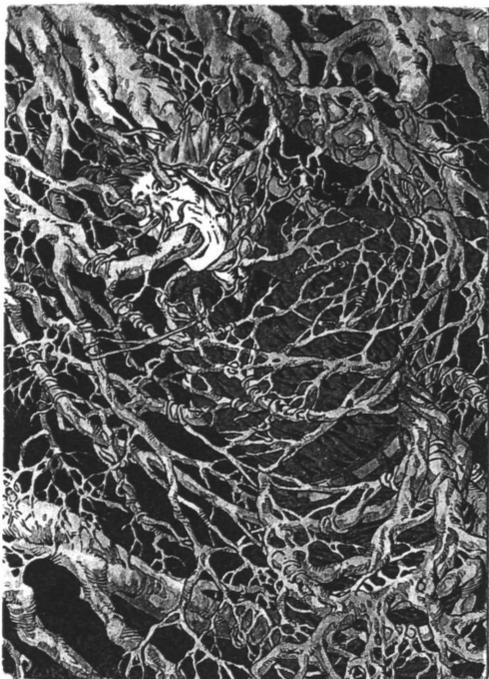
The Woods. An evil Witch. People growing increasingly frightened and lost with little hope of ever getting home. Sound familiar?

It seems then, that I'm not the only one haunted by the memory of a (undeniably powerful) story set out in the boondocks, maybe only a day or so's walk from the nearest road or habitat,, but a million miles removed from what passes for civilisation....

But there were at least two other sources of my inherent fear of the wildwood.

One was an article I first read back in the Autumn, nah, strike that, I prefer the American term; The Fall, of 1981, when I'd not long left school.

It was the leading piece in a magazine called '*THE UNEXPLAINED*,' penned by two authors named Toyne Newton and Hamish Howard and was entitled '*Under The Greenwood Tree*.'



The article dealt with the little-known (relatively speaking) Clapham Wood, situated, not as you might be forgiven for thinking, smack in the centre of London, but rather nestling in the midst of England's South Downs. It was the introduction that had me hooked straight away. Described by the writer's as '*a doorway from the real world into the beyond*,' Clapham Wood soon took on (to my mind, at least) the semi-mythical status afforded to areas associated with the paranormal; Loch Ness, Pendle Hill, Warminster, Heol Fenog, Chanctonbury Ring...

I spent many a rainy weekend afternoon poring over the piece, all the while dreaming of an expedition to West Sussex, jump a train down there in the Summer, investigate the place first hand. I remember I even told my then girlfriend; Jane Neal, that, together with a couple of friends I was going to spend a week or so camping in the woods. It's fair to say that she wasn't best pleased with this plan of action. I recall we once argued till the early hours at the drunken end of a session in 'The Railway Inn,' and at the height of the row she very nearly burst into tears, half-convinced that none of us would ever return.

I'm to blame for that, I guess. Although Toyne Newton and Hamish Howard, wherever they are, should be sharing at least some of the blame.

According to their article, you see, (which I'd had the bad sense to show to Jane, when she'd been pestering me for some scary stories one Hallowe'en), weird things happened in Clapham Wood, which, to quote the authors; '*Is a an area of mystery and intrigue, where stunted trees twist and writhe as if in pain*.'

They maintained that the district was rich in UFO sightings, Demonic manifestations, strange acoustic phenomena and (here's the thing that really put the wind up Jane), unexplained disappearances.

'If you go there, none of you's will ever come back,' she'd asserted in a voice that was tinged with such sincerity that I felt I could hardly have shouted her down.

I never went in the end. None of us did.

And if we were to resurrect the idea today, we'd likely be accused of trying to shamelessly rip-off the 'committed-to-video' exploits of Heather, Josh and Milky. But I digress. To return to the article, our intrepid reporters inform us that '*on a hill, above Clapham Village, as if protecting its parishioners from the dark woods beyond, stands the 13th Century Church of the Blessed Virgin Mary*.'

The former rector of this quaint, olde English Church, the Reverend Neil Snelling, was one those who is said to have vanished in decidedly mysterious circumstances. Apparently, he'd last been seen shopping in the nearby town of Worthing, and had elected to walk back to his home in Steyning, a journey that would have taken him right through the heart of Clapham Wood. He was never seen again.

To add to the eeriness of the locale, there is a crater, believed to have been caused by a wartime bomb, whilst others maintained that it was created a meteorite that fell to earth. Either way, nothing is said to be able to grow within the confines of the pit.

Even more disturbing are the reports that there are '*mysterious little clearings containing ruins of old cottages*.' Who built them, and why were they abandoned? These were just two of the questions that kept me awake on certain nights, when the wind whistled in the eaves and kicked at Autumn's debris piling up in the gutter.

You know, something's just occurred to me. Reading this back to myself now, I'm struck by the uncanny certainty that Messrs Myrick and Sanchez (the directors of '*TBWP*') must have read the piece in '*THE UNEXPLAINED*.' Either that, or else we've got ourselves a pretty strong case for life imitating art, here. Not only do we have the perennially dark woods beset with rumours of strange phenomena dating back countless years, the small village/town living in the shadow of its baleful presence, and a spate of mysterious disappearances...

We are also faced with an abandoned house, hidden away in the middle of the woods, owned by, get this, Cosmic Joke fans, an old woman, living alone, who was reputed to be a Witch!!!

She was shunned by the local community, and though '*smitten by the palsy*' was the official reason for her becoming a social pariah, it is considered to be far more likely, according to the author's, that '*the old woman of the woods was the victim of one of the Witch hunts that were so prevalent at that time*.'

Following a fairly lengthy discourse concerning the many UFO sightings in the locale, the author's recount tales of how many animals, including dogs and horses, have vanished without trace whilst walking, often with their 'owners,' in the woods.

There is a strangely haunting picture featured at this point. It's a photograph of a farmer, standing smiling into the camera, his aged Border Collie at his side. He reminds me of my Dad's father, Granddad Walker, with his kind, careworn face and friendly demeanour. He is bathed in the moonlight of a clear, windless January day. The sleeping fields of his farmland stretch away to the tree-lined horizon. The beginning of the woods, the bare branches clawing at the slate-grey sky...

Mr John Cornford, for it is he who is pictured, lost a collie in mysterious circumstances in Clapham Wood, and I feel more than a little sorry for him. But if I'm honest, there's a wistful kind of sadness reserved strictly for myself here, too. I miss my Granddad, even though he died when I was very young. I can still recall when he used to push me around Birkenhead Park and The Arno when I was a child in my pram, and the excitement-filled visits to each other's houses at Christmas, during the Summer Holidays and on my birthday.

It's hard to accept that all I have to remember him by is a faded colour photograph that used to hang on our living room wall, and is now granted pride of place in one of my dad's photo albums.

The snap is not all that dissimilar to that of the benign-featured farmer, and I find myself wondering if Mr Cornford has any grandchildren and whether they assist him tending his fields with the coming of Spring and help gather in the September harvest, or whether all they have to remember him by is a faded colour photograph that is now granted pride of place in one of their dad's photo albums....

I turn the page, and move on.

Oh, and here comes yet another coincidental (?) link between the world of fact and (supposed) fiction...The Clapham Wood enigma was investigated by a group of *soudents*.

The Southern Paranormal Group, run by Dave Stringer, visited the woods in August 1977, *'with an open mind and his Gelger counter.'* Whilst exploring the area known locally as The Chestnuts, he glimpsed a dark, indeterminate shape, about 12 feet in height, which he later described, appropriately enough, as *'a black mass.'*

He also encountered a large white flying disc, that suddenly shot out from behind a group of nearby trees. At the same time, the dark form; *'the nameless dread'* of some Lovecraftian nightmare, abruptly vanished. When he dared at last to take a closer look at the area where he'd sighted the phenomena, Dave discovered a *'four-toed imprint, twice the width of a man's foot but very narrow at the heel.'*

Dave made a rough sketch of the single footprint and later found, after indulging in a spot of research, that the imprint matched closely that of the Demon Amduscias, pictured in Colin de Plancy's classic *'DICTIONNAIRE INFERNAL.'*

Finally, and perhaps most chilling of all, Dave and two of his student friends re-entered the woods a couple of years later, in 1979.

As they made their way along The Chestnuts route, they all felt a unnatural coldness seeping into their bones. This otherworldly icy breath ceased the moment they left the area. Determined to track its source, they crossed the same vicinity a total of three times and on each occasion the temperature dropped dramatically.

Acting on impulse, one of the men, Paul Glover, aimed his camera at what he believed to be the epicentre of this phenomenon and fired the shutter. None of the group actually saw anything at the time. but later, when the photographs were developed, a smoky image of what appears to be a goat's head, the traditional symbol of The Devil, takes centre stage.

I used to gaze at this picture, feeling myself falling down the feathery slope of unreason as I did so.

And though there'd be arguments with myself as to the picture's authenticity, (the possibility that it could well be nothing more than a good example of simulacra - life imitating art, once again ) I'd invariably find that these inner-disputes, in the end, carried all the weight of ash-flakes from a distant bonfire....

The second source of 'wildwoodophobia,' occurred when I was just four months shy of my 11th Birthday. Mid-way through the school Autumn break, my Dad decided to get the kids out from under my mother's feet by taking Grant, Kearry, Dale and me for a walk in Storeton Woods, one of my Dad's favourite childhood haunts.

We set off on a still, overcast October morning weighed down with nothing more burdensome than a packed lunch and a couple of *'LADYBIRD BOOK'* guides to woodland plants and wildlife.

The journey from our hometown of New Ferry to the sprawling green countryside of Storeton and the surrounding area required a good two or three mile hike, but we all unanimously voted to make the trek on foot. Not for us the comforts afforded by a bus or train ride. No way. We were intrepid explorers keen to enter a vast, untamed wilderness that, to a child's eyes, seemed to stretch away into infinity.

My father, a regular Professor Challenger, had led the way into the woods, taking great delight in showing to us the Secret Places and Personal Landmarks that he remembered from when he was a kid, as well as pointing out the various species of wildlife, so that we could each of us make a note in our respective books.

It was the very grandest of times.

The type of day you pray will last forever - but which, all too soon draws to an end. And it seems no matter how much you manage to cram into those few sacred hours, still there remain so much that remains unseen, untouched and undone.

I'm sure that it was partly in an attempt to counter these feelings of imminent regret that, as the day wore on, Grant and I decided to climb one of the tallest trees in the whole of Storeton Woods - a giant Sycamore, whose highest branches were almost lost to sight in the afternoon gloom.

God, imagine the view from up there,' my Dad had muttered, doubtless speaking to himself. 'I bet you can see right across the Peninsula, all the way to the peaks of the Welsh Mountains.'

No sooner had the words escaped his lips than Grant had shot up the tree with all the agility of a gawky-nine-year-old, but with the self-confident sure-footedness unique to Spider Monkeys and and pre-teenagers who haven't yet been fully exposed to life's often cruel sense of humour.

I followed at a slower, more cautious rate after taking a sidelong glance at my father's face, etched with the twin-born expressions of pride at my younger brother's display of fearlessness and a wistful sadness that he himself no longer possessed the physique to climb up there and see the view firsthand.

Never having been blessed with a head for heights, I didn't dare look down again until I'd reached a point where the Sycamore's branches began to grow increasingly thin and fragile, and I wasn't at all certain that they would support my body, skinny as it was in those days.

Leaning back against the reassuring solidity of the tree trunk, I lowered my gaze to peek between my battered Billy-No-Make trainers.

And almost immediately wished that I hadn't.

I'd assumed that I was at most, only half-way up the tree and had willed myself to fight the unsettling feelings that come with standing suspended on the branches of a tree, high above the ground. But once I'd realised that I was in fact, only ten feet or so from the very top, I'd almost screamed aloud. The forest floor looked to be a million miles below me and it was kind of hard to shake the notion that in my efforts to prove myself to my father, I'd inadvertently climbed on to the very roof of the world.

I'd felt a too, a sudden stab of jealousy toward my brother and sister, safe on the ground. Shrunk to the size of *'ToyTown'* figures, they'd been scrabbling around looking for pine cones and conkers, and I found myself wishing with all my heart that I was down there with them.

And, if the truth be told, I was just about set to begin the long climb back down to terra firma when a sudden shout from somewhere just above me served as a reminder that Grant had continued climbing even higher.

'Oh yerrrrsss!!!' he yelled. 'You *can* see the mountains from here. C'mon have a look, Lee. You won't believe it, honest!!'

The unrestrained excitement in his voice caused me to tear my gaze away from the enticing scene below, and crane my neck to see how far above me my daredevil brother was. And my heart stopped as I saw that he was perched atop a branch that was so flimsy it barely looked capable of supporting someone half his size. As he stared out across a landscape that was invisible to me, his face lost in rapture, I could see that the branch was bending crazily beneath him like a dowsing rod that's just detected underground water.

I've often heard it said that sometimes, in the wake of a major disaster, a 'gifted' person will come forward and claim to have had a premonition about the tragedy, in the shape of a vision or a bad dream. I'm not sure whether I believe that is truly possible, but what I do know for sure is you didn't have to possess the 'gift' of second sight to predict what was going to happen in a matter of mere seconds to my brother, perched out on that treacherous bough. It was plain to anyone born with eyes to see.

And hot on the heels of *that* disconcerting fact, here came another, equally chilling; There was absolutely nothing either I, nor anyone else could do to prevent the inevitable.



That's not to say that I didn't at least try, of course.

In a voice choked with panic, I tried to call out to Grant, warning him to climb down quickly. He either chose to ignore my pleas, or else he didn't even hear me; his mind temporarily lost to the wondrous vision before him. I began shouting for my Dad, for what purpose, I can't precisely say, and it was then that I heard the sickening sound of wood snapping - a gut-wrenching noise that echoed in the still forest air like a pistol shot or a November firecracker.

And I'd known it was too late.

After that, everything seemed to happen in slow motion. I've always thought it strange the way your mind manages to record so much information in what amounts to no more than a few fleeting seconds. Storing it for future reference. Whether you choose to recall it or not.

I remember our Grant fell past me without uttering a single cry. He simply dropped into space as silent as a showroom dummy, his face a mask of almost comic - the amused/shocked expression of someone who has just opened up a gaily-coloured package and been confronted by a springing, cackling Jack-In-The-Box.

I remember his eyes were wide open and his pupils were impossibly large.

I remember his arms flailing wildly, like a marionette at the mercy of a demented puppeteer.

I remember the way his blonde hair was swept back from his forehead, providing me with a vivid flash of how he would look in twenty years time.

And most of all, I remember the brief disturbance of air, the tiniest breeze like the soft whisper of a baby's breath, as Grant's body plummeted to the waiting earth below.

When he hit the floor, I was sure he must be dead.

My Dad's anguished cries as he kneeled over the crumpled body of his son, erased any lingering doubts. I couldn't move a muscle. I only looked on, like a spectator in the theatre's back row, unable to tear his eyes from the heartbreaking tragedy taking place on stage.

It was only when my father screamed up at me to go and get some help that I was able to snap out of it and get myself moving again.

Although, even as I climbed back down, I was positive that Grant was entirely beyond help, I was glad to have something with which to keep my mind occupied. I knew it was only a matter of time before the hot floods of tears came, and once they started I knew they would likely never stop. And so I got moving.

I raced headlong through the woods whilst my Dad carried Grant in his arms and Kearry and Dale ran bewildered in his wake. I finally reached the edge of the seemingly endless banks of trees, stumbled onto the main road and managed to flag down the first motorist that I saw.

Two nightmarish hours later, when I'd finally succumbed to the held-back outpourings of grief, Grant was sitting up in a hospital bed, grinning like he'd just been told he'd won an all-expenses paid trip to 'Disneyworld'.

The doctors stated that he was probably saved from serious injury or worse by the carpet of fallen leaves, pine needles and damp earth. He was kept in for overnight observation, but aside from a lump the size of a duck-egg on the back of his head, he was perfectly okay.

I couldn't believe it.

None of us could.

It seemed too good to be true, and I was almost afraid to give voice to my heartfelt relief lest it tempt fate and prove false. He was back home the following day, and the incident was soon consigned to the Book Of Walker Family Folklore, a tale to be related around the Christmas tree, or upon the occasion of somebody's birthday.

And not long after that, it was all but forgotten.

But in my dreams...

In my dreams, the memory remains as vivid as ever. And worse, like a wound that's been left untreated, uncleansed, it began to fester and turn bad.

*The dream, when it came....*

*I'm climbing the tree in Storeton Woods. Grant is just above me. It's near dark and a howling wind dances among the remaining leaves of the Sycamore. It takes me all my strength just to cling onto the branches, and even as I struggle to do so, strips of brittle bark come away in my hand like the dried-out skin of something long dead.*

*Someone calls my name.*

*I look down.*

*There's nobody there.*

*It's just me, Grant and the Darkwood.*

*And the whispering voices of people of who aren't really there.*

*So I continue to climb. Grant tells me I won't believe the view from the top: The Welsh Mountains marching to the misted horizon. Rivers and streams, sunbright and sparkling. Farmer's fields, ripe for the harvest.*

*I hurry to join him on a branch that is impossibly thin and seems to be made of rubber. He smiles as I clamber up. Holds out his arms and points towards the valley below.*

*And finally, I see.*

*I see the Great And Wondrous View, revealed in all its glory.*

*The peaks of the mountains belching forth flame and thick, poisonous-looking clouds of smoke high into the air, turning the sky black and causing birds to fall in mid-flight. The rivers and streams, blood-red and teeming with silver fish, floating belly up.*

*The farmer's fields, filled with rotted Jack O' Lanterns and thorny bushes, drooping under the weight of their fruit that throbs and pulsates like something inside is trying to get out. And in the centre of every pasture a single scarecrow grins obscenely at the heaps of dead crows gathered at its feet*

*Grant suddenly shrieks wildly and then leaps from the tree, and I try to grab him but I miss and he lands on the deadfall below with an audible thump.*

*I peer down into the semi-twilight, and at first I can't see anything. And then I spot his body lying with its limbs hideously askew and I know that this time my brother must be dead, there was no way anything could be that shattered and still be alive.*

*And then his eyes flicker open, milky-white and pupilless, but glowing with a sickly luminescence. He smiles, revealing a set of jagged black teeth, and reaches out his twisted arms towards me, and although I'm 40-odd feet above him, I can feel the heat of his foetid breath on my face and hear his sibilant whisper as though he were stood right next to me; 'Come down and play with me, Lee,' he says. 'Come on and share the view.'*

*And then I know that it's not really my brother lying amidst the brown leaves and pine needles.*

*It's the Bogeyman. The Night Terror. The Thing That Gibbers And Capers In The Shadow-Filled Corners Of The Bedroom...*

*And having seen this dreadful realisation dawn, it begins to giggle, a sound like foul water burbling over dangerous rocks.*

*'Oh, I promise you, Bruv,' it says between the mirthless laughter. 'You'll never want to leave. Never EVER!!! It really is a view to DIE for!!!'*

*And then I'm falling*

*falling towards that moon-white upturned face*

*falling...*

*into the out-stretched arms of the malevolent dead*

*falling...*

*falling*

## THE PENDLE WITCH PROJECT

Whoops, did I say a little earlier that there were only two sources of Darkwood-inspired fear...

You'll have to excuse me, it seems I've somehow omitted a third point of origin, and I aim to rectify that forthwith.

Before we get to it, though, I'm afraid once again, I'll have to ask you to bear with me as we take the merest of sidetracks along the road named 'Shamelessly Self-Indulgent Nostalgia.'

I first heard of the legend of the Lancashire Witches when I stumbled upon a creased and battered copy of Harrison Ainsworth's classic novel of the same name, in some seedy second-hand shop in the centre of New Ferry. I read it one miserable, rain-swept Sunday afternoon, a few weeks before Christmas, and with the whole house seemingly asleep, I curled up on the sofa and lost myself in its faintly musty-smelling pages.

It was, without doubt, one of the most engrossing books I've ever read. And when, finally, I'd finished it, at school

some days later, I'd made myself a promise that I would one day pay a visit to the book's eerie, Witch-haunted setting; Pendle Hill.

In the meantime, I learned all I could about the characters involved in this real life horror story, and before too long, I'd managed to draw up a fairly concise picture of what had occurred in a time when superstition was rife and the reality of Witchcraft was accepted without question.

What follows, is an admittedly, condensed attempt to chronicle the tragic events that have long since passed into the misted realm of legend.



In the dark days of the early 17th Century, the whole of Lancashire was terrorised by the grim spectre of religious intolerance. Although the population was largely made up of Roman Catholics, the Protestants held all the aces, so to speak. This was, after all, post-Reformation England, and the bulk of those who adhered to the Protestant faith were either rich, fat cat landowners, or members of the local government. The fact that they formed the vast minority, inspired a kind of siege mentality, and they regarded their newly-elevated position as being somewhat precarious. As a result, they were quick to mete out severe forms of punishment to those whom they suspected of clinging too fervently to 'Popish and heathen practices.'

Little wonder then that the Jesuit ministers deemed it wise to conceal themselves in a variety of well-hidden 'Priest Holes,' several of which are still to be found in buildings dating from this period.

The apparent prevalence of Witchcraft in this region was also a major source of discomfort to the ruling classes. So much so in fact, that hot on the heels of passing The Elizabethan Witchcraft Act of 1563, the government deemed it necessary to rush out a further, more stringent act of parliament in 1604. It is perhaps true to say though, that the *real* catalyst for the outbreak of Witch mania that was to overtake the county in the year 1612, is a work of credulity and misperception on a par with the alien abduction tomes penned by Messrs Hopkins, Jacobs and Mack. Published in 1594, nine years prior to ascending to the throne, James I's treatise entitled '*DAEMONOLOGIE*'

has a lot to answer for. Featuring such pearls of knowledge and wisdom as; 'How To Tell If A Person Be A Witch Or Not' 'How To Locate The Witches Mark' and, most crucial of all, 'How The Practising of Sorcery is Considered To Be An Act Of High Treason Against The King.'

He also readily gave his blessing to the acceptance of the testimony of very young children and people of a decidedly less than honest nature when they chose to bear witness against suspected Witches.

Of course, once James was crowned King in 1603, he immediately began to put the whole gamut of these insanities into practice. In so doing, he callously opened the door to the Path Of Unreason.

The net result was that all of the power-mongers, con-merchants and crazy as a bedbug loonies came crawling out of the woodwork in a swarm of damn near Biblical proportions. And Witch-mania swept across the towns and hamlets of Britain like a veritable plague.

Suddenly, no one was safe from the accusations of self-appointed Witch-Finders; Farmers, landowners, even members of the clergy were labelled as potential evil-doers, and were more often than not charged with 'having unlawful discourse with Satan.'

And if you were unlucky enough to be an old woman or a person of ill-repute, you may as well have built yourself your own scaffold, placed your head in the noose and kicked the stool from under you...

At least by doing so you would succeed in sparing yourself the untold agonies of the torture chamber and the pain-induced confession that would inevitably follow.

In this atmosphere of deep mistrust and superstitious fear, it's not surprising that wild, out of the way places should acquire a sinister reputation.

The parish of Whalley, in East Lancashire, had more than its fair share of such desolate, Godforsaken areas. It was also home to a pair of rival families who, according to local tradition, had sold their souls to the Devil in return for magical powers.

The families were headed by a couple of hideous old crones, both of whom were widely believed to be fully-fledged Witches. One was a blind eighty-year-old named Elizabeth Sowthern, the other was an equally ancient-looking hag named Anne Whittle. They are better known by their local names, however; 'Old Demdike' and 'Old Chattox.'

They lived with their kinsfolk in the dark depths of Pendle Forest, and eked out a living by a combination of begging and poaching. Their very appearance was enough to inspire terror in all who beheld them, and some modern-day authors believe that Chattox and Demdike used this all-too apparent fear to their advantage. Certainly, their trade in selling rough and ready-made items was rendered a good deal more successful than would otherwise have been the case. After all, the people Pendle very likely assumed that when approached by either woman they were being made an offer they couldn't very well refuse.

Not unless they wished to run the risk of being made the victim of a deadly curse, that is.

During the Winter of 1612, Elizabeth Whittle, daughter of Old Chattox, was accused of theft from the home of Old Demdike. Elizabeth wound up spending some time in Lancaster Prison, but not before she'd taken the opportunity to make the allegation that the person who'd accused her, Alizon Device, (aged 11), and Demdike's granddaughter, was a Witch.

Alizon, seeking to absolve herself, blamed her grandmother for initiating her into a Coven against her will.

A tit for tat bout of allegation and counter-allegation then ensued with the result that both families were implicated in Witchcraft right up to their not-so-pretty-necks.

To cap it all, young Alizon had the dreadful absence of mind to curse a passing pedlar. She probably didn't mean for anything to really happen to him, but, as fate would have it, within a few minutes, and after having complained of severe pains in his legs, he collapsed to the ground unable to walk. What seems likely (from a logical point of view, anyway) to have been a stroke that was just waiting to happen, was described thus by one Thomas Potts, the Clerk of the Magistrates before whom she was duly brought to answer for her 'crimes.'

*'By the Devilsh art of Witchcraft his head is drawn awry; his eyes and face deformed; his speech not to be well understood; his thighs and legs stark lame; his hands*

*turned out of their course; his body able to endure no travail'*

Predictably, Alizon confessed to this crime, and almost inevitably, Old Chattox, Demdike, and certain members of their respective broods were also indicted on similar charges.

Demdike, it seems, freely confessed her guilt. Without interrogation she stated that she had been approached by an Evil Spirit whilst begging near Gould's Hey, in the Forest of Pendle, many years earlier. It appeared in the shape of a little boy dressed in a black and brown coat, and after telling her its name was Tib, promised her 'all that her heart desired,' in return for her immortal soul. Tib would often appear in the shape of a large brown dog that would suck blood from beneath her left arm. It assisted in the murder by Witchcraft of the child of Richard Baldwin, after he was said to have made serious threats against Demdike and her granddaughter.

Chattox wasn't quite as ready to admit to any amount of guilt, however. Instead, she set about heaping all of the blame on Demdike, who, she asserted, had all but dragged her kicking and screaming into the circle of Witches. She then accused Demdike and Elizabeth Device, who in turn accused Anne Redfearn, (Chattox's own daughter) of the murder by sorcery of a local land owner, Richard Nutter.

The magistrate, Roger Nowell, satisfied that there was at least *something* in the allegations, committed the four prisoners to Lancaster Castle to await trial.



*(Above): A contemporary woodcut depicting the Pendle Witches en-route to their Sabbat at Malkin Tower*

The remainder of the Demdike/Chattox families decided to bury their differences for once, and called an emergency meeting at a place known locally as Malkin Towe, the house of Elizabeth Device and her mother. The conference was set for Good Friday, April 10th, exactly eight days after the arrests of the family heads. A grand total of 17 'Witches' and three 'Warlocks' turned out for what has since been referred to as 'England's First Ever Witches Sabbat.'

The assembled sorcerors apparently plotted to kill Mr McCovell, the governor of Lancaster Castle, and to ensure the escape of their kinsfolk by blowing the building to smithereens. They also intended to christen the Familiar of Alizon Device, and to bewitch a Mr Lister, a resident of Yorkshire, who had caused trouble for one of the Witches present; Jennet Preston.

Their business concluded, they then, according to their own subsequent testimony, mounted his or her Spirit, which was in the form of a young horse, before quickly vanishing.

Once Roger Nowell was made aware of this plot, he immediately had nine more persons arrested and sent to the grim confines of Lancaster Castle.

Elizabeth Devise, James Devise (the simple son of Elizabeth and brother of Alizon), Jennet Devise, (James' nine-year-old sister), Alice Nutter of Roughlee Hall, Katherine Hewitt, alias 'Mouldheels,' and Alice Gray (both of Colne), Jane Bulcock and her son John, (both of Moss End), and Margaret Pearson of Padiham, were all locked into seperate cold, dank cells.

Many others were never apprehended however, and made good their escape.



Before the assizes, Old Demdike passed away in the Well Tower of the castle. The rest were brought to trial after the evidence of Jennet Devise (who was only nine-years-old, you'll recall) was read out loud to the court. She related a whole list of crimes including, 'Devilish practices, meetings, consultations, murders, charms and villainies.'

Elizabeth Devise eventually confessed to murdering three persons by Witchcraft, and of making a clay image at the behest of her Familiar, a dog named Ball.

Though she denied plotting to blow up the castle, her case wasn't helped any by the fact that she was cursed with a physical deformity that had one eye looking up, the other down; an incontrovertible sign that she possessed the 'Evil Eye.'

The trial of the Pendle Witches was presided over by Judge Sir Edward Bromley. There were eleven defendants in total; Anne Redfearn, Elizabeth Devise and her two children, Alizon and James, Katherine Hewitt, John and Jane Bulcock, Isobel Robey, Margaret Pearson and Alice Nutter. The eleventh was the first to be arraigned; Old Chattox (so-called, incidentally, because her lips were always 'chattering' when she walked). Her daughter, Anne, had apparently been insulted by Robert Nutter, and she had exacted a terrible revenge upon him. She was further charged with having bewitched the drink of one John Moore, and had produced, without the aid of a churn, a quantity of butter from a dish of skimmed milk...

Knowing the situation was hopeless, she admitted her guilt in an ultimately vain attempt to spare her daughter.

Elizabeth Devise was accused of killing John and James Robinson and Henry Mitton. The first had called her a 'strumpet' and the last had refused to give Demdike a penny after she'd begged him for charity. She apparently worked her magic by modelling clay images and inserting pins and other sharp objects into them. James Devise was charged on the evidence of his child-sister of killing by sorcery Anne Towneley.

He also told a decidedly weird story about how he's stolen the Communion Bread on Maundy Thursday, and when he'd gotten home a hare had approached him on its hind legs and politely asked for his bread. James had crossed himself, whereupon, the hare had duly vanished.

In spite of his co-operation in supplying the court with the names of the people present at the Malkin Tower Sabbat, and the fact that he was extremely ill, (so ill in fact, that he was unable to stand up in court) he was still convicted on

the Indictment laid against him, and was sentenced to death. Anne Redfearne however, was cleared of the murder of Robert Nutter...But, in response to the indignation of an angry mob, who were plainly not best pleased with the returning of this verdict, she was promptly charged with the bewitching of his father, Christopher Nutter. Of this offence she was all-too predictably convicted.

Alizon Devise was found guilty of utilising Witchcraft to lame the pedlar, John Law.

John and Jane Bulcock, despite their protestations of innocence maintained in a firm not guilty plea, were sentenced to death for 'bewitching to madness' Jennet Deane. Katherine Hewitt was charged both with being present at Malkin Tower, and the murder of Anne Foulds' a child of Colne.'

One of the strangest aspects of the whole trial was the curious Indictment of Alice Nutter, mother of the dead Robert Nutter. Unlike the other defendants, she was a rich, well-disposed woman who owned a large estate. How someone of such social standing came to be implicated in the murder of Henry Mitton by Witchcraft, and of having attended the Malkin Tower meeting on the flimsy evidence of Jennet Devise, is certainly a mystery. She was however, sentenced to death just the same.

Isobel Robey pleaded not guilty to bewitching Jane Wilkinson and Peter Chaddock, and for these 'crimes' she too was sentenced to death.

The judge, in passing sentence upon the ten convicted prisoners said; 'You, of all people, have the least cause of complaint; since on the trial for your lives there hath been much care and pains taken; and what persons of your nature and condition were ever arraigned and tried with so much solemnity? The court hath had great care to receive nothing in evidence against you but matter of fact. It is impossible that you, who are stained with so much blood, should either prosper, or continue in this world, or receive reward in the next. For the bewitching to death 'by Devilish practices and Hellish means,' 16 inhabitants of Pendle Forest, they were sentenced to be hanged on August 20th, 1612. Only Margaret Pearson escaped the gallows. For her crime of magically killing a mare, she was mercifully (?) sentenced to stand in the pillory at Clitheroe, Padiham, Whalley and Lancaster on four consecutive market days with a piece of paper stuck to her head, outlining her offence...And then, she had to spend a year in prison, just for good measure.

That we know so many details of this case is due to Thomas Potts, the lawyer who published a chapbook entitled; 'The Wonderful Discovery Of Witches In The County Of Lancaster.'

Within its pages, we are priviliged to see, all too clearly, that the unsupported testimonies of senile old women, half-witted children, and a highly credulous, ill-educated populace were accepted as Gospel truth by a judicial system clearly intent upon chucking that famous edict of law that states; 'A person shall be innocent until proven guilty,' right out of the nearest court house window.

Don't believe for one moment however, that the traditional belief in Witchcraft and its Evil practitioners has *entirely* been eradicated in the Pendle area. Even today, the locals talk in hushed tones of poisoned farmer's fields that are never cultivated because they've been cursed by Witches. Of buildings haunted by people who have committed suicide rather than fall victim to a sorcerers spell. Of 'things like a hare that can never be caught.' And of a 'foul yelling, like unto a great number of cats,' emanating from the sunless depths of the surrounding forest.

And still it is rumoured that when darkness falls upon the cobbled streets and wild, windswept hills of Pendle, the restless ghosts of Witches walk once more.....

# Shadows Over Pendle

## *Images And Words From The Lancashire Witch Country*

Before heading off to the old village of Pendle itself, it's certainly worth making just the slightest of detours into the beautiful, not to say historic, city of Lancaster. Its endlessly twisting backstreets, Victorian-style lighting and dark flights of stairs leading up to ominous-looking buildings straight out of 'THE EXORCIST.'

It's also home to the famous 16th Century castle, where the suspected Witches awaited their grossly unfair trial and eventual death sentence.

The photograph below depicts the impressive main entrance to the castle. The building itself is still very much in use as a modern-day prison, although, so far as I know, suspected Witches do not feature among the prison's inmates...



(Below): The awe-inspiring view of Pendle Hill from the centre of the picturesque village of Colne. Time really does seem to stand still here. The authors visited the place on a suitably overcast Sunday afternoon and we were immediately struck by the caught-breath silence, the sedate pace of country life, and the hard-to-shake feeling that nothing much had changed here for centuries. The village is also the birthplace of two convicted Witches; Katherine Hewitt (aka 'Mouldheels') and Alice Gray



(Below): St Mary's Newchurch-In-Pendle, built in 1544, at the very heart of the tiny hamlet.

From this very churchyard, Old Chattox was said to have taken 'three scalps of people which had been buried, and then cast them out of a grave, and tooke eight teeth out of the said scalps,' for use in ritual magic.

The place is certainly blessed (if that's the right word) with a pervasive sense of history, of lives long since lived, and of families and relatives gathered together in the hope of ensuring salvation within the walls of ancient brick and timber.

And of something else....

Something indefinable.

Intangible.

As shapeless and formless as a trick of the knife-edged shadows that had no business being where they were...But undeniably real for all that.



(Below): The traditional Witch-on-a-broomstick weather vane is probably erected here at least, with one eye set upon the ever-increasing tourist trade. This one was perched atop a set of stables at the head of the footpath that leads to the base of Pendle Hill

(Below): *'The Witches Galore'* store smack in the midst of what passes for a town centre, is a delightful mixture of the genuinely bizarre and the downright commercial. Well worth a visit, but don't step across the threshold expecting to find anything remotely antique. This is mostly for plastic monster and 'Wanda The Wicked Witch' lovers only.



(Above): The fear and concept of Witchcraft is still very very much alive in Pendle. The Horseshoe (the author's found this one hung upon a stable door in the centre of the village of Colne) has long been revered as a protective amulet against the forces of Evil. This is thought to be because cold iron has always been considered to be of Divine origin since it comes from the sky, and it is also a symbol of the Moon and fertility Goddesses Diana and Hecate. The acorns and the owl have been included here because Oaks were formerly worshipped by the Druids, and are said to protect buildings from lightning strikes. The owl, on the other hand, is said, according to folklore, to possess 'Witch-banishing' qualities. Its skin, nailed to a barn, or stable door, will, it is hoped, keep 'The Servants Of Twilight' at bay.

# THE CURSE OF THE BLAIR WITCH



## A Nursery Of Evil And Unreason

A decidedly unsteady Steadicam camera wends its way in slo-mo through a monochrome woodland, the trees stripped almost bare in the dying days of the Fall.

The female narrator announces in suitably sonorous tones that; *'In February, 1785, in the people of the township of Blair, Maryland, accused Elly Kedwards of Witchcraft. She was found guilty and banished in the middle of Winter. It was assumed that she died of exposure.'*

*'The following year, all of her accusers, and half the town's children, had vanished. Fearing a curse, the entire township fled as soon as the weather broke... And vowed never to utter the name; Elly Kedward, again.'*

The camera suddenly veers off to include a rapid selection of images; a blood-red, tree-lined horizon, a sprinkling of stars, wooden beams standing at impossible angles, the boughs of the forest shot in negative, and water dripping into a stagnant pool.

The only soundtrack is a discordant violin, drums that clank like machinery and the sound of children's screams. And then the screen goes black, save for the white of the numerals; 1994.

And we are introduced to Heather Donahue, one of the student filmmakers, soon to embark upon a doomed odyssey into the depths of the Black Hills above Burkittsville.

She is standing in one of the rooms of her typically suburban, middle-town American home, posing for the video camera.

*'This is my home,'* she tells us, hands behind her head. *'Which I am leaving the comfort of for the weekend to explore the Blair Witch.'*

The scene slowly dissolves and Michael DeCota, a white-haired, bearded Montgomery College Film Professor, gives us his opinion of Heather, interspersed with shots of his former pupil at work and play.

*'She was probably one of the two or three best students that I've had the pleasure of teaching. She was committed. She was energetic. She was very creative.'*

*'She was someone who reminded me of myself at that age. She was looking to develop and find her voice. Plus she was*

*interested in documentaries, echoing my own interest in documentaries.'*

Rachel Merger, one of Heather's best friends at the college tells of how they first met at high school and starred in a local production of *'ROMEO AND JULIET.'* A programme for the play that took place at Wheaton High School, and a stunning picture of Heather, in a dazzling blue cocktail dress are shown. The impressions these images leave are of a lively intelligent girl, standing on the edge of adulthood, the future stretching before her like a fabulous chest of bright dreams.

The good professor interjects to state that Ms Donahue had approached him in mid-April, 1994, with a proposal for a documentary entitled; *The Blair Witch Project.'*

*'The legend of the Blair Witch was something that I had never heard of, to tell you the truth,'* he readily admits, but the locals of Burkittsville, it seems, have longer memories. One resident, interviewed by Heather, appears on film, and is quick to confirm that the legend dates back many, many years. Michael DeCota, now fully-updated on the story, relates that *'The legend had developed in this area over the course of a couple of centuries. Whenever a particularly bad sequence of events happened in this community, there seemed to be blame it on The Blair Witch.'*

*'She was apparently a woman who had been cast out* (and here we see a contemporary ink sketch of a crowd of people ushering an old woman into exile amidst the snow-covered woods) *'during the Colonial Era, as a Witch'*

*'It seemed like a great opportunity to interview people who had been passing down this legend for a couple of centuries.'*

At this point, we get to meet the second member of the film crew, Joshua Leonard, (a dead-ringer for the lead singer of those one-hit wonders; *'THE SPINDOCTORS'*).

*'Joshua was more like,'* the professor states, a little wearily. *'He thought it would be cool to be in the film business. He was not willing, I don't think, to do the kind of work that was really necessary to develop a voice. I think Heather and Josh were sort of polar opposites in a lot of ways. But clearly, they liked each other.'*

*'They collaborated on several projects together. I mentioned to her a couple of times that I was concerned at some of the negative aspects. At his lack of energy and commitment which would, perhaps, be negative for her. But it turns out that they did like working together.'*

Lisa Toller, Josh's girlfriend, didn't share the team's enthusiasm for the Project;

*'It didn't really go over too well, because I remember we fought about it before he left. I mean, I feel really badly about that now, I mean, we argued horribly. But I just had this feeling that I didn't want him to go off with her, (Heather). There was just something about her that rubbed me the wrong way. It was just instinct, I guess.'*

A clip from the student's footage is screened; Josh filming the first night's camp site in the middle of the woods. Heather stating that she is pleased with the way the documentary is progressing, and that she is pleasantly surprised by *'our little Mikey.'*

She is referring, in patronising tones, to the third member of the team; Mike Williams, who, scowling, is clearly not best pleased at being labelled with that less-than-flattering moniker.

His brother, Tom, informs us that when he was a little (here's that word again) kid Mikey was a pain in the proverbial butt; *'The Devil With A Halo. He was that kind of character.'*

*'The last night I saw him, he was really excited. He was really happy with himself. He came into the house, all packed and ready to go the next day. We sat down, had a*

*cup of coffee together, and we talked about the whole thing. He really didn't know too much about it. That's what they were going to find out.*

*'But it was something that he really felt he loved doing. You know, doing the sound equipment stuff, and I just told him to go out there and be happy.'*

A second clip from the recovered footage; The all three members of the team, leaving the car behind, parked in a shaded lay-by. They each of them hoist the straps of their heavy-looking backpacks onto their shoulders. Mike asks whether they have to go up to the shack, the shanty? Heather, filming, answers yes. Josh exclaims 'Wow!' in tones of mock excitement.

'Oh my God, this is great,' Heather near-whispers to herself, as she shoots a backward glance at the car that's brought them to this point. It's almost like a last goodbye to the comforts of what passes for civilisation in modern-day America....

The screen fades to black.

A TV newsman; Joseph Nagy, from '11 NEWS,' announces that *'the search for the three missing Montgomery college students continues tonight, as dozens of volunteers and state officials join local forces in what has now become a full-scale search of the Black Hills area.'*

Minette Marcial, another broadcaster, from 'NEWS AT 6,' states that *'Local officials, combined with over 100 search volunteers, have failed to come up with any signs of the three missing filmmakers...'*

Another snippet of actual footage shows the group lost in an argument over a map of the locale they are supposed to be surveying for the Project. The feeling that they are well on the way to becoming lost, in a more literal sense, is increasingly hard to shake.

Here's Michael DeCoto, once more; *'I have since harboured some guilt because as I looked back over the proposal later, I realised that I had neglected to notice that Heather had suggested going into the woods for a couple of days, working on the film.'*

The female narrator informs us, rather unnecessarily given what we've already seen for ourselves, that the only piece of evidence found by police was Joshua Leonard's car, parked on Black Rock Road. Ronald Cravens, the Burkittsville Sheriff, claims that they checked the by now leaf-covered vehicle thoroughly, but found not the slightest clue as to the whereabouts of the three missing students.

Minette Marical then announces that, after ten days, the search has been called off, but that the families and friends of Josh, Heather and Mikey, were clinging to the hope that someone or something would provide some answers.... And here comes Dottie Fulcher, a local resident who just happens to have her own theories as to the mysterious disappearances.

*'Well, when the story turned into a really big story, I went to the sheriff's office and I tried to talk with him. And he's really been no help. I mean, joined the search party. I called when we didn't find anything on the search party, and I told him I thought we should still keep looking, because I know that there are clues out there. And I still go out. And I still look. And I know there's something out there. He's talked to me a few times, but he doesn't wanna hear anything that I have to say.'*

Including, it seems, the following letter that she wrote to the increasingly-frustrated sheriff;

Dec 12th, 1994

**Dear Sheriff, Craven,**

*I have tried repeatedly to reach you on the phone, but you have not returned any of my calls.*

*You and I both know the history of Burkittsville and the events that have earned our town its peculiar reputation. Past events have proven that something Evil resides in the Black Hills that surround us. The same Black Hills that those three young people hiked into a few months ago, and never came back home.*

*The Blair Witch is alive and well Sheriff Craven.*

*I urge you to look to the past for the answers you seek.*

*Sincerely, Dottie Fulcher*

*'They won't tell me anything,' Dottie sighs wearily. 'That's why there's this feeling that I have that they know more than they're willing to talk about.'*

*'I think they don't want to admit that they saw her and that she's there. You know, Elly, is not very far from any of us at any time, and she chooses her time to appear.'*

*'They just don't want to acknowledge that.'*

The screen fades to black once more. This time, it's the words; THE ORIGIN, that stand out stark against the background...

A segment from a cheesy, circa 1971 paranormal programme called 'MYSTIC OCCURENCES,' (complete with kitsch, 'video nasty' style music) features a male Witch who dresses like some hip'n'cool cat from 'THE PARTRIDGE FAMILY.'

With his shirt open to reveal the hairiest chest this side of Richard Keyes and a set of golden medallions that would shame Big Ron Atkinson, the Warlock In Tinted Sunglasses informs us that *'Witchcraft is basically a science. You have a delineation between paganism or polytheistic religions; more than one God, and Witchcraft, which is a scientific study of energies and materials.'*

*'Wiccanism is a new religion. And what you've gotta understand here, man, is we lost most of the records of what would be considered Witchcraft throughout the latter part of the 17 to 1800's. And a lot beforehand during the Burning Times, as we refer to it.'*

An old Hammer-esque film clip plays as he talks. A group of puritans and angry villagers gather round the house of a suspected Witch, firebrands at the ready. It is the time of the Salem Witch Hunts, and the mob are keen to mete out swift, summary justice.

The stake, piled high with kindling, awaits...

Another Professor, Charles Moorhouse, who specialises in folklore at Hampshire College, is wheeled in to remind us that by the American War Of Independence, the Witch Trials had largely died out. Aside from in the more rural areas, that is. *'Here we still had a lot of superstition amongst the populations, and people still practised Witchcraft. Two examples come to my mind... One being the 1786 case of The Blair Witch Of Maryland. The other being The Bell Witch of Adams, Tennessee, of 1817. Now, while both of these cases are interesting academically, I find the Blair Witch Of Maryland, the most colourful.'*

One person who would agree with that wholeheartedly is Heather Donahue. She appears in another couple of pieces of footage, one in the woods where she professes not to know whether or not The Blair Witch exists. And secondly, as part of the introduction of the planned (never-to-be-fully realised) documentary during which she narrates; *'This is Burkittsville, formerly Blair.* The lettering on a signpost says;

Welcome to the historic Village of  
Burkittsville 1824

Heather continues; 'It is a small, quiet, Maryland town. Much like a small, quiet town anywhere. (and now, she stands at the edge of a wide open cemetery, on a bright, sunlit afternoon. The headstones, some stark in their simplicity, others adorned with fancy carvings and statues of Angels, stretch for as far as the eye can see)

'No more than twenty families laid their roots here over 200 years ago. Many of whom remain, either on this hill. Or in the town below.

'There are an unusually high number of children laid to rest here, most of whom passed in the 1940's. Yet no one in the town seems to recall anything unusual about this time. Not to us, anyway.'

Yet legend tells a different story. The evidence is all around us.

'Etched in stone.'

Her words to the camera are drowned out by one Bill Barnes, Burkittsville's very own historian, seated in his office.

'Burkittsville was founded upon the site of Blair, in 1734, to protect the Western Approaches to Baltimore, from attack by the Indians, and so forth. But it died out because of a Witch.

'Her name was Elly Kedwards, and she took a bunch of the children, kidnapped them, carried them off into the woods, and they never found them again. The people became very afraid and they pulled up and left, and abandoned the town.

A watercolour depicting a hideous, ghost-faced, hooded figure clutching a terrified child flashes up on the screen.

A registry, one of the few documents that survive from the period, makes mention of a seafaring vessel that numbered amongst its passengers; a woman by the name of Elly Kedwards. In the Summer of 1769, it appears she sailed from Ireland to Baltimore aboard the clipper ship; 'The Reliant.'

Here is Charles Moorhouse, again; 'The Blair Witch story, begins like all other Witch stories and legends, with an old haggard lady. In this particular case, she was a Catholic living in a predominantly Protestant community.'

The Ray-Ban donning Witch from the 70's returns to add his tuppence worth... 'The story goes that she (Edwards) had bled a few children, no more than pinpricks, probably because of some sort of illness that she had detected or something to that effect.

'The children went back, reported it to their parents, At that time, this was taken as an early sign of Witchcraft. She was tried, summarily convicted and banished. The weather when she was banished was supposedly the worst ever and no one knows what happened to her. She was left out by herself in the woods.'

We see a black and white engraving that shows the poor unfortunate woman (at that stage, at least, tied to a cart out amongst the trees.

Contradictorily, Mr Moorhouse is of the opinion that 'They blindfolded her, took her out into the woods, tied her to a tree, and left her, where she soon succumbed to the elements.

'The following year, the lady who was her first accuser, and most of the others accusers, who happened to be children, vanished throughout the course of the Winter.

'Well, immediately, the townspeople blamed these disappearances on Elly The Witch. The people simply vacated the area. They left. They abandoned the community and they never spoke about the incident again.'

A contents of a letter dating from this terrible time are narrated by an actor; 'As he related to me, he had lived in a small town forty miles to the north. The place had been abandoned, he told me, as it had come under a curse. The well-built homes that had stood there were boarded up and

empty, with no sign as to why their denizens had chosen to leave so abruptly.

'This man had heard that the town had been cursed by a Witch, and he claimed that he had seen a cemetery full of the gravestones of children. Now, whether that is true or not, I could not say.'

In 1809, a rare book, with a horrendously garish, green-coloured cover, was found. Entitled; 'THE BLAIR WITCH CULT,' it dealt with the occurrences said have taken place in the area. This work is supposedly a true series of first-hand accounts that illustrate the effects of the alleged curse that had befallen the town of Blair.

'The book, says Mr Moorehouse, 'is filled with blood-letting, all sorts of bloody gore, Witchcraft, Paganism... Basically, it's a pack of lies. Don't believe any of it.

'But the people of the time did believe in it.'

An excerpt is read, for the viewer's delectation; 'The awful hag wrenched the boy's head from his writhing body and defiled the church with his warm blood. It was then, that I noticed that a dog's test had sprouted from her leg. She controlled the animals of the forest. (Oh, and here's something mighty important, for all those sceptics out there who voiced doubts as to how it was possible for the three filmmakers to get so hopelessly lost in modern-day America, Ed) 'Even the trees seemed to do her bidding,' (like they conspired to lead Heather and her two companions a not-so-merry-dance into the heart of nowhere - save for an old abandoned house that shouldn't even be there, seeing as how it burned down in 1941???) .

'When she walked, she didn't touch the ground. And her followers (the forefathers of Rustin Parr?) made a horrible mulch of the countless dead littering the street.'

We move on 38 years...

The town of Burkittsville was founded almost by chance, it seems. A railroad was being built through the area when the man in charge of the operation got himself lost, (an occupational hazard, one might be forgiven for thinking, in this locale).

He stumbled upon an old road that led directly into the centre of what was formerly Blair. This man had a friend named Mr Burkitt, who just happened to be a property developer. A conversation ensued between the tow of them, not long after the unnamed man had safely negotiated his way back to civilisation, and the upshot of that was, Mr Burkitt decided to found a new town on the site of the old. He christened it Burkittsville, after himself.

'It was actually founded in 1824, our old friend, Mr Bill Barnes, recounts. 'Round about a year after that, the crops had come in and they decided to have a picnic down by the local creek...'

An excerpt from a contemporary journal is read out;

August 31st, 1825

*Fappy East Creek has been possessed by a Demon. Since Eileen's horrible death a week past, the creek has been polluted by a foul oil and an abundance of strange totems.*

*Mary Johnson, 1825*

Dr Moorehouse is called upon to fill in the details of this enigmatic diary entry.

'There was an incident that occurred involving a young child, a girl named Eileen Treacle. This little girl was playing in a very shallow stream of water and she somehow drowned.

*'The creek was awful shallow... Only six to eight inches deep, a child could quite literally crawl across in complete safety. But according to the story, there was twelve witnesses who observed a ghostly white hand come up out of the water and drag the child under the water.*

*'Nobody ever remembers seeing a face or a body, all that they can recall is the arm and the hand. And before they could get to Eileen, she (Elly) had pulled her down. She had gone under the rocks and the mud and everything was calm again.*

*'It may well be, however, that the explanation for the girl's death may lie more in the more prosaic realms of parental neglect. Eileen may have fallen into the water when her parents weren't looking.*

*'Whatever the truth of the matter, though, this is the first case in recorded history, of a death being directly blamed on the Blair Witch.'*

News of this tragic incident reaches the major town of Baltimore, and provokes the following reaction in the correspondence pages of a local newspaper;

Dear Sir,

*I find myself forced to write this letter upon the atrocity I found within your pages this Sunday past. I have never seen such callousness shown towards the death of a young child. Especially one who was taken from this world in such a terrible manner.*

*As to your humorous view of the beliefs of her parents that she was murdered by a Ghost, I remind you that there have been many reports of such terrible spectres witness in the nearby townships. Whether or not these wild tales are true is incidental. The fact remains that a young girl has tragically drowned and her memory should not be tarnished by such wild and torrid speculation over the manner of her death.*

*Sincerely, Eugene Robertson*

*'The river, according to accounts related at the time, was filled with sick figures for the whole of the week following Eileen's death,' our '70's Witch relates. 'No one could use the water for washing or drinking or anything like that, it's totally unusable.*

No one would go near the Creek for months afterwards. Cattle that drank at the stream died in mysterious circumstances, and the whole area was once more believed to be cursed.

The screen goes black yet again...

It's 1886.

Time to for a rendezvous with Coffin Rock.

Bill Barnes remembers that there used to be a lady in town when he was little more than a boy, aged round about fifty. She told him (and there's a portrait of this woman, and stone me, don't it look the spitting image of Ms Heather Donahue as a child? - Ed) that when she was a young girl she was walking in the woods one day, when a strange lady appeared before her. According to the tale she had to tell, the woman wasn't walking, but was quite literally floating

in the air above her. She led her by the hand to an old house (Parr's domain?) back in the woods. Once there, they headed down to the basement (yep, guess it must be the one and only), she left her there and said she'd be back later. The little girl, amazingly, waited there for several hours (perhaps whilst Elly was busy looking for another victim to get to face the wall?) but she eventually grew scared as the daylight seeped from the sky, and managing to crawl through a window, she ran back to town.

In the meantime, however, a search party had been organised to head for the woods in a bid to find the missing girl.

Dr Moorehouse gives his opinion on what happened next; *'What is strange about this case is that the first search party that had gone out to find the little girl had themselves vanished. When this party failed to turn up, a secondary group of volunteers traipsed out into the woods to find them. What they found instead, was a massacre.*

*'The bodies of the men had been laid out on a flat rock in the woods. They had been disembowelled. And on their faces and hands and feet there were carved strange Pagan symbols.*

*'They were heavily cut in by the ropes, so they were alive when they were tied up. Somebody had disembowelled them and cut crudely formed letters into their foreheads.*

*'The sight scared the second search party pretty badly, as it would anyone.'*

Even stranger was the fact that bodies were in an inexplicably advanced state of decomposition. And when the second search party got the hell out of there to summon up a whole lot more help, and later returned to the site of Coffin Rock, there was absolutely no trace of any of the bodies.

But they could all still, quite clearly, smell the unmistakable aroma of death hanging in the air, as cloyingly pungent as flowers rotting in a charnel house.

We then leap forward another sixty odd years, for the cycle, (much like the chain of dreadful events that haunted Derry, Maine, until the Loser's Club raced to beat the Devil in the form of a clown-cum-spider during the flash floods of '85) to begin again.

In a genuinely creepy sequence of black and white footage, we see a prison guard, club stick raised standing outside a cell. The camera moves upwards to track a group of black-suited individuals, who it transpires are gentlemen of the press, crossing a landing in the company of uniformed guards. They pass through a connecting door in single file, and once they have stepped over the threshold, a balding screw slams the door shut behind them.

Flashbulbs pop as they snap their pictures of someone sitting in an isolation cell. He his facing away from the camera, at first. He appears fairly non-descript, head down, as if burdened by guilt.

But then he looks towards the journalists, as if he'd only just become aware of their presence, and he flutters his eyelids coyly, like an obscenely feminine come-on, and smiles a sickening, smile.

The screen fades to black. It's 1940.

Welcome to the hellish world of Rustin Parr, serial-killer of children.

A civilian witness is interviewed by Heather, and has this to say;

*'I remember Mr Parr, was an old hermit. He lived up on the mountain. He had a place up there that's been there for a longlongtime.*

*'In the Winter of 1940, some of the young kids started to disappear, and nobody knew why they were disappearing. Finally, one day old Mr Parr came down into the market and said; "I'm finally finished." What he meant by that, well, I guess nobody knew at first, but the police finally went up on the mountain, and they searched his house.*

*"They found the bodies of seven kids from the area. And those were the seven kids who were missing. And then they brought them out of the woods one at a time, and it was just a terrible thing. A terrible time. It just tore the whole community up."*

And it's here that we once more bring in the hip (for the 1970's, anyway) Warlock from 'MYSTIC OCCURENCES' *'Each of them (the missing kids) had again been disembowelled, and there was again reported strange carvings and marking on their hands, on their foreheads; ritualistic carvings, if you will.'*

And Dr Charles Moorehouse, from the present day; *'Well, Rustin Parr admitted to this crime, and in the court he said that the reason that he killed the children was he was simply doing what this old lady ghost was telling him to do. Now, it's possible that this man was trying to fit himself into the mythos of the Blair Witch. But that's conjecture.'*

One child, Kyle Brodte, (who we see framed in a sepia-toned photograph), would escape from Parr's clutches. He attended court to give testimony against the Burkdttsville mass murderer and part of the transcript of his evidence is read out; *'He (Parr) told me to stand in the corner and face the wall. I could hear Emily screaming. He was cutting her. I looked, he was cutting a symbol on her face. Sometimes he would come up to me. "Do you hear her? Do you hear the woman's voice?" I would cry. After a few days he killed her. He cut her open. And after he took everything out of her he left with her and I never saw her again.'*

*'When he came back he told me not to be sad. That he'd bring someone else back soon.'*

Rustin Parr's house was burned to the ground the night he was convicted of all seven killings (so how can it possibly reappear, in all its hideous detail, during the student's footage? Unless it's one hell of a convincing replica...?) He was hanged on November 22nd, 1941.

Bill Barnes, the local historian, recalls that he once possessed a video taped recording of a press conference given by Parr, shortly before his execution.

We get to see this grainy footage, complete with tinny microphone sound;

*'Why did you kill the children, Mr Parr?'*

*'I heard voices in my head'*

*'What kind of voices?'*

*'A woman's.'*

*'Whose voice, Mr Parr?'*

*'I've no idea who it was'*

*'Was it Satan, Mr Parr? Was it the Blair Witch, Mr Parr?'*

*'Could have been.'*

*'How did you kill the children, Mr Parr?'*

*'With knives'*

*'Mr Parr, were you alone when you killed them?'*

*'Yes'*

*'Mr Parr, how did you get the children into the woods?'*

*'Promised them things'*

*'What kind of things?'*

*'Candy'*

*'Did you kill other children that we don't know about, Mr Parr?'*

*'No'*

*'Mr Parr, why those seven children?'*

*'That's what the voices told me to do'*

*'Mr Parr, the writing on the wall, do you know what that means Did you write that. Did you write on the wall?'*

*'No'*

*'Do you think God has forgiven you?'*

*'Yes'*

And that's pretty much it. To a chorus of disapproval from the assembled members of the press chore, a grinning Rustin Parr is led away by the prison officers, back to his

cell, to await his imminent appointment with the hangman, and a desperate hope for absolution.

And as the screen fades to black, a terrible screaming, the sound of a woman faced with some unimaginable horror, or an all-consuming pain, (*and is she screaming for Mllllllkkkkee, in there ladies and gentlemen? Is she?!*) It repeats over and over as a series of photographs depicting the missing student's recovered back packs and film cans are flashed.

And then we see the aforementioned Mikey, in broad daylight in the middle of the woods, looking mightily pissed off. Heather is filming him, yet again. Which probably doesn't do a whole pile to improve his mood.

'We'll all look back on this and laugh heartily' she assures her less-than-convinced colleague.

And then we switch to 1995. The recovered film of the 'THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT' is spread across a plastic-covered table in a police forensic lab.

David Mercer, yet another professor, who this time hails from the University of Maryland, was part of an anthropological team back in '95, who were engaged in a dig near to the foundations of the old Parr house. He relates how whilst he was working there, a commotion caught his attention and it transpired that a section of the wall of the house, no more than 5ft off the ground, had collapsed. No one was injured but the team later recovered 'a dirty old backpack' from underneath the foundations.

A private investigator by the name of Buck Buchanan, then tells us that *'by the way that they had locate the backpacks, it appears that the stones had been there for many many years and had not been disturbed.'*

*'So it makes you wonder how someone had removed those stones, forensically, in other words, stone by stone, and then put them back in the exact same order that they were originally in the ground...It makes you wonder why someone was hiding them there. Certainly not for someone to find, because they would likely have stayed there for countless years to come if they hadn't have done that anthropology dig.'*

Ronald Cravens, who you'll recall is the Burkdttsville Sheriff, is not at all certain that the recovered footage is of any real evidential value;

*'I reviewed the film once it was developed, and all I found was the students themselves, some scary noises in the woods at night. And a few examples of that. But no concrete evidence as to what happened to the students.'*

A nighttime sequence footage is shown. The branches of the trees lit starkly white against the impenetrable blackness beyond. There is a sound like snapping twigs coming from somewhere in the midst of that ebon darkness. Heather beckons one of the cameramen, Josh most likely, towards where she believes the sounds to be coming from. Initially, at least. A few seconds pass. The twigs keep right on snapping. She calls out 'Hello?' but receives no reply, before concluding, almost to herself;

*'It's all around us!!!'*

Professor Mercer, meanwhile, is hesitant to admit that he cannot explain how it was the student's backpacks and video footage came to be buried inside a layer of ash that had been completely undisturbed. *'It was almost as if it materialised there,'* he states, albeit reluctantly.

Tom Williams, Mikey's brother, recalls that the time the footage was found was, for him at least, very eerie and not a little scary. *'I really don't feel too comfortable seeing the last few days of my brother's life on video.'*

Sheriff 'Fatman' and the somewhat hokey Professor Moorehouse, express the opinion that they believe the footage, like the infamous Santilli-Roswell Allen Autopsy video, to be nothing more than a well-constructed hoax.

The real-life Raymond Chandler character, PI Buchanan, refuses to dismiss the whole thing so easily, however.

Whilst he concedes there is a possibility that the film is faked, he is far from convinced of this.

As if to prove just how realistic the footage purportedly is, we see a segment of shaky, hand-held camerawork featuring Heather running in a blind panic, screaming 'Oh, God, God,' as she makes her way into the trees up ahead where Mike must be waiting. 'Hurry up,' one of the men shouts. 'I'm coming, Heather responds. 'My boot's are at least' And then she looks to her left, and yells 'Oh myGod, what the fuck is that? What the fuck is that?'

We can't help her identify the whatever-it-is, because its frustratingly (and perhaps, just perhaps, *thankfully*) off-camera (although there is at least a possibility that what Heather is seeing is her first glimpse of one of those ubiquitous 'stickmen' - the Runic symbols for 'gift' or 'sacrifice' - But like the good professor said earlier, 'that's pure conjecture')



The theory of the 50-60-Year Cycle is then propounded by Bill Barnes, once more. He raises the not entirely inconceivable proposition that the students may have encountered the spirit of Ely Kedwards, and by doing so, unwittingly ensured that the cycle would be continued.

Dottie Fulcher expresses the opinion that she thinks the students knew the legend but *'I don't think that they felt any fear, but I don't think that they felt any kind of respect. I think that to them it was just another project, a way to get a grade.*

*'And I think they met her. And I think that she met them when she was ready to. And I think they're gone.'*

Heather, her face caught half-off camera, only the tear-filled eyes, and dripping nose visible, loses herself in terrified confession, her voice shaking uncontrollably;

*'I am so, so sorry for everything that has happened. Because despite what Mike says now, it is my fault. Because it was my project. Everything had to be my way. And this is where we've ended up. And it's all because of me that we're here now. Hungry. And cold. And hunted.'*

The impression, awful though it may be, is hard to dismiss; She sounds for all the world like a woman who is waiting, fearfully for the hour of her death.

The documentary ends with PI Buchanan stating that the students disappearance remains unexplained at this point. We see a Missing Persons poster. Heather, Josh and Mike caught in eternal freeze frame. It slowly fades into the background.

The black background.

Where the 'Stickmen' await, dangling from some invisible thread, like a mobile above an empty cot in a nurse's of evil and unreason....

...and they're lost in a forest, all alone....

**Reviewed By Lee Walker November. 1999**

# The Final Chimes Of The Witching Hour

The final word, for now at least, on The Blair Witch Phenomenon, concerns just one of the many examples of happy coincidence that have allegedly graced the film.

The following interview with a real-life Burkittsville resident, (ie: not an actor) chosen at random by Heather Donahue, was said, by the directors, to have been entirely spontaneous, and was not in the slightest bit rehearsed (though exactly how much of that is just hype-generated nonsense is for the reader to decide)...

Canvassing for stories and opinions amongst the local populace, Heather speaks to a jovial thirtysomething woman, who happens to be carrying a small child.

The interview begins with Ms Donahue asking her; *'Have you heard of the Blair Witch?'*

*'Several times.'*

*'Several times? And what was the first time?'*

*'Well, I heard stories from neighbours and stuff like that, but also I saw a documentary once on the Discovery Channel or somewhere, about ghosts and legends of Maryland.'*

*'Oh, really?'*

*'The creepiest...'*

At this point the child, who can't be much more than two-years-old, suddenly thrusts her hands in front of her mother's face, effectively covering her mouth.

*'Uh-oh.'*

The woman laughs, unconcerned.

*'The creepiest story that I've heard was about these two men who were out hunting...'*

Again, the child attempts to put her hand over the woman's mouth, as if she's desperately trying to prevent her mother from relating the terrible story.

*'They were out near a cabin or something, that she's supposed to haunt, and...'*

At this juncture, the child becomes pretty much damn near hysterical, covering her mouth and crying *'No, no, no,'* over and over.

*'And they disappeared off the face of the earth.'*

Growing increasingly anxious at her daughter's reaction to the tale she's trying to tell, she turns to her and says; *'It's okay, Ingrid. I'm just telling a scary story, but it isn't true.'*

And whilst her daughter isn't looking (too busy trying to cope with an attack of the screamin meemies) she quickly turns back to the camera, silently mouthing; *'It's true!!!!'*

\*\*\* Equally bizarre, was the fact that the movie's directors; Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sanchez, were forced to agree to add a disclaimer, to be screened at the start of the film.

This brief section of text, apology, call it what you will, (which wasn't shown, I may add at the film's screening here on Merseyside) was apparently included because the movie's treatment of Witches served to incur the wrath of a White Witch - (if there truly be such a thing - I've always been wary of sorcerers who claim to only practice White Magic, but maybe I'm just being excessively paranoid - Ed) named Phyllis Currot. Apparently, she threatened to sue the filmmakers because, in her own words; *'The film's portrayal of Witches as evil old hags ignores the truth that Witchcraft is a legitimate, peace-loving religion.'*

Ms Currot should know, you see, because she is, you may be interested to hear, the President of The Covenant Of The Goddess, one of the largest of the Wiccan organisations.

# New Ferry In The Dark Hours: 2

## Jenny Greenteeth

### A Modern-Urban FOAF-Tale

#### I

Ray Wilson stepped from the train into late February twilight.

He rubbed the remnants of sleep from his eyes, lowered his large leather case, and turned to wave at the young couple with whom he'd shared his second-class compartment during the four hour journey up from London. He waited until the carriage lights had faded away into the distance, like fireflies dancing on the misted horizon, before heaving a world-weary sigh and making his way down a flight of steps to the station's exit. He handed his ticket to a disinterested collector, who didn't even bother to look up from his Roddy Doyle novel.

'Welcome To Port Sunlight' a sign above the booth proclaimed. Plain black lettering on a pristine background. Confirmation, if it were needed that after very nearly thirty years, Ray had at last returned to the village where he'd been born and raised.

His breath gusted greyly from his lips and it was hard to shake the notion that it was the breath of his own mortality...A grim confirmation that so great a part of his life could have slipped away with such remarkable ease. And yet, as he stood at the station's entrance, he was amazed to discover that so very little had changed. It seemed as though he'd stepped into a time warp or else had never been away at all. The chill, goose bump-raising wind, carrying with it the salty tang of the Mersey and the Irish Sea beyond, inspired a bitterly powerful wave of nostalgia. Even the sounds, travelling as they did with all the ease of slow thought, seemed achingly familiar...

A mother calling her children to come in and get ready for tea.

A football being kicked against a garden gate.

A church bell chiming.

A dog barking.

He glanced to his right and saw 'The Lady Lever Social Club,' the warm, welcoming glow from its windows slanting across the immaculate bowling green out front. 'O'Brien's Post Office and General Store was still standing on the corner of Greendale Road, and directly across from there were the 'Boy's Brigade' hut, the 'Working Men's Snooker Hall' and the acre or so of parkland the locals called 'The Dell' with its wild profusion of ancient Oaks, Sycamores and Weeping Willows.

Even the old village clock was just as he remembered it, perched atop the elaborate main entrance of 'Lever Brother's Soap Factory.'

It seemed hard to believe that in another age, he'd stood beside that very same clock and stolen his first kiss, had synchronized watches with 'The Lads Of The Seventh Cavalry' before embarking upon another do-or-die apple scrumpin' mission, had skived off from school, crouched beneath its shelter in the midst of a summer shower, and waited in vain for a date that never showed.

And once....

On a grey Wednesday afternoon in mid-October, he'd gazed grimly at the clock hands, filled with a fear he didn't fully understand, as they ticked slowly, inexorably, towards something his father had called 'Kennedy's Cuban Deadline.'

That had been way back in 1962, when Ray had been little more than six years old.

And yet, he remembered it as though it were yesterday.

Cursing (not for the first time) his damn-near photographic memory, he forced himself to focus on the present. Now was not the time to dwell on the past. A journey down that road, he knew, would only lead to the opening up of old wounds; a series of lost hopes sifting down through the blackness of a troubled heart.

There'd be time enough to reminisce (though he sure as hell didn't *want* to) once he'd checked into his room at 'The Bridge Inn', fortified by a couple of stiff drinks.

'I'm home,' he told himself, hunching his shoulders against the raw, biting wind and transferring the suitcase to his other, slightly less-numbered hand. 'Home to face my demons, after all these years... God help me.'

The entreaty fell from his lips like a stone, as he set foot into Port Sunlight, amidst the eerie afterglow of the day...

#### II

None other than Frank Sinatra greeted Ray, as he tucked into a delicious meal of steak-pie, chips and assorted vegetables, washed down with several pints of 'Cains Bitter.'

He hadn't realised how hungry he'd been when he'd first entered 'The Bridge Inn.' His mood had been as bleak as the weather outside, and all he'd really wanted to do was sign the register, grab the key to his room, order up a bottle of good malt whiskey, and pass the night in an alcohol-induced daze. And if he'd gotten rotten stinking drunk into the bargain, then that was just fine with him.

But the staff had proven to be genuinely friendly, the bar was tastefully-lit, enhancing its olde worlde charm, and over on the jukebox, Ol' Blue Eyes was busy crooning like an angel from saloon-bar heaven.

Seduced by this combination, he'd booked himself a table before a roaring log fire, and when his raised glass had caught the reflection of the flickering flames, bringing to mind images of snow and candlelight and children's voices pure as crystal, his spirits had briefly risen. For the first time since he'd waved goodbye to his bemused wife and kids at Euston Station, he felt at least some of the tension drain from his body. The beer buzz calmed him, Relaxed him. And although he hadn't the nerve to strike up a conversation with any of his fellow drinkers (even the most cursory of chats would result, inevitably, in a series of awkward questions, such as where was he from? and what had brought him here?) by the time last orders had been called, he'd achieved his ambition of getting more than half-way drunk.

He climbed the flight of stairs to his small, but comfortable first-floor room and quickly changed into his nightclothes; a pair of hideous candy-striped boxer shorts (a joke present from Danielle, the Christmas just gone) and a plain white T-shirt. He was dead beat but he didn't go to sleep straight away. He switched on the portable TV and sat

perched on the end of the bed, not really watching, but anxious for *some* kind of company.

He flicked the remote control through a less-than-appetising selection of late-night soaps, old black and white movies, and sit coms. None of them could hold his interest for more than a few seconds and he finally settled for the scanning the headlines on 'BBC News 24'

It was the usual litany of death and disaster...Another godawful day at the lost souls processing plant: Rusata was on the brink of civil war, the Asian stockmarkets were in freefall, Islamic terrorists were being blamed for a series of bomb explosions in South Africa, a passenger airliner had crashed off the coast of Canada, killing all on board, a pregnant mother had been viciously gang-raped at a popular London beauty spot, an ambulance driver had suffered serious head injuries after being pelted with bricks on his way to an emergency call...

Ray's switched off the TV, his head lowered, his former high spirits well and truly exorcised.

He staggered across the room to retrieve his jacket from where it was draped over the back of a chair. His shoulders were stooped as though they were bent with the weight of some impossible burden; the troubles of the World. The collective grief of an entire species. Withdrawing his wallet, he returned to the bed and emptied its contents onto the quilted sheets. Ignoring the wad of banknotes and loose change, the credit cards and party invitations, he stared instead at a couple of colour photographs. One was a picture of Danielle and the kids, snapped one-long-ago summer. They were all of them smiling into the camera, seated round a rockpool on the beach at Brighton.

The other was of a gawky, ten-year-old boy, sporting wire-rimmed glasses and a mop-top 'BEATLES' haircut. He too was grinning as he hugged a border collie that was nearly as big as he was - the carefree joy of the moment caught in eternal freeze-frame...

Davey...

His kid brother.

Davey...

Who'd drawn a moustache on Ray's Roger Hunt poster, cut-up his 'FAMOUS MONSTERS' magazines, and told Gina Williams, she of the buck-teeth and face full of spots, that he fancied her like mad.

Davey...

Who'd laced his cup of tea with laxative, put spiders in his bed at night, and used his rock'n'roll records as makeshift frisbees,

Davey...

Who'd selfishly piled in to help Ray, when the Portbury gang had jumped him on his way home from school, had emptied his savings jar after he'd accidentally spilled black paint all over his brother's favourite pair of 'Wrangler' jeans, and had placed a Liverpool v Everton derby match ticket inside a 'Get Well Soon' card when Ray had been confined to bed suffering from a mild case of glandular fever...

Davey...

Lying in a coffin beneath the bone-hard, sugar-frosted earth of Landican Cemetery.

Dead these past 30 years...

No more tricks or practical jokes.

No more illustrations of brotherly love.

Only a tiny plot of land, riddled with failure and broken dreams, beneath the cold, black emptiness of a starless, Winter sky.

Davey.

Ray's hand trembled as he held the lifted the picture, the better to see, and a wet tear rolled down to rest on his cheek like a tiny glass globe.

God, he *missed* him so bad.

Even after all this time.

And when you got right down to it, Davey was the reason he'd come back to Port Sunlight in the first place...

For the best part of thirty years, he'd convinced himself he need never return here. Would have laughed (a trifle uneasily) if anyone had so much as *suggested* it.

'Wild horses couldn't drag me back there,' he'd once told a bunch of his friends at the drunken end of a dinner-party. 'The past should remain in the past. Here's to a future of glorious potentialities!!!' There'd been much raising of glasses and heartfelt cheers of approval, and though Ray had been more than half-way sloshed, he'd certainly *meant* what he'd said.

But in the end, horses, wild or otherwise, hadn't been required.

All it had taken was a single, polaroid snapshot of his dead brother.

That, and the crumpled article from 'The Guardian,' Ray had attached to the back of it not three days ago.

The clipping was no more than a tiny, twelve-line piece. The type used by editors as a convenient space-filler on a slow news day.

But oh, the *import* of its contents.

And what it may portend..

He didn't want to dwell on any of that now, however.

There'd be time enough tomorrow.

He closed his eyes, suddenly dog-tired and found himself falling helplessly into a depthless lake of rancid dreams...

...And he dreams of a freezing afternoon in late-February, when he was twelve years old.

*The trees are leafless and claw-like against a roseate sky. A thin layer of frost hardens the ground and sugars the fields.*

*The very air feels brittle, ready to shatter into a million pieces at the snap of a branch in the stillness of a willowwood, a bird tugging its beak against thick, sheeted ice, or braying laughter that grates like a scream.*

*Silliness...*

*Sheeted ice...*

*Laughter...*

*The pond behind the disused army storage depot not five minute's walk from the Wilson's home. The one place Ray and Davey's parents officially list as being out of bounds as they leave the house, weighed down by the timeworn admonishments and the sheer bulk of their clothing.*

*'I don't want either of you even toying with the idea of skating on the old pond,' their mother tells them in her best "I-Am-The-Law-And-What-I-Say-Goes" voice. "The ice may be a little like your father, here. Not quite as thick as it looks!"*

*An expression of mock hurt crosses their dad's face, and then he pulls his shirt collars up, and in a passable imitation of Humphrey Bogart, he says; 'Hey, let me tell ya, looks, looks ya can buy. Humour and brains you can marry. Looks like you're stuck with the latter, sweetheart.'*

*Everyone laughs, and yes, the two boys promise, they'll neither of them go within a mile of the old pond (in reality, a large, disused gravel pit that had filled up with rainwater over God knew how many years), and who knows, perhaps they even mean it. They are good kids, and don't, much as they with breaking promises, if they can at all help it. But the fact of the matter is, they are just that: kids. And though the two of them spend most of the day trying to scrape together enough snow to build a snowman, or taking turns to sledge down Eccelshall Road, (nearly giving old Mrs Edwards, who was busy sweeping her garden path, a heart attack as they nearly collided with an oncoming car), somehow or other, whether by accident or design, here they are standing*

on the banks of the forbidden pond, with scarcely an hour of daylight left in the sky.

They stand in silence for a single endless moment

Neither of them speaks.

Neither of them moves.

They merely stare in wonderment at the expanse of frozen water, and it's almost as if the pair of them know exactly what the other is thinking. Their parents warnings seem foolishly excessive. Okay, so they are technically trespassing on private property. They had clambered through a hole in the perimeter fence, cut by a gang of bigger kids the previous Summer, but hell, everybody, it seemed, knew about it, and no one, not even the local council, had bothered to repair the damage, so surely they weren't doing any harm by being here. And if that was the case, it couldn't hurt if they were to take a quick, slithering skate over the smooth, solid-seeming surface below them.

There is nothing to fear here.

Just the opposite, in fact.

In the end, the temptation proves too great.

They step onto the ice with a gullible innocence that would perhaps be touching in happier circumstances...

Time ceases to have any meaning once the pair of them begin slipping and sliding across the surface of the pond, their shouts and squeals ring through the trees and bounce off the virgin ice. They are lost in the carefree joy of child's play, when the concerns and worries that go hand-in-hand with the painful day-to-day business of growing up are cast aside, like a discarded item of clothing. They fail therefore to notice the lengthening shadows, the pools of darkness that quickly surround them like a seeping pitch-black tide.

It's only when the gloom becomes so apparent that the boys realise that they can hardly see any further than the edges of the pond and the topmost branches of the winter-naked trees, that they think to pause for a second.

And, it seems, everything else pauses right along with them.

The air is preternaturally still. There is not the slightest breath of wind. And all is silent save for the call of a marsh bird from somewhere deep within the midst of the reeds - an achingly haunting sound that speaks to the boys of loneliness unbidden and incurable.

'Okay, Davey, I suppose we'd better be getting home' Ray says, struggling to keep his voice light. He doesn't want to alarm his brother but he feels he's suddenly been dragged to his senses, like a weary driver who's fallen asleep at the wheel and has awoken just in time to prevent a devastating crash.

He cannot be certain as to the precise cause of the coiled knot of dread that forms in the pit of his stomach, but he strongly suspects that it may have at least something to do with the fact that their parents are likely to throw a kingsize dicky-fit and kick them both all the way to New Brighton and back, the minute they step through the front door. They are late, and neither of them (they know from bitter experience) can lie to save their lives.

Ray suspects that Davey, despite his tender years, is more than aware of the sorry fate that awaits them, but all he says out loud is 'Yeah, Mum and Dad will be getting worried, won't they?' and shuffles towards his brother, who has already turned his back, as anxious to be away from this place as he had earlier been excited by the prospect of playing here...

Suddenly, and without warning, there is a loud crack that echoes like a pistol shot, shattering the caught-breath hush.

Ray swivels round to see his brother lying sprawled face down on the ice.

Davey cries out more in surprise than any real degree of pain and then incredibly, he is laughing at his own

clumsiness and for a moment, relief sweeps over Ray, and he begins to laugh himself...

But then, the ice splits apart, and a gaping rent, like the mouth of some huge Arctic beast, opens up directly beneath Davey's legs. Unable to haul himself upright in time, he slides backwards at a frightening speed. He vainly tries to grasp some purchase on the too-slick ice, and his fingernails rasp and rake... A sound like something equipped with razor-sharp talons scratching at a frosted window in the dead of night.

'Help meeeee, Ray' Davey screams, and his brother shakes off the shock-induced paralysis and begins to skate the fifty-odd yards distance between them as fast as he can.

Straight away however, Ray can see that he is not going to make it. Even as he flings himself full length across the ice in a desperate attempt to grab hold of Davey's hand, he knows it's too late, and as the force of his own momentum carries him forwards to the very lip of the fissure, he sees Davey slip into the water and begin thrashing wildly.

Davey isn't a particularly strong swimmer, but he can swim. (They'd both had compulsory lessons at school and had been to the local baths in Rock Ferry, on many occasions the previous Summer). Ray tries to keep the rising panic out of his voice as he shouts at his brother to stop struggling and try to swim for it. He knows that no one can survive for very long in water that cold, a couple of minutes, tops, but he remains hopeful that if Davey can somehow manage to regain his composure sufficiently to doggle-paddle a few feet in his direction, he'd be able to haul him out to safety.

But Davey appears lost in the grip of blind terror and before too long, Ray realises that he is left with very little choice but to jump in himself.

He is preparing to do just that when Davey is suddenly swallowed up by the inky black waters, and disappears from view.

He doesn't resurface.

Ray doesn't waste another second.

He dives straight in.

The shock of the biting cold immediately seeps into his bones, first stinging and then turning his entire body numb. It takes a supreme effort of will for him to submerge and begin searching for Davey. But after gasping in a great lungful of air, he ducks his head under and begins frantically looking this way and that.

Although the pond is entirely artificial in its construction, and isn't especially deep (no more than 15ft at its deepest point) it is choked with weed and a variety of cloying algae. It is also heavily polluted with foul-smelling effluents and a thick, black viscous substance, most likely a chemical spill from Lever Brother's Soap Factory, lines the bottom.

Visibility then is not good at the best of times, but with nightfall drawing down fast, it is all but impossible to see your hand in front of your face. Despite the level of contamination, the pond is fairly well-stocked with fish, and crazily, Ray suddenly finds himself remembering how one of his friends, a keen angler named Joey Mearns, had told him that he'd once caught an eel in here that was fully nine feet long. It had been a sickly pale white colour with a set of teeth that looked capable of tearing a man's throat out. Ray hadn't been sure he believed Joey back then. But now that he is actually in the water it's far too easy to imagine all kinds of unnamable horrors lurking in the near stygian darkness.

And when, at that precise moment, something touches his leg he almost screams his way to the surface. Only the grim determination to find Davey keeps him from doing so.

Eventually however, he is forced up to breathe.

*He is now so cold he is barely conscious, and a feeling of detachment, of dreamlike unreality, begins to wash over him.*

*This feeling is further enhanced by the sight that confronts him, immediately he breaks the surface.*

*Over by the reeds on the far side of the pond, but no more than 30 feet away, there's another hole in the ice. And in its centre, Davey's body lies floating on its back. Even accounting for the rapidly fading half-light, Ray can see his brother's face is a pallid shade of blue and that his eyes are staring sightlessly up at a sky laced with the first smattering of stars.*

*He can see too, that Davey is dead.*

*And faced for the first time in his twelve years with the awful, irrevocable finality of death, he is at first, totally unable to accept that which he is seeing. Instead, he simply stares, uncomprehending, the way a jungle native might regard his first sight of an airplane. His mind retreats within itself faced with such an apparent absurdity.*

*And then, in less time than it takes to muster up a scream, the world tilts still further down the slippery slope of unreason, and the merely absurd enters the realm of the completely insane.*

*There is a sudden, violent commotion and something from a nightmare surfaces alongside Davey.*

*It appears so fast that Ray doesn't even have time to react to its presence. All that he can do is watch as a hideous, vaguely female form slowly rears itself up out of the water, clutching at Davey's body as if it were a piece of flotsam. It remains in that position for a while, regarding him with eyes that are as cold and unfeeling as a dead fish on a slab, and though Ray knows that he simply must be having a trauma-induced hallucination, that the thing before him cannot possibly be REAL, he can nevertheless see, with a ghastly clarity, every detail of it just the same; The mottled skin glowing with a soft green light, like a poisonous fungus in the wildwood after dark. The white bone that peers through a gash in its forehead. The straggly hair, matted with pondweed, draping across a pair of painfully-thin shoulders.*

*The blade-like claws.*

*The wormy lips...*

*And when the thing opens its mouth, revealing three rows of barbed, serrated teeth, the awful stench of its breath wafts across the distance between them. It smells of mud and decay and of things that live in sunless places.*

*It's this last that gets Ray moving. A sort of dreamy terror had floated into the hollows of his body, paralyzing him up until that moment. Now, mewling and gasping, as the thing grins at him from across the way, he turns his back and begins furiously scrabbling at the ice that forms the edge of the fissure, in a desperate bid to drag himself out of the water.*

*Ray's efforts however, prove to be every bit as fruitless as those of his brother. The surface is as smooth as polished glass and his fingers are so numbed with cold, they no longer feel part of him. But he redoubles his efforts and emits a thin scream when he hears the sound of wet-slapping feet squelching slowly towards him. The smell becomes almost over-powering - and now it stinks of spoiled meat, flyblown and rancid and though Ray flatly refuses to glance behind him, still he knows the thing is almost within touching distance. This is confirmed when he feels its hot breath on the back of his neck.*

*And the sound of those lethal jaws snapping shut like a hunter's trap.*

*He shrieks loudly for his mother in hopeless desperation, the way we do when the bones of our deepest fears are laid*

*bare, free to be picked over by the gibbering horrors that lie waiting, secret in the dark. And though he knows his mother is likely to be sitting at home at that moment, alternately casting worried glances at the clock on the wall and her increasingly anxious husband, Ray goes right on yelling for her anyway and as he does so, something happens that later, he will struggle to explain, even to himself.*



*Ray's arms thrashing wildly about, no longer seeking to gain a purchase, find a good one regardless, as if it had been there all along. The feeling quickly returns to his frozen hands, he actually feels the blood rushing in an unstoppable torrent right the way from his veins to his fingertips with not a hint of pins and needles and after securing a grip in the ice and employing a new-found strength, he heaves himself clear out of the water. Half-expecting at any moment that a pair of hooked and snagged claws would reach out and drag him back to the black, chillsome waters of the pond, he somehow manages to struggle to his feet, skate crazily across the ice and scramble up the snow-covered slope.*

*He doesn't stop when he reaches the top. Nor does he look behind to check and see if the thing is following. He simply runs pell mell, scarcely aware of the direction he is taking, his feet pounding the frosted earth like pistons, as if they have a mechanical will of their own, and maybe it's instinct, maybe it's blind luck, maybe it's the 'Voice Of The Wonderful Mr Ed,' whatever, something has guided him to the hole in the fence; a magical portal that leads back to the Land Of The Righteous And Sane. Ray near throws himself through it, and charges headlong across the empty playing fields, and doesn't stop until he reaches the brightly-lit car park at the top of Corniche Road.*

*It is doubtful whether he would have stopped running even at that point, if it wasn't for the unwitting intervention of Howard Johnson. The old man happens to have his head buried beneath the hood of his battered Ford Cortina,*

*fiddling around with the engine, when Ray comes hurtling around the corner and, choosing that precise moment to dare to sneak a glance behind him (just in case the thing has followed him across the fields) slams into the back of Mr Johnson, very nearly knocking the unfortunate man face-first into the tangled (and quite frankly, well-clapped out) mass of machinery.*

*'What the hell...' Mr Johnson yells, swivelling round with a speed that is quite surprising for a man of his age. He is intending to give this clumsy idiot a right mouthful, maybe lecture him on the impetuosity of youth, and of how children had respect for their elders in his day, but the words die on his lips when he catches the expression clouding the boy's features.*

*He will later tell his wife that he'd only ever seen that look of panic-stricken terror once before in his life. And that he'd prayed he would never see it again. It was the exact same expression he'd seen on the face of his best friend, just as they'd been about to go over the top on the first day of The Somme. The same best friend who had been mercilessly cut down by machine gun fire before he'd taken more than a couple of steps into No Man's Land.*

*'What's wrong, lad?' he asks, his voice suddenly heavy with concern. 'What's happened? Are you alright?'*

*In answer, Ray can do little more than whimper softly and cover his face. And when the old man reaches out to place a comforting hand on the boy's shoulder, he screams and screams, and the sound of it echoes in the February air like a note of long-lost hope....*

**To Be Continued...**

## *Glimpses Of The World Unseen.*



### **The Latest Breaking News!!!**

#### **Slaughter Of The Innocents**

A 'panther' is suspected has apparently been prowling the neighbourhood of one Donna Jones, according to reports coming down the wires from northwest Hernando County, Florida.

The mysterious predator was said to have been responsible for the deaths of at least three of Donna's beloved goats.

The first casualty was discovered on 22nd October of this year, its throat had been slashed and the carcass had been dragged to the back of Ms Jones' 10 acre farm, where it was found to be covered with leaves.

The very next day, she found that the remains had been devoured, and the day following that, a second depredation of livestock had taken place, and was eaten 24 hours later.

The third, the last to date, was discovered with the coming of the dawn's early light on the 26th of October.

In desperation, Donna called on the Animal Control and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, but they can not act until the creature is positively identified. Assuming a panther is the guilty party, killing it herself would land Donna a prison sentence as the animal is a protected species.

The mystery has been deepened by the fact that the predator, whatever it is, does not appear to have left anything as conveniently handy as a set of paw prints or teeth imprints on the bodies of the dead goats.

Donna, not unreasonably, you might think, strongly suspects that the culprit is a pet cougar that escaped from a Citrus County home last February. But the only solution the 70-year-old woman has so far come up with is to seek the assistance of her neighbours.

They duly set up a series of video cameras and have even offered to build a cage with bait. Typically, as is so often the way with this type of phenomena, the only thing they have succeeded in capturing on film is an all-too brief, enigmatic glimpse of a dark animal with bright eyes and a long tail.

One of these intrepid, and very helpful neighbours, Bucky Cox, has claimed that he can well sympathise with Donna. He had several of his goats killed in a disconcertingly similar manner the previous March, and the authorities never were able to identify that particular killer.

*'I know where she's coming from because I was totally perplexed,' he told local reporters. 'I was out there in the woods trying to find it. We've just got to wait, watch and be prepared.'*

Good advice, but methinks they could be waiting for an entire lifetime....

*26th October, 1999 Hernando County, Florida, USA 'ST PETERSBURG TIMES'*

## **The Hunt For The Skunk Ape**

And speaking of Florida, the suitably-named Green Swamp, is said to be the domain of the so-called Swamp or Skunk Ape, and a local reporter, Terry Tomalin, set out the Halloween just gone to see if he could solve the mystery.

The evidence, he claims, suggests that the mysterious entity is some sort of hairy hominid a la Bigfoot, a bipedal beast that emitted a powerfully repugnant stench. It is said to feed on roots and berries, and at times, small game.

Most sceptics argue that in a state populated by 13 million people, the possibility of an creature unknown to science existing in the swamps is highly unlikely.

But, as Mr Tomalin has been keen to (quite correctly) point out: *'History is full of examples of previously unclassified species' going mainstream. The Mountain Gorilla, first reported by an explorer in 1860, was not officially recognised until as recently as 1902. So why not a secretive simian hiding on the outskirts of Dade City?*

*'Over the years, cryptozoologists have kept meticulous track of the Skunk Ape, and some of the most recent reports come from Ochopee, where a group of British tourists saw a*

*six-foot tall creature, with long brown hair, walking across the road.'*

A further report, this time from the Three Lakes Wildlife Management Area, in January, 1999, made reference to an animal with a *'cone-shaped head, wide shoulders and no visible waistline.'*

If we were to dig through old newspaper accounts and other periodicals, we would undoubtedly uncover a welter of accounts concerning this 'Allen Animal.' One need only consider the story from the spring of 1966, when Mrs Eula Lewis, of Brooksville was chased into her house by a 'Bigfoot.' A matter of few months later, a man named Ralph Chambers was said to have spotted a creature that gave off a *'rancid, putrid odor,'* standing in a clump of trees near the Anclote River.

And that December, four teenagers in the same area reported that a *'smelly Bigfoot with glowing green eyes jumped on the hood of their car.'*

\* \* \*



All of the above may help explain why it was that this year, the Boy Scouts Of America elected to call their annual gathering, 'The Bigfoot Wilderness Survival Camporee.' Only in America!!!

The intrepid Terry Tomalin was assigned the task of reporting the story of their plans to camp on the very outskirts of the Green Swamp, where they would study wildlife survival.

Terry was also requested to give a campfire lecture on Sasquatch research in general and the Skunk Ape in particular.

*'So I gathered my camping equipment and secured an assistant, 12-year-old Andrew Mort, a bright lad who shared my passion for cryptozoology and enthusiasm for fine root beer. "You have nothing to worry about," I told him as we headed toward the swamp. The Skunk Ape eats mostly roots and berries....and the occasional small child.'*

The team's first stop was Pasco County's Withlacoochee River Park, where they met by several members of the local American Indian community. *'Our people have always known about them,'* the splendidly-named Thunderwalker Wilson, informed the party. He apparently encountered a Skunk Ape in Summer County, a few years back. As night fell, the reporter placed a collection of lima beans, rumoured to be the Skunk Ape's favourite delicacy, outside the front door of their cabin.

In the dead hours before dawn Terry awoke to hear the sounds of *'something big and hungry'* chomping away on the pile of beans. No one jumped up to offer to go and see what it was that was feeding outside.

The next morning there was a marked absence of footprints, but the beans were gone.

Andrew and Terry decided to set up camp at the edge of a pond, pretty far away from the rest of the group, and that night at the campfire, Terry told the assembled scouts about his *'selfless quest for the truth. As a journalist, paranormal researcher and cryptozoologist, I have dedicated my life to explaining the unexplained.'*

He then told them about the Skunk Ape's horrible odour, sharp teeth and insatiable appetite for the flesh of young boys.

*'You should be relatively safe,'* he assured them, without a hint of a smile, *'as long as the beast has eaten recently.'*

*'The scouts returned to their primitive campsites and Andrew and I returned to our tent pitched at the edge of the pond. We were only there for a few minutes when I heard a noise from the bushes. Knife in hand, I crept slowly toward my prey...'*

*"Ready, I whispered. "Are you ready?"*

*'But my assistant, it seemed, had disappeared. I turned and shined my flashlight toward the tent. "I'll just wait in the car," he yelled. Then there was a loud crash. I turned, but it was too late.'*

*'The beast was gone.'*

*'Andrew returned and we sat there for a moment and considered our options. After a brief discussion, we decided to set out a meal that no Swamp Ape could resist; lima beans, pork rinds and a chocolate chip cookie.'*

*'Minutes seemed like hours as camera and flashlights in hand, we stared out the tent window. Then, without warning, it was morning. We rushed outside to look at our bait.'*

*'The lima beans and cookies were gone. All that remained were the pile of pork rinds, just as we had left them.'*

*'Had the Skunk Ape taken them?'*

*October 31st, 1999 The Green Swamp, Florida, USA  
'ST PETERSBURG TIMES'*

## And A New Hunt For The Beast Of Bodmin

An RAF part-time squadron, currently engaged in night exercises, is to play a part in yet another attempt to solve the enigma of the so-called 'Beast Of Bodmin.'

The creature which is rumoured to haunt the Cornish moorland, is to be 'hunted' by up to 40 reservists from the RAF's 2625 Auxillary Regiment Squadron, based at St Mawgan, North Cornwall.

They will be equipped with infra-red night vision binoculars and cameras, but it'll sure be some surprise if any of them have any more luck in solving the mystery than all those who have gone before.

Such is the nature of the Beast...

*25th October, 1999 St Mawgan, North Cornwall 'THE TIMES'*

## Ritual Horror In India

Police in India arrested a man they believe intended to behead his 12-year-old son and eight-year-old daughter as part of a bizarre ritual that he genuinely thought would cure another son of schizophrenia. Bihari Lodh, 40, and his 18-year-old-son were duly held on charges of attempted murder and injuring police officers in the execution of their duty.

*26th October, 1999 India 'LIVERPOOL ECHO'*

# KEEP WATCHING THE SKIES!!! UFO UPDATE



## A Sleepless Night Of Fruitless Vigil: The 'Truth' Behind The 'Fife Incident'

According to Strange Phenomena Investigation's (SPI's) very own Malcolm Robinson, the 'major UFO incident which occurred back on September 23rd, 1996' in the skies over Fife, Scotland, may very well have been a hoax.

The account, that originally made 'headline news' in the quite often surreal world of ufology, included reference to a large black triangular UFO, reportedly sighted by four witnesses, as well as several mysterious 'Grey' creatures.

Malcolm, a sometimes contributor to this humble publication, was initially of the opinion that the case may very well be of especial importance in the annals of Scottish UFO reports. He even went so far as to say that he afforded it greater consequence than even the famous Robert Taylor Incident in Dechmont Woods, near Livingston, West Lothian, back in 1979.

Prior to voicing his recent reservations about the account however, Malcolm thought it only right that he should provide his 'audience' with a brief resume of the accepted 'facts' regarding the alleged incident....

On the night in question, Mary Robinson (pseudonym) accompanied by her two-year-old son, Peter (also not his real name), and her friend, Jane (ditto), left their home somewhere in Fife, to drive to a local shop. En route, they were startled by the sight of a large, jet black triangular object that came to a sudden halt directly in front of their car. It shone down three intensely bright beams of light onto the surface of the road. After a few tense moments of

inaction, the object, whatever it was, departed, leaving the mother and son in a state of fear and bemusement about what they had encountered.

Incredibly, they apparently sighted the same, or a similar object on their return journey from the shop. Malcolm neglects to go into details about the second sighting, but upon arriving at Jane's home, she informed her 15-year-old daughter about that which they had all just seen. Perhaps not surprisingly, she didn't believe her, so Jane challenged her to go and see if they could locate the UFO once more. All four of them climbed back into the car and drove in the direction of their earlier encounters, and, you might think, somewhat fortuitously, bumped into the object yet again.

The witnesses claimed to have been amazed by the sight of a series of incredibly bright lights 'similar to a laser show' rising above a row of trees. These particular lights were accompanied by another group of star-like objects that were simply hanging suspended, low in the sky. According to one of the witnesses, later recorded on audio tape, just in front of the line of trees, a mist began forming, in the midst of which were literally hundreds of 'small grey beings' running around the woods, lifting and carrying what appeared to be boxes or cubes, as well as cylinders.

Suddenly, parts of this unnatural mist, began to move in the witnesses direction across a ploughed farmer's field. Unnerved, they jumped back into the car from which they'd previously alighted, and got the hell out of there as fast as they could. A few seconds prior to them screeching into the night however, the formerly-sceptical daughter screamed that she'd seen a 'creature' standing next to the car, 'grinning' in at her. As the car left the area, a tremendous flash of blue light illuminated the field behind them.

What may well rankle with even the most open-minded of individuals, is the fact that the four witnesses, terrified by their ordeal to the point of breaking into outright hysteria, had elected to go back out into the darkened countryside yet again, in an attempt to investigate still further.

They claim that they once more encountered hundreds of grey beings moving around at the edge of the woods.

The subsequent SPI investigation raised the following points:

A): Certain of the alleged witnesses were said to have emerged from the experience with unexplained scars on their bodies.

B): One female witness in particular stated that she sighted many more UFOs around her home address in the days that followed the initial encounters.

C): The young boy claimed to have observed a small 'Grey' entity floating (in classical abduction-mythos stylee) outside his bedroom window. He also spotted one in, of all places, his bathroom.

D): The young boy also claimed that a 'Grey' entity followed him to his school and actually consented to assist with his schoolwork....Tellingly, you might think, the 'Grey' remained invisible to both the teachers and his fellow pupils....

The necessarily condensed account featured here, was related via audio tape to Malcolm Robinson. Prior to the SPI's involvement, 'Quest International' elected to send a Scottish researcher along to Fife. Once there, he took soil samples and photographs of the alleged 'landing site'

Malcolm then takes up the story; 'I wrote this case up for a number of British and overseas UFO magazines (with the permission of the witnesses ensuring that no real names of locations were given). I also assisted BBC 2 on a documentary concerning this case during January, 1998. At the time, I was as sure as I can ever be that 'Mary' was telling me the truth. Not that one can ever be certain about such things, of course. But at least, I did not think that she

was knowingly lying to me (nor indeed, was her 10-year-old son). So what happened, you may well ask, for me to change my views so radically on this?

Before giving my answer, I would like to make very clear a few salient points regarding the case, points that certain researchers have taken me to task over. They are simply these;

A): The witnesses have never, at any point in time, either written or spoken to me personally, to inform me that they are in any way unhappy with my write-up of their alleged experience. The only person to have said to me that the witnesses were in fact, displeased, was another Scottish researcher by the name of David Colman, who also part-assisted on this case.

B): I guaranteed absolute anonymity to the witnesses. I did not use their real names in my report, and I did not give the true location of the alleged encounter, either. Someone else must have given away details of the whereabouts of the site. I actually went so far as to openly lie to many press agencies when they took to hounding me to tell them where the encounter had taken place.

C): I wrote (enclosing an SAE) to the witnesses asking them if it was true they were in any way unhappy with the SPI report of the case. Despite my writing on a further two occasions after this, they never replied.

D): SPI were not the only research group to write about this case. As previously alluded to, David Colman did a write up in his own magazine: 'COVER UP' Ron Halliday has written about it in his excellent book 'UFOs - THE SCOTTISH DIMENSION' (Scottish Paranormal Press, 4, Linden Avenue, Stirling, Scotland FK7 7PG Price: £9.95). My only gripe about it was the fact that Ron never made mention of SPI's involvement in the case, so that therefore the reader is left thinking that Ron did an excellent, entirely thorough job investigating this account, when in point of fact, he never actually researched it firsthand.

The Fife case has been commented on and written about by many other ufologists. Why were they not being tongue-lashed by the witnesses???

E): According to David Colman, I was asked by the witnesses not talk about case to a BUFORA International Congress in Sheffield in 1997. Why did the witnesses not specifically tell me this direct. Why did they deem it necessary to go through David Colman? Something didn't ring true to me. I personally wrote to the witnesses asking them if this was correct. They never replied. Because of my acceptance of the BUFORA Code Of Practice as far as witnesses go, I did not speak about this case in Sheffield, even though it was common knowledge and had been the subject of many a newspaper and radio piece.

F): My report on the Fife Incident is a word for word transcript taken from the audio tape. And because I know this to be true, I am fully prepared to give £1,000 to any person who can prove otherwise.

There is no false rewording of the witness testimony

G): An exhaustive investigation was undertaken by the SPI to try and find a rational solution for this case. Checks with local airports, the police the Met Office, the MOD, and various other agencies were made, none of which shed any real degree of light upon the search for answers.

There are further points to which I could relate, but suffice it to say, the above are the most relevant ones, the ones that need to be addressed given the current sceptical climate that prevails. I shall now look at the reasons why my views have so radically changed concerning this formerly impressive case.

'Mary Morrisson' was a subscriber to a number of UFO publications prior to her alleged sighting (including 'FLYING SAUCER REVIEW' and the now defunct

'ALIEN ENCOUNTERS'). Therefore, Mary was 'clued up' on the subject of UFOs, and knew exactly what UFOs and their respective 'occupants' are supposed to look like.

Further, this witness, on her own admission, bought a copy of a UFO magazine whilst on her trip to the shops, ostensibly to buy a jar of coffee. This does not of itself prove anything, it's just interesting to note.

It is not inconceivable that perhaps (please note that I state perhaps) this incident was dreamed up as being nothing more than a sort of test aimed at judging the gullibility of UFO researchers, or just to see how long the story could be treated seriously. Admittedly, she doesn't appear to have actively sought publicity, but that doesn't entirely discount the possibility.

Could this case be nothing but a modern-day Cottingley Fairy Story that went a tad too far, hence the reluctance to speak any further about it?

The witnesses might not have realised the full extent of the interest the subject inspires in this country, and their make-believe story (if such it was) reached uncontrollable proportions. Better to say nothing perhaps, lest they be found to be hoaxsters.

Whatever the truth of the matter, I now have very strong reservations about this case. I accept the fact that certain witnesses do see anomalous phenomena and simply refuse to discuss it further with researchers for fear of ridicule. But something doesn't quite sit right with me on this one.

Robert Moore, editor of the 'BUFORA BULLETIN,' was intending to do a major write-up of the Falkirk Incident in a forthcoming issue, but had to abandon the idea due to another contributing writer, Kevin McClure, stating that he could not get in touch with the witnesses to investigate the matter firsthand.

The Fife Incident was one of the most perplexing cases that I have ever worked on, and I would dearly love to have discovered more.

'Sadly however, I was never afforded the opportunity to do so.

Until such time as the witnesses elect to come forward and supply us with more information, then any half-decent investigator will have to view the case with at least some degree of suspicion.

## Madness Or Wisdom?

According to a survey carried out by 'FOCUS MAGAZINE,' late last year, more than half the population of the UK believes that extraterrestrial intelligence exists, and that, if alien contact has already been established, the governments concerned would do everything in their power to keep the news top secret.

Interestingly, a larger proportion of men than women professed their belief in alien civilisations, a fact which may or may not supply ammunition to those who say males are more stubborn in their refusal to cast aside the make-believe worlds of childhood....

Paul Simpson, editor of 'FOCUS,' was quoted as saying; 'Even people who don't believe in UFOs, believe that the government wouldn't tell the truth if they knew there was alien life.'

More than 50 per cent of the 1,000 who were polled were convinced there is intelligent life on worlds other than our own. 14 per cent aren't too sure. Geographically speaking, people who live in the south west of the country seem to be more open-minded, with up to three quarters of them accepting the possibility of extraterrestrial life. London

London meanwhile, seems to be a darn site more sceptical, and pensioners were far less likely to consider the idea of aliens.

*'A lot of scientists are coming to the view that alien life is out there,'* added Mr Simpson in defence of his survey *'Our poll shows that belief in alien life is no longer only the preserve of the lunatic fringe.'*

The ubiquitous Nick Pope was roped in to give his tuppence ha'penny worth: *'Although 90 to 95 per cent of UFO sightings can be dismissed with fairly mundane explanations, but a small number of sightings are really interesting, because some form of intelligence was at work. I never got anyone trying to shut me up, though. Never once did anyone have a quiet word with me to cover up a mysterious sighting. Never once did a witness say that mysterious Men In Black had turned up at their house after a sighting. There's a lot of paranoia out there.'*

*'Of course, I have been accused of being part of the conspiracy myself, but you just can't win with some people.'* 12th January, 1999 *General 'LIVERPOOL DAILY POST.'*

## Tycoon Sets Out To Prove The Existence Of UFOs

Joe Firmage, a computer tycoon, has apparently elected to abandon his £1.2 billion business to search for the 'truth' about Unidentified Flying Objects.

He is apparently convinced beyond doubting that aliens have secretly made contact with our 'puny, pathetic human race,' and that there is a conspiracy aimed at suppressing this (quite literally) earth-shattering news from the public.

The 28-year-old tycoon quit his job at the computer consulting firm US Web/CKS, which he self-founded over a decade earlier, to devote his life to the search for proof positive.

He called this one-man campaign *'the most important news in 2000 years,'* and he seemed determined to uncover evidence of a supposed link between recent scientific and technological advances (including such exotic-sounding paraphernalia as semi-conductors, fibre optics and lasers) and the recovered debris from alleged saucer crashes. This theory of so-called back-engineering can be traced back to the myths and wild rumours that have since sprung up in the wake of the infamous Roswell Incident of 1947, and is now as much a part of modern Ufological folklore as the those pesky, abducting Grey's and immense Flying Triangles....

Firmage was quoted as saying; *'It is quite understandable, given decades of government disinformation specifically designed to create a "giggle factor" surrounding the subject. But if we can travel to another star, why can't others?'*

Interestingly, the press reports that we came across all seemed keen as mustard to highlight the fact that Joe's credentials as an entrepreneur, at least where computers are concerned, were second to none. He was a physics student at the University of Utah, and was aged just 18 when he formed his first company; Serius, specialising in writing computer operating system codes. That selfsame company was sold off just five years ago for the cool sum of £15 million.

By 1995, the whizzkid had formed USWeb, which as recently as December, 1998, merged together with the CKS Group to form a £1.5 billion conglomerate that provides work for up to 1,950 people.

Joe has stated that he wanted to leave the (abem) humdrum life of a business tycoon behind him because he was afraid

that voicing views on the subject of UFOs could lead to his damaging the company's hard-earned reputation.

Joe has also taken to express these aforementioned 'views' on the pages of the Internet; a mammoth 600-page opus called 'THE TRUTH' (the Web site address, should you be curious enough to want to check it out for yourself, is: [www.thewordistruth.org](http://www.thewordistruth.org)). We haven't gotten round to perusing its contents, just yet, but it reportedly contains a set of new documents from a source he calls, somewhat predictably, the *'DEEP THROAT OF CYBERSPACE.'*

The material featured here includes alleged memos on the Roswell Mythos courtesy of none other than Harry Truman and scientists Albert Einstein and Robert Oppenheimer.

*'Ultimately, history will be my judge,'* Joe is quick to insist, in the face of the countless hordes of sceptics and detractors. *'I am making my best effort to help my friends out in the world take a look at the big picture, to look up into the stars tonight and consider the possibility that I might just be right.'*

Time will tell, I guess.

11th January, 1999 *'DAILY EXPRESS'*

## The Birch Photographs: Genuine After All?

Alex Birch, who shot to his fifteen minutes of fame after he'd reportedly snapped a photo of a formation of UFOs, only to later admit that he had faked the evidence, has it seems, retracted his confession.

The (frankly, to my mind at least, more than a tad dubious-looking) picture, taken in 1962, was snapped when Alex was little more than 12 years old. He claimed at the time that the five objects he'd captured on camera were hovering over his parent's house in Sheffield. The photos were pronounced as being genuine by Kodak, as well as 'experts' from the Air Ministry, and an inaugural meeting of BUFORA.

Ten years later, Alex made it known that the whole affair was nothing more than a rather disconcertingly simple hoax. He'd merely stuck the saucer-shaped images onto a pane of glass through which he took the photograph.

However, Alex now claims that he was forced into this 'confession' by a combination of the constant ridicule and pressure following the publication of the pictures.

Last February, Alex, now 49, told reporters that *'People think that I made a fortune. In fact, I made almost nothing, but I did become famous and with that came a lot of misery. My five-year-old grandson is UFO-crazy and I think it is important that the public knows the truth.'*

February, 1999 *Retford, Nottinghamshire 'SUNDAY PEOPLE'*

## A Planet Too Far...

Apparently just as determined to prove that Joe Firmages' search for 'the truth' about UFOs is doomed to end in a sea of mundanity, here comes James Annis, an astrophysicist, to voice his theory that the universe seems to have a self-regulating mechanism, thereby preventing alien life-forms from visiting other planets....

James, who is based at the US government's Fermilab Laboratory in Chicago, has set about trying to provide an answer to the so-called Allen Paradox Theory, first posed by the Nobel-prize winning physicist Enrico Fermi back in 1950.

Fermi drew attention to the fact that the Milky Way, is approximately 100,000 light years across. If any inquisitive aliens were able to explore it at a mere thousandth the speed of light (about 671,000 mph), they would cover it in a hundred million years.

As the Milky Way is somewhere in the region of 10 billion years old, this raised the question; where then are the ET's?

Now pay attention, here comes the science bit; Professor Annis was quoted in an article in the highly-respected journal *'NEW SCIENTIST'* as saying that apocalyptic explosions, or gamma ray bursts, may destroy advanced civilisations just as they have set about inventing methods of interstellar space travel

Gamma ray bursts are considered to be the most powerful explosions in the universe, unleashing immensely destructive amounts of radiation in a matter of seconds, quite feasibly when superdense remnants of dead stars or black holes collide.

The observed rate of gamma ray bursts is about one a galaxy every few hundred million years. The good professor maintains that that they may well have been a more common occurrence in the distant past, possibly sterilising galaxies every few million years or so. This is a markedly shorter period than any plausible timescale for the emergence of life sufficiently advanced to be capable of space travel.

*'They just haven't had enough time to get here yet,'* James told *NEW SCIENTIST.* *'The GRB model essentially resets the available time for the rise of intelligent life to zero each time a burst occurs.'*

2nd January, 1999 General *'THE TIMES'*

## A Twin Planet Earth?

And talking, as we were earlier, of the Milky Way, a planet said to be amazingly similar to our own, was recently discovered, according to astronomers.

The assembled 'experts' were quick to add that the potential for indigenous life is fairly high, and that it represents the first planet outside our solar system which compares with the Earth both in size and distance from its attendant sun.

The other 17 extra-solar planets that have so far been discovered have all proven to be so-called 'gas giants' like Jupiter and Saturn, which quite plainly, would be totally unable to support any form of life.

Researcher Ian Bond was quoted as saying of the find; *'It has a probable mass range between that of the Earth and that of the planet Neptune. Probably it would be a little bit heavier than the Earth.'*

*'The planet is over 30,000 light years away, and is the right distance from its star to sustain life'*

*'It will be something like between one to four astronomical units, which places it in a promising region.'*

An astronomical unit, incidentally, is the distance from the Earth to the Sun - about 93 million miles.

Less than one astronomical unit around a sun-sized star means that a planet would be too hot to support life (at least, as we know it). Planets more than a couple of astronomical units away will prove to be too cold.

In our solar system, the Earth lies pretty much dead centre of the 'life zone' - a band of space around the Sun which is warm enough to allow water, but not too hot to simply boil it away.

A team of New Zealand and Japanese astronomers, in conjunction with their American and Australian counterparts, who have been observing from Australia's Mount Stromlo, discovered the new planet in July, 1998, and elected to present their findings early this year at a meeting of the American Astronomical Society.

13th January, 1999 General *'DAILY MAIL'*

## Whispers From The Past

In the wake of Channel Four's more than halfway decent UFO series (see reviews elsewhere in this issue), *'RIDDLE OF THE SKIES,'* the tabloid press were quick to jump on

the bandwagon with a section of 'exclusive articles' featuring a writer of 'revelations' the majority of which are already well-known to Ufologists...

For the sake of completeness however, we include here a selection of airline pilots UFO encounters.

Captain Graham Sheppard's sighting of 1967 is inevitably given pride of place. The story of how he and his flight crew's routine flight from Scotland to London was suddenly enlivened by a message from Preston Radar Control which informed them that they had *'fast moving, opposite direction traffic in the airway.'*

Almost immediately, the Captain and two of his co-pilots were confronted by the sight of a 30ft wide, disc-shaped object that sped within metres of the plane.

It was in full view for about five seconds. The crew elected, for reasons that are surely obvious, not to report the sighting when they finally landed at Heathrow, and as a result the story of their near-miss remained a personal secret for over twenty five years.

Not that this was Sheppard's first UFO encounter. During the March of that very same year, on a routine flight from Gibraltar to Heathrow, his crew spotted two anomalous flying objects performing a bizarre aerial display high over the Bay of Biscay. The sightings were backed up by ground control radar, but the pilots were, perhaps not unsurprisingly given their profession, not exactly falling over themselves in a bid to make their stories public.

And when, in 1993, Graham felt emboldened enough to relate his account to the public during a TV programme dealing with UFOs, he was ordered to appear before British Airways Public Relations Department and his boss. It was made clear as crystal that any further talk of flying saucers would not be tolerated.

Graham later received a letter from BA informing him that; *'There is an overlap between your status as a BA captain and any statements which you make on all matters relating to aviation, including UFO phenomena...I must insist that you do not communicate with any branch of the media.'*

A mere 18 months after the receipt of this letter, Graham elected to take an early retirement.

He's now aged 56, and is employed as a freelance pilot, though that's not to say that he has forsaken the subject of UFOs. Far from it in fact. His own experiences have more than convinced him that there exists a whole welter of material concerning the subject of strange things seen in the sky by both commercial and military pilots. Graham has estimated that there are somewhere in the region of 4,000 such sightings on record.

*'I would guess that about 10 per cent of pilots have had some sort of experience. However, afraid of being ridiculed, and unwilling to attract the attention of extreme UFO enthusiasts, few speak out.'*

*'I must have spoken to 20 pilots who have had sightings but all are adamant that they do not want any publicity.'*

*'This reluctance is frustrating because, when they do talk, pilots make for very convincing witnesses.'*

*'Science is littered with pronouncements of the impossible that have then become facts of life. Sooner or later the authorities will have no option but to acknowledge the existence of extraterrestrial craft. It's bound to happen in the next ten years or so.'*

8th January, 1999 *'DAILY EXPRESS'*

## The Strange Case Of The 'Coma Man'

One of the weirdest cases we've come across in putting this issue together, concerns an unidentified man who was found unconscious at a railway station in Swindon, Wiltshire, during the first week in May.

The John Doe has since slipped into a coma from which, at the time of writing, he had failed to emerge. Despite repeated appeals by the police, no one has yet stepped forward to help identify him, and curiously, the only clues as to who he might be are a curious tattoo, and a collection of books on the paranormal, including numerous volumes dealing with UFOs (hence this snippets inclusion here).

Police issued a description of the man, he is 5ft 10 in, shaven headed with a swarthy (*Man In Black?*) complexion, and stated that he was in possession of a black backpack, and a sleeping bag.

As well as those books on the paranormal, of course.

He is thought to have been walking through North Wales, because he had a map of Snowdonia in his bag.

A ticket from Swansea to Bristol Temple Meads was found in his pocket.

A police spokesman added to the air of high-strangeness, by stating that; *'This is a bit like something out of the X FILES. No one has reported him missing and he could remain in a coma for the foreseeable future.'*

*'His strange tattoo (described as being 'Alien' in the good ol' Sunday press. Make of that what you will), could be of French origin, but the books were in English.'*

30th May, 1999 Swindon, Wiltshire 'SUNDAYMANC'

## Human Errors in Man's 11 message To Extraterrestals

Call it Cosmic Joke, or just plain ol' human penchant for mistakes, the fact is Earth's first radio message aimed directly at any potential ETs, in over 25 years contains two errors...

The message, which is a total of 23 pages long, was targeted at four Sun-like stars about 60 light years distant. It has been written in a code hopefully devised to make it understandable even if the signal becomes degraded across the vast gulf of space.

Its authors, the Canadian astrophysicists Yvan Dutil and Stephane Dumas, were reported to be nothing short of mortified when they were told the bad news by a Dutch computer programmer that they used the wrong symbol for an equals sign in a page devoted to geometry. Paul Houx, said somewhat sheepishly, *'I'm afraid we might be judged as a sloppy species by the League of Galactic Civilisations.'*

Dr Dutil was said to be so gutted by the realisation that they'd managed to get something so fundamentally obvious, completely and utterly wrong, he never slept for a couple of nights worrying about it.

The good news however, is that 'experts' have since confirmed that they think it is highly likely any advanced Extraterrestrial intelligence should still be well able to conceive that there has been an error. This optimism remains undaunted even though the blooper occurs twice, in explanations of circles and triangles, which will be simple pieces of geometry to anybody who has mastered radio and has a suitably powerful radio telescope to pick up the signal.

The last such attempt at establishing contact, of a sort, took place in 1974. The final page of the current message asks anybody receiving it to reply.

The signal will be broadcast three times over a three-hour-period from Eupatoriya Radio Observatory in the Ukraine. Don't hold your breath waiting for a response however. It would take more than a century before any reply could be received here on Earth.

## Instruments Of The Impossible: Giant UFO Over The North Sea

The pilot and crew of a British Debonair BAe 146 plane filed a report that they had encountered a huge unidentified

craft, *'the size of a battleship,'* as they flew over the North Sea.

Their accounts were afforded further credence by three other pilots who claimed to have also independently sighted the same, or a strikingly similar object.

Articles in the tabloid press seem to indicate that the CAA have admitted that they had received a report of the sighting, the contents of which indicate that the crew of the British charter plane first became aware of the mystery object after the jet's underside was bathed in an *'incandescent light.'*

A spokeswoman for the CAA issued the following statement; *'The captain reported seeing an unnatural bright light below his aircraft while flying at 28,000ft. The area below him was illuminated for about 10 seconds by incandescent light and it was certainly not a light from another plane'*

*'Three other aircraft saw it moving at a high speed or static. However, air traffic control were informed and confirmed that there were no other planes in the vicinity. Then, five minutes later, there was a brief radar return from a spot 75 miles away. We believe that there was no danger involved'*

The last part of this statement struck me as being somewhat curious given the apparent proximity of this fast moving 'mystery object' to the plane. Perhaps they know something we don't?

The Luton-based 96-seater was flying executives from Linköping, Sweden, to Humberside Airport. A spokesman for Debonair also issued a statement confirming that he had informed the chief executive of Debonair that a *'great red light in the sky'* had been sighted near to a company plane. Meanwhile, yet another CAA official claimed that the cylindrical-shaped object was tracked by military radar in Yorkshire as it entered UK airspace.

27th April, 1999 North Sea 'THE EXPRESS'

## Signs And Wonders: Green Fireballs Sighted Over The United States

The current crop of anomalous aerial phenomena sweeping across the skies of America began back in the early part of this year when on Friday, 8th January, a fireball of *"an eerie blue or green colour,"* flashed through the heavens across southern Alaska, and exploded with an *"earthshaking boom."*

Local papers carried reports that dozens of people phoned the authorities concerned by the appearance of the celestial objects at approximately 10:25pm. Most of the eyewitnesses stated that they'd seen a brilliant and colourful flash, followed several minutes later by a boom. This boom was so loud that it shook homes in the towns of Palmer and Wasilla, and was heard from South Anchorage to Sutton and beyond.

*'I wish I could describe it,'* eyewitness Gina Gilmore, who hails from Palmer, told reporters. *'It was an eerie blue or green colour. It lit up the whole area. Then we heard an explosion and it stilled our conversation.'*

*'I thought at first that it was a shooting star, but it's sheer intensity later had me wondering if it could have been a missile or something from "THE X-FILES."*

Another witness, Rachel Wagner, 16, was inside her house when she watched the object flash past her window.

*'It was greenish and it was loud.'* she less than helpfully related to investigators.

Donald Masters, an astronomy professor at the University of Alaska, put forward the theory that the flash came from a meteor or a comet fragment probably the size of a pumpkin, that exploded about a mile above the Earth's surface.

Other scientists were of the opinion that the meteor was a late comer from the Quarantid Meteor shower, which began last December, 28th.

There were rumours that the object, meteor or otherwise, struck the ground near Parks Highway, but no trace of debris was ever recovered. Perhaps we shouldn't be too surprised by this however, because as Donald Masters was quick to point out; *'Meteors are extremely hard to find.'*

\*\*\* Meanwhile, on Sunday, January 10th, at 7:05pm, when Bill Statton, who was driving home at the time, spotted what he took to be a green fireball streaking across the night sky in Pittsfield, New Hampshire.

*'My God, this thing is as clear as day'* he remembers thinking to himself. *It was huge, it was right along side of us.*

*'It was descending like a plane, and was the size of a nickel or quarter in the sky, and perhaps a few thousand feet away and a few thousand feet up, although it was hard to tell.'*

Bill's fiancée, Kathy Bickford, also saw the object, and police departments in Bow and Northfield, also reported sightings. Callers described the phenomena as being *'a green flash in the sky'* (a description which is remarkably reminiscent of a line used by the Artilleryman character (played by David Essex) in Jeff Wayne's Musical Version Of HG Wells' *'WAR OF THE WORLDS'*

\*\*\* A few days later, on January 19th, at 10pm, a blue-green fireball was seen moving quickly from the southeast to the southern part of the Makiki section of Honolulu, Hawaii.

One witness, Raymond Petry, was on Punaohu Street, when looking eastward, he was startled to see a fireball, much slower than a meteor, surrounded by a luminous glow.

Interestingly, the residents of Fairfield, Ohio, were reporting having heard a mysterious boom *'similar to a shotgun sound,'* in the skies above the town.

The sound was attributed to ice heaving or frost cracking by representatives of the National Weather Service at Wilmington, Ohio.

However, Professor Kenneth Hinkle, a geologist at the University of Cincinnati, refuted the 'frost cracking' theory and stated that *'such explanations are not workable in this instance.'*

*'In the high Arctic, frost-cracking resembles a sharp snap similar to a rifle report, which can be felt.'*

The origin of the boom, therefore remains a mystery...

10th January, 1999 Southern Alaska, *'THE ANCHORAGE DAILY NEWS'* / 11th January, 1999 New Hampshire, USA *'UNION LEADER'*

## US Government Draws Up Plans To Protect The Earth From Aliens

Reports in the American press, seem to indicate that the authorities in that country were serious about formulating a strategy aimed at protecting our planet from potentially dangerous extraterrestrial life forms.

For the first time in three decades the US government has deemed it necessary to act in a bid to ward off contaminants, virulent microbes and infectious organisms, all of which remain a possible risk during NASA's programme of sample retrieval from our neighbouring planets, such as Mars.

*'If there is a living organism in a sample you bring back, you don't want to let it out,'* Margaret Race, a biologist at stationed at the SETI Institute in Mountain View, California.

Without shouting the news from the rooftops, scientists are due to begin a series of meetings aimed at recommending ways they may be able to contain any potential space bugs. The Agriculture and Interior Departments as well as the Environmental Protection Agency, will look at protecting crops, livestock, air and water. The National Institutes of Health and the Centres For Disease Control and Prevention have become involved because of possible human risks from disease.

The National Science Foundation has experience with organisms that live in extreme environments like Antarctica. Not since the inaugural Apollo Moon Mission of 1969 have the powers that be had such a cause for concern. The fact is though, that over the next decade (assuming we're still around, of course) unmanned craft will doubtless be launched with the express purpose of bringing back samples of extraterrestrial soil, dust and other assorted materials, and whilst most scientists agree that the chances of anything decidedly deadly coming from outer space are slim (*"a million to one?"*) it's certainly not advisable to be taking any chances.

A timely re-read of *'THE ANDROMEDA STRAIN'* should provide all the proof we need of that...



## Jill Tarter: The Woman Who Believes We Are Not Alone

Jill Tarter, 55. (the real-life model for Jodie Foster's character Ellie Arroway in the movie *'CONTACT'*) is the chief scientist at SETI's Puerto Rico laboratory. At a conference in Washington last April, on the origins of the known universe, told reporters from *'THE EXPRESS'* that she was approached back in the 1970's by people from interested in the possibility of Extraterrestrial intelligence, because she was the only person who knew how to programme the early computers that they were then using. *'I got hooked on the idea that astronomer's and engineer's could do experiments that would answer questions that, up until then, had only been tackled by philosophers.'*

*'My eight-year-old daughter, when asked in school what her mother did, said: "Look for little green men!"'*

*'But SETI is not about searching for alien visitors or UFOs. Two huge radio telescopes at Arecibo and Jodrell Bank, in Cheshire, England, are constantly scanning the skies for "narrow band" radio signal.'*

'So far SETI has searched about 400 nearby stars for signs of intelligent signals. It works on the assumption that aliens would put a message in a "code" understandable by any intelligent life-form - say a "language" based on the atomic spectrum of hydrogen - the most common element in the universe.

'We cannot guess what aliens might want to say to us but it is possible that we would feel compelled to reply. But we may not want to broadcast our presence to possibly predatory species. Strict international protocol is in place to govern the nature and timing of any reply.

'Several dozen interesting signals have so far been discovered, though none have been confirmed as alien signals. They could be radio blasts from natural objects such as pulsars or black holes, or possibly even from our own satellites.

'Many researchers now believe that there is a good chance that life evolved on Mars. Even if Martians turn out to be bugs, the fact is that a kind of life has turned up on the first planet where we went looking for it.

'Finding a second genesis in our Solar System will greatly increase the chances of life being ubiquitous in the universe.

'Just last week (April, 1999), it was revealed that another entire Solar System had been found, 44 light years away. Three planets orbit a sun-like star called Upsilon Andromedae.

'Finding a Solar System so close, after so little searching, shows that planets orbiting stars must be the norm - and many astronomers believe that planets around most stars in the Galaxy equals billions of potential homes for life. Even if only one per cent have living beings and even of only one per cent of those have intelligence, and only one per cent of those have advanced technology, that is still 100,000 advanced civilisations in the Milky Way alone.

'I believe that our new system of computers will one day pay off. In just six years we will be able to reach 100,000 stars.

'With similar technology, an alien civilisation 10 light years away could detect our radio broadcasts with ease.

'The current search is a trillion times more sensitive than when SETI began.

'A signal would make us realise that the difference between us and this other species was vast. I would hope that this knowledge would trivialise the differences between us humans.'

26th April, 1999 Arecibo, Puerto Rico. 'THE EXPRESS'

## Weird Human Behaviour

### Sadly-Misplaced Faith, The Rose-Eater, Blind Drivers, The Foot Fetishist, And The Man Who Ate His Living Room

We kick off this issue's selection of Tales That Witness Madness, with news from Paris, France, that an African woman named Hawa Greou, was jailed for a total of eight years for circumcising 48 young girls.

Twenty six parents were found guilty of acting as accomplices to Hawa and were given sentences ranging from three years suspended to two years in prison.

Ms Greou, who hails originally from Mali, had organised the ritual mutilation of the girls, but the incidents only came to light when a complaint was made by Mariatou Koita, 23, who is now a Paris law student.

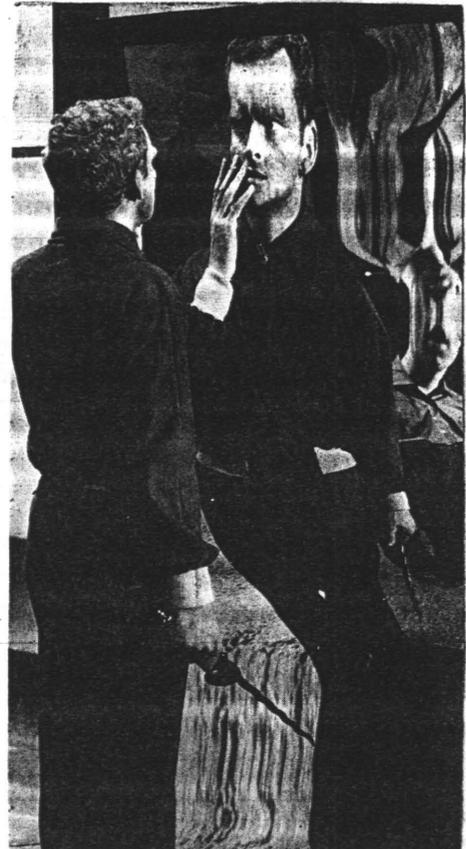
She demanded to see a judge five years ago after Greou, 52, went to her parents' flat to circumcise her younger sister, Mariam. Female circumcision became a crime in France in 1984.

16th February, 1999 Paris, France 'THE GUARDIAN'

\*\*\* Then, consider if you will, Constant Reader, the fact that police in San Francisco arrested a man who held several people at gunpoint before attempting to zoom away in his motorised wheelchair.

Cuong Tran, 27, was apprehended on charges of robbery. Investigators were working on the theory that Tran is a former Vietnamese gang member who was paralysed in an inter-gang shooting.

4th February, 1999 San Francisco, USA 'THE TIMES'



\*\*\* Next up, in the Bizarre Crime annals, we have the case of a thief who, for reasons best known to himself, has taken to breaking and entering into people's homes and cooking and eating the owner's sausages, eggs and bacon. He (or maybe it's a she. This is the age of sexual equality, after all) then washes the plates, cleans up and leaves without taking anything else whatsoever.

March, 1999 Scarborough, England 'THE VIRGINIAN MAGAZINE'

\*\*\* Lauren Rhoda, a less-than-successful mindreader, who also claimed that she had x-ray vision, elected to drive along a street in Canada, blindfolded.

Sadly, her faith in her powers proved to be unfounded and she crashed into seven vehicles and wound up smashing into a shop.

7th March, 1999 Ottawa, Canada 'SUNDAY PEOPLE.'

\*\*\* Equally bizarre, was the case of the 'Rose-Eating Woman,' who was reported to have been entering florists in Istanbul, Turkey. According to police and astonished witnesses, she wolfs down a total of 24 roses and flees without paying.

7th March, 1999 Istanbul, Turkey 'SUNDAY PEOPLE'

\*\*\* Only in America!!! A Pennsylvania judge, one might think, not too surprisingly, threw out a lawsuit in which Donald Drusky, 63, attempted to claim that God Himself

had failed in his duty. The reason? Donny had asked the Lord to see to it that he be given back his youth, granted the talent to play guitar, and to resurrect both his mother and his pet pigeon from the dead.

He argued that if God failed to turn up in court then the case would be lost by the Almighty by default. Judge Norman Mordue however, saw sense and found the suit to be 'frivolous.'

I guess that's one way of putting it...

12th March, 1999 Pennsylvania, USA 'SUNDAY EXPRESS'

\*\*\* According to statistics coming out of Japan, more countrymen than ever before elected to take the irreversible step (unless you happen to subscribe to the beliefs of a certain Glenn Hoddle - and how anyone can honestly lend any credence to the words of a man who stated that he didn't consider Michael Owen to be 'a natural goalscorer,' is beyond me - Ed) of killing themselves.

The prolonged economic slump in that part of the world has been identified as being the main factor behind the dramatic rise in suicides, most of which have been committed by middle-aged men.

The number of suicides rose to an incredible 27,102 in the first 10 months of 1998, an increase of 38.3 per cent from the same period a year earlier, according to a spokesman from the Health and Welfare Ministry.

20th March, 1999 Japan, General 'LIVERPOOL DAILY POST'

\*\*\* One of the strangest methods of killing someone we've come across in a long time (well, since the publication of the last issue, anyway) concerns an unnamed Japanese lady, who was hell-bent upon murdering her husband...

Rather than stick to any conventional method, she elected to beat her hubby to death with, of all things, their pet turtle. The poor creature proved to be heavily bloodstained, but was otherwise unharmed.

21st March, 1999 Japan 'SUNDAY PEOPLE'

\*\*\* At least 10 Filipinos were nailed to crosses in a farming village north of Manila, whilst scores of other fanatics made do with flogging themselves as they walked shirtless and barefoot in the midst of the annual Good Friday Rites of Penitence.

Hundreds of tourists flocked to San Pedro Cutud village in San Fernando, the capital of Pampanaga province, to watch this (somewhat dubious) highlight of the Easter Week celebration.

3rd April, 1999 San Pedro, Pampanaga Province, Philippines 'LIVERPOOLDAILYPOST'

\*\*\* This sounds to us uncannily reminiscent of a modern Urban Folk Story, but according to reports in the less-than-reliable Sunday press, an unnamed man, a victim of a somewhat severe eating disorder, managed to eat his entire living room at his home in Lop Buri, Thailand. Included amongst the items he wolfed down during a reported seven month binge, was the television set.

I've heard of people eating their way through house and home, but this is ridiculous!!!

4th April, 1999 Lop Buri, Thailand 'SUNDAY PEOPLE'

\*\*\* Police in Argentina, spotted a truck being driven in a somewhat erratic manner stopped the vehicle only to discover that the driver was blind and was being guided by his 13-year-old daughter. 'The blind man was driving fairly well, an officer was reported as saying later.

'Although he made some pretty abrupt manoeuvres which attracted the attention of a patrol car.'

2nd May, 1999 Argentina 'MAIL ONSUNDAY'

\*\*\* Meanwhile, over in New York, USA, the former publicist of Maria Maples has been convicted for a second time of stealing approximately 70 pairs of her shoes.

Chuck Jones readily admitted that he had formed a 'sexual relationship with his client's footwear. At the time of going to press, he was facing a possible jail sentence of up to 15 years.' He was due to be sentenced sometime during June.

His first conviction was set aside on a legal technicality.

7th May, 1999 New York, USA 'DAILYMANC'

\*\*\* A man decided to use a shotgun to blast off his own kneecap for the deceptively simple reason that it had caused him over two years of pain, despite several fruitless operations.

Henry Shepherd, 27, of Cambridgeshire, is now reported to be very likely to be given an artificial knee.

Let's just hope for his sake, that he doesn't feel quite so trigger happy again in the future....

12th May, 1999 Chatteris, Cambridgeshire 'THE TIMES'

\*\*\* Talk about poetic justice...Sean Barry, a 23-year-old waiter who hails from Arizona, USA, had an outstanding warrant for his arrest, and was duly caught by the police when he somehow managed to trap himself in a pair of his own handcuffs. Unable to get himself free, he was forced to phone the police for assistance, and was eventually released from the cuffs...Only after he was safely locked up in jail.

16th May, 1999 Arizona, USA 'REUTERS NEWS AGENCY'

\*\*\*Nicholas Vitaleh, 24, who hails from San Diego, USA, has been charged with assaulting his girlfriend with a deadly weapon....A 10lb tuna.

20th June, 1999 San Diego, USA 'SUNDAY PEOPLE'

\*\*\* And finally, a completely doo-lally burglar named John Ward, elected to ring for a taxi directly from his victim's house in Perth, Australia.

Perhaps not too amazingly, he was promptly caught after the police managed to trace the call by simply using the redial button.

4th July, 1999 Perth, Australia 'NEWS OF THE WORLD'

\*\*\* One of the most pointless crimes we've come across in the five years or so this magazine has been doing the rounds, concerns a manic graffiti artist who, for some totally illogical reason has taken to spray-painting a series of luminous swear words on poor defenceless sheep.

As a police spokesman, somewhat understatedly told reporters; 'It's a very strange crime.'

11th July, 1999 Bavaria, Germany 'NEWS OF THE WORLD'

## A SERIES OF TOTAL OVER-REACTIONS

A pile of dog muck served as the catalyst for a bizarre chain of events in Lille, France.

Jean Marc-Noyelle, 30, and his wife Ellane, 38, returned home from a day out only to find that their pet had left a stinking heap of cack in their front room. Jean accidentally slipped on it and was so angry that he physically strangled their puppy. His wife, equally enraged at her husband's actions, promptly took out a kitchen knife and stabbed him to death.

9th March, 1999 Lille, France 'DAILYSLUR'

\*\*\* A Maths teacher in a New York school elected to file a law suit against a pupil who had the temerity to grab a quick ciggie in the imagined sanctuary of the Boys' toilets.

Gary Phillips is attempting to claim the equivalent of £40 in damages after suffering bouts of watering eyes, a sore throat, headache and congestion. He asserts that these ailments were caused by the cloud of smoke emerging from the lavatory door.

12th March, 1999 New York, USA 'SUNDAY MAIL'

\*\*\* An elderly inhabitant of a residential home in Australia was charged with beating a nurse to death with a

cane. The reason? She had been raging mad because she had been banned from watching a wrestling match on the TV

6th April, 1999 Australia 'DAILY SLUR'

\*\*\* Harminder Singh Virk, 54, shot his daughter Ranjit, 18, a total of seven times after she had had the temerity to favour him with a dirty look.

He was convicted of first-degree murder by a court in Kent, Washington, USA, and faces a minimum of 25 years in jail.

23rd April, 1999 Seattle, USA 'THE TIMES'

\*\*\* Kendrick Bengtsson, who is profoundly deaf, was arrested in Stockholm, Sweden, for attempting to chop off his wife's fingers... The reason? He claims she kept nagging him in sign language.

20th June, 1999 Stockholm, Sweden 'THE SUNDAY PEOPLE'

## WHEN FATE SMILES DOWN

A plumber by the name of David Cross was hurled from his motorbike after crashing into a car, and suffered a major heart attack, after swallowing his tongue, and slipping into unconsciousness. He was at death's door, and would almost certainly have passed away if it hadn't have been for a quite remarkable series of coincidences...

The car that he quite literally, crash-landed in front of was being driven by a coronary surgeon, specially trained in treating road accident victims.

Even more incredible, not too far behind the scene of the smash, were an ambulance and a car containing no less than four anaesthetists.

'When I hit the car I was hurled into the air and landed in the other lane of traffic,' said Mr Cross, a 56-year-old father-of-three who hails from Horsforth, West Yorkshire. 'I took a right pounding and was in terrible pain. I was sure I was going to die. I had swallowed my tongue and was turning blue, but luckily the surgeon managed to revive me and keep me that way until the ambulance arrived.'

Dr Joe McGoldrick, a consultant coronary surgeon at Leeds General Infirmary, was driving home along the A6120 in the midst of the evening rush hour when the accident occurred. The doctor, who also happened to be an instructor in life-saving, was aided by the arrival of a passing St John ambulance fully loaded with breathing equipment. He was even further assisted by the four coronary anaesthetists who just happened to be passing. Mr Cross, who sustained a fractured collar bone and broken breast bone was quoted as saying that; 'I didn't recognise the doctor's face but I knew his voice very well. I'm just glad everything is okay - I feel like I've won the Lottery.'

8th February, 1999 Leeds, Yorkshire 'DAILY EXPRESS'

## Stretching Coincidence To Its Outer Limits

Mrs J. McDonald, of Airdrie, Scotland, was walking past her local station together with her husband, when she noticed an old lady struggling to carry her bag.

'Go and help her, please,' she asked her partner. It was obvious that she couldn't manage.

As the couple assisted her up the steps with her luggage, they struck up a conversation, and it turned out the old lady was on vacation from Canada. On impulse, Mrs McDonald mentioned her aunt, whom she'd dearly loved, but who had died whilst in Canada.

She went further and related both her name and the town where she'd lived.

The old woman had suddenly gone ashen white.

'My goodness,' she said, when she'd recovered her composure. 'She was my best friend. I was the one who found her after she collapsed at home. I was the lady who called the ambulance.'

29th May, 1999 Airdrie, Scotland 'THE WEEKLY NEWS'

## A REAL BARGAIN BUY

Some people have all the luck...

An unnamed Dutch woman purchased a second-hand book for the decidedly-less-than princely sum of 60p at a flea market, and wound up £30,000 richer.

Unbeknownst to anyone, there were two original Rembrandt sketches hidden between its pages.

She came across them as she was leafing through the book at home. Just to add to the good fortune, there was also a third sketch by one of the acknowledged Master's students.

5th May, 1999 Holland 'WEEKLY NEWS'

## 'I Was Working As A Waitress, In A Small Cafe...'

An Alabama woman was serving a plate of bacon and eggs to a famished trucker at a roadside diner when she was tipped with a lottery ticket. Amazingly, it turned out to be a jackpot winner and she netted herself a £6.25 million payout.

It was the driver's habit to buy the tickets from another state as a tip for staff due to the fact that there's no lottery in Alabama.

Predictably however, the woman's good fortune has caused a great deal of bitterness and resentment amongst her fellow workers. Other employees set about suing their colleague for a share of the winnings stating that there was an understanding that if any member of staff got lucky, it would be shared by all.

7th May, 1999 Alabama, USA 'THE DAILY SLUR'

## AND WHEN FATE TRULY TURNS ITS BACK... The Cosmic Joker's Latest Pranks

Torquay Bowls Club were forced to call in a team of exterminators after their greens were constantly being ravaged by hordes of marauding rabbits.

Ironically enough, the so-called crack team were only able to catch and strangle one single rabbit...And that wound up being the pet's club mascot; Lucky.

March, 1999 Torquay, England 'THE VIRGINIAN MAGAZINE'

\*\*\* Another animal similarly cursed with bad luck, was a lost cat who had returned home after going AWOL for two years, to its home in Newquay...Only for the unfortunate moggy to be run over by a car immediately upon its return.

23rd March, 1999 Newquay 'DAILY MANC'

\*\*\* In Hanover, a German hit upon the not-so-cracking wheeze of hiding his DM 23,000 (£7,850) in his underpants in a bid to conceal the cash from any would-be robbers whilst he embarked upon a train journey.

Unfortunately for him, he managed to lose the entire sum after he went to the toilet for an (ahem) Number Two!!!

Everything turned out okay in the end for the unnamed man, however. Police later found the money on the line after he'd breathlessly poured out his story to the officers.

The man, who had been terrified of potential pickpockets, had somehow contrived to forget about the cunning hiding place and accidentally flushed the money away.

9th March, 1999 Hanover, Germany 'THE TIMES'

\*\*\* Meanwhile, in Nairobi, a heartless thief who was callous enough to steal the collection following a Sunday service at All Saints Cathedral, was perhaps the victim of Divine Retribution, as he was run over by a bus as he fled with the box.

The middle-aged man, who had attended the service, wasn't looking where he was going and ran smack into the bus's path after he was confronted by members of the congregation who had clocked him stuffing the money into his pockets.

7th March, 1999 Nairobi, Africa 'THE KENYA TIMES'

\*\*\* And the award for the Most Hopeless Bank Robber of 1999, so far at least, must surely go to Andrew Buckland, who was jailed for life last March.

Manchester Crown Court heard that Buckland, aged 30, burst into a Barclay's bank armed with a toy pistol and amazingly, took his place in the queue for customer services.

When he finally got to the front of the line of people he handed over a note. It contained the following words: 'This is a robbery. Give us your money. I've got a gun.'

Even more incredible, he actually signed the demand; Andrew Buckland!!!

And the fun doesn't stop there, either.

On the reverse side of the note was a typed letter from his council, complete with his address.

A cashier calmly read the note, and bade Andrew to take a seat, 'we'll be with you in a moment.' She then pressed the secret alarm button to summon the police.

Andrew sat himself down, and when no one came over with the cash he started banging on the counter-window shouting; Hurry up, I haven't got all day.'

He was still sitting waiting patiently for his money when the police eventually turned up.

He was arrested without a struggle.

5th March, 1999 Manchester 'DAILYMANC'

\*\*\* A good deal less deserving of such an unlucky break (unless you've got one hell of a macabre sense of humour) was 12-year-old James Stones, who, mere moments after being picked from over 300 hopefuls to join a child modelling agency, fell prey to a pretty nasty accident. He was struck by a hit-and-run lorry driver, and suffered severe facial injuries and a broken jaw.

10th March, 1999 Thurnscoe, South Yorkshire 'THE TELEGRAPH'

\*\*\* Steve Legg, 28, a supposed escapologist, was forced to call out a locksmith to gain entry to his garage. He was intent upon acquiring his...Wait for this, stage props!!!

21st March, 1999 Rustington, Sussex 'SUNDAYPEOPLE'

\*\*\* Our favourite clipping in the 'hard-luck' stories section, for this issue however, simply has to be the tragico-comic tale of a Nigerian rainmaker who was instantly killed by a bolt of lightning as he was setting about climbing onto a building where a burial wake was being held.

He was attempting to divert a rainstorm that threatened to unleash a deluge upon the mourners. The man, known only as Rasaan, had been employed by a family in the locality of Abeokuta, southwestern Nigeria, to ward off the rain and had just scrambled up to the roof of a house to begin intoning his appeal to Sango, the Yoruba God Of Thunder, when lightning streaked from the Heavens and threw him to the ground.

How's that for divine intervention?

17th March, 1999 Abeokuta, Nigeria 'THE POST EXPRESS'

\*\*\* An Edinburgh office worker lost his rag and slammed the keyboard in frustration when his company's antique computer crashed for the umpteenth time.

The irony was that he'd been writing a report to his bosses about a US survey which reveals that 83 per cent of users have hit their computers at least once.

21st March, 1999 Edinburgh, Scotland 'SCOTTISH SUNDAYPOST'

\*\*\* A fugitive by the name of Horst Sieber, had been on the run from a maximum security prison for a total of three years when he was finally recaptured in Munich, Germany. He'd been earning a living as a circus escape artist.

4th April, 1999 Munich, Germany 'NEWS OF THE WORLD'

\*\*\* A festival in Egen, Holland, that involves the traditional sport of cheese-throwing wound up shrouded in tragedy after a Kobiicki Kobiski somehow managed to kill his own father with a decidedly badly thrown cheese.

11th April, 1999 Egen, Holland 'NEWS OF THE WORLD'

*Incidentally, this story reminds us of the egg fight in Islamabad, last January, when Afghan tribesmen clashed with Taleban militiamen in a southern border city after they were stopped from playing a traditional game of egg-fighting. This altercation left 12 people dead and two seriously wounded.*

*The fighting broke out in Khost when tribesmen refused to obey a Taleban edict declaring that the game, in which two participants hold an egg and hit them together until one breaks, 'un-Islamic'*

\*\*\* A sword swallower from Bonn, Germany, managed to inadvertently kill himself after he shoved an umbrella down his throat...Only to accidentally press the button that opened it

18th April, 1999 Bonn, Germany 'NEWS OF THE WORLD'

\*\*\* Three women were enjoying a spot of chill-out relaxation in a tanning salon in Arkansas, when suddenly, the ceiling collapsed, causing tiles to go crashing to the floor....Along with a 26-year-old Peeping Tom, who had previously hidden himself in the space between the ceiling and the roof.

The second he hit the floor, the intruder legged it and locked himself into a bathroom. He waited there nice and quietly until the police arrived to arrest him.

11th May, 1999 Arkansas, USA 'DAILYSLUR'

\*\*\* John Blake was given a rabbit's foot, a so-called lucky token, by his son, to place on his car key ring...And suffered a total of four accidents in just eight weeks.

John, 54, of Christchurch, Dorset, was quoted as saying; 'It was a total jinx. I'd driven for 28 years without so much as a single accident.'

6th June, 1999 Christchurch, Dorset 'SUNDAYPEOPLE'

## THE NAME GAME

The new police superintendent for Lewes, Sussex, is, less-than-appropriately enough, Colin Crookes.

17th February, 1999 Lewes, Sussex 'SUNDAYMANC'

\*\*\* A plumber had to be freed by firemen after he had somehow managed to get his head stuck in a lavatory bowl at his home in Puckeridge, Hertfordshire.

His name was WC Sticks!!!

March, 1999 Puckeridge, Herts 'THE VIRGINIAN MAGAZINE'

\*\*\* And in an article in a recent edition of 'THE TIMES,' concerned with obesity, a Professor Michael Lean and in

the very same issue, there was a feature on Birthdays Today, which included mention of the Surveyor Of The Fabric of Westminster Abbey, who had the Cosmic Jokery name of Mr Donald Buttress.

25th May, 1999 'THE TIMES'

\*\*\* An American waiter called in the boys in blue after he became stuck in a pair of handcuffs after a childish prank went wrong.

When the Phoenix Police arrived on the scene, they routinely checked out his name on their warrants computer and, you guessed it, they discovered that there was an outstanding warrant against him on a driving charge.

The waiter was duly taken to the police station and his cuffs were finally removed. In the dubious comfort of a cell.  
29th May, 1999 Phoenix, Arizona, USA 'THE WEEKLY NEWS'

\*\*\* And, here's something to give a fair welter of encouragement to anyone who hasn't managed to pass their driving test at the first attempt....(Chin up, Kathy, read this and you'll feel a whole pile better).

An Australian learner driver finally elected to call it a dead loss in his attempts to master the art of successfully passing his test.

And not before time you might think, when you consider that he'd failed on an unbelievable 103 occasions!!!

30th May, 1999 Australia 'WEEKLY WORLD NEWS'

\*\*\* How's this for a classic example of a Cosmic Joke...

Phillip Tinkler, 34, decided on impulse to go shopping for a burglar alarm for his house in Grimsby. You've guessed it. When he returned from his trip to the store he was gutted to find that he'd already been burgled.

30th May, 1999 Grimsby, England 'SUNDAYMANC'

\*\*\* A prisoner residing in a cell in Cape Town, South Africa, must have been left wishing that he had gone on that crash course diet he had been promising himself for ages....

He'd also been planning a jail break by arranging for two hydraulic jacks to be smuggled into his cell.

Inmates had collaborated on his behalf to prise the bars of the cell apart and at least seven of the prisoners managed to make good their escape. Unfortunately for fatty arbuttle he remained behind bars 'cos he was too obese to get through the hole.

12th June, 1999 Cape Town, South Africa 'THE WEEKLY NEWS'

\*\*\* A thankfully (for him) unnamed thief was easily apprehended by the police after the brick he attempted to throw through a window simply bounced off the armoured glass...And it promptly knocked him clean out.

11th July, 1999 Marseilles, France 'NEWS OF THE WORLD'

## Witchcraft In The World Today A Sure-Fire Spell For A Millennium Baby

As the days roll by at a fair break-neck speed towards the year 2000 (and the possible dawn of The End Of The World As We Know It), the latest craze seems to be a somewhat irrational desperation to conceive a baby so that it might be born on New Year's Day itself.

Particularly obsessive on this score, are a couple from Witney, Oxfordshire, who sought the intervention of a

'white sorcerer' to assist in their bid to accomplish their goal.

Susan and Eric Ray took to hiring the Warlock, Kevin Carlyon, to perform a magic ritual aimed at ensuring Sue's pregnancy. Reckless Eric was quoted as saying; 'We've been trying for a baby for years, now. Hospital tests show there's no reason why we can't have children.'

Kevin is reported to be charging £25 for the 'benefit' of energising an onyx crystal at an altar on the ancient, locally revered site of White Horse Hill.

The object is then for the couple to take the crystal back to their home and place it under a pillow or right next to their bed.

Perhaps we shouldn't stand too aghast at Kevin's bold assertion that 'as long as Susan and Eric conceive between March 20th and 31st, they will have a baby on January 1st, 2000

21st March, 1999 White Horse Hill, Oxfordshire.  
'SUNDAY PEOPLE'

## Penning A New 'Book Of Shadows'

Phyllis Currott, a former celebrity lawyer, has decided to jack in her professional status and become a full-time Witch.

In an interview with Noreen Taylor, a journalist from 'THE TIMES,' Phyllis, who has just published a book on the subject; 'BOOK OF SHADOWS: REDISCOVERING THE ANCIENT WISDOM OF WITCHCRAFT,' related the following.



NT: 'Why would you, a seemingly intelligent woman, call yourself a Witch and High Priestess? Are you fond of derision?'

PC: 'I can joke about pointy black hats like the rest. I've got a sense of humour. I've heard all the stereotypical stuff before; cackling, toothless hags flying around on broomsticks, invoking evil spells. I listen for a while, and then I pull the plug and get serious, because the demonisation of Witches is inextricably bound up with patriarchal religions and the tyranny women have suffered throughout history.

'The word "Witch" comes from the old Anglo-Saxon word wicce, meaning 'Wise One.' Using the term 'Witch' forces the world to confront its negative stereotypes and the dark

history of misogyny from which these stereotypes have sprung.'

NT: 'You seem keen to banish other myths connected with the subject, also. For example, Witches do not always wear black, most prefer 'jewel colours' such as blue, green and red?'

PC: 'Yes, and we do not worship the Devil. There was no Devil in the pre-Christian religion of Goddesses.

'Nor do we cast spells to harm people - it's a grave violation of Wiccan spirituality to use power to control another. Witches learn to work with the energy present in the natural world, to transform themselves.

'Magic is bringing one's own divine power into manifestation.'

NT: 'Okay, so you're formally known as the High Priestess Of The Circle Of Ara, the President of The Covenant Of Goddesses. You claim that Witchcraft is one of the fastest-growing spiritual practices in the United States. Even the famous are drawn to it - in the preface of your book, you name four women who have come out in public as believers in the new Goddess. These include Tori Amos, Cybil Shepherd, Erica Jong and Olympia Dukakis...'

PC: 'Well, sisterhood is powerful. There are many women in the media who support and perceive what I am doing and have helped me to reach a wider audience.

'Witchcraft empowers women. You stop taking crap. You say "I'm sorry boys, move over. You don't have the one true way."

'By so doing, you are challenging the last bastion of the patriarchal structure.

'I've toured 20 cities in the US talking to about magic, telling them of the inner journeys I've made. Afterwards, women come up to me saying: "I know exactly what you're talking about! I've had those flashes that have turned out to be premonitions, too."

'I wouldn't be involved if it was all a question of belief. What charges my batteries is evidence, experiences. You know what would be marvellous now? If I was home I could invite you to one of my circles to do a bit of journeying.

'Everything would become much clearer then. You would lie on the floor with the rest of my group, close your eyes and think, "Oh, this is so uncomfortable." Then I would start drumming, you would eventually relax, breathe deeply, and begin to have visions. When I stopped drumming you'd sit up and talk about your visions with the others in the circle, and you'd find that you'd shared the same images. You think that you'd been imagining it all, but you would have experienced something true and real.'

NT: 'This evidently has material benefits?'

PC: 'Yes, the visualisation leads to energy, which one takes away from the circle, re-empowering the believer and helping her towards achieving goals. Is this how Cybill Shepherd landed her TV series CYBIL?'

NT: 'Cybil eventually got the show she wanted through a combination of techniques learnt through spiritual practices.

'Being a Witch is not a rejection of science, nor is it a regressive step back into a world of superstition.

'I am the daughter of intellectuals. My parents brought me up to believe in ideals, not in religion. When I was a law student and began to have experiences I couldn't find answers for. I didn't go to the world of gurus and mystics. I searched in the rational world, and found that the answer to my flashes, telepathic visions and intuitions - too many to ignore, I might tell you - lay in science, in the study of quantum physics.

'Scientists now recognise that human beings have a remarkable capacity in ecstatic states of consciousness to integrate with the Universe, slowing our heartbeat, moving back in time, having out-of-the-body experiences. There are many such examples.'

At this point in the interview, Phyllis's husband, who is also a Witch, is introduced to Noreen, and gives his views on the subject;

'Since meeting Phyllis I've become active in the movement. I'm worried about the world and how we are all killing ourselves. Shall I tell you how Phyllis and I met?'

PC: 'We met in a dream six years ago. I was divorced, dating like crazy, but bored. I decided I wanted to love in my life. So on my birthday, when I get to do like, introspective goals, and give gratitude to the Goddess within, I made a love spell. Then, I asked the sage of the Universe to give me a sign, so I'd know it was him

'That night I dreamt of a dark, handsome man who was wearing a leather jacket and sitting on a Harley-Davidson motorbike. Eight months later some friends invited me to dinner to meet a friend of theirs. Guess who? Bruce. Yes. Bruce. On a Harley.'

18th March, 1999 New York, USA. 'THE TIMES'

## Columbine High School Massacre Blamed On 'Satanic' Rock Stars

In a bizarre echo of the (some would say) outlandish claims that the 'Satanic' lyrics of certain rock songs can inspire people to murder, prevalent in the 1970's and 80's, the truly godawful tragedy that befell the students of Columbine High School on April 20th, (the 110th anniversary of Hitler's birth) has been 'identified' as being at least partly due to a similar, 'dark metal' influence...

Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, the two teenage killers who went on a rampage that resulted in the deaths of 15 people, were members of the so-called 'Trenchcoat Mafia,' and police investigations into the groups' activities, found that they had a strong association with Goth music. On the groups website, the lyrics of a song by a German anarchist band Kein Mehrheit fur Die Mitleid called '*No Sympathy For The Majority*.'

The opening line of the song goes;

*'What I Don't Do I Don't Like  
What I Don't Like I Waste'*

The group were even more taken with the notorious Marilyn Manson, and the inclusion of his lyrics has been viewed by the 'moral majority' as being proof positive that he (Manson) inadvertently provided motivation for the killings.

One of his songs; 'Antichrist,' features the words;

*'The Moon Has Now Eclipsed The Sun  
The Angel Has Spread Its Wings  
The Time Has Come For Bitter Things'  
'The Time Has Come, It Is Quite Clear  
Our Antichrist Is Almost Here....  
It Is Done'*

Shock, horror, eh wot?

I don't mean to be insensitive here, but surely there have been countless songs published that have been a trillion times more inciteful than this puny attempt that appears to us to carry all the threat and dark menace of a publicity blurb for a schlocky 'OMEN'esque direct-to-video B-movie...

Another of the band's songs, 'Mechanical Animal,' contains the lyrics:

*'And I was a hand grenade that never stopped exploding,  
You were automatic and as hollow as the "o" in God.  
This isn't me. I'm not mechanical, I'm just a boy playing  
the sulcide king.'*

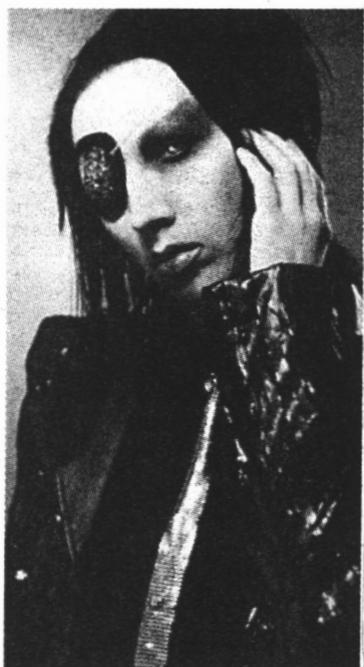
The group's official website makes reference to hidden tracks and the ubiquitous backward messages rumoured to contain 'Satanic' influences.

Such dark murmurings have become the stuff of legend ever since the days of The Beatles, and especially rose to prominence with the rise of Heavy Metal rock music. In 1988, Ozzy Osborne was blamed for the death of Thomas Sullivan, a 14-year-old New Jersey Boy Scout. Sullivan managed to stab his mother to death and attempted to burn down the family home before slitting his own throat with his scout knife.

His father made the claim that his son's personality and character underwent a dramatic change for the worse after Sullivan began listening to an Ozzy Osbourne record called 'Suicide Solution.'

Jennifer Norwood of the Washington Wives Lobby, however, dismissed the claims as being something of an oversimplification.

'The child had other things going on in his head than Osbourne's music,' she said. 'He was doing a research paper for his school on Satanism. Subsequently, he had a dream where he saw his face on Satan's body and Satan had told him to kill his parents.'



Whatever the validity of the assertions that Manson was to blame for the actions of Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, the self-styled 'God Of Fuck' cancelled the last five dates of his American tour; 'Out of respect for those lost in the school tragedy.'

Manson's music was judged to be, at the very least, a contributory factor in the killings by Senator Joseph Lieberman and conservative philosopher William Bennett on NBC's 'Meet The Press' TV programme.

As for Marilyn himself, he was quoted as saying 'People are trying to sort out what happened and to deal with their losses. It's not a great atmosphere to be out playing rock and roll shows, for us or the fans. The media has unfairly scapegoated the music industry and the so-called goth kids, and has speculated - with no basis in truth - that artists like myself are in some way to blame.'

'This tragedy was a product of ignorance, hatred and an access to guns. I hope the media's irresponsible fingerpointing doesn't create more discrimination against kids who look different.'

Not that these words of reason carried much weight with the moral guardians here in less-than-Merrle Olde England...In Milton Keynes, site of a proposed Manson gig this July, 'THE SUNDAY CITIZEN,' a local newspaper, carried a letter stating that 'We cannot believe the people of

Milton Keynes want this type of people or their followers in our city.'

These selfsame watchdogs, standing at the borders of the moral high ground however, maybe need to take sometime out to consider the fact that the week after the massacre, both the National Rifle Association (the most vociferous of all America's pro-gun lobbies) and the demonised Mr Manson were due to appear in Denver, mere miles away from Littleton.

Manson's concert, as we mentioned previously, has since been cancelled.

The NRA's wasn't.

Doesn't that tell you something about the prevailing mentality over there in the States, the (ahem) 'Leaders of the Free World?'

21st April, 8th May, 1999 Columbine High School, Littleton, Denver, Colorado, USA 'THE TIMES' 'THE DAILY MAIL' 'THE SUNDAY CITIZEN' 'MELODY MAKER' and 'THE NME'

## Living Without Fear?

The ever-thoughtful Reverend Malcolm Hathaway, concerned for the well-being of his flock in Salisbury, hit upon the 'revolutionary' idea of seeking to ban 'THE EXORCIST' movie from being screened in his home city, last autumn, in a bid to keep the forces of evil at bay. Not only that, but he placed an advert in the 'SALISBURY JOURNAL,' the contents of which are reproduced below.

**THE EXORCIST**

SEEN THE FILM?

WORRIED ABOUT THE POWER OF EVIL?

CONCERNED, BUT NOT SURE?

**WANT ANSWERS?**

*Come and hear a talk entitled:*

**LIVING WITHOUT FEAR**

**SUNDAY, 15th NOVEMBER, 7pm**

ELIM CHRISTIAN CENTRE, DEWS ROAD, SALISBURY

CHARITY NO. 251549

He accepted at the time, that no one had actually been so disturbed by the film that they had felt compelled to come to him for counselling, but was quick to explain that this was only because 'the evil effects of the malevolent movie' may take some time to manifest themselves.

March, 1999 Salisbury, England 'TOTAL FILM'

\*\*\* And as an added postscript to the above item, (and as a testimony to 'THE EXORCIST's' enduring power and reputation), we should include, this little snippet from William Friedkin (the director of the classic movie), who has gone on record as stating that the real-life male nurse who prepared the possessed 12-year-old during the film's notorious arteriogram sequence, became a gay serial killer four years after the film's release.

'Yeah, Friedkin recalls, he killed nine men. I remembered his face because when we were shooting the scene I was struck by the fact that he was wearing an earring and a leather bracelet. You didn't see a lot of that back then.'

'As I was making the film 'CRUISING,' which is about a gay serial killer, I visited him in prison.'

'I can't repeat what was said, but I can tell you what was shown on screen wasn't anywhere near as graphic as his descriptions of the murders he'd committed.'

The implication here of course, is that this actor/nurse carried out these crimes due to the influence of the movie...  
28th October, 1998 General 'THE DAILY EXPRESS'.

# The Curse Of The Mummy

Low Hall, in Scalby, North Yorkshire, was the setting for a story straight out of an M.R James ghost tale collection.

A sequence of jewel-shaped blue lights were reportedly seen hovering above the garden of the hall by Peter Aldridge, the current owner. Sure at first that he was simply hallucinating, his wife later informed him that, by tradition, these lights are rumoured to appear above the final resting place of a cursed ancient Egyptian Mummy.

The elderly daughter of a long-dead explorer informed Mr Aldridge that there was an embalmed body in the garden of the rest home that he runs. Jean Rowntree, the 93-year-old granddaughter of chocolate tycoon Joseph Rowntree, came forward to announce that the mummy had been in the 17-acre grounds for 95 years.

It had originally been brought to the house by Joseph Rowntree's son, John, in 1904, following an expedition to Egypt.

Within a mere twelve months of displaying the mummy in the library however, Rowntree died in mysterious circumstances at the young age of 37.

His relatives had always believed that he had been struck down by an ancient curse brought down by the mummy, and so they buried it in the grounds, where it has remained to this day.

Peter Aldridge, 64, only got to hear about this legend when he was appealing for historical details about the £6 million mansion. He told reporters; *'I've been here for 20 years without knowing anything about the mummy. Jean Rowntree said she had included the story in her memoirs and the mummy was the only thing in her childhood to cause her mortal fear.'*

*'She has never understood why her father had brought it home and displayed it in the library.'*

Peter claims to have seen the mysterious lights on at least ten separate occasions and refuses to dig up the grave for fear of being struck by the curse.

*'Every time I went to touch the jewel, it disappeared. My wife Shirley always believed it was just a shadow or a figment of my imagination. Now I'm not so sure.'*

*'I'm terrified that if I dig up the mummy I'll be struck by its curse, and I certainly don't want to be around if anyone else does it.'*

15th February, 1999 Low Hall, Scalby, North Yorkshire  
**'DAILY EXPRESS'**

## The Rite To Practise Spelling

A school in Michigan, USA, eventually agreed to allow a student to practise Witchcraft. The American Civil Liberties Union had been forced to take Lincoln Park High School to court after it had previously banned the student from wearing a pentagram.

The Union successfully argued that the girl had been illegally prevented from practising her religion.

18th March, 1999 Lincoln Park High School, Michigan  
USA **'DAILY EXPRESS'**

## The Stealer Of Souls

According to reports coming out of Los Angeles, an unidentified man was apparently busy terrorising the locals by threatening them at gunpoint and demanding they hand over their souls.

The would-be robber never takes any money and instead he makes a series of weird yanking motions in front of his victims chests before racing off.

At the time of going to press, the LA Police Department were still engaged in hunting down this strangest of criminals.

18th April, 1999 Los Angeles, USA **NEWS OF THE WORLD'**

## Millennium Witch Hunts

Equally bizarre were the various cases of do-it-yourself Witch execution taking place in countries as culturally diverse as South Africa, Switzerland and India...

Firstly, in Lausanne, back in January, a girl of 11 was beaten to death in front of her two sisters, aged five and nine, because her mother and aunt believed she was bewitched. Both adults were later arrested.

And then in February, twenty villagers stormed the house of Sangampedda Pochiah in Andhra Pradesh state, India, and doused him, his wife, mother and two young sons with paraffin.

The unfortunate family (hell, now that's one major understatement!!!-Ed) were all burned to death after the mob, convinced that Sangampedda was a Sorcerer, locked them up and splashed fuel on the walls and doors before setting the house on fire.

A few months later, four South African women, aged between 64 and 71, were murdered when another howling mob, straight out of a 1930's Universal Horror Movie, who suspected the women of being Witches, forced them into a hut and razed it to the ground.

20th January, 1999 Lausanne, Switzerland **'THE TIMES'**  
13th February, 1999 Andhra Pradesh, India **LIVERPOOL ECHO/28th April, 1999 South Africa 'LIVERPOOL ECHO'**

## A MISCELLANY OF WEIRDNESS MUTILATED CATS VICTIMS OF CAR ACCIDENTS

As reported in the last issue of 'DON,' (*'Dark Eyes Over London'* P:50), an unexplained series of attacks on domestic felines in the both the capital, and the suburbs of Surrey and Essex, was being investigated by the combined forces of the Metropolitan Police and the RSPCA.

Theories abounded as to the cause of death of more than 40 cats, the bodies of whom were horribly mutilated. Everything from twisted, sadistic maniacs (and potential future serial killers) to Satanists and experimenting aliens.

The truth of the matter, according to the relevant authorities at least, may prove to be a great deal more prosaic, however. Following a 13-month investigation, the police and the RSPCA announced that they were satisfied they had unmasked the 'Phantom Cat Ripper' as being not some individual human agency, but rather a whole welter of automobiles.

In other words, they were certain, that in most cases at least, almost all the cats had died in road accidents.

Despite the assertions of RSPCA officers that some of the carcasses had been found with their heads and tails carefully removed, as if with some sharp instrument, the organisation confirmed that it was now convinced that the cats had in fact never been deliberately mutilated, and that new evidence now proved the majority of them had been involved in 'fatal road traffic accidents.'

Post-mortem examinations had apparently shown that the cats had not been hacked to death by persons unknown, but had been gradually torn apart by natural scavengers such as dogs, crows and foxes.

25th March, 1999 London, Surrey, Essex. 'THE TIMES'

## But Who or What Is Killing The Rabbits???

As is disconcertingly often the way with such incidents however, no sooner is one mystery 'solved' than another, equally bemusing, rises to take its place.

In a case eerily similar to that experienced by the editor of this very magazine, (see DON #16 P:7 *New Ferry In The Dark Hours*), police and RSPCA officers were said to be hunting what they have termed a 'sick' animal hater who preys on pet rabbits.

The killer chooses, for some unspecified reason, to decapitate the defenceless creatures and make off with their heads. (In the case of the Editor, the rabbits heads were crushed flat as the proverbial pancake by assailant or assailants unknown, for reasons unknown).

At the time of writing five animals had been removed from their hutches and beheaded, possibly with an axe, during a three-month period in the county of Plymouth.

23rd June, 1999 Plymouth 'LIVERPOOL DAILY POST'

## A Leap Off The Edge Of Forever

A story doing the rounds in the dying days of last Winter, was certainly more than enough to provide this reviewer with a week or so of screamin' meemle nightmares....

For some unexplained reason, three girls, who it seems had everything to live for, aged 11, 12 and '14, elected to jump from the eighth floor of a block of flats.

Two of the children, Tanya Kuznetsova and Masha Pavlichenko, were killed instantly after they hit the struck a ledge that jutted out from the building.

The third, Alyona Strukova, died in hospital hours later.

The girls all lived in the same flats and were very close friends, but although they left a 'farewell' letter requesting that they all be buried in the same coffin, the motive for the joint suicide remains a mystery.

The following words still fill me with a sense of unspeakable dread...

*'Mum, bury us together in a red and black coffin'*

Their parents, understandably grief-stricken, were quick to rule out any connection with either drugs or any kind of religious sect. The fact remains however, that the baffled police were left with little alternative but to consider the possibility that some sort of underground cult was in some way involved in the girls' deaths.

Two groups in particular, the White Brotherhood, said to be active in the Ukraine, and the Jehovah's Witnesses, which had reportedly approached at least one of the three girls, came under the most suspicion.

Back in 1996, leaders of the White Brotherhood in Kiev, were found guilty of organising public disorder and civil disobedience and sentenced to prison terms ranging from four to seven years.

Chillingly, according to a self-help group, the Organisation for the Rescue of Moscow's Youth, there are somewhere in the region of 13,000 sects and religious movements registered in Russia since a law on freedom of religion went into effect after the inglorious fall of the former Soviet Union, back in 1991.

The organisation further stipulates that the membership of these sects in Russia has now soared into the millions and some are openly recruited at universities and schools.

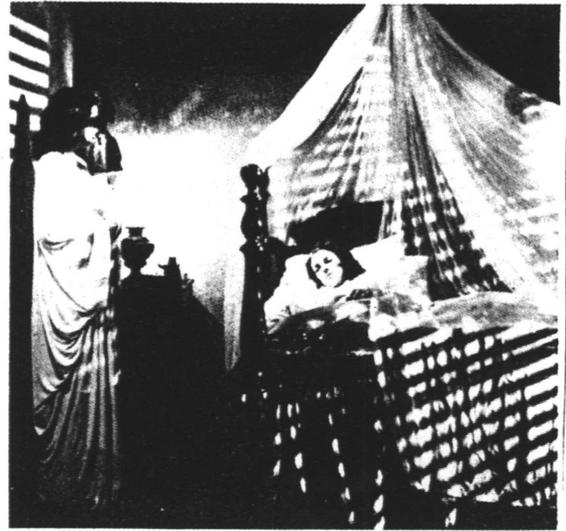
The State Statistics Committee stated that 44,700 people in Russia killed themselves in the first ten months of 1998. That amounts to 37 suicides per each 100,000 people.

Now, they're the type of statistics that would doubtless give even Stephen King the creeps!!!

10th February, 1999 'THE TIMES'/'THE DAILY SLUR'

## THE SLEEPWALKING KILLER

Scott Falater, 43, admitted to police that he had stabbed his wife, Yarmilla, a total of 44 times before drowning her in their swimming pool, but claimed that he did not actually murder her because he was sleepwalking when he carried out the attack.



He accepts too, that he set about trying to conceal the evidence, but his lawyers have attempted to raise the defence that their client suffers from a medical disorder.

The jury at the murder trial in Phoenix, Arizona, was told that Falater's brain was 'fast asleep' when he killed his wife.

At the time of going to press, we have no idea what the outcome of this remarkable case was, but a legal 'expert' was quoted at the time as saying; *'You may be able to get jurors to believe in the existence of sleepwalking... But it's gonna be hard to convince them that it happened for that long and involved so many acts.'*

Interestingly enough, however, a man was acquitted of murder in Toronto, Canada, in 1992, after claiming that he had been sleepwalking.

4th June, 1999 Phoenix, Arizona, USA 'THE TIMES'

## 'All The King's Men' -TV Movie To Be Made About The Disappearance Of The Norfolks

The BBC have announced plans to film the poignant, true story of the royal gardeners who fought and died in a fruitless campaign on the shores of Gallipoli in 1915.

The drama will focus on one of the great mysteries of the First World War; the so-called unexplained disappearance of the Sandringham Company, otherwise known as The Norfolks.

According to legend, on August 12th, 1915, the battalion of 250 men, led by the former estate manager at Sandringham, Frank Beck, charged towards the well-dug in Turkish positions, located within a wood. It was the last anyone saw of Frank Beck and his brave men. After the battle, not a single body was found, no prisoners were

recovered from the Turkish army at the end of the war, and not so much as a cap badge retrieved.

The men became known as 'the vanished battalion' and King George was so anguished about the disappearance of his men that the Royal Family made a direct appeal to the Turkish authorities but they could shed no light on the matter.

In the absence of any hard evidence as to the Norfolk's fate, wild rumours and bizarre stories began springing up like weeds in a vacant lot. 'Witnesses' came forward to attest that they had seen strange cross-shaped clouds descending on the men and bearing them away to God only knew where. There was even a theory doing the rounds that a giant UFO had swooped down from the heavens and abducted the entire battalion.

As late as 1965, at an old comrades meeting, a New Zealander who fought in the battle claimed that he saw the Sandringham's march into a group of weird-looking clouds at the top of a hill, and that when the clouds (if that's what they truly were) had lifted the men had simply vanished.

New evidence however, has since emerged, and researchers who have had access to formerly secret files held by the Royal Family, are now convinced that the truth (sadly, not to be revealed until the film hits the screens later this year) is more tragic than fantastic.

We await the revelation with bated breath

1st May, 1999 Gallipoli, Turkey 'THE WEEKLY NEWS'

## The End Is Not Yet Nigh.....

Still spending countless hours agonising over how you're going to spend the last evening of the second Millennium?

Well, if Carlos A. Carvallo, Secretary-General of the Pan-American Institute of Geography and History, is to be believed, you may be wasting your time...

In a news release he was busy distributing during the early Spring of this year, Carlos stated that the Millennium will not officially start until January 1st, 2001.

*'I have read, I have seen on television, I have seen declarations by important people saying that this is the last year of the Millennium,'* Cavallo told reporters. *'That leads to error.'*

The Institute points out that since the Christian era began with the year 1, 2,000 years will not be over until the very end of the year 2000.

Nice try, Carlos, but somehow I don't think you're going to succeed in your efforts to postpone the biggest-hyped, most-over-the-top excuse for a massive piss-up in the history of mankind...Well, since New Year's Eve 999 AD, anyway.

20th March, 1999 Worldwide, General 'LIVERPOOL DAILY POST'

## Or Then Again, Maybe It Is!!!

Another less-than-welcome dollop of bad news on the doorstep was provided by the scientists and astronomers currently engaged in the search for near-Earth asteroids....

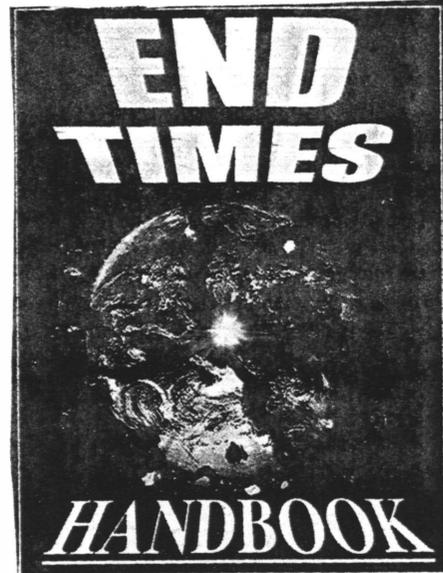
The numbers are reportedly stacking up at a rate that's pretty damn scary. A total of fifty five new asteroids, all displaying the potential to collide with our suddenly fragile-seeming planet, were discovered during 1998. This number is especially disconcerting when you consider this total is far more than in the previous six years.

I don't know about you, but I'm not particularly reassured by the assertion by the 'experts' that none of these giant chunks of space debris poses a direct threat. Nor does the revelation that there are many more still undiscovered, looking for a planet to smash into.

NASA claims that there are currently up to 2,000 known asteroids, and have set themselves a target of ten years for identifying the vast majority of them. Up to now, a mere 63 have been catalogued, but a new telescope, due to go on

line in the near future, will assist in dramatically speeding up the search.

Dr Brian Marsden, of the Minor Planets Centre in Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA, predicts that around 90 per cent of the potentially dangerous asteroids will be found within the next 17 years, which is all very well if we Earthlings are still around to derive comfort from the fact. Don Yeomans, of NASA's Near-Earth-Orbit Programme, has gone on record as stating that *'a few years is hardly likely to make any real degree of difference. I expect that if there is an asteroid with the Earth's name on it, we will get ten, twenty or thirty years' warning, enough time to devise a way of shifting the asteroid's orbit; perhaps by explosives, to ensure that it misses.'*



Twelve months or so ago, we were handed a grim reminder of just how vulnerable we are spinning here on this ball....An asteroid was said, by the aforementioned Dr Marsden, to be on course for a collision with the Earth in the year 2028.

The media trumpeted the news of our imminent demise with apocalyptic headlines straight out of a trailer for 'DEEP IMPACT' or 'ARMAGEDDON.' It was only when more refined calculations were made concerning its orbit that it was discovered these fears were in fact to be entirely groundless.

Still reeling from the embarrassment, news of the most recent discovery, Asteroid 1999 AN10, was kept decidedly low-key by just about everyone concerned.

The news leaked out onto a website in the form of a paper from three Italian astronomers.

The interest in AN10 is that its orbit is tilted at an angle of 70 degrees and intersects that of the Earth twice a year during the months of February and August. It is estimated to be about a mile in diameter, easily large enough in size to do continent-wide damage were it to hit the Earth.

Dr Andrea Milani and Dr Steven Chesley, of the University of Pisa, along with Dr Giovanni Valsecchi, of the Planetary Institute in Rome, calculate that it will remain close for the next 600 years.

There is, apparently, a one-in-a-billion chance that it could strike our planet sometime during August, 2039, but that it is, they 'assure' us, longer odds than being struck by an entirely unknown asteroid, any day without warning...

They do caution though, that the long-term potential needs to be watched carefully. The current orbit of AN10 could be disturbed by its constant, comparatively close approaches to the Earth, maybe, just maybe, increasing the prospects of a collision.

Yet another 'expert', Dr Peiser, says that he finds the all-too apparent lack of public notice concerning the new discovery, even more disturbing.

Other astronomers seem entirely content with the way the news of AN10 was handled, however. *'I commend them for the process of being careful,'* Richard Binzel, of the MIT, told the *'BOSTON GLOBE'* *'On a scale of scale of zero to five, this thing is a zero!!!'*

Oh, so that's all right then.

And just to add to the fun and frolics, news came through in late June that the giant asteroid that had previously been thought to be threatening the Earth, last Spring, only for it to prove to be a gigantic false alarm, may now present us with problems after all....

MPs were said to be demanding immediate action in order to avoid a potential catastrophe when the asteroid boomerangs back towards our planet in the year 2044.

Liberal Democrat MP Lembit Opik was quoted as saying: *'We must blast it out of orbit the first time around because we may not get a second chance.'*

*'We should not be taking any chances but planning to do something now. It would be the best investment Tony Blair has ever made.'*

21st April, 1999 General *'THE TIMES'* / 20th June, 1999 General *'THE SUNDAY PEOPLE'*

\*\*\* Meanwhile, certain top American senators were pleading for 'experts' from the world's nuclear powers to meet up with each other on New Year's Eve, to eradicate any chance of a Year 2000 computer problem triggering a false alarm.

The proposal went along the lines of an assembly at some temporary centre in Colorado Springs, where America's missile-tracking headquarters; NORAD, is buried deep inside Cheyenne Mountain.

The Russians had already agreed to the proposal (or at least they had prior to the outbreak of hostilities in the Balkans) forwarded by the Yanks that they set up a joint early warning system to avoid any risk of the dreaded Millennium bug causing the widely predicted nuclear Armageddon.

Those self-same senators were also deeply concerned that the remaining nuclear powers, Pakistan, India, China, etc, also give their blessing to the plan.

Robert Bennett, a Republican, and Christopher Dodd, a Democrat, were two of the most vociferous advocates of this exercise in prudence and caution. They counsel that the assembled 'experts' should be in the same room for the critical period when the older computer systems - using only the last two digits of a year - could malfunction by misreading 2000 as 1900.

*'If something does break down, we've got people there who can monitor it and make quick decisions,'* Dodd was quoted as saying.

The missile watchers do not, they are quick to reassure us, believe that there is any real danger of an accidental nuclear launch caused by the Millennium Bug. Missiles are fired, after all, not by computers, but by human beings. They do concede however, that the confusion in the event of a country suffering a blackout or breakdown in the power supply to its nuclear systems that could leave other countries 'blind' to its intentions.

The 'experts' would therefore gather around a round table and be in permanent touch with each other by telephone.

Worryingly, Pentagon officials were reportedly concerned that the Russians were aware of the Bug, but had not yet dedicated anywhere enough money or people to actively set about fighting it.

A report from the two senators said that no matter how confident they were that a nuclear catastrophe could be averted; *'when we get to New Year's Eve, everybody, no matter how informed we are, is going to be holding his breath.'*

They were also keen to highlight the non-nuclear dangers facing the world at the dawn of the new Millennium.... These included potential power cuts and problems in doctor's surgeries and hospitals, where Millennium Bug preparations are well behind schedule.

They stopped a little short of issuing a doomsday declaration, but advised people to stock up on two or three days' supplies of food, much as they would prior to the onset of a blizzard or some other meteorological phenomenon.

3rd March, 1999 General *'THE TIMES'*

## MILLENNIAL CULT MISERY

One of the ironies that will doubtless manifest itself should the predictions of doom and gloom not come to pass, will be the need for therapists and counsellors to administer help to those thoroughly disillusioned by this huge anti-climax (as they will, rather perversely see it).

Yvonne Walsh, a counselling psychologist at City University in London, believes that psychologists should prepare themselves for a deluge of clients in the wake of the realisation that Nostradamus had gotten it totally wrong, the 'Great King Of Terror' had gone AWOL, and Jesus Christ had postponed his return the planet (and hell, who could honestly blame Him for *that?*). Yvonne, a specialist in dealing with all kinds of cults, has gone on record as stating that the classic symptoms for those likely to be most affected by the failure of the emergence of Armageddon are those afflicted with low self-worth, depression and anxiety.

*'Quite often these people have problems reintergrating into every day society. If you have spent ten or twenty years living in a new religion or cult, you tend to be out of step with everybody else.'*

*'Socialisation techniques within cults can loosen links with the outside world.'*

She went on to claim however, that the counsellors need not worry about 'deprogramming' cult members who had been 'brainwashed.'

*'Brainwashing is extremely rare and tends only to happen in totalitarian situations. Most people who have been involved with cults have been socialised or culturally assimilated into certain ways of life and it is this that can lead to problems later when they return to the mainstream.'*

*'Typical methods of assimilation include depriving members of contact with the outside world by controlling what television programmes they watch and what books they read, and by monitoring letters and telephone calls.'*

*'Cults also control the way people think by a technique called "loading the language" which gives new meaning to ordinary words. In one cult for example, called 'The Family,' "Roman" means "Police".'*

*'Many cult members develop problems after leaving their group.'*

And if, as seems entirely possible, those dire warnings of imminent apocalypse prove to be every bit as groundless as a modern-day Western military campaign over Iraq or Serbia, there's going to be a lot of very disillusioned people feeling like they've had the carpet well and truly pulled from beneath them....

12th June, 1999 *'THE TIMES'* General

\*\*\* And proof, if it were needed, that people are becoming increasingly nervous about the approach of the Year 2000, can be provided in spades by our good friends over in the United States....

It seems that more and more Americans are setting about selling their property and snapping up cabins in (what they doubtless hope to be) suitably remote locations, such as forests, to escape the coming Apocalypse.

And we're not just talking about your 'crazier than a shit house rat' cult members here, either. This mad dash rush for them that hills has been undertaken by just as many (reputedly) level-headed, mainstream Americans (if there is such a creature). They are storing food faster than a bunch of paranoid squirrels, and buying rifles and electricity generators to ensure that they entirely self-sufficient when the death knell strikes for the rest of humanity. Cody Varian, who sells isolated hideouts through his Internet Website, (and presumably doing a roaring trade) has recently been quoted as saying; *'People are taking rational precautions - They are not drastic - to move away from the cities to a safer, rural area.'*

Cody's worst fear seems to be the oft-predicted demise of the world's computers, struck down by the infamous 'Millennium Bug.'

*'Until recently, most computers recorded the date with only two digits - so 1999 appeared as 99. When 2000 rolls around, the final two digits will be 00, which could mean 1900, and many computers will not be able to cope. With computers talking to each other, it's my fear that the bug could spread quickly. A handful of rogue computers could infect even those that are 2000-ready. In a trial run recently, a power station shut down despite months of preparatory remedial work because a small computerised heat sensor in one of the chimneys had been neglected. Maybe each glitch will have a ripple effect, the electricity grid will crash, businesses will go bust as orders are neither sent nor received, stock markets will collapse, food will not reach the shops and cities will erupt in riot.'*

And it seems, the American public are only too keen to subscribe to such prophets of doom. A recent survey conducted by 'NEWSWEEK' magazine, revealed that 13 per cent of the population were stepping up security at home with burglar alarms and guns, 11 per cent are stockpiling water, and nine per cent are storing canned food, installing generators and wood stoves and moving from the city to the isolated retreats.

Some of these so-called Y2K adherents have even gone so far as to set upheavily-guarded compounds where the well-stocked inhabitants can defend themselves against any would-be marauders. The self-styled leader of one of these 'survivalist cults,' at the Morningland Compound in California, Sri Patricia, teaches the Jesus Christ Himself will arrive in Long Beach in a UFO roughly the size of Texas (the American state, one presumes, as opposed to the store) piloted by her late husband. And near Concho Lake, Arizona, Y2K Survivalists have built themselves a retreat at High 54 Ranch where they have underground living quarters powered by wind and solar panels, and protected 24 hours a day by armed guards. Newcomers will only be afforded admittance if they bring a years supply of food, a rifle and a pistol with 1,000 rounds of ammunition along with them. Gas masks are also advised.

At the time of writing, no one seems able to agree as to just how bad things are likely to be should the Millennium Bug strike the world's computers. Nevertheless, many Americans simply aren't prepared to take any chances.

Ron Smith, the director of Alpine Air Foods in California, stated that his company's sales of canned dehydrated foods amounted to \$2 million last year, and he fully expected the figure to rise to \$30 million this year. One customer, who has already set about stacking the inside of his basement with supplies told bemused newspaper reporters; *'If I'm right, I'm going to look pretty smart. And if I'm wrong, I'll have a lifetime's supply of canned tuna.'*

February, 1999 United States 'NEWSWEEK'

### **Skyscrapers' In The Sky**

From Shanghai, China, comes reports that a weird optical illusion was to blame for a widespread panic amongst residents of Shenzhen, in the north of the country.

Thousands of people were sent running for their lives on two separate occasions during May, as they believed that a skyscraper was falling to the ground. 'Experts' explained away the phenomenon as being due to unusually fast-moving clouds combining to create the illusion.

21st May, 1999 Shenzhen, Northern China 'ASSOCIATED PRESS'

## **ICE FALLS IN HERTS AND SOMERSET**

Keith and Joe Smith of Cottered, Hertfordshire, were woken in the early hours by a two-foot block of ice that crashed through their bedroom ceiling.

They counted themselves lucky to be alive after the ice landed a matter of mere inches from their bed.

As is often the case with such phenomena, the 'expert's were quick to lay the blame on a passing aircraft heading for Luton airport.

7th May, 1999 Cottered, Herts, 'DAILY SLUR'

\*\*\* Meanwhile, in Quantoxhead, Somerset, a block of ice plunged from the sky and narrowly missed Gill Goodland, 68, by a matter of mere inches. She was sitting in her garden at the time, and according to reporters, she believes, like Karen and Joe Smith in the aforementioned incident, that the ice fell from a plane flying overhead.

16th May, 1999 Quantoxhead, Somerset 'DAILY MANC'

## **Archaeological Anomalies**

A skeleton found in New South Wales has been cited as evidence that human beings occupied Australia at least 16,000 years earlier than previously believed.

Professor Alan Thorne, of the Australian National University's School Of Pacific and Asian Studies, said that; *'by using three systems of dating on the skeleton, its age can be placed at between 56,000 and 68,000 years.'*

Previously uncontested evidence put the earliest occupation of Australia at 40,000 years ago.

21st May, 1999 New South Wales, Australia 'ASSOCIATED PRESS'

### **A REAL MAMMOTH FIND**

Whilst digging for a new reservoir in southern California, the workers stumbled upon a huge array of Ice Age fossils. Included amongst these, were the remains of a Mammoth, which may well prove to be the best preserved bones of the elephant ancestor to be found in the region.

*'It's huge,'* Eric Scott, of the San Bernardino Museum told reporters. *'It's going to rewrite North American palaeontology.'*

The Mammoth's yellow curving tusks, teeth, lower jaw and other bones were found about 75 miles east of Los Angeles.

2nd April, 1999 Southern California, USA 'LIVERPOOL DAILY POST'

\*\*\* For more news on the Woolly Mammoth, see also Allen Animals Section

## **THE LOST WORLD OF KERGUELEN**

Proof, as if we needed it, that even in these days of technological prowess, scientific advancement and resultant hard-nosed scepticism, there remain, hidden below the surface of accepted reality (whatever that may be), a welter of mysteries just waiting to be discovered, is provided in spades by the following account....

Geologists working in the Southern Indian Ocean have stumbled upon a lost continent. It was apparently formed 110 million years ago by a gigantic volcanic eruption, only for it to sink, much like the fabulous realm of Atlantis, back beneath the waves from whence it sprang, 20 million years ago. A geological survey of the sunken land mass has revealed that it would once have been covered with thick, verdant forests of fern and conifers, and would also have been home to various species of prehistoric mammals.

It has even been speculated that the land could have played a significant part in the migration of some forms of life between the drifting land masses of Australia, India and Antarctica.

Cores were drilled from the seabed by the research vessel *Joides Resolution*, and they have revealed that much of the Kerguelan Plateau, which now lies more than 6,000 feet below the ocean surface, once extended to form a whole continent. The curiously-named Mike Coffin, of the University of Texas, co-chief scientist on the expedition, told reporters; *'We have found abundant evidence.*

*'Wooden fragments, a seed, spores and pollen recovered in a 90-million-year-old sediment from the central plateau unambiguously indicates that much of this region was above sea-level.'*

Helen Coxhall, a palaeontologist from the geology department at Bristol University, is another member of the team that is currently examining fossil plankton brought up in the drill cores and using them to calculate the age of the underlying basaltic rocks.

*'We found that the plateau had formed in three successive phases of volcanic eruption,' she said. 'The southern part formed 110 million years ago, the central part, and a western salient called Elan Bank, 83 million years ago, and the youngest part, to the north, 40 million years ago'*

The plateau, which is about a third of the size of Australia, was formed in the same way as Iceland or Hawaii, by an undersea eruption driving huge amounts of material from the mantle into the sea where it quickly solidified and built up to form islands. Such instances were relatively common between 150 and 50 million years ago, but have become much less regular in the past 50 million years. The sheer scale of the eruption that created Kerguelen is far beyond human comprehension.

To attempt to draw a comparison however, consider this; One of the greatest eruptions of recent times, at Laki, in Iceland during 1783-84, created a lava field only a hundredth the size of Kerguelen, and yet the Laki eruption lasted for a period of six months, killed three quarters of Iceland's livestock and a quarter of the people, and actually altered the climate of the whole of Europe for several years. As far as the team of geologists is concerned, the most spectacular find is the piece of rock containing the mineral garnet at Elan Bank. This can form only at the tremendous pressures found in continental rocks, so the conclusion is that this is a fragment of one of the continental plates.

To those of us fascinated by the tales of such legendary realms as Lemuria, Mu, and most appropriately, Atlantis however, the discovery of this lost continent gives cause for speculation that there may well be at least some (ahem) concrete foundation for their existence.

*'THE TIMES'*

## MICE ALL AGLOW IN THE NAME OF SCIENCE

Green mice have apparently been created by scientists testing a new genetic engineering technique.

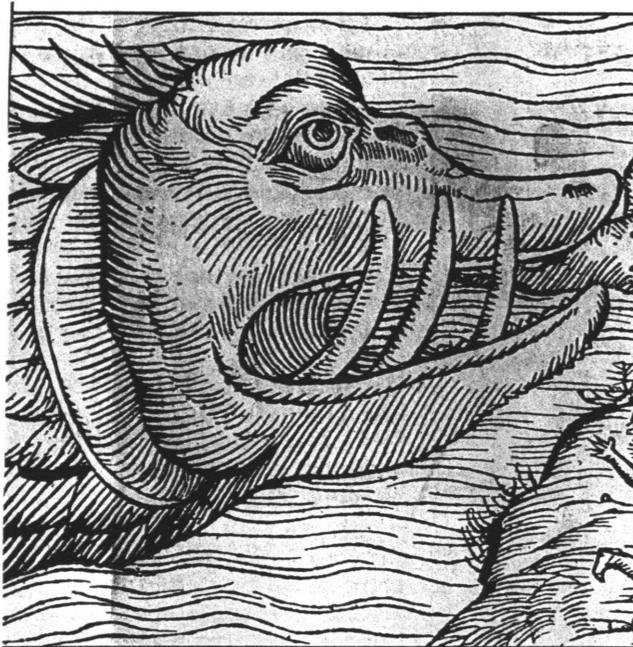
The animals were produced by adding a fluorescent gene from jellyfish into their cells. Under ultraviolet light, they glowed green.

The team from the University of Hawaii, performed the experiment merely to test their technique of using sperm cells to transfer genetic material, instead of injecting it into fertilised eggs. The method could eventually help in the study of human genes.

*14th May, 1999 University of Hawaii, USA 'DAILY SLUR'*

## Strange Days In The Animal Kingdom: Revolt Of The Creatures:

*Jeezly Old Crows, Rampaging Bulls,  
Horny Rhinos, And Killer Trout*



Benedictine monks at Prinknash Abbey, near Gloucester, were being driven crazy by the antics of a crow that was intent upon swooping to attack the monastery windows.

For over nine months, the bird, nicknamed Bonker, seemed to be intent upon harrasing the monks. It was theorised that the motive behind the attacks lay with the confused crow believing that the reflection in the glass was its rival trespassing on its territory.

Abbey bird 'expert' Fr Gyles Tarbuck, was quoted as saying; *'The attacks are frequent on warm, sunny days, but absent when it rains. Birds attacking their own images in, for instance, car wing mirrors is well known territorial behaviour.'*

*25th February, 1999 Prinknash Abbey, Nr Gloucester 'THE DAILY EXPRESS'*

\*\*\* A horserider fell off his steed and was killed in a tidal river when a swan contrived to startle the horse and inadvertently cause the fatal accident.

Mark McKnight, 19, from the Cardigan area of West Wales, had been attempting to cross a 600-metre stretch of the estuary between Poppit and Gwbert. A witness later reported that a swan had swooped exceptionally low, startling the horse. The rider fell and was swept away. The horse was rescued.

*29th March, 1999 Poppit, West Wales. 'THE TIMES'*

\*\*\* And, as stated in previous issues, even when they have, like the the infamous Monty Python Parrot 'shrugged off this mortal coil', certain animals can be deadly...

An example of this is well illustrated by the following case. An angler managed to land a huge trout, but before the 76-year-old could celebrate his catch, he dropped dead of a heart attack.

The shock of his success on the banks of a lake at Petworth, West Sussex, proved to be enough to kill him. He died with the fish still dangling from the line.

A fellow angler told reporters; *'I think the joy of landing such a big fish was too much for him.'*

12th April, 1999 Petworth, West Sussex *DAILYMANC'*

\*\*\* A couple of bullocks were shot dead by police after they'd rampaged down dual carriageways, trampling across gardens and running across gardens and ramming a bus carrying a group of elderly people.

The castrated animals wreaked their very own brand of havoc for over three hours after they escaped from farmer's fields in Dudley, West Midlands.

One of the animals headed the wrong way down a dual carriageway after hurtling across a line of front gardens, destroying flower beds and knocking down shrubs and small trees in its path. It then collided with a Renault Clio before making its way to the busy Merry Hill Centre shopping mall where it was shot dead by armed police officers.

Meanwhile, the second refugee was busy ramming a Help The Aged minibus with several passengers aboard. The terrified passengers were forced to watch as the furious animal rammed the side of the vehicle denting it in several places, though luckily no one was injured.

The animal was eventually chased to the grounds of a local factory where it was shot dead.

Superintendent Gary Cann, who was forced to defend the decision to kill the animals, stated that; *'the use of tranquilisers darts had to be ruled out as the serum used is lethal if touched by a human and takes 20 minutes to work. The animals were a danger to the public.'*

28th April, 1999 Dudley, West Midlands *'LIVERPOOL DAILY POST'*

\*\*\* Bill Webb and his family were on a visit to the West Midlands Safari Park in Bewdley, Worcestershire, when Bill's Volvo drew the amorous attentions of a rhino called Tutsu.

The badly frightened occupants of the vehicle were forced to sit tight until park wardens raced to their rescue and managed to ward Tutsu off with their jeep.

Mr Webb, a computer salesman, was quoted as saying; *'Any further and it (the rhino) would have been in our laps, but we didn't dare get out.'*

His sons, Michael, 8, Matthew, 6, and their cousin Camille, were in the back as they made their way through the park. His brother-in-law John Best was in the front.

Mr Webb told reporters; *'We were watching four rhinos feeding at a trough. One lumbered across and climbed on the bonnet. I tried to reverse but the engine stalled, which isn't that surprising when you've got a two-ton rhino on the bonnet. Then the animal put its right foot to the windscreen, which started to splinter.'*

*'Seconds later, the wardens came, though it seemed to go on for ages.'*

*'The hilarious thing was that we'd just seen a monkey stripping the windscreen rubbers off the car in front.'*

*'We were sniggering about everyone else's car being trashed and a mere ten minutes later we had a rhino on the bonnet.'*

The animal managed to cause over £1,500 worth of damage to the car.

The head warden Bob Lawrence was moved to comment on the family's misfortune; *'It's par for the course to get your wipers pulled off by the monkeys, but the last thing you expect is a rhino on your car.'*

26th April, 1999 West Midlands Safari Park, Bewdley, Worcestershire *'DAILY SLUR'*

## A Decidedly Unhappy Delivery

Perhaps by rights, the following story would be more at home in the Strange Deaths section of the magazine, but seeing as how an animal was involved, albeit unintentionally, we've saw fit to include it here....

A court in Spain elected to award the equivalent of £2,000 to a extremely unfortunate man whose car was smashed by a stork's nest that had fallen from a church spire in Alfaro, Spain.

1st May, 1999 Alfano, Spain *'LIVERPOOLECHO'*

\*\*\* And talking of 'accidental' animal attacks, consider if you will the case of John Thick, 24, who lived in Chandler's Ford, Hampshire.

John was only hours away from getting married when the driver of a car he was in was forced to swerve to avoid a cat and smacked into a brick wall.

He was killed instantly.

1st May, 1999 Eastleigh, Hampshire *'LIVERPOOL DAILY POST'*

\*\*\* Consider too, the case of the flock of seagulls that conspired to throw a spanner in the works as the good folk of Kennewick, Washington State, sought to bake the world's largest stuffed tortilla.

The birds took it upon themselves to peck their way through a sizable portion of the 4,000 foot-long Mexican dish, blissfully unaware of the efforts of the local populace.

16th May, 1999 Mexco *'ASSOCIATED PRESS'*

\*\*\* A shoplifter was thwarted in his attempts to escape justice by a swan which was guarding its young. The angry bird succeeded in cornering the unnamed 15-year-old boy as he tried to swim across a river to evade the police.

PC Karen Taylor reported that she had tackled the youth after she'd spotted him stealing a bottle of vodka in Lewes, Sussex. He'd managed to slip from her grasp and jumped into the River Ouse, only to be confronted by the swan.

He eventually waded ashore and gave himself up.

PC Taylor had this to say; *'He must have been very frightened with this swan coming towards him in the middle of the river. It saved us from having to get into the water, which made us very grateful.'*

7th May, 1999 River Ouse, Sussex. *'DAILYMANC'*

## Attack Of The Killer Mosquito's

Swarms of the so-called super-Mosquito have reportedly been massing for an attack in the city of Rome, this Spring. The Tiger Mosquito, far larger than the normal species, and so named because of the light stripes that cover its body and legs, had, by late May, already begun its predicted invasion.

The insect was busy biting ankles, necks, ears, faces and elbows (and doubtless other parts of the anatomy that shall remain nameless in the interests of good taste) during a single 24-hour onslaught. And with the imminent arrival of up to 30 million pilgrims in the run-up to the Millennium, officials at the Vatican are understandably worried about the pretty damn near Biblical swarms descending on the city.

Not least because, as has been well-documented, the Mosquito is much-feared as a carrier of serious viral diseases and potentially, Yellow Fever.

Perhaps the assembled cardinals and other members of the Roman Catholic clergy should pray for a little of that ol' Divine Intervention

8th May Rome, Italy *'THE WEEKLY WORLD NEWS'*

## Crocodiles Feast On Boat People

\*\*\* A Chinese fishing boat filled almost to overflowing with over 80 illegal immigrants ran aground on the Cape Cork Peninsula in Queensland, Australia, late last May.

They were forced to dive overboard into the sea in a desperate struggle for survival.

Unfortunately for them, they were forced to plunge headlong into a stretch of ocean infested with huge, man-eating, saltwater crocodiles.

The Australian police were successful in managing to rescue up to 70 of the boat people, but as to the fate of the remaining ten, well, the authorities could only speculate that they had fallen victim to the voracious crocs.

And just to add to the fun and frolics, the shoreline area is also home to wild pigs and vicious vegetation. The locale has been dubbed 'the wet desert' by the first explorers, and not without good reason.

*'There would be crocs in every little creek in that area. They are big, sea-going crocs. They swim out, catch turtles and bring them to the beach to eat them,'* Percy Trezise, a pilot and the foremost authority on the area, was quoted as saying.

The police were forced to search for the missing people amongst the thick, unforgiving morass that makes up the mangrove swamp which features prickly, head-high turkey scrub that tears and rends at the body.

At the time of writing, there had still been no trace of the disappeared...

28th May, 1999 *Queensland, Australia 'THE TIMES'*

## Against All Odds....Animal Intelligence And Lucky Escapes Sheep Commits Suicide

Rather than succumb to the inevitable slaughter as part of Muslim Feast day celebrations taking place in Egypt, a sheep elected to take its own life instead.

It jumped off the roof of an apartment block in Nag Hammadi, thereby forcing the owner to make alternative arrangements. According to Islamic law, meat cannot be eaten unless it is killed by the ritual method.

18th March, 1999 *Nag Hammadi, Egypt 'DAILY EXPRESS'*

## The Lions Versus The Hyenas

Reports from Adids Ababa revealed that, a pride of lions has at last been successful in its efforts to drive off a pack of hyenas, but only after a bloody two-week battle in the middle of Ethiopia's Gobebe Desert.

According to the state news agency, the final casualty figures included six dead lions and thirty five hyenas.

23rd April, 1999 *Gobebe Desert, Ethiopia 'THE GUARDIAN'*

## A Real Shock For Sparky The Cat

A cat christened Sparky somehow managed to survive an electrical shock deemed to be powerful enough to kill a human outright, according to reports coming out of Hull.

Veterinary nurses who later treated the fortunate tabby cat after it was hit by 11,000 volts when he stumbled into an electricity power station.

He was rescued by Gerry Bullock, a Yorkshire Electricity engineer. *'Sparky's one very lucky cat,'* Gerry was quoted as saying. *'That voltage could kill anything.'*

The cat was treated for (abem) shock and severe burns at the Haven Veterinary surgery. One of the nurses looking after him said: *'His whiskers are stung and they don't usually grow back. Both his ears are paralysed so he's having trouble walking. When he came to us he was having trouble breathing but he seems to be all right now. We cleaned him up and he's on antibiotics. He's eating and drinking really well and he loves pilchards.'*

At the time of going to press the RSPCA were attempting to help trace Sparky's owners.

19th March, 1999 *Hull, Britain 'DAILYMAIL'*

## The Day 'Bobdog' Caught The Train

Now here's a heartwarming story that should move even the most cynical of people....

A colliery by the name of Bobdog remained exactly where he was after his absent-minded 'owner' had thoughtlessly abandoned him on the platform of a train station.

The patient dog simply waited an hour or so for the next train to arrive that would take him home, and jumped aboard the moment it pulled in.

Bobdog had been left stranded after his 'owner' had taken a train bound for Newport, South Wales, after travelling to Trowbridge, Wiltshire.

A rail official was later quoted as saying; *'It's amazing, because other trains stopped at the same station, but somehow the dog knew which one he had to get on.'*

20th June, 1999 *Trowbridge, Wiltshire 'SUNDAY PEOPLE'*

## Bee Brigade - The New Landmine Hunters

At first glance, this item may sound like something 'M' would dream up in one of the more far-fetched James Bond film, but apparently, scientists are presently engaged in research that could help train bees to locate deadly landmines, like the ones currently infesting the war-torn landscape of Kosovo.

Up to 60 people a day are killed or maimed by landmines but now scientists have discovered that bees are *'flying dust mops'* because they pick up tiny particles of virtually anything that they happen to encounter.

They can move into an area and return to their respective hives with detailed information of what material that area contains.

Landmines leak small amounts of explosives into nearby soil or water.

The bees collect this in their fuzzy, statically-charged bodies as they forage. When they return to their hive they can then be checked for TNT dust.

Scientist Jerry Bromenshenk believes that bees can carry out chemical surveys of up to a mile around their hives.

*'If there are airborne chemicals out there, then the bees will find them.'*

The training programme is being carried out at the University of Montana, USA. The same scientists eventually plan to take their work a stage further and attach miniscule tracking devices to the backs of the busy little creatures.

Hand-held tracking devices would then chart where those bees go and lead explosives experts to more precise locations.'

20th June, 1999 *University of Montana, USA 'THE SUNDAY POST'*

## THE SAD SLOW DEATH OF THE DAWN CHORUS

One of the most heartening sounds after escaping the cold, seemingly endless embrace of Winter, is undoubtedly the '*natural musical symphony*' provided by the striking up of birdsong.

Sad to say then, that the much-loved 'dawn chorus,' the regular outpouring of unrestrained 'singing' aimed at attracting potential mates and warding off rivals, is rapidly disappearing. According to figures released on the First Official Day Of Spring (21st March), there are at least 31 million fewer birds about, compared to a mere 25 years ago.

In a total population of between 50 million and 120 million songbirds, the huge decline is changing the countryside for the worse. Amongst the species said to have been progressively decimated are such melodious birds as skylarks, song thrushes, yellowhammers, house sparrows, and even the previously common blackbird.

The RSPB had stated that the main culprit for the decline in intensive modern agriculture. Pesticides kill the weed seeds and insects which the birds thrive on, whilst the switch from Winter to Spring sowing of crops has deprived the various species of seed-rich stubble to eat during the very bleakest months of the year.

Chris Mead, of the British Trust for Ornithology, was quoted as saying that the figures chronicled an '*appalling decline. When you visit the countryside it looks lovely and green, but it may only be lovely for the farmer who is growing his corn.*'

Oh, isn't progress a wonderful thing, ladies and gentlemen...

21st March, 1999 Britain, General 'DAILYMAIL'

\*\*\*...And speaking, as we were, of birdsong, scientists at John Hopkins University have apparently discovered that the process of the twittering harmonies is triggered by melatonin, a hormone known to be linked to the daily cycle in many species, including, believe it or not, we humans.

The part of the brain that is said to be responsible for song in birds, the high vocal centre, actually expands as the days of Spring grow longer. This was believed to be controlled by levels of the male sex hormone testosterone, but the change happens even in birds that have been castrated.

In experiments on Starlings, Gregory Ball and George Bentley, of John Hopkins, and Thomas Van't Hof, of the Max Planck Institute, have shown that by providing extra melatonin they can control the changes, regardless of the length of the day.

'*These findings could have wider implications,*' Dr Bentley told reporters.

'*We would never have discovered this if we had started out trying to see what melatonin is doing in humans. Now, with this discovery, we can feed back the information to other scientists and perhaps help them to understand what is happening in other species.*'

April, 1999 General 'NEWSCIENTIST'

## BEEES FOOLED TO STING IN THE RAIN

After a truck overturned on a highway ramp in Maine, USA, it spilled its cargo of around 20 million bees. In a desperate bid to seek to control the situation, local firemen elected to douse the hives with water. This ingenious plan managed to convince the bees that it was raining and that they must therefore head for home home without further ado.

As a result, only five firemen were stung, and none of them suffered any real injury.

16th May, 1999 Maine, USA 'ASSOCIATED PRESS'

# ALIEN ANIMALS

## The Invasion Of The Monster Fish

At first glance, the following snippet may seem to rightfully belong in the pages of some schlocky sci-fi potboiler, but news of it appeared in one of the more reputable broadsheets, so I guess we can afford it at least some degree of credence...

A species of transgenic salmon has apparently been created in a series of specially-designed tanks at Loch Fyne, Strathclyde. The appearance of the giant, disfigured fish has prompted a call for an international treaty to prevent the genetically-modified creatures from being released into the rivers or seas. The mutant fish bred six times faster than conventional salmon, and they had large, armour-like gill covers and other growths which caused concern in the event of them breeding with wild fish.

The grandly-named European Communities Committee of the House of Lords issued a warning that stated; '*once these fish are released, it would be impossible to to recapture a fish or to control its breeding. Fish do not respect national boundaries and we would be very concerned if sea or river releases were to take place here or abroad.*'

21st January, 1999 Loch Fyne, Strathclyde, Scotland 'THE TIMES'

## Chupacabras Strikes Again

According to reports coming out of Guanica, Puerto Rico, the dreaded Chupacabras, or 'Goatsucker', has been on the prowl once more, killing 10 chickens and two ducks.

The attacks were said to have occurred last January (the 12th, to be exact) in a backyard poultry pen in the Laguna section of Guanica.



'*Ten chickens and two ducks were found dead in their pen,*' Ada Figueroa, a local resident told reporters. He further stated that the ducks, owned by her husband Heliberto,

and the chickens, property of her neighbour Cruz Luco, were found with two puncture marks on their bodies.

*'The animals had been in securely locked pens and it was remarkable that my dogs had barked incessantly all night.'*

The Mayor of Guanica, Edwin Luco, had visited the site to see the carcasses for himself. It transpired that the marks on the dead animals were very similar to those which had been reported on the bodies of other mutilated animals whose owners claim were victims of the 'Goatsucker.'

13th January, 1999 *Laguna, Guanica, Puerto Rico 'EL NUEVODIA'*

## 'Crocs And Alligators' On The Loose In Birmingham

The centre of Birmingham seems to have been plagued with reports of out-of-place 'alligators' just lately.

First came news that a watersports lake was forcibly closed during early April, as wildlife 'experts' were called to attempt to catch an 'alligator'-type creature that was reportedly sighted swimming on the surface of the water.

Sandwell Borough Council stated that West Bromwich's Swan Pool would remain closed throughout the Bank Holiday unless the 20-foot-long animal was caught. Speculation was rife that an escaped South American Cayman might well be the culprit for the sightings. It had been reportedly spotted on at least 12 separate occasions in the lake, a water sport's venue at the town's Sandwell Valley Country Park.

Anglers had reported seeing the creature feasting upon pike. As per usual, when anomalous animals are sighted in the most unlikely of surroundings, the 'experts' were quick to voice their opinion that the 'alligator' was almost certainly an unwanted pet that had been dumped into the lake after growing too big to be looked after.

A few weeks later, animal welfare officers were called to a block of flats in the city centre, following sightings of a '10-foot long alligator.'

Not long after their arrival the officers found a baby crocodile a mere 12 inches long. The creature was apparently an unwanted pet that had been found dumped in a cardboard box by a resident.

Either the witnesses who called the authorities were prone to massive exaggeration, or else the officers mistakenly concluded that the baby crocodile was the culprit. Judge for yourself.

As for the search for the 'Swan Pool Monster,' we await developments with great interest, although don't be too surprised if they never succeed in capturing the creature. Alien Animals have time and again displayed a talent for evading their would-be hunters, and of disappearing every bit as quickly as reports of them hit the news stands...

3rd April, 1999 *Sandwell Valley Country Park, West Bromwich, Midlands 'LIVERPOOL DAILY POST'*  
3rd May, 1999 *Birmingham City Centre, LIVERPOOL DAILY POST*

## The Return Of The Mammoths Part Two

Several issues back, we made mention of the fact that scientists were looking into ways that they may be able to resurrect the long-extinct Mammoth, utilising methods not that dissimilar to that featured in 'JURASSIC PARK'

Now comes news that the Discovery TV channel is, at the time of going to press, mounting an expedition to the Siberian Arctic to dig up a Woolly Mammoth that has been discovered buried under 15 feet of permafrost. The producers were hopeful that scientists would be able to carry out important research on the carcass, and stated

that the find was especially rare due to the fact that the body was believed to be intact and has not been exposed to temperatures above freezing. The programme is scheduled to be screened next Spring.

The US-television company is jointly working with the ever-reliable BBC and the French explorer Bernard Buiges, as well as the Natural History Museum of France. After the excavation genetic samples are to be taken for research and analysis.

Donald Wear, president of Discovery Networks International, told reporters; *'JURASSIC-PARK-type research will be carried out, where dinosaurs were re-created through DNA samples of their blood found in mosquitos held in amber.'*

Nigel Hawkes, the Science Editor for 'THE TIMES' stated that *'some scientists have long dreamt of reconstructing the Mammoth from frozen remains, and a few have tried. But the objective appears to be impossible. Mammoths frozen in permafrost are rank, so the chance of recovering sperm or eggs, or any intact cells is small'*

*'DNA has been recovered from remains, but these are fragments of mitochondrial DNA, not the nuclear DNA with the genetic blueprint.'*

21st April, 1999 *Siberian Arctic, Russia 'THE TIMES'*

## And A 'Tiger' On The Prowl In Deepest, Darkest Doncaster

Police were busy issuing those by now familiar warnings to the public to be on their guard after reports filtered through to them that a tiger had been sighted out in the countryside.

A man rang the boys in blue to inform them that he had been working in the Armthorpe area when a big cat, resembling a tiger, had sprang from the dense undergrowth and attacked his fork-lift truck before making off in the direction from whence it came.

Police officers and the force helicopter scoured the locale, but they only managed to discover a set of large paw-prints.

18th June, 1999 *Doncaster 'LIVERPOOL DAILY POST'*

## THE GIANT TURTLES OF VIETNAM

Rumours and legends surrounding the Ho Hoan Klem Lake Monster of Vietnam, may it seems, have at least some foundation in fact.

Peter Pritchard, a world-renowned biologist, has gone on record as saying that he at least believes that the creature, said to resemble a giant turtle, is the real thing.

Together with a bunch of other scientists, he has studied the legend for years, and told reporters that; *'People are treating the sightings as another Loch Ness Monster, but this is not a myth.'*

*'For generations, Vietnamese parents have been telling their children about the Le Loi, the warrior kings who beat back the Chinese invaders in the 1400's with his heaven-sent sword.'*

*'As the victorious soldier crossed a lake, the weapon jumped from its scabbard and into the mouth of a turtle, which dove to the bottom.'*

*'The lake has been known as Ho Hoan Klem (Vietnamese for Lake Of The Returned Sword) ever since.'*

This mythological tale (on a par with the story of St Columba's encounter with 'a certain Water Horse' at Loch Ness in 565 AD) helped to provide a basis for subsequent sightings down the years, and now investigating scientists are said to be convinced that the 6-foot long, 400 pound

turtle recently spotted traversing the lake, may well indeed be the creature of legend.

'Yes, that's right. The same turtle,' Doctor Ha Dinh Duc, a biology professor at Hanoi's National University, who has studied the creature for years, announced in the local press.

'That would make him about 550 years old. There could well be up to five of the stupendous slowpokes plodding around the bottom of the lake.'

'People here believe the turtle is sacred. They think that only crazy people would want to catch one.'

12th January, 1999 Lake Ho Hoan Klem, Vietnam 'THE NATIONAL EXAMINER'

## Prices On Nessie Sighting Doubled

To mark the end of the old Millennium, the bookies, William Hill, and the official Loch Ness Monster Fan Club have decided to double their prize money for the best sighting of 1999.

They are now offering the not inconsiderable sum of £1,000, and if that wasn't tempting enough, William Hill are quoting odds of 5000-1 for proof positive of the actual existence of the legendary creature being produced on January 1st, 2000.

The Fan Club are apparently due to hold a special New Millennium Day Monster Hunt on that date.

1st June, 1999 Loch Ness, Scotland 'DAILY SLUR'

## New Species Of Coelacanth Found In Indonesia

Laughing once more in what passes for the face of accepted science, a species of fish said to have been extinct for over 65 million years, has been discovered lying on a cart in an Indonesian fish market.

A series of genetic tests subsequently revealed that creature, adorned with a series of stubby fins, is a member of the Coelacanth family. It's discovery brings to two the number of species now known to have survived the cataclysmic disaster that befell the Age Of The Giant Reptiles. Only freshwater lungfish have similarly survived virtually unchanged for over 400 million years.



Back in 1938, scientists off the Comoros Islands near South Africa, came across a 'living fossil,' and researchers, not surprisingly, considered the fish to be a unique relic population. It was believed that the creature had maintained its existence due to the preponderance of subterranean caves around the Comoros, caused by the unusual geological circumstances.

However, this latest discovery in the Celebes Sea, near to the Indonesian island of of Menado Tua, indicates that 'fossil fish' may have been more widespread than had previously been supposed. Laurent Pouyaud, of the French Government's Institut de Recherche pour le Development, was quoted as saying: 'We have not only found a new population of of Coelacanths but an entirely new species.'

From speaking to fishermen, who, it seems, occasionally catch the fish and sell them for food, it appears the population around Indonesia could well be large and healthy. The original one back in the Comoros, is considered to be no bigger than 500 and highly vulnerable to over-fishing and inbreeding.

Japanese dealers have been paying Comoros fisherman to hunt for *Coelacanth* after forming the idea that a fish that has cheated extinction must surely hold clues to eternal life. Spinal fluid from a *Coelacanth* reportedly sells for thousands of pounds for a mere teaspoon full.

Dr Pouyand suspects that the tests on Indonesian *Coelacanth* would show that the population was bigger and more generally diverse, making it, as a consequence, less vulnerable.

The species of the Comoros has been called *Latimeria chalumnae*, and the one found off Indonesia *Latimeria menadoensis*. It was stumbled upon when Mark Erdmann, a marine biologist who hails from the University of California, Berkeley, was on honeymoon, and his wife happened to notice an odd-looking fish being taken to market in the town of Manado.

23rd March, 1999 Manado, Indonesia 'THE TIMES'

# Religious Phenomena On The Trail Of The Garden Of Eden

David Rohl, the well-known (though somewhat controversial) archaeologist and author, has, he asserts, rediscovered the site of the Biblical Garden Of Eden, on the shores of Lake Urmia in Central Iran.

In a recent article published in the 'DAILY EXPRESS,' he told of how he stumbled upon this fabulous locale after climbing the 'snow-covered dome' of the Mountain of God, high above the Mongol village of Kandovan.

The prophet Ezekiel had referred to this volcanic peak as being the site of God's Throne, from where He gazed down at his creations; Adam and Eve revelling in the splendor of true paradise on Earth.

After years spent 'delving into realms of ancient documents from Babylonia, Assyria and Egypt, analysing the epic literature of ancient Sumer, and poring over faded 19th Century maps in the British Library,' David had travelled to this mountain, situated in the Iranian province of Azerbaijan. His quest had begun way back in 1987, following the receipt of a privately published paper by an amateur historian named Reginald Walker (no relation to the Editor). It was Reginald who theorised that the location of Eden may well lie within north-western Iran. The reasoning behind this speculation was that the four Rivers Of Eden, described in Chapter Two of Genesis, were to be found in that region.

All four had their sources around the two great salt lakes of Van and Urmia.

And therein lies the problem for would-be Eden locators. The identification of the four rivers has been the subject of much speculation and argument. The Bible names them as being Perath, Hiddekel, Gihon and Pishon. Rohl maintains that the first couple at least, are fairly easy to decipher; the Perath is simply the Hebrew version of the Arabic Firat and Greek Euphrates; similarly, the Hiddekel is Hebrew for Sumerian Idiglat from which the Greek Tigris derives. The remaining two rivers however, have always been a mystery. Reginald Walker's painstaking research was to prove fruitful to Rohl in his attempts to identify the remaining two rivers.

He showed that the River Aras, flowing into the Caspian Sea from the mountains north of Lake Urmia, was once called the Galhun.

*'By checking the writings of the Islamic geographers who accompanied the Arabic invasion of Persia in the 18th century, I confirmed that this was indeed the case. Moreover, even as late as the last century, atlases and encyclopaedias were still naming the River as the Galhun-Aras. The Galhun is therefore the missing Biblical Gihon.'*

Walker suggested that the fourth river, Pishon, was the Hebrew (West Semitic) name derived from the old Iranian Utzhun, where the Iranian vowel 'U' had been converted into the Semitic labial consonant 'P' *'Thus we have Utzhun to Pizhun to Pishon. The River Utzhun (the modern Kezel Uzun), thus identified as the Biblical Pishon, flows from the mountains of Kurdistan and empties into the southern basin of the Caspian Sea.'*

*'Bringing all this together, I found that the sources of all four rivers originated in the highland area which Alexander The Great knew as Armenia and we know today as eastern Turkey and western Iran.'*

Rohl also sought corroboration from the ancient Sumerian epic known as Enmerkar And The Lord Of Aratta. The story tells of a journey made by the envoy of the King Of Uruk, from his homeland in southern Mesopotamia, through the seven high passes of the Zagros range and down into the magical kingdom of Arrat, the Eldorado of the ancient world.

One of the most important parts of the tale concerns the envoy descending from the last of the seven mountain passes, and crossing a broad plain before arriving at the city of Aratta.

*'The envoy travelling to Aratta, covered his feet with the dust of the road and stirred up the pebbles of the mountains. Five gates, six gates, seven gates he traversed.'*

*'Like a huge serpent prowling about in the plain, he was unopposed...He lifted up his eyes as he approached Aratta'* (extracts from Enmerkar And The Lord Of Aratta).

Now, what is undeniably interesting here, is that the Sumerian word for plain is 'edin' which, not surprisingly, some scholars believe to be the origin of the name Eden, in Genesis.

Rohl was therefore able to combine his discovery of the location of the four rivers with the Sumerian location of Eden. He elected to set out himself for the ancient city of Susa (incidentally, the burial place of Daniel, of the lion's den fame), from the south western flood plain of Iran, in an attempt to retrace the steps of that long-ago envoy, and his journey to paradise.

He arrived by car four days later, to find that, even today, the edin remains one of the lushest regions in the whole of the Middle East. He was convinced beyond doubting that the sight which met his eyes; the thick soil, the abundant fruit orchards and vineyards, the winding rivers, marked the site was the original Garden Of Eden.

*'The Bible describes the Garden as being "east in Eden" (Genesis 11:8), in other words the east of, but still within, the wider territory of Eden.'*

Rohl therefore continued travelling eastwards by car between the south-eastern shore of Lake Urmia and the volcanic peak of Mount Sahand. After they had driven for about an hour, they came upon a long west to east valley, *'the sides of which were terraced with every kind of tree smothered in Spring blossom.'*

*"God planted a garden in Eden, which is in the east, and there he put the man he had fashioned. From the soil, God caused to grow every kind of tree, enticing to look at and good to eat." (Genesis 2: 8-9)*

Rohl describes the scene upon alighting from the vehicle in colourful terms; *'The soil was deep and rich. Little mudbrick villages clung to the foothills, others scattered across the valley floor. All around, a high, snow-laden ring enclosed this earthly idyll, nurturing its warm*

*micro-climate. The nearest mountain to the north glowed bright red in the low evening light; a pile of pure red ochre. At its foot, sprawled the regional capital of Tabriz.'*

David had spent more than ten years trying to locate this site, but he states that his first impressions were more of paradise lost than found. *'Nothing of the earthly garden and its original settlement could have survived, beneath these bustling streets,'* he later told reporters. However, he remained convinced that this was where Man first began to establish what passes for a civilized society, in around 7000 BC.

Adam, he further informs us, mean, quite literally, the 'red earth' man. According to Sumerian legend, Man was created by the gods from the common clay of the earth. The creation of Man in Genesis is virtually identical.

David believes that the clay in question here, the clay that gave Adam his name, was sourced in the red mountain that overlooks Tabriz.

## ...And Following The Star Of Bethlehem

In late February this year, (the 23rd, to be exact), people all over the world gathered to watch the planets Jupiter and Venus close together in the early evening sky.

The conjunction of the two celestial bodies, a rare event in itself, has also attracted those who believe a similar phenomenon may have been responsible for the appearance of 'The Star Of Bethlehem...'

Certain astronomers have speculated that a conjunction that occurred on June 17th, 2 BC, might have acted as the catalyst for the Three Wise Men to begin their journey to the birthplace of Christ.

On that occasion, calculations have shown that the two planets came so close that they would very likely have fused into a single brilliant beacon.

The appearance of this current conjunction has of course been interpreted by some, as being a sign that the Millennium is fast approaching...Or even that it heralds a Second Coming.

24th February, 1999 General 'THE TIMES'

## Searching For The Source Of The Flood

A group of scientists were planning to investigate a claim that the Black Sea was the origin of the Great Biblical Flood, at the time of going to press.

According to their theorising, 7,500 years ago rapidly rising waters combined to drive into exile untold thousands of people from the Middle East into Europe, thereby forming the inspiration for both the story of Noah and the Babylonian *'Epic Of Gilgamesh.'*

This thesis was first proposed by a couple of oceanographers; Dr William Ryan and Dr Walter Pitman of Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory, New York, back in 1997. Sediment cores they had taken seemed to suggest that around 5,500 BC, rising waters in the Mediterranean surged through the Bosphorus and swept into the Black Sea, until then a freshwater lake. The waters rose by 15cm a day until the sea had risen by 150m and land the size of Florida was totally submerged.

The scientists are hoping to find evidence of settlements engulfed by the Flood. And the signs are pretty good. A sonar study last year revealed a series of shapes that, according to expedition co-leader Dr David Mindell of the famous MIT, *'are too large for a shipwreck and too shaped not to be man-made.'*

This Summer's planned expedition includes amongst its party scientists from the University of Pennsylvania, the Archaeological Museum in Sinop, Turkey, and Dr Robert

Ballard, the man who successfully located the wreck of the 'Titanic.'

And whilst the project cannot of itself provide proof positive that the story of Noah and the Ark is a literal truth, it may at least be able to show that there was indeed a Flood which swamped existing settlements and might therefore have formed the basis of the Biblical story.

17th February, 1999 The Black Sea 'THE TIMES'

## The Walking Miracle

Now, here's the kind of story you only ever usually hear about humming down the wires from some hot, sweaty Revivalist tent in the middle of some Southern US state.

But *this* one is alleged to have taken place in the heart of England....

David Gregg was so desperate in seeking out a cure for his unbearable back pain that he entered the Peniel Pentecostal Church in Brentwood, Essex, to beseech a preacher, the Right Reverend Michael Reid, to offer up prayers that he would be healed.

David, 46, suffered from sciatica, and had been in such terrible agony on the day that he called at the church that he had to lie down in the aisle for the duration of the service.

According to Mr Gregg however, the preacher had told him to stand, and as he'd staggered to his feet, Rev Reid had ordered the pain to leave his body. A few moments later he was able to walk unaided from the church, free from the crippling pain that the doctors, despite their best efforts, had been unable to alleviate. He later told reporters; *'I am completely cured. I haven't taken a painkiller or seen a doctor since.'*

News of this apparent 'miracle cure' quickly spread and when the church made full reference to the incident, (said to have occurred last October), in a newspaper advert, the Advertising Standards Authority ordered the church to withdraw the ad, stating that it was concerned that unsubstantiated claims could well succeed in raising the hopes of *'vulnerable readers that they were likely to be cured of pain or disability.'*

The advert had stated; *"A church were healing and miracles happen today. Come and see what God can do for you!"*

The church also sent out testimonials, including seven from doctors, that claimed instances of physical healing had occurred.

David Gregg, once a confirmed agnostic, perhaps not surprisingly, now remains convinced of the authenticity of the power of prayer....

*'I was lying down in the aisle while the service was going on. My back was so bad I was in agony. Then the preacher came over and helped me up and blessed me.'*

*'The pain began to ease straight away and I was up and walking almost immediately.'*

*'It was wonderful to have that searing pain taken away.'*

*'What else could it have been if it wasn't the work of God? I have got to see it as a miracle. What else can you call it?'*

*'I was sceptical at first. If people want to believe me or not, it's up to them. I know what happened.'*

18th April, 1999 Peniel Pentecostal Church, Essex  
'NEWS OF THE WORLD'

## Serbs Looked To Nostradamus For Comfort

At the height of the tragic and hopelessly one-sided war over Kosovo, which raged across the Balkans for a couple of months this Spring, the demonised Serbs could have been forgiven for thinking that the whole world was allied against them.

Still, as the bombs rained down nightly on the major cities of the beleaguered country, (the Americans displaying once again their remarkable bravery of being out of range) the citizens scrambled for solace in the most unlikely of sources.

Traditionally, the Serb's are said to be a superstitious people (hell, when the chips are down, aren't we all?), so it came as no surprise to Western correspondents covering the war from the streets of Belgrade, that the populace found some real degree of comfort from reading the leading occult magazine; *'THE TWILIGHT ZONE.'*

According to the publication, Bill Clinton's political career was as good as over, Monica Lewinsky is pregnant, and America will shortly be split into two....

The TV stations (when they weren't being bombed off the air) were equally keen to play up the prophetic angle. Spasoje Vljic, an author and soothsayer informed viewers of the pro-Milosevic BK Channel that Mr Clinton is in league with the Devil (no surprise there then), and that he has recently been excommunicated by his home parish in Little Rock, Arkansas.

Mr Vljic, comparatively unknown prior to the outbreak of hostilities, became something of an overnight star thanks to his supposedly 'uncanny ability' to convert names into numbers. Somehow, although it was never made precisely clear which method of Numerology was employed, the names Clinton, Albright, and Blair all added up to the dreaded 666. Their evil, Vljic claimed, was being countered by divine intervention. In other words, every time a bomb dropped on the former Yugoslavia, and civilians were killed, so would one of the countries allied against Milosevic suffer a similar number of fatalities. The Columbine High School Massacre and the nail bomb victims in central London were just two of the more obvious examples given as evidence of this 'eye for an eye' policy.

The Serbs Orthodox religion includes a heady mixture of both Christian and Pagan traditions. The spirit most fervently prayed to is Elijah or Ilija, patron saint of the weather and known as 'Ilija the Thunder-maker' Coincidentally or not, the fact that many of the NATO airstrikes were regularly hampered by the appearance of thick storm clouds over the country did not go unnoticed by the faithful.

Books on Nostradamus were also being snapped up by the proverbial trolley load with many of the civilians openly quoting the old prophet as predicting that World War Three would break out in June (it didn't, of course, unless you subscribe to the belief that we are already engaged in a secret war against either the rise to power of the Third Antichrist, the establishment of a UN-dominated New World Order, or the malevolent alien race that has reneged on their deal with the US government and is waging a war for possession of our planet, even as we speak..But that's all in the realm of the conspiracy theories given credence by the lunatic fringe, though...Isn't it? ).

Equally grim were the recollection by many Serbs of the words of Mita Tarabic, who, it is said, saw a calamitous leader plunging the nation into a hopeless war with a defeat every bit as humiliating as it would be inevitable.

Sadly, for the proud people of Serbia, *that* prophecy at least, came true...

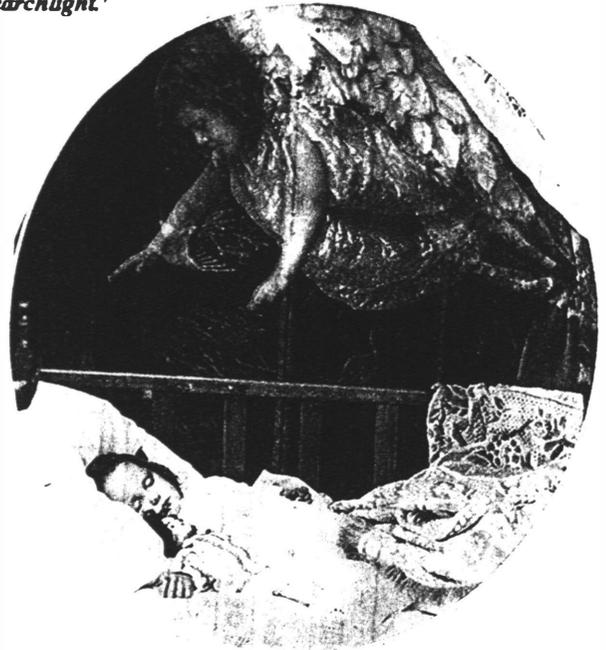
21st April, 1999 Belgrade, Serbia *'THE TIMES'*

## Saved By An Angel?

A man who prefers to remain anonymous, wrote in to the letters page of the *'WEEKLY WORLD NEWS'* to state that when he was a child, he'd accidentally fallen into the local canal.

Whilst his terrified friend ran off to go and get help, the man, known only as Mr D, began struggling for breath as

the water started rushing down his throat. Suddenly, everything went black, and Mr D truly thought his number was up. In the midst of the near stygian blackness however, he beheld a *'a shaft of bright light that looked like a searchlight.'*



Standing in the centre of this illumination, was a female figure, and at this point, Mr D felt himself floating upwards and towards her, (Ufologists might well prick up their ears here at this remarkable similarity to modern-day accounts of so-called Alien Abduction). As he drew closer to the being, he was able to discern quite clearly that the entity was an 'Angel.'

*'The next thing I remember was lying in the road, being wrapped in blankets. I could hear the muffled sound of distant voices. Fortunately, a man walking by had seen me fall in. He was able to fish me out and pump the water from my lungs.'*

*'I am now 70 years of age, yet the memory of that vision of light still stays with me.'*

22nd May, 1999 *'THE WEEKLY WORLD NEWS'*

## The 'Myrrh Miracle' Project

The Russian Orthodox Church had, last Winter, elected to make a fresh attempt to canonise the last Tsar as Muscovites flocked to see what they believe is a modern-day miracle.

Priests at the Church of the Ascension have gone on record as stating that an icon of Nicholas II has been exuding myrrh - an important criterion for sainthood according to Russian Orthodoxy. At the Metropolitan Kirill of Smolensk and Kaliningrad, a prominent church leader, released a statement that saying the church would set about investigating the apparent miracle.

Father Vasili Golovanov, one of those selfsame priests, was quoted as saying that the icon had quite literally been oozing myrrh since last November (the 7th, to be exact), the anniversary of the Bolshevik's takeover. He said that the scent was particularly strong on days were services were held in memory of the tsar.

The Church, together with various other faiths, believes that myrrh or other fragrant liquids exuded by icons are signs from God, a belief rejected by Protestants and most Catholic, has a year to decide whether the matter is a real, bona fide miracle. If the decision is positive, the Church could conceivably canonise Nicholas, giving his remains the status of holy relics.

Such a move would delight the Church's arch-conservative wing, which has always maintained that Nicholas is a saint,

although it believes that the royal family's bodies were destroyed in the 1920's.

But, despite pressure from within church ranks, elders have been forced to tread carefully. If the relics were later found to be fake, the Church would be guilty of venerating false relics, which would not only be sacrilegious but could also lead to a schism within the Church.

When the tsar and his family were buried in July, 1998, the Church refused to recognise the remains as genuine as it has never trusted the Russian government's findings.

1st February, 1999 Moscow, Russia 'THE TIMES'

## The Search For The Lost Ark Of The Covenant

Perhaps, to be honest, the above headline may prove to be something of a misnomer because, according to the true believers of Ethiopia, the Holy Ark has been with them all along, or at the very least, since it was removed from Jerusalem hundreds of years prior to the birth of Christ.

The faithful of the Orthodox Ethiopian Church still gather today for their most important festival; Timkat, which commemorates the baptism of Christ. And nowhere is this festival celebrated with greater ceremony than in Axum, the oldest and most sacred of Ethiopian towns. And it is here, that the Ethiopians believe that the Ark can be found. On the eve of the Timkat, and indeed on Timkat itself, the Ark is displayed to the faithful of Axum. This particular Ark, it is openly acknowledged however, is of course nothing more than a replica of the real thing. The genuine article being considered far too powerful for any mere human to behold. This most sacred of holy relics never leaves the chapel where it is guarded night and day.

Instead, a *tabot* or symbolic representation is used. In Axum, as all over Ethiopia, *tabots* are wrapped in brocade and paraded amid much rejoicing and dancing. According to legend, the stone tablets on which God inscribed the law were placed in the Ark by Moses. Its power helped the Israelites to defeat their enemies and they carried it with them to the Promised Land. The Ark was then installed in a temple in Jerusalem by King Solomon. From whence it was said to have mysteriously disappeared.

No one it seems, claims to know the reason for this, but after the time of Solomon (970-931 BC), the Ark is almost never mentioned in the pages of the Old Testament. The Ethiopians however, are confident enough in their faith to drum up a ready-made answer to the riddle.

The venerated relic is kept in a chapel beside the Church of St Mary of Zion. David Orr, a journalist working for 'THE TIMES,' was taken there by Deacon Fiseha Asfaw, who told him 'the true story of the Ark.'

This chiefly accorded with the main points of the legend accepted by most biblical scholars, but also varied from it in various parts.

A thousand years before the birth of Christ, the Queen of Sheba travelled from Ethiopia to Jerusalem, where she conceived a child by no less a dignitary than King Solomon. That child was named Menelik and as a young man he, too, travelled from Ethiopia to Jerusalem. He stayed there for some years with his father. When he left, he took with him the Ark of the Covenant. Solomon apparently accepted that its removal had been sanctioned by God.

The Ark was brought to Ethiopia before the birth of Christ, and installed in a temple near Axum. During the reign of the late Emperor Haile Selassie, it was placed in a new chapel, the very same one before which David Orr and his confidant stood during the narration of this story.

Inside, a door, draped with a cloth, is flanked by two tall windows with turquoise frames. The edifice is surmounted by a turquoise dome. Within, a priest stands guard inside a fence.

'Aba Teklemariam has been looking after the Ark for nearly four years and he is the only one allowed to see it,' the deacon told the curious Mr Orr. 'The former guardian was rebuked by the Ark because God was displeased with him. Many times I asked what had happened but he would not tell me.'

The deacon went on to say that he had personally witnessed the power of the Ark. One of the previous guardians had been urged by a former patriarch of the Egyptian Orthodox Church to show him the Ark.

'From his nose the patriarch discharged blood. He came a second time and again tried to persuade the guardian to show him the Ark. The guardian hesitated and he, too, was punished by the Angels. Blood came from his nose. He was sick and died some months afterwards. After suffering many years, the patriarch also died.'

'We are not worried about the prospect of another war with neighbouring Eritrea. We have to power of the Ark on our side and God will protect the Ark and Ethiopia.'

12th January, 1999 Axum, Ethiopia 'THE TIMES'

## GLIMPSES IN THE TWILIGHT Ghostly Tales From Around The World



### The Haunted Ambulance Station

Reports humming down the wires from Southend, Essex, tell of a series of apparently paranormal incidents taking place at an ambulance headquarters in the locale.

Witnesses, most of whom, surprisingly enough, have been on-duty paramedics, claim to have seen an ephemerally figure floating through a wall, and to have heard voices in an empty room. A woman was also sighted standing by an ambulance, but when approached she simply disappeared.

Doors and windows have been opened and closed by an invisible agency and, according to the account we have on file, the spirit has even deigned to answer telephone calls and taken messages.

One of the paramedics, Colin Peagram, was quoted as saying; *'Crowd are level-headed people, but staff are petrified to be alone in the station at night* ( 'In The Night. In The Dark' - to paraphrase Shirley Jackson in her classic *'HAUNTING OF HILL HOUSE'* )

30th May, 1999 Southend, Essex *'SUNDAY MANC'*

## *A Case For Mulder And Scully: Cerys 'Catatonia' Admits To Seeing A Ghost*

Cerys Matthews, lead singer with the popular indie/rock group *CATATONIA*, claims to have encountered a similar invisible presence (to the one referred to in the aforementioned snippet) when she was recording with her band at Monnow Valley Studios, just outside the Welsh town of Monmouth.

In answer to a question put to her by a fan in the pages of *'Q MAGAZINE'*, she related that *'the boys from the band knew that this room in an old converted mill house, was haunted, but nobody thought to tell me. Everything was fine for eight weeks or so, but then I heard someone calling my name and they touched my leg. I couldn't see them. I truly believe in ghosts, so that's probably why it happened. I moved rooms after that.'*

February, 1999 Monnow Valley Studios, Wales *'Q MAGAZINE'*

## *The Phantom Monk Of Purley*

An anonymous woman known only as 'Mrs S,' claimed that she had moved into a flat, together with her husband, that appeared to be plagued by the presence of what could only be termed 'bad energy.'

*'Eerie things used to happen in the old flat, everyone who entered it hated it and felt uncomfortable when they visited,'* she told reporters. *'Sometimes unexplained voices could be heard and occasionally visitors would say that they felt someone walk through them.'*

*'Others claimed that they saw faces or felt someone tap them on the shoulder. One evening, my husband went as white as a sheet when he "bumped" into someone in the hall. Of course, there was nobody actually there at the time.'*

*'After my husband and I divorced, the phenomena stopped. All except the regular visitations I had from a ghostly monk I nicknamed Fred. I felt that Fred helped and protected me. I have since moved from the flat and no longer experience these supernatural things. However, I recently found out something interesting about the building. It had been built on the site of a cemetery.... For Monks!!!'*

24th April, 1999 Purley, Surrey *'THE WEEKLY WORLD NEWS'*

## *Lowes Cottage - The Saga Continues*

A psychic by the name of Tim Chilton, has recently decided to purchase the infamous 'haunted' cottage situated in Upper Mayfield, Staffordshire, for £56,000 at an auction.

The property, which was catapulted into the paranormal headlines last year following the claims made by the Smith family that the place was plagued with 'evil spirits,' was (ahem) repossessed after the mortgage was defaulted.

You may well remember, Constant Reader, that the Smith family tried to make legal history when they attempted to sue the family from whom they'd previously bought it, their argument running along the lines that they hadn't been informed that the house was 'Ghost-ridden.'

Not surprisingly, you might think, the judge presiding over the case chose to dismiss the Smiths claims as being entirely bogus. Actually, he went a tad further and branded Andrew and Josie, husband and wife, both 'hysterical and devious.'

Undeterred, Mr Chilton, who hails from Finchley, north London, was decidedly less sceptical about the possibility of the property being haunted, went on record as stating that he wasn't in the least bit worried about its less-than savoury reputation.

*'My father died recently. The death was sudden but he had a kind of premonition and wrote a letter to a friend. The letter was completely out of character for a very fit man. It was his final act. The letter related to his circumstances that this house has been associated with in the past.'*

*'I do not see my wife Katrina and two children living in it but I intend to spend a lot of time there.'*

The former owner, Mr Andrew Smith, was keen to pass on a few words of ominous warning to Tim, however, prior to his moving in....

*'You won't like it. You can't imagine some of the things that happened there. We knew nothing about hauntings until we had to live through it all....'*

21st April, 1999 Upper Mayfield, Staffordshire *'THE EXPRESS'*

## *Ghostly Cries Over Lake Windermere*

According to local legend, the peaceful silence that normally reigns supreme over the tranquil waters of Lake Windermere is on occasion, shattered by the sound of a terrible screaming.

It carries across the surface of the lake in a ghostly echo. And its origin has never been discovered.

There are the apocryphal tales, of course. Stories that the locals whisper, seated around the comfort of a blazing hearth, concerning a dark Winter's night back in 1752. According to that particular tale, a group of ferrymen were struggling to keep warm in the comparative sanctuary of the Ferry Inn. The weather outside was atrocious. High winds, and a freezing rain that whipped hands and faces and churned the waters into a ferment. No one was too keen to step beyond the shelter of the inn, not even when there came the plaintive cry for a ferry issuing from the Nab, a promontory on the opposite side of the lake. They tried to ignore it at first, inwardly praying that whoever it was, they would give up and try later when the elements had improved drastically.

But the cries didn't cease. If anything they grew ever more insistent, and eventually, one hardy soul took it upon himself to volunteer to row across the lake and pick up the nuisance passenger.

He never returned until the early hours of the next morning, and when he did he was alone....His face was as white as parchment and he was struck dumb with terror.

His friends tried to question him as to what had happened out there on the lake, but he was unable to answer them.

He died later that same day, without ever giving the slightest clue as to what horror had befallen him.

As the years passed, the locals claimed to have continued to hear those same eerie cries on cold, wind-blasted nights, and eventually, they felt they were left with little choice but to call in an Exorcist to lay the tortured spirit to rest.

The priest duly performed the ceremony out on the lake, and was said to have succeeded in driving the ghost to a quarry situated in Claife, a dark, wooded area just north of the Nab. Once there, the priest committed it to lie entombed under a collection of rocks and boulders 'Until dry-shod men should walk on Windermere.'

The Nab itself, however, continued to retain a sense of evil. Fox hounds were averse to hunting in the area, and would often be seen to stand stock still, rooted to the spot, whimpering with plainly obvious fear.



The perplexed villagers, who'd mistakenly assumed their troubles to be over, began speculating once more as to the identity of the presence they themselves felt when standing on the Nab.

Some said it was likely the place was haunted by Thomas Lancaster, a former landowner who had been executed hundreds of years earlier for committing a series of particularly cold-hearted murders.

Lancaster had been born in High Wray, on the very banks of Lake Windermere, although he later upped sticks to Threlkeld in Cumbria. In January, 1671, he was involved in a huge scandal by causing a young girl to cancel her wedding at the last minute to marry him instead. A few short months down the line however, after Thomas had managed to extract a large sum of money from the girl's father, he poisoned him with a dose of white arsenic. Not long after this, Lancaster set about doing away with not only his unfortunate bride, but also her three unmarried sisters and a couple of servants.

All were killed using precisely the same method; Arsenic poisoning.

Lancaster's attempts to make the whole thing look a fatal outbreak of fever failed miserably, and he was subsequently arrested for his crimes and sentenced to death by hanging.

The custom of the times dictated the Thomas be brought back to the place of his birth for his last day on earth. And so, in the village of High Wray, he was hung from the doorpost of his former home. His body was then chained to a gibbet on the road that led to the Nab.

In the days and weeks that followed the removal of Lancaster's rotting remains, local people swore blind that they had seen his swinging skeleton, wailing in the wind.

Another theory holds that the ghostly cries are the desperate screams for help from the 47 members of a wedding party which drowned in the lake back in 1635.

Whatever the truth of the matter, there are still those who maintain that when the sun goes down over Lake Windermere, the woeful cries of the eternally damned can sometimes be heard drifting across the water like a creeping Autumn mist...

April, 1999 Lake Windermere 'THE VIRGINIAN MAGAZINE'

## Spirits In 'The Punchbowl'

The following account came courtesy of a letter from one of our readers, Alan Johnson, who hails from Birkdale in Southport;

*'I wonder if you are aware of the alleged ghost that is said to haunt The Punch Bowl public house standing on Lunt Road, Seston, Merseyside.*

*I first read of this apparition many years ago whilst poring over a childrens' book of ghostly stories. Having lived in Maghull for over 20 years, prior to moving to my present home in Southport, in 1998, I had conversations about the spectre with the current landlord along with several members of his staff, after they'd experienced some "odd" situations late at night.*

*'The ghost(s) are supposed to be that of a dead sailor and/or a housemaid of times gone by, when the River Mersey came right on up to door of the old Punchbowl building (as opposed to the new extension) which was formerly the churchwarden's house. The ages-old church is still in use next door.*

*'This church has an ancient cemetery in its grounds. A shipwreck which occurred at the relevant time caused the churchwarden's house to be used as a temporary mortuary, and the sailor's ghost is assumed to be one of those unfortunate souls.*

*'As for the housemaid; she was said to have fallen down a flight of stairs, still in use in the old building.*

*'The management have see fit to erect a plaque explaining the details of the legend, which can be viewed when entering the restaurant.*

*'Included amongst the more recent paranormal incidents are glasses and bottles shaking and rattling on the bar late at night, for no apparent reason, when the landlord has entertained friends and staff after hours, an invisible presence has been felt on occasion, and figures have even been seen in the cellar, which terrified the member of staff involved. There was also the case of the customer who happened to be a medium and knew nothing about the haunting. She apparently 'saw' a figure on the ground floor room and "something else" by a serving hatch. A boyfriend of another member of staff (who was also ignorant of the resident spirit(s)) was waiting for his girlfriend to take her home. Growing impatient, he decided to go up the stairs to collect her coat, and came running back down, babbling that there was something 'not human' on the stairs.*

*'And yet another customer, who was waiting to be served at the restaurant counter, was advised by a 'member of staff' that they 'would not be a moment,' and went into the kitchen. It turned out that this 'member of staff' was in fact an apparition, as the rest of the restaurant staff knew nothing of the person described by the customer who had been kept waiting.*

*'No doubt there are other experiences awaiting investigation, and I don't believe that they are a result of 'spirits' behind the bar!!!*

*I'm sure the Landlord and Landlady would be of further assistance in corroborating and adding to the aforementioned...'*

# Ghost-Hunting At 'The Half-Way House'

The Ellesmere Port based 'Supernatural Encounters Association, decided to stake out another reputedly haunted pub, namely, 'The Half-Way House' in Childer Thornton, Cheshire, earlier this year.

For five long hours, the ten-strong team waited for something to happen, and it was just cracking on first light when their vigil was finally 'rewarded.'

At a little after 6am, a door in the bar area, which had been firmly shut for the whole of the night, suddenly flew open with no apparent agency.

According to S.E.A's Mike McManus, it was preceded by a whooshing sound, and as the door crashed open, the curtains hanging on the window blew up with great force. As a member approached the middle of the bar, a dark shadow sped past him heading for the lounge area.

At the same time, a smallish shape was seen to dart from the entrance area into the lounge. Two members sitting on the stairs head heard sighing noises which were apparently picked up on their recording equipment.

As for the building itself, it has a long history dating back to 1893. A neighbouring pub, The Rifleman's Arms, was demolished years ago. As the decades have rolled by, there have been reported sightings of many ghosts, including those of a White Lady, a young boy, an elderly female, a man in a dark suit and a cellarman.

*Childer Thornton, Cheshire, 1999 'LIVERPOOLECHO'*

## The House On Haunted Slope

For our next story, we are grateful once more to another reader who has taken the time and trouble to write in with their personal account....

Cathie O' Donnell, who currently resides in Dorset, but who is originally from the blessed county of Merseyside, wrote to me last February, and humble apologies must, I fear, once more be uttered for my having only just gotten around to including the contents of her missive here, in late September...Sorry, Cathie, I promise you it won't be so long next time.

*'Between the ages of one and twenty two, I lived in the Alburgh Vale area of Liverpool, quite close to Sefton Park and Otterspool Promenade. Me and my Mum (she was sadly divorced when I was just two years old), resided in a large, typically rambling Victorian terraced house that teetered on a slope in quite a posh area of the city.*

*As I grew older, I became aware of several strange things happening around our home. Doors would open and close of their own accord, floorboards would creak mysteriously, and there were a series of unaccountable cold spots.*

*'Of course, all of this 'phenomena' can be quite easily explained by our living in such an old house, but it was harder to be so dismissive when dealing with other incidents such as objects being moved around by themselves, items going missing without trace only to turn up in decidedly odd locations, ie; a pair of shoes appearing in a fridge???*

*'By the time I'd turned fourteen, the 'spook' (for want of a better word) really began to get into the swing of things.*

*'For a start, there there would often be an overwhelming sense of an invisible "man-thing" standing close behind*

*me, looking over my shoulder. The sensation was so strong that I was convinced that I'd get to see it "in the flesh" so to speak, if I could have spun round quickly enough. But I never did.*

*'And it wasn't just me that experienced this 'feeling.' Many of our guests and friends who came to stay would tell of experiencing a similar sensation on occasion, too.*

*'At least three of these people flatly refused to sit in the diningroom after encountering 'Mr Nobody' as we came to call the unseen presence.'*



*'The entity seemed to display a great gift for mimicry. On countless occasions, I would be outside a room or going down the stairs when I would glimpse Mum disappearing along the hall, outside a particular room, or heading down the stairs, when in fact she was in the lounge or chatting to a mate in the kitchen.*

*'She would also see me going somewhere when I was in a completely different room. Our names would also be called from points around the house. I'd often hear my name "Catherine" being shouted, in a voice that sounded identical to my mother's only to later discover that my Mum hadn't called me at all.*

*'Perhaps more disturbing were the times that my Mum would hear 'me' crying and would come running to my aid, to find that I was fine and not moved to tears.*

*'This behaviour could often be annoying, but mostly we were quite impressed with "Mr Nobody's" talents for mimicry.*

*'However, in 1996, things took a decidedly more sinister turn.*

*'My Mum elected to re-mortgage the house during that year, intent upon doing the old house up big time. The building was re-wired, re-plastered and damp-proofed. A new kitchen was fitted, new windows and central heating*

were installed. I'd turned 16 and was positively awash with raging hormones and boundless energy. It was kind of hard then, to shake the notion that somehow "Mr Nobody" appeared at this point to set about absorbing some of this youthful vigor... Or maybe "he" simply didn't like the home improvements.

Whatever the case, on the occasions "he" now chose to stand behind me, I began to feel that "he" was constantly sulky. Not only that, but electrical plugs were yanked out of their sockets when my Mum and I were watching the TV or playing records, and the doors would slam loudly.

'One balmy July evening, everything seemed to come to a head.

'Me, my Mum and my boyfriend were sitting in the lounge. I had been undemocratically voted to make a pot of tea. It was 9:15pm. I walked along the hall into the morning room, heading towards the kitchen. As I was about half-way across the morning room, I felt "Mr Nobody" directly behind me. And it was all so different this time. He 'felt totally pissed off. I could actually hear carpet slippers slowly shuffling coupled with heavy asthmatic breathing. And oh, he was so very close. So close that I most certainly did not want to turn around to see him.

'I felt the hairs on the back of my neck and head actually crackle and bristle, and an air of electrification pervaded the room. I was absolutely terrified, and let out an ear-splitting scream. As I did so, I was able to break out of my trance-like state and hurtle into the kitchen, hiding behind the sanctuary of the freezer. My Mum and my boyfriend came running, and they both later confirmed that they too had felt a large patch of icy-coldness in the centre of the morning room.

'When I told Mum that "Mr Nobody" had sneaked up on me and scared me half to death, she lost her rag. She promptly stormed into the morning room and began yelling at the invisible entity.

"Don't you dare scare my daughter again!!!" she roared, and no sooner had the words dropped from her lips than the door between the hall and the morning room slammed shut with such force that the whole house seemed to shake with the impact.

'And that was that.

"Mr Nobody" didn't really bother us again after that. There would still be the odd shout, the occasional cold spot, but nothing like as bad as it had been during the previous years.

'My ghost-busting Mum moved out of the house in 1994, and a young couple moved in. And who knows, maybe they are right now enduring their own experiences of "Mr Nobody."

'Now though, I'm living down in Dorset, in a small market town called Blandford Forum, slap bang in the middle of belts of green, rolling countryside. There are it seems, a whole welter of ghosts haunting a less-than-delighted populace.

'Interestingly enough, the majority choose to congregate around ancient or sacred areas. Blandford itself is predominantly Georgian, due to the enforced cleansing of the "Great Fire." I was lucky enough to make plenty of friends down south, and the following stories are all first-hand accounts:

'Firstly, let us consider the tale of the Phantom Coach. The Coach is supposed to career along the small road up to Bryaston Village on each and every Christmas Eve. A little old man I was introduced to once told me of how, thirty years earlier, he had been walking home in the early hours of a cold Christmas Eve. As he drew level with the large gate posts that stand at the head of the road into Bryaston, he became aware of an odd noise. As he strained to listen, he was eventually able to discern that it was the sound of

carriage springs and horses hooves. He stood stock still for a single endless moment as a horse-drawn carriage shot past in front of him, causing him to jump back in alarm. Just as he'd succeeded in steadying himself, the carriage promptly disappeared!!!

'There have been many more recent sightings, too, but most of them are by patrons of The Stour Inn, opposite Bryaston Gates, so perhaps they can't be taken too seriously!!!

'Another pub, formerly known as 'The White Hart,' once had a major problem acquiring staff to work in its cellars. The aged landlord (who has since retired) once told me about a woman who was seen hiding in the back cellar, (the old pub used to have tunnels running right the way through the cellars - Legend has it that there are literally hundreds of these tunnels snaking along underneath the nearby houses and the local church, and the townsfolk were forced to seek refuge down there at the height of the Great Fire).

'The landlord, Ted, and his wife, used quite often see a ghostly woman in a long white dress, huddled in a dark corner of the cellar. Perhaps not surprisingly, most of the bar staff flatly refused to venture down there alone.'

'I'll wind up this letter with my favourite tale concerning my friend's experience with a phantom jay-walker....

'The public transport is particularly bad down here, so using your own car to get from village to village is essential. My friend (we'll call her Jane, because she's less-than-happy about making her experience public knowledge), owned a sparkling little Mini, her pride and joy. This car enabled her to visit her boyfriend who lived in the next village on a fairly regular basis.

'The car journey from Blandford to Milbourne usually takes about 30-40 minutes, along a quiet country lane, bordered by banks and hedges and vast expanses of farmland and woods on either side.

'In April, 1997, "Jane" left her boyfriend's house in Milbourne at approximately 11:45pm. She had been driving for about a quarter of an hour when she approached the bow of a hill in Thrornicombe. Well aware that there is a particularly sharp bend to the left immediately after the brow of the hill, she began to slow down. As she turned a corner, she noticed a dark figure walking out directly in front of her car. She slammed on the brakes and the car screeched to an abrupt halt.

'The figure simply carried on walking across the road, disappearing into the gloom.

"Jane" was really shaken by the person's lack of acknowledgement of her. It was almost as though the figure hadn't even been aware of her existence.

'Eventually, she calmed down sufficiently to be able to drive home, and though it's fair to say she wasn't in the best of moods, she soon forgot all about the incident.

'Two weeks later however, she again left her boyfriend's home at 11:45pm, and as she drove over the bow of the hill and turned left, once more a figure stepped out about ten feet in front of her. This time, "Jane" honked loud on her horn, but the figure in the dark clothing simply ignored her. She slammed on the brakes, as on the previous occasion, and wound down the window, intending to give the jay-walker a piece of her mind. When she stuck her head out of the window however, she found the road ahead of her was clear.

'It was only then that a number of things began to dawn on "Jane." Firstly, she was on a small country lane, 8-10 miles distant from the nearest village. For as far as the eye could see, even in daylight, there was nothing but fields and endless tree-lined hedgerows. There were certainly no houses nearby, and no sodium glare of streetlights.

'Secondly, the figure had been walking on the level of the road, yet the bank on left hand side of the road was

approximately 2-3 feet high, topped with a "laid" hedge. So why wasn't the figure stepping down onto the road?

'She didn't wait around for an answer to these questions. Suddenly deciding she had a infinitely more pressing engagement elsewhere... Any damn place but here.... She put her foot down and sped home to Blandford.

'When she arrived home, she found that the car window was still half-open. The following night she told us about what had happened, and half-convinced that she probably imagined the whole thing, we nonetheless elected to drive out and take a look for ourselves.

'There were about five of us squashed into a couple of Mini's, as the last of the daylight drained from the day. When we arrived at the scene, we closely inspected the hedges on either side of the road, and soon discovered that there were absolutely no gaps or visible holes through which anyone could have squeezed. We were all one hundred per cent satisfied that, assuming she did see something, it couldn't have been a solid human being.

'Unable to come up with a logical solution to the mystery, we drove home, more than a little nonplussed.

'Jane, though still affected by the encounter, nevertheless continued taking the identical route home when returning from her boyfriend's, at least a couple of times a week, and for a while, nothing untoward occurred.

'Until July, 1998, that is, when Jane was once more driving home. On this instance it was coming round to 8:40pm, and still very light. As she came over the hill, she saw a tall woman with long red hair, dressed in a flowing dark blue skirt, a long dark blue sweater (pretty contemporary clothing) directly in front of the car. Jane quickly braked and watched in horror as the woman started to walk across the road, oblivious to her. Just when an impact seemed inevitable however, the figure 'simply melted' the moment the Mini's bonnet made to touch her.

'This particular stretch of Blandford is surrounded by ancient fields and woods (yep, it's those dog-blamed, cursed WOODS, again, Chaps and Chapesses - Seems like this issue is haunted by the vengeful spirit of Elly Kedwards, late of Burkittsville, Maryland, USA!!! - Ed), and, perhaps even more significantly, a number of Stone Age-Iron Age fortresses.

'A good friend of mine, Debbie, used to live with her parents at Billington, right next to Hed Hill, with its ancient rings and burial mounds.

'When her parents booked a holiday in Cyprus one year, she jumped at the chance to house-sit. The house is situated completely off the beaten track, the nearest neighbours are half-a-mile away. Along with Debbie, and another friend named, Fiona, I agreed to pile around for a girl's night at the address. It had been a roasting hot day, and we'd made ourselves a curry (though we'd drunk far too much to truly appreciate it) when Fiona suggested we attempt to walk off the after-effects by tracking to the nearest pub; 'The Ox.'

'It was now dark and we ambled along the single lane, often tripping in the near total ebon darkness bereft of even the slightest hint of moonlight. Perhaps unwisely, given the circumstances, we started talking about ghosts, and by the time we finally reached the pub, we were all giggling nervously.

'Fiona spotted a fella she knew and pointed at him, saying; "Now, HE'S got a good scary to tell!"

'She called him over, and after much cajoling, he eventually told us of an experience that had left him terrified.

'In the Summer of 1996, Steve, the chap concerned, had been in 'The Ox,' enjoying a few bevies. His brother's wife, was in hospital at the time, and he'd agreed to stay at his brother's place to keep him company. He'd borrowed his bike in order to get to 'The Ox,' leaving the car at his brother's.

'After last orders, he helped the landlord and lady tidy up, and left at some time round about 12:15am. To get to his brothers, he had to cycle between two large hills. The road, incidentally, is the Old Roman Road, and is very seldom used, particularly at that time of night.

'As Steve cycled along, he was pleasantly surprised at how well-illuminated the area was thanks to a bright, full Moon. After a while, he became aware of a strange rustling and crashing in the hedgerow to his left. Initially, he wasn't startled, assuming it to be some countryside animal, a badger for instance.

'Whatever it was, it clattered about for a while, and finally emerged behind him onto the black tarmac. The 'something' then struck Steve, and he could discern immediately that it was very large in size. He could hear it breathing, along with the sound of claws raking across the road surface - like a dog. It was only then that he was struck with an almost overpowering wave of fear. He slowed down and risked a look behind him. Instead of seeing the large black dog that he'd half-expected to encounter, he was confronted by a man with very long hair, running on all-fours!!!

'Steve, not surprisingly, screamed aloud in terror, and the 'Man-Thing' scampered off into the undergrowth on the other side of the road.

'Steve later told us that he'd never pedalled so fast in his life. He found that people had a great deal of difficulty in believing his story, so after a while, he chose to keep quiet about it.

'However, when he related the tale to me, I found him to be a solid, down-to-earth, country bloke, who had been genuinely scared out of his wits. Two years on, and he still refuses to drive down that same stretch of road, let alone cycle along it.

'Interestingly enough, there have been a number of "Black Beast" sightings throughout the Blandford and Handley area during 1997 and 1998. If you check the AA map and check out the locale mentioned, you will see that the Shillingstone-Hammoon area is slap-bang in the middle of where 'The Black Beast' has been seen.

Cathie O' Donnell Blandford, Dorset 1999.

## The Far Reaches Of Fear: Ramsey Campbell's Ghostly Experience

We here at 'DON' were very honoured to receive the following snippet from none other than the famous horror writer, Ramsey Campbell.

The author of, amongst others, 'THE DOLL WHO ATE ITS MOTHER' and 'THE FACE THAT WOULDN'T DIE,' wrote to tell us of his experience in North Wales....

'Plas Teg is a Jacobean mansion in North Wales. Perhaps I shouldn't locate it more exactly, since the present owner tells me publicity often brings vandals. Its ghosts, according to the booklet the owner publishes, not to mention the television documentary in which she talked about them to Colln Wilson (the highly-respected paranormal researcher) are many.

'Nowadays, visitors are given a guided tour, but when we first visited the house, one could wander at will through the removed sections. The first bedroom my wife entered she dramatically emerged from, dismayed by the atmosphere in it. This room proved to have been used as an execution chamber, not least by Jefferies, when he was a circuit judge.

'Upstairs, the Great Chamber has a Witch mark carved within the fireplace, above which is a hideous painting by Snyder, a pupil of Rubens, of the Medusa's head from which crawl insects as well as snakes.

'A recent canvas which hangs in one of the bedrooms shows a naked male body whose inverted head leans backwards towards the viewer, its face erased, and a study of an inverted head from the neck down beside it, exhibiting distress.

'I am at a loss as to why I find this picture so disturbing. Whatever the time of year it is, several of the upstairs windowsills are strewn with dozens of dead flies, for no reason that the owner of Plas Teg can satisfactorily explain, (shades of 'THE AMITYVILLE HORROR'- Ed).

'Whilst visiting the mansion in company with the American macabre artist J.K. Potter, and his partner Susanne, we discovered a framed sampler in a basement store room. Above the motto on the sampler was the number 777; below, the Seal Of Solomon. The motto was Aleister Crowley's: "Do What Thou Wilt."

'I think it's safe to say that there is something decidedly odd about Plas Teg. I should have liked to spend a night, but the owner preferred to shun the publicity, and so, I've yet to stay in a haunted house.'

Ramsey Campbell, Wallasey, Merseyside

## GHOSTS AND DEVILS OVER MERSEYSIDE The Monks Ferry Poltergeist

The area around Monks Ferry Brow, situated in the centre of Birkenhead, features in a letter penned by Mr Alan Moss, who lives in Noctorum, Merseyside....This is his story.

'I used to be employed as a plant fitter at 'Weston Ship Repairs,' at Monks Ferry Brow, on the night shift. I was invariably on my own, and it fell to me to ensure that both the docks and the plant itself kept running.

There were other electricians in the same engine shop, but they were usually on the other side of the building. They slept in an office which they kept locked, whilst I had to find somewhere within the large building that made up the engine shop to sleep after the work was finally completed.

'We would go out for refreshments at what passed for 'lunchtime': ie: 9:30pm to 10:30pm.

'It was during one of these surreal lunch-hours that I discovered a van to sleep in. The vehicle had been brought in for repair. I had a camp bed in my car and I'd pretty soon transferred it into the van.

'After locking the workshop doors, I got my head down intending to sleep away the remainder of my shift. About 2am, I was awoken by the sound of the van doors rattling. My first thought was that the foreman had come onto the site and was about to catch me sleeping on the job. Warily, and with a growing sense of dread, I got up to wrench open the van doors. They were rather difficult to open, the hinges hadn't been oiled in God only knew how long, but it didn't matter much anyway, because when I finally managed to open the doors, I found that there was no one there.

'The thought struck me that one of the electricians had come looking for me, but when I confronted them, they denied having done any such thing.

'The incident had unnerved me sufficiently for me to decline the use of the van the following night. I removed my

camp bed once more, and secured it to a nearby bench. I fell asleep at roughly the same time as the previous night, but at bang on 2am, I was once more rudely awakened from my slumber.

'This time, it was a terrible shaking that had me starting wildly around for a second or two, before I was unceremoniously thrown to the workshop floor. Luckily for me, my head didn't make contact with the solid concrete, but I was still, understandably shocked and extremely shaken.

'I was more than aware that I simply could not have turned over and fallen from the bench in my sleep, perhaps troubled by a nightmare, because there was a very large vice beside the bench that would have prevented me from doing so.

'The very next night, I decided, you might not be too surprised to learn, not to go to sleep, but to stay awake for the entire shift in the workshop, on my own.

'The electricians went to sleep in the blessed sanctuary of their office, as usual, and thoughtlessly locked the door.

'All was quiet until the dreaded time of 2 am, when a radio which had previously been switched off, suddenly blared into life of its own accord. I got up and switched it off.

'Two hours later, it switched on again, and after having turned it off, I went to the electricians and woke them up. I tried to explain what had happened, but they weren't interested in the slightest.

'To be honest, they were mightily pissed off, and after assuring me that I was just being stupid, warned me not to wake them again.

'I kept my counsel, until the next morning, when I told the electrician whose radio it was about had happened. He was due on the day shift, so I asked him, if the radio had a timer on it. He merely looked at me in astonishment and shook his head.

'Round about then, my foreman approached me and inquired as to whether I had thrown a gearbox, which a fitter had been repairing, all over the shop. I told him no, of course I hadn't, and he replied that it must have been one of the electricians, then.

'I was of the opinion that not even one of those selfish 'sparks' would have carried out such an act, but I kept that pretty much to myself.

'Apparently though, there had been several other occasions when similar incidents had occurred - and it hadn't just been gearboxes that were being thrown around.

'As for my own experiences, well, I guess I chose to keep them to myself, also.

'For the remainder of that week's night shift, I locked the main workshop up, and went and slept in the comparative safety of my car, situated as it was, out in the car park.

'Later, when I went back to the blessed relief of the day-shift, I spoke to some of the dayshift fitters, who had on occasion, worked nights. It soon transpired that they too had undergone similar experiences.

'Most curious of all, however, was the account of an employee who had worked the night-shift on and for years at Monks Ferry. He said that he'd seen a parade of ghostly monks walking through the dock gates with lighted lanterns, on some occasions. It seems the area is well-known locally, as a haunted spot.

Alan Moss, Noctorum, Birkenhead, Merseyside

## The Eastham Ghost Dog

Debbie Fair, one of the Editors over at the 'Paranormal-Online' Web Site, used to live in my home

county. She was anxious therefore that I print the contents of a letter she sent me some time back, to draw our local readers attention to a phenomenon she claimed to have encountered during her time here.



*'About ten or fifteen years ago, I used to regularly drive around the dark, winding back roads of Eastham, in Merseyside. My parents lived in Bebington, back then, I had friends who lived in Eastham, and I myself, lived in Chester, so this drive was more often than not on my route as I drove to and fro.*

*'I found the direct route along the A41, pretty boring and as a result, I preferred to use the country roads as often as possible*

*'I can't remember exactly when it started, but while I was driving home late at night, I would often spot a large black dog sitting calmly by the roadside. The animal looked real enough and was dark in colour, and I would describe it as looking a great deal like an Irish Wolfhound.*

*'I always assumed it belonged to one of the local houses and would drive past without giving the matter a whole pile of thought.*

*'One night however, as I was travelling home, I spotted the dog once again. To my surprise and horror, on this occasion the animal darted right out in front of the car. I was convinced I must have run over the creature because it didn't re-appear anywhere. I can't recall now whether I'd noticed any kind of impact. I jerked the car to a halt and got out to look for the dog, which I felt sure must be badly injured, if not dead. I was already dreading telling the owners.*

*'However, not long after stepping from the car it quickly became apparent that there was no dog to be found anywhere. I checked under the vehicle, both sides of the road, I even called out once or twice...*

*'But there was nothing.*

*'Suddenly frightened, I jumped back into my car and drove home as hastily as the law would allow.*

*'I stopped using that route and have not used it again to this very day.*

*'I do wonder now, though, whether the appearance of the black dog was some sort of warning. The thought occurred*

*to me because very shortly after my last sighting of the creature, I was involved in a rather nasty car accident which happened at the point that I would normally have joined the A41 from the back roads of Eastham.*

*'I wonder if I had gone by the old route, the dog would have been waiting to stop me again, and the accident would never have happened.'*

Debbie Fair. Winter 1999

## Uncanny Experiences Of The Afterlife?

By Richard Thompson

### Uncle Norman's Last Farewell

I have never been religious in the conventional sense (although I do hold the greatest of respect for those who are) but have a deep interest in the Supernatural and paranormal.

Two relatively recent events regarding the possibilities of the afterlife still haunt me.

Both concern family bereavements.

The first event took place about six years ago, although the date itself is not important. My wife's uncle, Norman, died suddenly from a coronary - it had come as quite a shock as he was a very fit man in his mid-50's. He enjoyed 'keep fit' and had collapsed at the local swimming baths whilst trying to beat his won record.

Norman (a bachelor) was very fond of animals and really enjoyed taking our dog Sadye, for long walks down to Moreton Shore, along with his mother's dog. Sadye very much enjoyed these expeditions and treated the older dog as her 'step mother.'

Immediately prior to his funeral, Norman was in a Chapel Of Rest in Upton Village, this being the premises of Alex Taylor (Undertakers) at Greenbank. The family, of course, had been to pay their respects.

I should mention at this stage that whilst Norman frequently took Sadye for walks, it was not on a daily basis. This task fell to myself, and I greatly enjoyed it. It was also a standing joke that Sadye used to (and still does) take me for walks. Although quite a relatively small dog, she has always had a very strong pull and an independent nature. Possibly this can be put down to poor training by myself for which I plead guilty as charged!!!

We realised the undoubtedly Sadye would miss her regular walks down to Moreton Shore, and I made a mental note to take her there in the not too distant future. However, at that point in time we were in the latter stages of making the funeral arrangements.

Sadye went for two daily walks from our Beechwood (formerly the Ford) Estate home and I would try and guess in advance which of her four favourite routes she would take me on. I had these numbered - one to four - occasionally there were slight variations and for these I would add a letter to the number - rather like bus routes. Basically, one of these routes was into the centre of the Ford Estate, one was up Ford Hill, towards Birkenhead, one was down Manor Drive (heading for our previous home) and one was into the field opposite the traffic lights at the top of Manor Drive.

Two days prior to the funeral, Sadye headed towards her Manor Drive walk, but hesitated by the traffic lights at the top of this road. After 'some thought' she took me to the beginning of the road leading into Upton Village, where she again hesitated (which in itself was rather unusual) and stopped, but looking in the direction of Upton itself. She seemed strangely unsure of herself, but after a few moments we returned home. I thought no more of it.

The next day, the very same thing happened. However, on this occasion, she seemed rather more determined to carry on, and we took the road from Upton Village.

I was rather surprised because this was very much off the beaten track for Sadye. Often, and definitely in Sadye's case, dogs only go where they recognise familiar smells. We continued at her usual quick pace and I was a little concerned as to how far she was taking me. I had things to do on arrival back at home so I was a little pushed for time. Granted, I could have simply done an about turn and dragged her back, but I kind of liked her to have the exercise that she needed.

We continued up into Upton Village and past the local shops. I was half-hoping that she would turn down a side road so that we could have done a circular trip back home. But she seemed determined to carry on. We came to the set of traffic lights, and by this time I realised that things were taking a decidedly odd twist. Norman was in the Chapel Of Rest, just up the road.

Surely not, I thought!

But, yes, it was to be.



Sadye crossed over by the lights and headed straight up to Greenbank, the aforementioned undertaker's premises. By this time I was feeling somewhat shaky. The following events were both totally unexpected and to my mind at least, unexplained.

Sadye stopped directly outside the Chapel Of Rest, looked towards it, and started whimpering. I went ice cold. How could she have known?

We stood there for a couple of minutes, Sadye having sat down. She then got up and took me home by exactly the same route. She now seemed to have a bounce in her step - almost as though she had achieved something worthwhile - And she *had*. In her doggy way she had paid her last respects.

I wish to add that at no time had Sadye ever walked into our even around Upton Village prior to that fateful day. Not even when we had gone shopping in the car. It was all new territory to her. And she has never been back since.

Even now, when I think about I get cold shivers.

It was Sadye who took me there. I swear that I never encouraged or egged her on in any way on that day. Seemingly, there was some sort of communication between Sadye and the dearly departed Norman, and he was calling her for a last farewell.

## My Father's Funeral - A Last Wish Granted

My father never liked seeing or attending extravagant funerals, and it was his express wish that, when he died, his own would be a very simple affair.

So, sadly, when that time finally came after a long illness, we followed his wishes to the letter. However, there was some slight family disagreement over whether or not we should follow the hearse to Landican Crematorium. I felt strongly that we should, but my mother was equally adamant that we should not.

After reflection, although not changing my point of view, I bowed to my mother's wishes..After all, there was little to be gained by our falling out over it. The plan was to arrive at the gates of Landican early, wait for the hearse and follow it down to the chapel.

The arrangements were that my mother would travel from her Spital home my aunt (my father's sister) in her car, and I would drive separately, taking my wife and other family members. This also involved driving to Spital to pick them up. We departed in good time, planning to arrive at Landican 30-35 minutes prior to the time of the funeral.

I drove via the M53 Motorway, and realising that we were running a little early, maintained a modest but safe 50 mph. Coming off at the Woodchurch Road interchange, I was surprised to see a hearse, bearing a coffin, coming over the bridge that spanned the motorway, heading towards Arrowe Park, and presumably, Landican.

However, there were no cars following it. Surely, I thought, this could not be my father.

A multitude of thoughts flashed through my mind in a matter of seconds. Conversely, it was unlikely to be another funeral - if it had have been, it would be inappropriate for us to follow it. I nevertheless had this overwhelming feeling that it was my father.

Coming onto Woodchurch Road on the link road, we 'tucked in' behind the hearse. It was a vehicle belonging to the same undertaker that was arranging my father's funeral. This was disconcertingly uncanny. We followed it to Landican, where it was confirmed that it was indeed my father.

This encounter on the move, I commented to my wife, could not have been arranged in a thousand years of dreaming. There had been absolutely no liaison with the undertaker over the departure time of the hearse from their premises or the route that they were planning to take. Only the actual funeral time at Landican had (obviously) been arranged with a meeting at the gates shortly beforehand.

I had arrived at our relatives house in good time and my departure time as driver of the family car could have been several minutes either way. And if I had driven at the permitted 70 mph on the motorway, we would have been ahead of the hearse.

My father had always been a great one for compromise in family disagreements. To my mind, it was more than a mere coincidence. It seems to me that he had been watching over us to grant this last wish of mine, for the last mile.

The thought of him 'arranging' this final compromise, so true of his character, still haunts me to this day.

## Spirit Children

By Michelle McWilliams

Samhain, October 31st, I adore this night. It's like all the magic in the universe comes alive. I follow the old Pagan religion because it gives me the freedom to worship my own deities. I love the way the streets are filled with children out Trick Or Treating, and myself, dressing up as a Witch. I treasure every moment because I am only too aware that the very next day, November 1st (All Saint's Day), I will have to behave 'normally' again, and to the nine to five, humdrum routine of daily work.

And so, on this very special night, I set about eagerly lighting the assembled candles, setting the mood for my guests to arrive. On this night, of all nights, it seems only right that I have a whole welter of Tarot Card readings booked.

What I really want to tell you about however, is something that occurred one Halloween evening, a couple of years back.

The party I'd arranged was in its full swing, the air filled with the clinking of crystal glasses to toast each other good fortune. One of the guests, a neighbour, had asked me for a Tarot reading and keen to oblige, we sat down whilst I lay out the cards. Suddenly, I began to feel a trifle dizzy, and I explained to my companion that I could quite clearly smell

gas emanating from somewhere in my living room. At the same time I was struck with the vivid mental impression of a manhole cover.

I was not at all sure what this meant, but the lady for whom I was doing the reading seemed to understand precisely what was going on. She asked me if she could send for her sister as she was certain that the reading was meant for her.

I readily agreed, and a few moments later, the sister walked into my living room. I asked her to kindly shuffle the deck, but as she was doing so, my eyes became fixed on the locket she was wearing around her neck. I had recently done some psychometry and was getting to be something of an adept at it, so I asked her if she would let me hold it. She readily agreed, and handed me the locket. As she did this, a strange sensation, almost as though everything were moving in slow motion. The room visibly darkened and I felt dizzy once more. The smell of gas was now much stronger than before, and the vision of two little boys appeared before my eyes.

I felt no fear, rather it was wonderful. I 'spoke' to the boys and they told me their names and how they had died. I immediately passed this information on to the neighbour's sister who was called Pam. My relating of this to her saw Pam reduced to tears because, she said, the two little boys were none other than her sons, Mark and Mike. They had died when they were both very young, one due to a chronic heart condition, the other, fell down a manhole and was suffocated by gas fumes. From my imparted description of the two children, Pam was convinced beyond doubting that they were her two dead sons.

Further confirmation came as a direct result of their 'telling' me about the yellow roses that Pam had once set in their rooms. Pam seemed to be overcome with an immeasurable degree of happiness, secure in the knowledge that her sons were still, spiritually at least, with her.

Prenton, Birkenhead, Merseyside 1999

## Phantoms At The Top Of The Stairs

Yet another letter that I recently received concerns the experiences of a certain Pam Jones, who used to live in Steble Street, Liverpool 8.

This is her story...

*'I used to live in a house which was connected to a swimming baths. My husband was a supervisor there, and at the time, we'd sold our previous house to move in there.*

*We had one child at the time aged two. While living there I became pregnant again. I can't really remember now when it started, but the truth is I never really felt comfortable there. I would never put my child, Clare, to bed until we ourselves headed up the stairs of the three storey building.*

*There was a lobby entrance and stairs directly ahead. On the right was the front room, then the back room, with the kitchen just off it. Upstairs there was a good sized landing with another set of stairs going up to the third floor. Off the landing as you came up the stairs was the bathroom straight ahead, and on the left was the back bedroom with I'd call a Victorian dressing room just off it. At the top of the third floor staircase there was a door which opened into a room which had yet another door which led through to yet another room. The stairs to both floors went round a bend so you couldn't see straight up them.*

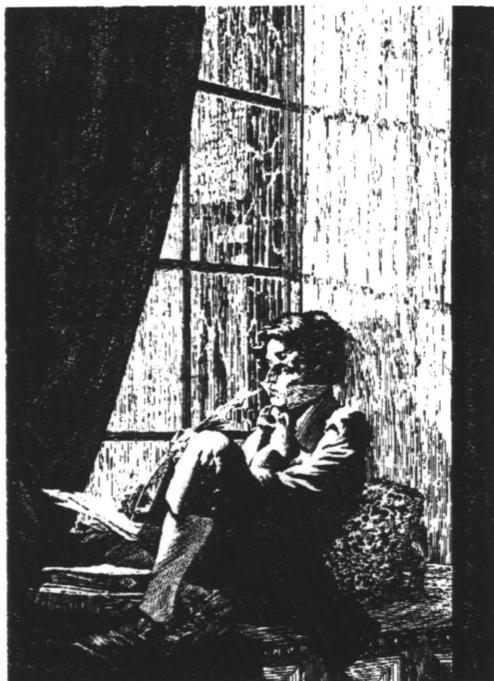
*'On the first landing I had hung an old rack from the ceiling. On occasion, when I was hanging clothes from it to dry, I would become aware of what I can only describe as being a large black figure peeping around the bend of the second staircase.*

*'This was not a pleasant experience and waves of fear would wash over me at such times. The presence was decidedly unfriendly.*

*'It got so bad that, of a night we would leave a light on in the small dressing room/bedroom where Clare used to sleep, and we would take the adjoining back bedroom in order to be close to her.*

*'Perhaps the most disturbing thing to happen in that house were the occasions when I would be overcome with a feeling of unutterable dread and I would raise my head from the pillow to see a vague shape bending over my daughter's prostrate form.*

*'When John, our son was born, we put his cot in the far corner under the window of our room. Then I could shut the door with all of us together at night. This seemed a wise course of action as I had a terrible feeling that the entity, whatever it was, exuded a real sense of Evil.*



*'As the children grew progressively older, Clare was now aged three-and-a-half and John had turned six months, I decided to put them in the front bedroom to sleep. I spent all that day changing things over, fixing the bed and the cot, etc. The front bedroom had formerly been a play room - a nursery you might say - and although my husband and I were prepared to let them sleep there alone, we still adhered to the strategy that we would not let them go to bed before us.*

*'I pointedly left our bedroom door open, fearfully waiting for "IT" to appear on the landing. At 2am, overcome with a sense of all-pervading dread, I changed my mind about letting the kids sleep alone and woke my husband up to bring the kids back in with us.*

*'We lived there for two whole years, but it's fair to say that as soon as we had saved up enough money we got the hell out.*

*'Whilst moving from a large, five-bedroom house, it was inevitable that we would have to leave a fair amount of our stuff there. Before leaving we had to call in workmen to renovate the bathroom as black mould continually kept emerging from the walls.*

*'Not long after moving, we got a phone call from the new owners, to ask whether we still wanted to come back for the gear we'd left behind, and if so, could we move it. We somewhat reluctantly agreed to come on over and collect our things. Leading to the house from the former swimming baths was a long passageway that led to the front door. My*

*husband and a family friend went ahead of me. John was also with us curled up snug in his buggy. Clare was in school.*

*'As I went through the door to the lobby and the back living room, that familiar feeling of trepidation came over me. This time, it was so bad that I simply couldn't catch my breath. I just turned and ran screaming that I wanted nothing more out of that damned house!!!*

*'I am not sure if the person who moved in after us, one Kenny McQuigan, experienced anything untoward in the premises. All I know for a fact is that he died of mouth cancer not long after taking up residence.*

*'As the years rolled by, the council decided to turn the house and its attendant baths into a set of office blocks, but I later learned that no one would work there on their own.*

*'Employees confided in me that they would sometimes go in of a morning and find pieces of photocopied paper scattered all over the place with nothing other than the letter X printed large in the centre.*

*'In a bid to deter the people they believed to be responsible for a hoax, the employees switched everything off, including the photocopiers, before going home at night. And yet, every morning, the pieces of paper would be scattered all over the office, on this occasion, even the time was printed on it: Midnight*

*Interestingly enough, I learned that these machines were situated in exactly the same location as the where the old back bedroom and dressing room had formerly been.*

*'What strikes me as being more than a little strange is the fact that for years after when we would pass down the nearby Park Road and pass the top of Steble Street, either on the bus or in the car, our Clare would get really upset and declare loudly that she would love to go back to the old house to live there again.*

*'Since Clare has become an adult, she is 23 now, it seems that we both have developed a 'psychic gift'.*

*'When we moved into our present house, I often used to get a strange feeling in a certain part of the front living room. Curious, I asked the next door neighbour if anything had ever happened there. She told me that two sisters had once lived there and that they both became terminally ill. Eventually, when there was no hope left their sick beds were brought down into the front room where I had had this weird feeling. The priest had given them the Last Rites, and they were later carted off to die either in a local hospital or else a Catholic home.*

*'I finally want to tell you about how, in our current house, I was putting the sheets over the banister to dry, when out of the corner of my eye I saw what I thought to be Clare standing just off to me left. I said "Mind out, Clare. You can see I'm busy."*

*'It was only then that I realised with a numbing shock, that the kids were both at school. I was supposed to be on my own in the house. Clare at the time was still little more than a child and had very long golden brown hair. The little one I saw that afternoon had blonde hair, and was the size of a seven-to-nine-year-old.*

*'In the days that followed, I would often see this 'child', but I never told anyone else about the ghost I came to regard as 'The Little One.' I certainly didn't feel any threat from her.*

*'On November 4th, 1987, it was my husband Jimmy's 40th birthday, and we'd gone out with a couple named Sue and Donny. Jimmy and Donny got themselves in a pretty bladdered state, and Sue and I got fairly annoyed with their drunken antics. It was about 1:30am, we were having some black coffee, and Donny decided he needed to use the upstairs loo. Donny half-fell up the stairs, and that got us all laughing....A few seconds later however, and Donny was coming down the stairs saying "Where is she, the little cow? I've told her she'll be in trouble if she came down."*

*We calmly told him that that no one had come down, but he was so certain that Clare had come down that he searched everywhere, even peering into cupboards, and looking out in the garden. It was only when he came back inside that he began to come to his senses. I took him up to Clare's room and showed him that she was lying there asleep.*

*'When we returned downstairs, I told him that he must have seen "The Little One" but that she normally stayed on the landing.*

*'As I explained exactly what I meant by this, I have never seen anyone sober up as quickly. Sue and Donny exchanged a glance of incredulity and then flew off in their car.*

*'I never told Jimmy what had happened the following morning. He'd slept soundly through the whole palaver.*

*'On the following Friday however, Jimmy came flying in from work as Donny had told him he wouldn't be calling round at ours again, unless we upped sticks and moved house again. I felt it was now my duty to explain to him what had been happening both here and at 'The Bath House,' and to my surprise, he readily believed everything I told him. I suggested to him that he need not be afraid of the dead, and he seemed to subscribe to my belief that ghosts cannot harm you in anyway...*

*'I have since seen 'The Little One' on a few occasions, though they have scarcely been little more than half-caught glimpses.*

*'And sometimes, our dog simply sits staring at the stairs for ages, or begins licking the empty air. She often does this as the rest of the family just stare at each other, lost for words.*

*'A strange thing happened last November (1998). Jimmy had gone up for a shower, and the dog went over to his chair and started licking the air directly in front of it, in that by now customary manner. It was almost as though some invisible presence were feeding her....*

## And Finally...A Campfire Ghost Story

The following account was sent to me by Martin Fitzpatrick, a subscriber who hails from Belfast, Northern Ireland. I am deeply indebted to him, despite the fact that he unfortunately forgot to quote the source....

*'The wind piped in from the sea across the bleak crags sending high clouds scudding across the moon. Shadows fell across the tiny path, making it difficult to say which way it wandered through the valley. It was after 9pm, on an October night and, suddenly, to George O' Connell, hiking alone across the Welsh hills didn't seem such a good idea after all.*

*'He had set off three days earlier, after travelling to Wales by train, staying at night in remote inns and remote farms. It was the first time that the 30-year-old Manchester teacher had ventured on such a strenuous holiday, and in that autumn of 1932, he was hardly likely to meet anyone of a similar inclination - hiking was still a minority pastime back then, particularly in those remote valleys.*

*'O Connell had stopped during the afternoon at a cottage by the side of a steep lane and asked the way to a small guest house recommended in his walker's guide. He was advised to keep to the track which ran through the valley roughly parallel to the railway which ran through the cleft in the hills, and this he duly done throughout the afternoon.*

*'But when the sun sank over the western hills, the hamlet containing the guest house was nowhere to be seen, and O' Connell began to wonder whether he had misunderstood the directions.*

*'He hadn't eaten since lunch time and, as darkness began to fall, hunger increased his growing alarm. He stopped and scanned the valley, looking for a friendly light, but saw only*

*the deepening shadows of the pine woods climbing from the valley floor to the steep hills above. Now the first stars were glinting in the sky and George O' Connell felt very alone.*

*'Going back was out of the question. He had a sleeping bag and, if necessary, could snatch a few hours' rest in a ditch or beneath a tree. But such notions, romantic as they sounded, filled him with dismay. He had walked for over 12 hours and a hot bath and a comfortable bed filled him with obsessive longing. It was no night to sleep out.*

*'What happened next was to transform what was little more than a minor holiday drama, into a puzzling enigma of the paranormal which still excites curiosity and comment.*

*'Years afterwards, when journalists interviewed Mr O' Connell, he still recalled the incident vividly, and was obviously still disturbed by its memory.*



*"I must confess that for a long time I kept quiet about it, fearing that people would think that I had gone crazy," he told reporters. "But as my interest in the supernatural grew, so did my belief that we can stray into other dimensions of time and space. It seems that this is what happened to me."*

*'By 9pm, George was glancing with growing apprehension at the dark clouds banking over the glowering hills. He was also beginning to reconcile himself to a night on a bare mountainside, when suddenly a glint of light on the valley floor attracted his attention and made his heart leap with renewed hope.*

*"I left the path and began to descend the steep hillside to where I saw the light. At first, I feared it might just be moonlight on water, but then I saw the glinting line of the railway track and realised that what I could see was the light of a signal box. Surely the signalman might let me take shelter for the night? Indeed, he might be glad of some company.*

*"The track was still at least two miles away and as I walked towards it I saw a train rush by - a long line of lighted windows - plunge into the darkness of a tunnel at the valley's end. It was nearly an hour later when I finally reached the railway embankment, and could see a plume of smoke wafting from the tall chimney of the signal box. It was a welcoming sight.*

*"Before long, I was climbing the steps of the remote box, the only habitation as far as the eye could see, and knocking on the door. After what seemed like an eternity, the door slowly opened and signalman peered out. I could feel the warm air wafting out around him and caught a glimpse of a cheery fire flickering in the stove, and the yellow glow of paraffin lamps.*

"I explained that I was hopelessly lost, and asked whether I might stay the night. He stood back a little and I momentarily saw his face in the light. It was lined and old, but not unfriendly.

"It's not allowed, you know, he said. "But you'd best come in."

I made up a bed alongside the stove and watched for a while as the signalman went about his mysterious work, leaning against the huge gleaming levers until they swung over with a dull clang.

He said nothing, but the warmth and the strange timelessness of the cosy little cabin, gave me a sense of drowsy security, and soon I drifted into a heavy sleep.

George was awakened by a chilly wind flapping the edge of his sleeping bag against his face. Half asleep, he stretched out an arm and touched something cold and metallic.

"It was the stove. I opened my eyes and saw that it was rusty and broken. It obviously hadn't been lit for years. Instantly, I was awake, and sitting up staring around me. The place was derelict. The windows were broken and the roof in bad repair.

"The signal gear had obviously been removed years ago. I was on my feet and the broken door creaked with rust as I swung it open as though the key to the mystery would be found outside.

"But it wasn't. The steps were broken and rotten and it was a wonder that I hadn't fallen when climbing them the night before.

"I packed my rucksack and went on my way thoughtful and shaken. I reached the hamlet two hours later... and found, on inquiry, that the signal box had been closed for years because of the difficulty of finding anyone to man it in that remote spot.

"Had I imagined the whole thing? Or had I slipped into some previous dimension of time?

"To say I dreamed the whole incident would be convenient and comforting.

"The problem is that when I described the man I had seen to someone in the hamlet, they said it sounded exactly like the last signalman, who had died in that very box almost ten years before..."

## Another Slab Of Ice-Cold Laughter Cosmic Jokes Part Two

A New York wine merchant by the name of Bill Sokolin, decided to go to a local restaurant to celebrate the fact that he had just purchased a fantastically rare (not to say expensive) bottle of 1787 claret. It apparently once belonged to President Jefferson.

Unfortunately, a clumsy waiter managed to knock the bottle over...Leaving a whopping big £400,000 stain on the carpet.

July, 1999 New York, USA 'THE VIRGINIAN MAGAZINE'

\*\*\* A terribly unlucky man with a pair of (admittedly hideous) furry dice hanging above the dashboard of his car was jailed for a total of 15 years in Iran. The reason? He was guilty of 'transporting a gambling device'

Boy, are they strict!!!

18th August, 1999 Iran 'SUNDAY PEOPLE'

\*\*\* Firefighters in the centre of Brighton were pleased as punch at having successfully answered a 999 call...Only to find that on their return to the station the building was on fire. One of the firemen had mistakenly left his sausage supper frying on the stove.

July, 1999 Brighton, England 'THE VIRGINIAN MAGAZINE'

\*\*\* And there must be something about tucking into sausages at the moment...An unnamed man (and I bet he's quite pleased about that much, at least), managed to tragically kill his brother from over a mile distant, whilst hunting in Finland.

He was shooting at a grouse in a tree, but the bullet from the 23-year-old's gun shot clean through the bird and then hit his 18-year-old brother in the back on its downward trajectory. The brother was innocently cooking SAUSAGES on a campfire a mile and a quarter away.

He was killed instantly.

3rd October, 1999 Finland 'SUNDAY MANC'

\*\*\* A flasher who elected to step out onto the road in a bid to whip down his kecks and display his wares to a queue of women waiting in line for a bus, was knocked down and killed by the selfsame vehicle.

3rd October, 1999 Aswan, Egypt 'NEWS OF THE WORLD.'

\*\*\* And sepaking of unlucky buses, a vehicle with a wicked sense of humour that was meant to be giving a safety demonstration to children in Stockport, went and crashed into a garage, completely wrecking it.

18th July, 1999 Stockport, Greater Manchester 'DAILY SLUR'

\*\*\* Even worse on the ol' cursed bus front, was the following account...All 80 people aboard a bus were drowned when it plunged into an irrigation lake in Davanagere in the South Indian state of Karnataka.

And what warrants its inclusion here is the fact that the passengers were pilgrims returning from a Hindu temple. Guess not even their God couldn't save them.

27th August, 1999 Davanagere, India 'LIVERPOOL DAILY POST'

\*\*\* Locals in Batley, West Yorkshire, were reported to be losing sleep due to the sound of extractor fans at a bed factory owned by the firm called...Wait for it...SILENT NIGHT

22nd August, 1999 Batley, West Yorkshire 'DAILY SLUR'

\*\*\* How unlucky can you get...A team from the 1st Battalion Royal Gloucestershire and Wiltshire Regiment climbed a reportedly previously unconquered glacier in the wilds of Greenland, only to find that the Germans had got there 20 years earlier.

29th September, 1999 Greenland 'LIVERPOOLECHO'

\*\*\* Equally less than blessed was Roger Russell, who set off on a walking marathon across South Africa in a bid to highlight crime in that country. He was held up at gunpoint only a day into his planned six-month-one-man expedition.

Roger was robbed a mere 12 miles from his starting point in Cape Town

15th September, 1999 Cape Town, South Africa 'Associated Press'

\*\*\* The faded writings that were all but hidden on the roof of a 90-year-old oriental shrine had constantly baffled staff at a Cheshire country park. The black brush strokes on the building at Tatton Park's Japanese Garden were assumed by 'experts' to be either samples of poetry or maybe even a heartfelt prayer.

No one knew for sure however, so not surprisingly, when a top Japanese horticulturist arrived at the park to advise on restoration work, head gardener Sam Youd decided to ask his advice.

He was told that rather than being a set of some sort of mystical symbols, they were in fact assembly instructions, namely; 'Place edge A into slot B'

He was told that rather than being a set of some sort of mystical symbols, they were in fact assembly instructions, namely; 'Place edge A into slot B'

A disappointed Mr Youd, 49, was quoted as saying; 'You expect to find that sort of thing at MFI, not on a Japanese artefact.'

8th September, 1999 Tatton Park, Cheshire 'DAILY TELEGRAPH'

\*\*\* A Spaniard's desire for safe sex was turned into a hell of an embarrassing ordeal when his hand got stuck in a condom vending machine for over four hours.

The 23-year-old man put some coins into a machine outside a pharmacy on a beach in Cadiz, but when nothing came out, he stuck his hand in the opening to pull the condoms out.

Two of his fingers became caught inside. He was finally freed by firemen.

8th September, 1999 Cadiz, Spain 'ELMUNDO'

\*\*\* And finally, for this issue at least, consider if you will the exceptionally hard luck story of Paul and Sandra Gianini, who hail from Orlando, Florida....

In the late Summer of this year they decided to go on holiday in a bid to consign to the dustbin of memory, the ravages of Hurricane Floyd. They left their home on a Monday, to participate on a working holiday, organising university exchanges in Taiwan.

And yes, you've guessed it, no sooner had they arrived there than the area were they were staying was hit by a devastating earthquake!!!

The quake struck as they were relaxing in their Taipei hotel. Drawing upon their hurricane experience, they hid in the bathroom (supposedly the safest place to be at the height of a storm) as the walls started to crack and the earth began to move.

When the lights came back on they fled down six floors to the street, where they saw the hotel next door was in ruins. The quake measured 7.6 on the Richter Scale, and the official death toll was put at 424.

24th September, 1999 Taipei, Thailand 'THE DAILY TELEGRAPH'

## From The Realms Of The Totally Absurd: Yet More Weird Human Behaviour

Nicholas Vitalich, 24, was accused of (ahem) battering his girlfriend with a fish during an argument at their local supermarket, and was duly arrested on a charge of assault with a deadly weapon!

Nicholas apparently struck the unnamed woman repeatedly with a large tuna from the fish counter after she walked out of the store in San Diego, California. He followed her into the car park where the assault took place.

Police spokesman Bill Robinson was quoted as saying; 'When officers got there she had a cut above her eye, bruising on her right arm and cuts on both legs, from where she was knocked to the ground.'

He added that the fish was fresh, not frozen, but that it was still to be considered a deadly weapon.

16th June, 1999 San Diego, California, USA 'DAILY EXPRESS'

\*\*\* But beating even the aforementioned case for outright bizarreness, was the following (more than a trifle dubious - but hey, we just report the stories, Consant Cynical Reader), account from Poland...

A farmer by the name of Krystof Azinski, 30, was enjoying a round of drinks with a group of friends when they decided to strip naked and have a Macho Man Contest.

As you do.

First, they elected to clobber each other with frozen Swedes. Then one of the assembled gobaloons decided to seize a chainsaw and cut off his foot. Not to be outdone, Krystof promptly grabbed the saw for himself and yelled 'Watch this then!' before sawing off his own head.

July, 1999 Poland 'THE VIRGINIAN MAGAZINE'



\*\*\* Two inmates at a jail in Austria, somehow managed to persuade the governor to allow them to take part in a cycling race. Perhaps predictably, they made good their escape simply by outpacing their escorts.

11th July, 1999 Graz, Austria 'SUNDAY PEOPLE'

\*\*\* Much less successful in the escape stakes was Donald Thomas, who absconded from prison after serving 89 days of a 90 day sentence.

He was immediately recaptured and ordered to serve a further six months.

15th July, 1999 Rhode Island, USA 'DAILY MANC'

\*\*\* A couple of armed robbers were promptly arrested after they paused at the scene of their proposed crime to embark on a fist fight in the middle of the street.

The reason for the punch-up? It transpired that they both wanted to raid the same bank

18th July, 1999 Hamburg, Germany 'SUNDAY PEOPLE'

\*\*\* A less-than-successful robber in Sydney, Australia, unlike the two hopeless individuals featured above, fled the scene of his attempted crime, but with more reason than most...

Whilst he was in the bank he was intending to hold-up, his coat slipped to reveal that he was armed with a banana. In a desperately embarrassed panic, he tried to convince the laughing bystanders that the fruit was rigged to explode.

3rd October, 1999 Sydney, Australia 'NEWS OF THE WORLD'

\*\*\* A man who shot dead two strangers in Carolina, USA, was amazingly awarded £300,000 after suing his therapist. Wendel Williams claimed that he wouldn't have killed anyone if his psychiatrist, Dr Myron Lipitz, had treated him properly

July, 1999 Carolina, USA 'THE VIRGINIAN MAGAZINE'

\*\*\* A burglar spent more than 48 hours stuck beneath the floorboards of a Dutch school when he attempted to hide from the police after setting off an alarm.

Investigating officers who found nothing amiss locked all the doors in the building, including the trap door which led to his hiding place.

The man pounded and screamed, but wasn't heard until two days later.

15th September, 1999 Holland 'DE TELEGRAAF'

\*\*\* A thief who attempted to siphon fuel from a mobile home in Kentucky, USA, wound up in hospital after sticking his hose into the wrong tank.

Instead of petrol, he only succeeded in sucking up a mouthful of raw sewage.

12th July, 1999 Kentucky, USA 'DAILY SLUR'

\*\*\* A teenage driver, who was stopped by police for a spate of somewhat erratic driving, attempted to eat some of his underwear in the vain hope that the cotton fabric would serve to absorb the alcohol on his breath.

David Zurfluh, 18, of Stettler, Canada, chewed the whole crutch out of pants while he was held in the rear of a police vehicle.

Needless to say, it didn't work one iota.

10th September, 1999 Stettler, Canada 'THE VULCAN ADVOCATE'

\*\*\* Peter Crawford, a suspected mugger who was seeking to defend himself at his trial in a New York court, contributed to his own conviction when he asked the complainant; 'Did you get a good look at my face when I snatched your bag?'

26th September, 1999 New York, USA 'NEWS OF THE WORLD'

\*\*\* Just as patently absurd was the following case of a thief who stole Gail Richards' washing line from her garden while she was out, and yet inexplicably left all of her expensive designer clothes scattered across her lawn.

19th September, 1999 Ramsgate, Kent 'SUNDAY PEOPLE'

\*\*\* A burglar known as The Muncher, has reportedly struck at least 26 times in Logan, Oregon, USA.

The unidentified fiend feasts on victims' food and then, for some reason best known to himself, cleans up after himself.

27th July, 1999 Logan, Oregon, USA 'SUNDAY MANC'

\*\*\* A man threatening to commit suicide with a knife pointed at his throat was blown away by the police who fired rubber bullets in a failed bid to make him give himself up.

A spokesman, one suspects, struggling for excuses, was quoted as saying; 'They were trying to subdue the man. They did what they felt was right.'

Oh, so that's all sorted then.

27th July, 1999 Denver, Colorado, USA 'MAIL ON SUNDAY'

\*\*\* Patrick Manning, a suspected murderer who was one the run, was duly arrested by a bunch of amazed police officers in Oklahoma, USA, after he turned up for court on, of all things, jury duty.

15th August, 1999 Tulsa, Oklahoma, USA 'NEWS OF THE WORLD'

## The Darwin 'Stupid Death' Award For 1999

As regular readers will doubtless be aware, 'The Darwin Awards' for the most senseless deaths on the planet (excluding the tragic victims/collateral damage inflicted upon those nations unfortunate enough to provide the US government with a ready made excuse for diverting attention away from their President's indiscretions) are now an annual Internet event, and the contenders for this years coveted posthumous title include; Dan Dukes, who jumped

into a pool in the-less-than-advisable company of a killer whale. You couldn't really blame the creature from thinking that Dan was a new toy and so held him under water at Sea World, Florida, USA, until he drowned.

Also in contention are the three Cambodians who were blown apart by their 'football' aka a live mine, and a 25-year-old soldier from Alabama, who plummeted from a third floor balcony in an attempt to win a spitting contest.

You can add to the list the American walker who was swept over a 180 foot waterfall as he was cooling his feet in a stream.

And then there was the boy of ten who was killed opening a can of Coke with a nail. The pressure combined to fire the nail into his neck.

There is also the arsonist who got locked in the house he set alight and the drunk who climbed into a Russian zoo to feed bread to the nice cuddly lions...Which predictably enough, chose to forsake the bread to dine on him.

Oh, and let's not forget the child who bled to death after swallowing a Swiss Army Knife for a bet, or the driving instructor in Poland who accelerated into a lamp-post whilst showing a learner 'how to stop safely.'

Finally, consider if you will, the cases of the Canadian eager to render himself drunk in as cheap a manner as possible. His potent cocktail of petrol and milk made him throw up into his fireplace, and blew him and his family home to smithereens, the three Brazilian flyers who mooned at a passing aircraft and crashed their plane into a mountain, and the man in Ohio who used an electric sander on his todger in order to get a sexual thrill, only to electrocute himself when he got too excited.

5th October, 1999 Various Locations 'DAILY SLUR'

## The Nail-Biting Maniac

Police in London, were engaged in a hunt for a nutter who enjoys biting off women's fingernails last September.

Dubbed 'The Clipper,' he was said to have struck on at least four occasions in recent times, taking his total toll to twelve reported incidents in less than two years.

In each instance, the man with a foot fetish has managed to charm his victims by complimenting her on her nails. One time he even posed as a manicurist. He then holds a pair of nail scissors against bites off as many nails as he can.



Detective Constable Michael Dean, of the Metropolitan Police, was quoted as saying; 'We believe it is a sexual fetish. He always approaches very attractive girls and is consistent in his manner and the chat up lines that he uses.'

*'We need to catch this man before he can terrorise anyone else.'*

The first reported attack was on a woman aged 33 in Tottenham, North London, back in December, 1997. Since then 12 victims, some as young as 13 have been assaulted in a similar manner.

One girl of 14 had a chunk of her nail and skin ripped off. Not surprisingly, she described the experience as being *'very frightening.'*

The last word, for the time being at least, went to DC Dean; *'These are not pranks. This man is extremely dangerous.'*

12th September, 1999 London *'NEWS OF THE WORLD'*

## The Animals Strike Back...Again



## The Attack Of The Killer Fire Ants

Tens of thousands of poisonous red fire ants swarmed into a nursing home and conspired to kill two bed-ridden elderly women in Mississippi, USA.

Staff at the home were alerted to the horror by the screams of the two victims, but could do nothing to help them. They were already literally covered with a seething carpet of the deadly ants. The women were aged 79 and 83 respectively, and they died of a mixture of shock and the potent effects of the toxic venom imparted by the insects' stings.

The ants, having carried out their attack made good their escape by crawling through cracks in the floor.

The incident, horrific as it undoubtedly was, is however just one example of a series of attacks by these lethal creatures, the current death toll standing at more than 80.

These tiny, but nonetheless deadly, creatures are currently swarming across the warmer Southern States, after hitching a ride aboard ships sailing in from their native South America.

'Expert' Darren Gaines was quoted as saying; *'They fear nothing because there are so many of them. Kill 10,000 and there's another 100,000 behind them. They can swarm up a person's body in seconds'*

The good news for the majority of our readers who reside in Britain, is that the selfsame 'expert' believes it is highly unlikely that these lethal fire ants would ever survive a voyage to our own shores as the climate is too cold for them. For now, at least.

Give it another few years and maybe global warming will entice the swarming hordes over here...

28th September, 1999 Mississippi, USA *'LIVERPOOL ECHO'*

## Invasion Of The Spiders, Killer Elephants, A Dog Named Satan And Foot-Biting Pikes,

A German woman was killed when an elephant suddenly took it upon itself to attack her at a wildlife sanctuary in southern Sri Lanka.

She was in the company of a group of tourists in the Bunadala Sanctuary, 150 miles south of the capital, Colombo, when she strayed from into the depths of the jungle and was trampled by the animal.

21st September, 1999 Southern Sri Lanka *'DAILY TELEGRAPH'*

\*\*\* Darren Blake was enjoying a spot of water-skiing on Llangorse Lake, in the Brecon Beacons, when his fun was rudely interrupted by a 5-foot-long pike, which took a bite out of one of Darren's feet.

He felt himself being pulled into the lake before the pike bit him, leaving an inch-long gash and six V-shaped toothmarks on his sole.

The Llangorse Skiing Club felt compelled to issue a warning to its 80 members about the fish.

Mr Blake, 31, told reporters; *'Now I know how those people feel when they get bitten by a shark.'*

*'I was in terrible pain, but most of it was the shock of something trying to eat me.'*

*'I can't tell you how terrifying it is when something grabs you from under the water.'*

*'I am hobbling at the moment, but I am just glad to have my foot in one piece - that fish could have killed someone with a weak heart.'*

10th September, 1999 Lake Llangorse, Brecon Beacons, Wales *'THE TIMES'*

\*\*\* A family living in Gosport, Hampshire, were forced to up sticks and move after a plague of poisonous spiders invaded their home.

Roger and Tina East described the scene in their once idyllic back garden as being like something out of horror movie, *'ARACHNOPHOBIA'*, for example.

The couple found over a hundred *Steatoda Nobilis* spiders, who hail from the same family as the infamous Black Widow, nesting on their garden fence.

Bites from the arachnids, which are normally found in North Africa, can cause swelling, dizziness and numbness.

The couple were forced to keep their 18-month-old twin daughters Sophie and Jessie indoors.

Not even a team of assembled 'experts' were able to get rid of the decidedly unwelcome visitors.

Mr East was quoted as saying; *'I was frantic about my daughters. The spiders were very creepy.'*

*'They look strange. They are a red-brown shiny colour, with long legs. The bigger ones had large bobbles on their back. I was told they are not lethal but they can give a nasty bite.'*

As per usual, the explanation as to where the spiders came from had its roots in the old chestnut that dictates they likely sneaked into Britain in the midst of a bunch of imported bananas from North Africa or the Canary Islands.

*22nd August, 1999 Gosport, Hampshire 'SUNDAY MANC'*

\*\*\* A python managed to black out a Zimbabwean town for over 11 hours simply by coiling itself around an electricity transmitter.

Sadaly, it had to pay a price for its spot of impromptu sabotage; It was found electrocuted at Beltbridge, on the South African border.

*23rd August, 1999 Beltbridge, South Africa 'DAILY TELEGRAPH'*

\*\*\* A deer farm manager was reported as being seriously ill after she was gored by a rutting stag.

Jill Gilroy, 47, defied the pain from severe stomach injuries to stagger 400 yards across two fields before she collapsed in the road and was helped by a passing motorist.

She was attacked as she tended the animals at the Narramore Deer Farm in Devon.

*10th September, 1999 Narramore Deer Park, near Moreton-hampstead, Devon 'DAILY MANC'*

\*\*\* Alan Elwood, a vicar from Kingsbury Episcopi, Somerset, was forced to battle to escape from a vicious dog called (Cosmic Joke Time, again) Satan!!!

The Reverend Alan Elwood had called at the farmhouse of Marjore and John Cload to discuss a problem with a family grave.

But as he walked into the farmyard, alsation Satan sank his teeth into the priest's arms, legs and stomach.

The 45-year-old vicar, who needed hospital treatment for 11 wounds, stated afterwards that; *'I was convinced that I was going to meet my maker.'*

*1st August, 1999 Kingsbury, Somerset 'NEWS OF THE WORLD'*

\*\*\* A helicopter was called in to search for a pride of lions that ate a villager at the South African resort of Marloth Park, south of Kruger National Park.

An Mpumalanga parks official, Gary Sutter, said; *'The lions are believed to have escaped from a game reserve, and have previously attacked five people. Now they have killed they will have to be shot.'*

*20th September, 1999 Marloth, South Africa 'THE DAILY TELEGRAPH'*

\*\*\* Three towns were on alert after attacks by killer bats, at the time of going to press.

The blood-suckers have pounced at least 15 times, and one boy was reported as having died after becoming infected by rabies.

Weather conditions have been blamed by the 'experts' for the attacks in Mexico.

Now the terrified people have been forced to set up bat-spotting patrols.

*5th September, 1999 Mexico 'SUNDAY PEOPLE'*

\*\*\* And finally, for this issue at least, whales and sharks not idigenous to these shores, have reportedly been sighted off the British coast...

During July, rising sea temperatures led to sharks visiting Skegness. Coastguards at the popular Lincolnshire resort, warned the public of three varieties that had been seen, including the man-eating blue shark.

Then in August, a Sperm Whale was seen for the first ever time in the Channel.

The whale, seven miles off Cherbourg, was spotted from a ferry by a member of Earth Kind, an environmental charity.

And then later that month, scientists were said to be investigating a possible sighting of a Great White Shark off Cornwall.

The 15ft shark was seen by anglers during a weekend trip out of Padstow. It may be the first time that the species has been seen in British waters.

The Great White normally lives in the tropical waters of South Africa and Australia, although it has appeared occasionally in American coastal waters where it has attacked humans.

One of the fishermen, Mike Turner, who had seen them before in South Africa, said; *'I am 95 per cent sure. There is nothing that looks like it in the water. It was near us for quite a while because the seagulls would not land.'*

*26th August, 1999 Cornwall 'THE TIMES'*

## CREATURES FROM THE OUTER EDGE

### Hunt For A Live Brontosaurus

Scientists were said to be about to mount an expedition to a remote area of the African Congo after reported sightings of a surviving Brontosaurus.

Frightened natives claim to have had dozens of encounters with the swimming 30-foot-long creature.

Their descriptions resemble no known living animal, but are remarkably similar to the reconstructions of a giant dinosaur believed to have become extinct more than 65 million years ago.

*July, 1999 African Congo 'NEWS OF THE WORLD'*

## Alien Big Cats Blamed For Lamb Mutilations

Police and wildlife 'experts' were involved in a (doubtless fruitless, if the history of the subject is anything to go by) search for an entire family of 'Pumas' after a total of six lambs were torn apart.

Farmer Henry Edwards stated that the lambs had been dragged through tough netting down a stream and into another field.

*'The lambs were ripped apart. It was obviously something stronger than a dog or a fox.'*

The local police called in Terry Hooper, an exotic animals 'expert,' after a paw print was found to match that of a Puma.

He at least, is now convinced that two breeding Pumas and two young are on the loose in Carmarthenshire, West Wales.

*'They were not the clean kills you'd expect from an older animal, which indicates a younger Puma,'* he told reporters.

The attack, near Carmarthen, follows more than 26 sightings of black, Puma-like creatures over the last twelve months. *'Fortunately, Pumas are usually shy animals and only attack humans if they are cornered or injured,'* stated a police spokesman, somewhat unconvincingly.

*22nd August, 1999 Carmarthenshire, West Wales 'DAILY SLUR'*

## 'Yeti' Tracks Found China

Chinese officials looking into tourists claims to have sighted a Yeti-like "Wild Man" in a Hubel mountain forest, found giant footprints, an official journal reported.

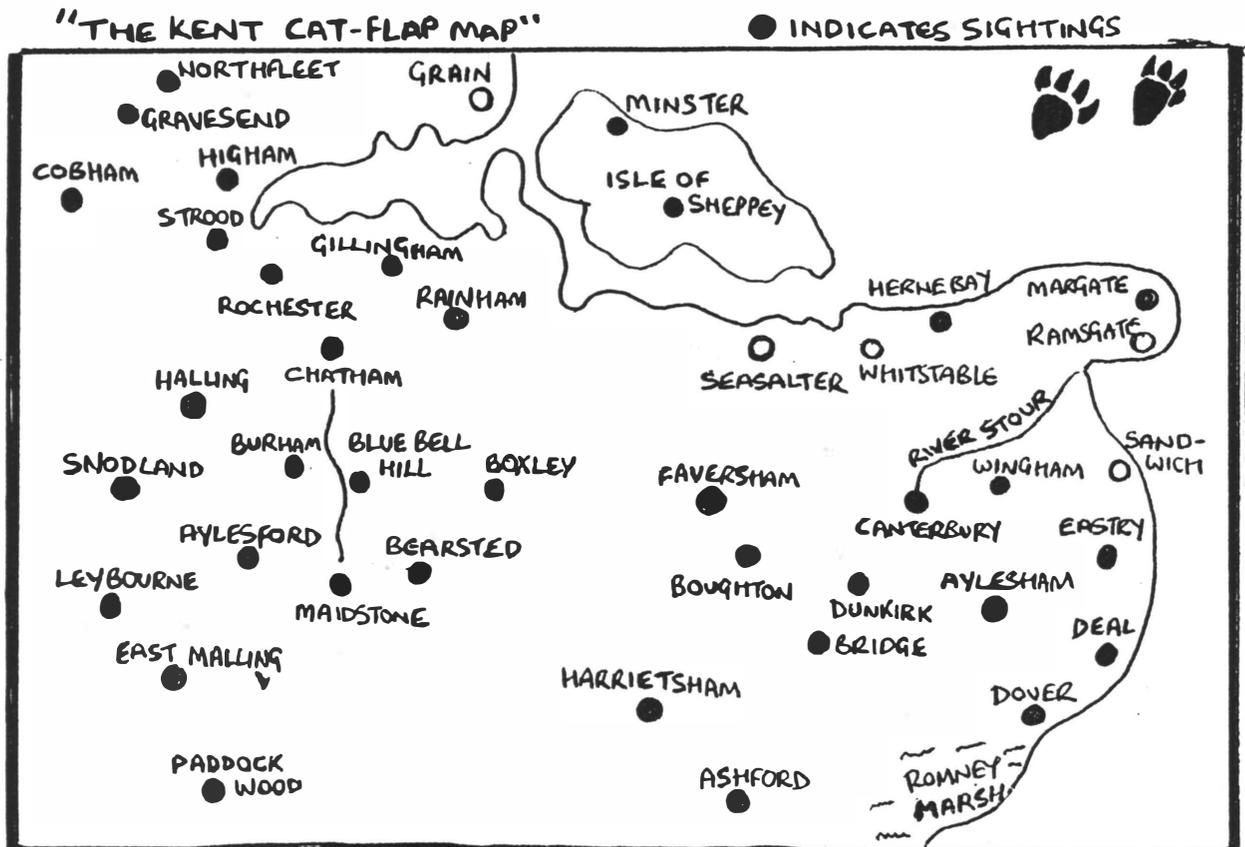
*27th August, 1999 Hubel, China 'LIVERPOOL ECHO'*

# On The Trail Of Kent's Alien Big Cats

Since the age of about eleven I have been fascinated by stories of all kinds of ghosts, ghouls and monsters. In the years that have since passed, (I am now aged 24), I have become Kent's sole Cryptozoologist, mainly obsessed with the alleged sightings of mystery felines.

Tracking these eternally elusive big cats has become something of a full-time (albeit un-paid) job, and I have more than a little difficulty in pursuing my quarry whilst performing the more mundane tasks as a stores-worker at my real place of employment.

Whilst, understandably enough, sightings of the Beasts of Bodmin and Exmoor have served to grip my attention, Kent; 'the garden of England,' (a rural hideaway if ever there was one), has itself been caught up in a somewhat overlooked 'cat-flap.' This wave, if placed into a Premier League of sightings per county would certainly nestle in a comfortable third place, beaten only for consistency by the more prominent flaps of the West Country and Surrey.



OF THE 31 SHADED AREAS, THE CATS HAVE BEEN SIGHTED MORE THAN ONCE IN HALF OF THE LOCATIONS.

In recent times, it has been my ambition to expose this South-East enigma, by various means, and if I haven't quite gotten round to shouting from the rooftops, loud-hailer pressed to my lips, I have at least broadcast my views on radio and written articles for the local press. News of the strange phenomena prevalent in the area is leaking out...If a trifle slowly.

'The Beast Of Blue Bell Hill' has, to my mind at least, a far more ominous ring to it than 'The Beast Of Exmoor,' The locale, famous in paranormal circles for its Vanishing Hitch-hiker (which can appear in the form of an eerily-smiling young girl or a cackling old hag straight out of the 'BLAIR WITCH PROJECT') and the mystical significance of the Kit Coty Stones, is also reputed to be the lair of a beast that prowls the dense quarries and the surrounding woodland of Boxley, Detling and Burham. Evidence for the existence of this creature is such that attempting to write a short article on the subject is well-nigh impossible.

And this, despite the fact that lesser known cases in other areas ie; Barnet, Lincoln, Norwich, etc, have all gained far more exposure in the media.

When a black panther was shot on Burham Downs in the 1930's, teenage witness Len Cuckow never realised that some sixty years later he would come face to face with another feline, this time a puma, near his Strood home. Such a one-off event has now become almost run of the mill.

The 1930's sighting, I think, can be explained in slightly more prosaic terms than we would normally associate with Big Cat sightings. At the time of the sighting, a rich, and well-respected man named Sir Garrard Tyrwhitt-Drake, opened up his very own exotic zoo. Despite his great wealth however, security at the zoo was considerably less than that required, and according to reliable sources, several big cats made good their escape.

However, such administrative inadequacies can not be blamed for the more recent big cat flaps. Indeed, whilst the mystery was not so widespread before the 1970's, there have nevertheless, been reports of big cat sightings, but many

accounts went astray due to the fact that the majority of witnesses were probably unable to believe their eyes and so kept their sightings very much to themselves.

Now, however, things are very different, and accounts of big cat encounters are being reported on an almost daily basis. A large proportion of people have heard of the Exmoor Big Cat, and due in no small part to the veritable mass of sightings, more and more witnesses are being encouraged to come forward.

In Kent, this phenomenon is at an all-time peak. I have no hesitation in believing that the 1976 Dangerous Wild Animals Act caused many owners of exotic pets to set them free into the surrounding countryside rather than run the risk of prosecution.

The Weald of Kent doubtless suffered its own intake of such creatures.

This also applies to most other areas in the UK. Despite this potential mass liberation of wild beasts, the 1970's were comparatively quiet on the big cat sighting front.

A few isolated sightings of yellow, striped creatures originated in the Folkestone area, but even the 1980's elapsed without any noticeable increase in the number of reported sightings. Hastings, Mersham, Dover, Peckham and vague sightings around the locale of Canterbury all seemingly had potential. In one case, a snow leopard was shot dead by a farmer, but this was no real mystery, as it had simply escaped from Howletts Zoo, the authorities there readily admitting that the creature had made a successful (though ultimately fruitless) bid for freedom.

As we moved into the 1990's, however, a certain kind of 'beastmania' began to descend upon the inhabitants of rural Britain. And as I dreamt of personally tracking Nessie or Bigfoot in relatively far-off lands, at last, a real crypto-puzzle had landed on my very doorstep, so to speak. Finally, Kent had its very own 'legend,' a Kentish version of the Beast Of Exmoor,' and one thing at least seemed certain; It wasn't going to simply go away. To vanish like the memory of some half-remembered dream upon waking.

Over a period of five years or so, my log of Kent sightings, tracing back to the 1930's, grew to over 500 in number, and it is fair to say that the vast majority of these accounts were said to have occurred during the 1990's. Marden, Snodland, Addington, Rainham, Paddock Wood, Sheppey, East Malling, Southfleet and West Malling were all strongly rumoured to be the haunt of Alien Big Cats, but the main area of sightings came from the Dover, Deal, Canterbury vicinity. In all of these cases, the creatures were described as being strongly reminiscent of either a panther or a puma, and often the animals would be seen to be with cubs. On many occasions, in the wake of these sightings, the pitiful remains of mutilated livestock would be found littering farmer's fields, and tell-tale paw-prints would criss-cross the soft earth alongside the carcasses.

During the mid-1980's, although sightings of ABC's were scattered across the mainland, the coastal areas of Southern England were swamped with accounts. One sceptical theory had it that the reports were simply misperceptions of smaller wild cats that may have come to Kent after stowing away on boats and later making good their escape.

Whilst this may provide the solution to the mystery in at least some of the cases, the majority of witnesses quite clearly described BIG cats, uncannily similar to pumas and panthers.

From Canterbury and Deal, the sightings appeared to spread to areas such as Bridge, Littlebourne, Selling, Wingham and Eastry. Reports became so persistent that one beast, dubbed the 'Ashley Puma,' was sighted over sixty times in a mere fortnight. Livestock kills were analysed by teams of 'experts,' as was other evidence present at the scene, such as scratch marks, animal

droppings and paw-prints. On each occasion, these selfsame 'experts' agreed that a very large, unidentified cat was responsible for the killings.

Local papers had by now become interested in the Alien Big Cat story, often presenting it as another example of Modern Urban Folklore. But when domestic dogs and cats began to vanish and local residents elected to stay indoors, even the media began to reluctantly accept that there may be something exotic prowling the English countryside.

The county of Kent is very rural, and whilst not particularly large, is certainly big enough to conceal a number of elusive predators. Rumour has it that a number of private collections of wild cat were released into the countryside in the 1980's, an example of which occurred around Ashford. At the present time, I estimate that there are at least five big cats living wild in some of the more inaccessible, less-frequented areas of Kent, such as Boxley Wood, Burham Quarries, and Cliffe Marshes. It is my belief that these creatures can quite easily remain hidden from human sight and have had little trouble in adapting to the British climate.

I believe also that the current decade offers a wider variety of species of Alien Big Cat. Perhaps, in the 1970's and '80's, there were only two species existent in Britain; the puma and the panther. I cannot accept that the sightings in the Kent area were all down to just the one Big Cat, though they can, of course, travel great distances under cover of darkness. I do accept that the creatures move on from time to time, but that they each have a marked territory.

In 1995, the best evidence so far, for the existence of Alien Big Cats in the area, came to the fore when a Devon man, visiting friends in Maidstone, caught what appears to be a black panther on film in the grounds of Aylesford Priory.

Attempts were made by various locals to pour cold water on this footage, and to try and identify the animal in the film as a common (though unusually large) domestic moggy!!!

In my opinion however, it is abundantly clear that the footage shows a muscular beast about three feet high and over four feet long.

By this time, the East of Kent was well and truly on the way to becoming real Alien Big Cat territory, but there were also a number of sightings even closer to home.

The Beast of Bearstead reared its head in 1995, and a spate of sightings were said to have occurred. However, those sightings originally reported from Deal never ceased, proving that there was more than just one creature involved here.

A number of places were visited again and again by mysterious animals; Marden, Selling, Mersham, Bliting, the wilds of Romney Marsh and Leybourne were constantly plagued with accounts of a creature (or creatures) that slaughtered lambs and chickens in its passing.

Curiously, as the 1990's draw to an end, the number of reported sightings seems to have trebled in number, and it was during this decade that the so-called Beast Of Blue Bell Hill came to light.

Blue Bell Hill and its surrounding woodland merges into the Burham Quarries. The area also encompasses the thick foliage of Boxley Wood, and the heavily-wooded environs of Detling, Aylesford and Maidstone; more than a potential sanctuary for any exotic beast keen to avoid human contact except when it is absolutely unavoidable. Indeed, Alien Big Cats have been sighted in these woods, the vast majority of the encounters have been reported by people you would have thought experienced in the ways of the countryside and by implication, less likely to make a mistake when it came to identifying the creatures they saw. Gamekeepers, poachers, farmers and ramblers, all more than familiar with the indigenous wildlife.

The busy Capstone Park, with its ski resort, played host to a handful of sightings and a fair degree of what might be termed 'hard evidence' in the shape of anomalous paw-prints, which I examined for myself at first hand. 'Puma' and 'Panther' were observed in the area earlier this year (1999), whilst at Boxley, a 'Puma' was sighted on a number of occasions.

Into the February of this year, and Allen Big Cat reports continued unabated. If anything, they were on the increase and accounts quite literally flooded into me, my phone barely ceased ringing.

And, for once, miracle of miracles and wonder of wonders, the local newspapers treated the subject with an admirable degree of seriousness. From Hucking ('Lynx'), to Strood ('Puma'), to Cooling ('Serval'), to Eccles ('Panther'), to Grafty Green ('Panther/Ocelot'), the plot thickens.

The sheer wealth of eyewitness testimony was little short of overwhelming. And the hard, concrete evidence so valued by the hard-nosed sceptics wasn't exactly lacking, either. The remains of partially eaten domestic cats, (for a more prosaic, though nonetheless tragic explanation for the demise of pet cats elsewhere in the country, earlier this year, see 'MUTILATED CATS THE VICTIMS OF ROAD ACCIDENTS' snippet elsewhere in this issue - Ed), lambs and birds coupled with anomalous animal droppings, were found littering the fields and country lanes.

As a result of this all-too apparent increase in ABC activity, the past few months have been virtually all-go for me. Thankfully, local radio, and magazines such as 'DEAD OF NIGHT' (aw, shucks, 'twas nothin Nell, ol bean - Humbled Ed), have helped me expose a Big Cat phenomenon that is far more consistent (not to say more persistent) than is commonly supposed.

It would take an article roughly the size of the big print version of 'WAR AND PEACE' to enable me to give you, Constant Reader, some idea of the level of activity we're currently experiencing here.

The featured map that I've included in this article should help to pin-point a number of what I've termed 'Big Cat Dens,' but these creatures have proved to be some damned elusive that at times I am baffled by the whole thing.

It is sometimes mighty difficult to shake the notion that the phenomenon itself is playing some kind of game with me, cat and mouse, perhaps, (a common enough feeling, experienced by many a paranormal researcher, Neil. Just ask John Keel, Steve Feltham, Jacques Vallee or Jenny Randles. Or even, if you ever really find yourself stuck with nothing better to do, Your's Truly - Ed. It often appears, as crazy as it sounds, that the phenomenon, be it UFOs, Lake Monsters, Ghostly apparitions, or Giant Mothmen flying around West Virginia, seems hell-bent on leading the would-be researcher a decidedly less-than-merry dance. It often puts me in mind of the mischievous pranks beloved of the denizens of Faerie)

I'll keep on trying regardless, however. I'm determined to get that conclusive, incontrovertible, photographic evidence, or that equally convincing, sceptic-proof camcorder footage.

I must bring this article to a conclusion now, lest this issue become entirely dominated by the subject and my obsessive task.

To conclude, I would like to take my hat off to Kent's Allen Big Cat population, whether it be numbered two or twenty. They've given me a burning ambition, and made me a monster-hunter of sorts.

This case is never closed.

Indeed, there is so much more to tell you....

But right now, you'll have to excuse me, I have a cat to catch....

Neil Arnold, Kent, England, 1999

# 'The Beast Of Exmoor And Other Mystery Predators Of Britain'

Roy Kerridge Reviews the Classic  
Di Francis Opus Published by  
Johnathan Cape

*'Now, you all know Shuck, he's a real old dog,  
And every night he's found  
Down by the shore, a-waiting for,  
The master who was drowned.  
His hair is black, his teeth are red,  
His eyes - how they gleam!  
If he see's you it's toodle-oo!  
On the night of Halloween.'*

So sings Allan Smethurst, East Anglia's Singing Postman of recent fame. Legends of Old Shuck, the Black Dog, are told not only in Norfolk, but in Devon and Somerset, where I have heard them myself.

To meet Old Shuck whilst travelling along a dark, secluded lane late at night means deep misfortune.

In this fascinating book, Di Francis puts forward the theory that these legends are based on true, real-life sightings of an unknown black carnivore that has so far escaped detection by naturalists.

I wish I had asked the person who had seen the Black Dog's giant paw-prints in the Dartmoor snow, some twenty years ago, if the prints showed claw-marks. If they did not, then this 'Dog' was most likely a Big Cat.

Police reports of 'Pumas' seen prowling the English moorland country seem convincing enough to me, since puma cubs were sold in pet shops prior to the 1976 Dangerous Animal Act.

In South America, travellers sometimes found a puma padding silently along behind, on a lonely jungle path. Since the puma seldom attacks man, the animal's presence is usually put down to 'Curiosity.' Old Shuck's equally silent footsteps in leafy English lanes also seem remarkably puma-like. Should a traveller assume the creature to be a dog, he or she would get a shock when shining, feline eyes were suddenly illuminated by a shaft of bony moonlight.

At the sound of the traveller's cry of fright, the Big Cat would vanish, ghost-like into the darkness.

So are legends formed.

However, the puma is brown, not black, and did not become a popular menagerie animal until the turn of the century. Black Dog legends have their origins way back in the Middle Ages, and even beyond that ancient time.

Di Francis, makes a convincing case for her 'Unknown Panther,' and claims that the elusive Beast of Exmoor belonged to this race. The first half of her book is made up of a somewhat racey account of the Exmoor Beast Hunt of 1983, in which not only the police but the Royal Marines took part. Gradually, farmers and hunters became aware that they were not searching for the anticipated sheep-killing dog, but for a far more exotic, (not to say dangerous) Big Cat resembling a black panther.

In Chapter Seven, 'Missing Without Trace,' Miss Francis describes the disappearance in 1978, of thirteen-year-old Genette Tate, of Aylesbeare, Devon. Her body has never been found to this day. She sped around a corner on her bike ahead of her friends, and a mere moment later they found the bike on its side with the wheel spinning, but not

the slightest sign of Genette. Could she have been ambushed by a panther and carried away?

When DI Francis describes her own meetings with Big Cats, she does so in a somewhat unique, throwaway style, quite casually, in half a sentence. Photographs taken by herself and others, apparently genuine, show animals that look like escaped panthers at large on British moors. If the animals are truly escapees, or the recent descendants of escapees, they should certainly be shot or captured without delay (*I must say, as a lover on animals I much prefer the latter option, Roy, Conservation Ed*). But if there is an indigenous British Cat that has never been shot or captured over the centuries, then we are quite clearly dealing with something almost supernatural. We can only pray for our own safety, as peasants did of old when meeting Old Shuck at the turn of a lane, by twilight.

At one point, Miss Francis hints strongly that Old Shuck might be a surviving Sabre-toothed Tiger!!! Strangely enough, a photograph of a skull found on Dartmoor seems to bear her out. Neither fossil nor fake, it appears to have belonged in the head of a walrus-tusked jaguar.

Colonel Haines of Brushford, is quoted as having seen a 'Living Fossil Cat' somewhere in Devon.

To my mind, the Colonel's description can be of no other creature than a Spotted Hyena, such as the one described by Saki (H.H. Munso) in his famous short story; "*Esme*." In this story, fox hunters on horseback are surprised to encounter a large hyena perfectly at home in the English countryside. Before their eyes, it seizes and devours a gypsy baby. Saki would have loved DI Francis's book, for he had an obsession with man-killing wild beasts at large in the West Country. One of his forebears had suffered the misfortune of being eaten by a tiger in India.

I urge DI Francis to read Saki without delay, if she has not already done so.

Photographs in this book are puzzling. A picture taken on a Welsh hillside, appears to show a Scottish Wildcat in typical pose. Wildcats are only Scottish by default. In the Middle Ages, they lived all over Britain, and Welshmen have assured me that such cats still survive in the Principality. Yet the next photograph in the book plainly shows a black panther on the same Welsh hillside. Miss Francis seems to think that the two animals are related, but in my opinion, they are cats that pass in the night. An escaped panther, lonely in the wild, might befriend a small cat, and the smaller animal could be mistaken for its cub.

Another photograph from Wales purports to be that of a Mystery Panther Cub. Yet, as far as I can see, the picture shows an adult cat of an unusual but not alarming type - perhaps a cross between a feral domestic Cat and some species of Wildcat.

Before I read this book, I would have been amazed to read about Scottish Wildcats at large in Wales. Now, with Sabre-Toothed Surrey Pumas and Beasts of Exmoor dancing around my brain, nothing can surprise me any more. DI Francis's latest book is about her captive pair of Kellas Cats, a newly-discovered black variety of Scottish Wildcat, possibly a distinct species.

I look forwards to reading it, even though I shall probably glance backwards whenever I walk in the countryside, for the rest of my life.

## Identifying The Phantom Bear Of Hackney Marsh

In a recent letter, penned by our long-time, and well-respected correspondent, Roy Kerridge, a possible (and to my mind, highly feasible - Ed), explanation for sightings of the so-called Phantom Bear of Hackney Marsh (see DON #17), was put forward, and we feel that it's only right that we share it with you....

*'The site of 'The Hackney Horror' stories of the Winter of 1981, is fairly close to where I live, and it takes only a few minutes by rail to get to. Around Hackney Marshes, and the canal (a frightening, dismal place where rats run squeaking around your ankles at dusk), live a great many Romany gypsies. They have an 'official' site these days, but in reality, they have been here since at least, the Eighteenth Century. Back then, they were mostly bare-knuckled fighters. These men, who quite literally, fought for their wages, became latter-day heroes to the local Cockneys. To this day, the East End Cockneys boast of their Gypsy blood. Gypsies and Cockneys, quite naturally, inter-married, to produce a very tough offspring that were known as 'didderkols' or half-Gypsies.*

*I once had to enter this Gypsy site to interview one of them who had written his life story; 'THE LUCK OF THE DEAD' (a good read, but sadly unpublished at present).*

*These Gypsies still go in for bare-knuckle fighting, dog-fighting, (I strongly suspect) cock-fighting, and worst of all... Wait for it... Bear Baiting!!! They set pit bulls and Staffordshire terriers, Rottweilers and the like, on bears.*

*The former proprietor of the (appropriately-named Bear Inn, in Billericay, Essex, may well know something about this sad state of affairs. Not least because he once kept bears in the backyard of his pub (and yes, pop fans, Ian Dury did once write a song about Billericay!).*

*In bear-baiting, there is obviously a fairly high turn-over of bears, and sometimes one of these unfortunate creatures gets lucky and makes a bid for freedom.*

*The Didderkols, anxious lest their secret be discovered, frantically attempt to hunt down the escapee. These dangerous men, who once threatened me with crowbars, (Roy doesn't say precisely what he had done to so incur their wrath - Maybe he'll get around to sharing that with us someday) obviously do not want children or any other would-be nosy parker hanging around, hence the throwing of snowballs, the false claims of bear-suited hoaxers, etc. I have seen the island in the River Len, a strange, wild spot where enormous carp the size of porpoises swim around against a backdrop of decaying industrial 'scenery.' It is hard to shake the notion that anything could happen hereabouts. Gypsies camp on bits of wasteland everywhere. Anyway, the most common sorts of bears bought and sold circus people are Brown Bear, Syrian Bears, Himalayan Bears and American Black Bears. The latter species have thin legs when half-grown. The most prized bear for fighting is the Brown Bear, the European relative of the American Grizzly.*

*A few years ago now, in the rat-infested canal, Hackney Cut, cut between the Grand Union Canal and the River Len, by the Marsh, a corpse was found.*

*The corpse of a full-grown Brown Bear.... Minus its head!!! I only heard the following anecdote second-hand, but I am reliably informed that news of the grisly (no pun intended) discovery made the local papers. A champion fighting bear inevitably succumbed to the endless assaults by the dogs, and had its head cut off to be stuffed as a trophy.*

*Incidentally, if you've ever wondered why it is East End pet shops always sell quail... Well, it's because certain East Enders still go in for betting on quail fights.*

*There are, thankfully, regular RSPCA raids on private houses... One such house owner jumped into bed when the inspectors came a-calling, claiming that he was ill and confined to bed. Unfortunately for him, a tell-tale cheeping from beneath the blankets caused the covers to be whisked away, revealing several quail as his strange set of bed-fellows.*

Roy Kerridge, Kensal Green, London 15th February, 1999

# Dark Visions

The Latest From The  
Weird And Wonderful  
World Of Fortean TV



## RIDDLE OF THE SKIES

CHANNEL FOUR

31st January-15th February, 1999

### Programme One: Is There Anyone Out There?

Call me a cold-hearted cynic if you like, but I really wasn't expecting too much from this latest foray into the highly controversial world of ufology.

I'd previously caught sight of a trailer for the programme not long after the credits had rolled on another classic re-run of 'FATHER TED,' and I have to say, the prospect hardly had me dancing around like the 'Duracell' Bunny in the throes of myxomatosis.

But even though I was sure it would doubtless prove to be yet another regurgitation of the terminally inane, empty half-truths, and conspiracy-fuelled twaddle, I knew I'd be compelled to tune in anyway. For the sake of review purposes, if nothing else.

In the event however, I was to be somewhat pleasantly surprised.

The inaugural programme opened with a familiar grainy footage of a cogar-shaped object, travelling slowly over a distant range of brown-coloured mountains. The clipped Teutonic tones of ufologist Michael Hesseemann, announces his belief that; *'There's no question that UFOs are real. I studied the UFO phenomenon all over the world, in 42 countries. I travelled a million kilometers for it. And there is no question, indeed, that there is something behind the phenomenon, which is real, and indicating an extraterrestrial presence here on Earth.'*

We get to see a slice of even more grainy film, featuring a a rocket-shaped object straight out of an episode of Gerry Anderson's 'THUNDERBIRDS.' It suddenly disappears from view, vanishing from the screen as though it had slipped through the very fabric of reality.

Dr Steven Greer, adds his voice to the argument for the genuineness of the mystery, when he states, with somewhat twisted logic; *'I don't believe in UFOs..(I have to say, this seems a strange comment to open on, given the contradictory nature of what follows. Maybe it lost something in the final editing)...I've seen a number of UFOs, so I'm certain that they exist, but it's a bit like someone asking do you believe in this chair I'm sitting in. Well, I mean. It's there and you can see it (or you could if you saw the documentary or else own a copy of the video -Pedantic Ed). I've seen them. I've seen tremendous evidence associated with them..(and here is included an sequence of a brightly-lit, diamond-shaped object cavorting across an inky black sky - the video numerals at the bottom of the screen announcing that this footage was shot at 7:24pm on December 27th, 1997).. 'and there's no question in my mind that they are real.'*

Before we get too excited however, here comes astronomer and arch-skeptic, Seth Shostak, who is equally forthright in his views when questioned alongside the giant radio telescope at Arecibo, Peru.

*'There has been committee after committee consisting of top-flight academics, and people who are skilled in recognising aerial phenomena. They look at the evidence, and what they find is that the UFOs turn out to be natural phenomena.'*

To illustrate this point, film is shown of a series of streaking meteorites entering the earth's atmosphere in the dead of night. This is countered by something that looks decidedly unnatural; a bright pink, flare-like object that dances erratically alongside the rocky scree of a hillside, and the now infamous clip, allegedly shot above the even more infamous, Area 51.

This is followed by further bizarre video shots of a dazzling light hovering over the skyscrapers of some sprawling city, and an unusually clear, shimmering UFO that emerges, once more, from behind the dark silhouette of a mountain.

The programme proper, then opens with the depressingly-inevitable reference to the dog-blamed Roswell Incident, and Kenneth Arnold's sighting over Mount Ranier, Washington State, in 1947.

Thankfully, not too much time is wasted on these overly familiar episodes, and we are pretty soon re-introduced to Dr Steven Greer, and his, so far, fruitless attempts at forcing a congressional hearing on UFOs...

*'There is more evidence for this subject than there is for black holes,'* he contends. *'We have over 3,500 pilot reports, from a member of my team who has collected them from civilian and military people. We have 4,000 landing trace events. We have hundreds of photographs, that are daylight, crystal-clear, that have been analysed, and they're not hoaxes.'*

We switch to a typical UFO conference, at which Greer (or at least his shadow, which is filmed, cartoon-like against a plain brick wall) lectures an assembled audience of believer's.

Back seated in his favourite chair at home, the good doctor informs us that; *'There has been a combination of tremendous security put around the subject, which we're familiar with, and public disinformation and ridicule, which makes the subject the laughing stock of the scientific community and others. And so, I may go and meet with the deputy director of NASA, and they're extremely interested. And they know the subject is real. But they would never go*

*in front of a camera talking about it, because it would be the end of their career's, professionally.'*

The programme's suitably grave-toned narrator, asks the question; 'Is the photographic evidence and the eyewitness statements too readily dismissed by the so-called 'experts'? Mr Hesseemann is wheeled on to give his opinion; 'We, healthy, normal human beings, are able to describe something we have seen accurately. We are not victims of delusion all the time. We can be. But we are not always. Denying the reality of UFOs means denying the value of the human testimony itself.'

The possibility of extraterrestrial visitation is then put (over a decidedly flaky-looking clip of an Adamski-type saucer, that looks for all the world as though it were hanging suspended from an invisible length of rope - Oh, let's tell the truth and shame the Devil here, shall we, Dear Readers, the effects reproduced here, would shame Ed Wood's saucers in 'PLANNING FROM OUTER SPACE.') to Farouk Baz, a former NASA scientist; 'We ourselves send UFOs to other planetary bodies, so if there was life on some other planet, they may have also done the same thing, by sending things to our planet...'

A still photograph, depicting the beauty of the star-filled cosmos, the vast 'silence of the infinite spaces' that so terrified the philosopher, Immanuel Kant, fills the screen, making even the most cynical among us, feel a little humble. An astronaut by the name of Ulrich Walter is then briefly interviewed... 'I am convinced that within our universe, there are other intelligence. However, I do not think that's true within our galaxy, our Milky Way.'

Fellow astronaut Story Musgrave, a man who looks like he'd be more at home chowing down on the 'Cadbury's Creme Eggs' along with look-alike, Georgie Dawes, adds his endorsement for the feasibility of ET life, and adds that he believes it may well be possible that these aliens have mastered the mechanics of interstellar travel.

Next up, is Science Consultant, James Oberg. 'The ultimate question is, Are They Out There?' And, if they are out there, how many are there? Are They visiting us? We don't know. And we want to know.'

Bemused that Mr Oberg doesn't even attempt to formulate an answer, we move on to behold the panoramic vista of a Chilean mountain range. 'Extraordinary claims require extraordinary proof' cites our narrator, quite rightly, as the preamble to the story of a goldminer named Jorge Barra.

Jorge, it seems, encountered a UFO in the shape of a tricoloured light that spread 'an energy force' throughout the witnesses entire body. The object hovered above the frightened prospector, virtually silent, aside from a sound that the witness described as being like the displacement of air at the twirling of a stick. The lights, whatever they may have been, eventually moved away.

The fact that this case, like so many others in the annals of Ufology, (and indeed, within the archives of most other types of paranormal phenomena) stands or falls on the testimony of a single witness, is referred to by the narrator. The programme-makers don't have to look too far, however, for a case that involves, not only multiple, trained, witnesses, but also involved the highest levels of the military...

The famous 'Belgian Triangle Wave' of 1989-90, is given extensive coverage, The story of this flap has already been well-chronicled in previous issues of 'DON,' so I don't propose to dredge it all up again, here. A brief synopsis of the interviews featured here will suffice. Physicist Leon Brening, a teacher at the Free University Of Brussels, is quoted as saying of the reported sightings; 'At first sight, it is very strange. Because the technical characteristics are such flying object are very different from what we know'

*I saw a lot of first-hand witnesses. And I had direct access to at least 800 investigations, which were carefully made. All these investigations indicate that there is really a phenomenon which is unusual. All the flying characteristics are highly strange.*

*We have a lot of observations of such triangular platform, which was hovering silently, without any apparent action on the air, above a farm. During 20 minutes. Why above a farm? What does it mean?'*

Over in Belgium, it appears that the military, are a good deal less secretive about their dealings with the subject, than here in an increasingly paranoid Britain. Proof of this is provided in spades during an interview with Colonel Andre Almond, a civil engineer in the Belgian Army, who claims he himself saw 'the Flying Triangle' whilst driving along a country road one grey December afternoon.

He and his wife were frightened by the appearance over a field, of a series of intensely bright lights, pulsating in a triangular formation. They were so scared in fact, that the Colonel's wife became most insistent that they drive away from the rapidly approaching lights as quickly as possible.

A video recording of one these 'flying triangles' was made by a shopkeeper from Brussels, named Marcel Alfarano. The clip is certainly sufficiently enigmatic enough to make one wonder what actually was traversing the skies over Belgium at the outset of the 90's.

Marcel, who was later visited by a group of alleged government officials (MIB's up to their old tricks again?) described the mysterious lights as being 'something bizarre... Something unrecognizable.'

The Belgian airforce was subsequently scrambled, such was the intensity of the reports, and we get to see footage of F-16 jet fighters screaming into the 'Triangle' - infested skies.

To no avail.

Interestingly, depending on your point of view, despite apparent confirmation from ground-based radar that the 'target' was real, none of the pilots involved were able to make direct visual contact with the UFO.

The Air Force's official explanation was, quite simply, that they didn't have one. General Wilfried de Brouwer, the officer in charge of operations the night the planes were scrambled, is quick to dismiss the notion that the UFO could have been some sort of American secret weapon, test flying over Belgium. He, in fact, has the courage (though some would say, foolhardiness) to state on camera that he believes we should certainly not rule out the possibility that we are dealing here with an extraterrestrial craft.

And, after the tape of the radar readings is sent to the Centre For The Study Of Electronic Warfare, for analysis, we learn from its chief investigator, Professor Emile Schweicher, that 'The UFO could make right turns... Which is impossible, by our laws of mechanics. And the UFO could also very suddenly change velocity... Which is also impossible, because it would give an infinite acceleration.'

He rules out the potential explanation forwarded by the sceptics, who say that the radar readings were entirely due to an aberration, either of meteorological origin, or else of mere equipment malfunction, and, in common with the previous 'expert' to be interviewed, states boldly; 'I am going to be fired by my colleagues, but I think... (dramatic pause, as he steels himself to take the proverbial leap off the edge of reason)... extraterrestrial intelligence is very highly likely.'

The programme then switches to further video evidence from around the globe, most of which will be familiar to seasoned UFO buffs, (the majority of the clips date from fairly recent times, though the Nick Mariana, 1957 Montana, film is also included). but which still make for fascinating, if argument-inducing viewing, nonetheless...

What they show, or what they purport to show remains, so damn open to interpretation.

The action then switches then switches to Germany, where some truly remarkable footage was shot over Grieswald, on the Baltic Sea. The sequence of orange lights, which this reviewer had never clapped eyes on before, hang stationary in the evening sky, looking for all the world like a series of bright, glowing teardrops.

I'm not sure precisely why, but this piece of film genuinely unnerved me (likewise my Dad, with whom I first saw this programme). It has an indefinable eerie quality. Something that is truly otherworldly.

Surreal.

It put me in mind of one of those old woodcuts depicting showers of hovering globes, such as the one from Basle in 1566, featured below, and to be quite frank, even just writing about it now, gives me the willies.

One of the witnesses, Valery Vinogradov, is interviewed, and states the following; *'I heard noises out in the street, so I went into the kitchen. I looked out of the window. I could hear excited voices, and everyone was pointing towards the sky. And then, I saw these glowing balls hanging in a sort of formation in the sky. It was hovering over a nuclear power station. (a pertinent clue to their origin, perhaps?), Within the formation, the spheres all appeared to be rotating, as if they were acting together, and the whole group was hovering, not making any sudden moves. It was just hovering in a stable kind of way. Then I saw a small sphere come in from the right. It looked as if it flew right into the group and dissolved. I think it's proof that, whatever they were, they were not flares.'*

Shuddering involuntarily, we move on to consider further UFO video evidence, both old and new (the Peter Day and ATV films, mixed in with various other clips of varying degrees of quality), and a further brief discussion with James Oberg; *'If we say how would alien phenomena look? Then we don't have a clue. It might look like a UFO. It might look an ordinary airplane in disguise. It might be totally invisible. There could be alien spacecraft hanging over the city of Houston, (he says, pointing out of the campus window towards the invisible horizon) It's possible. But we're looking for evidence to prove it's so.'*

Unfortunately, video evidence alone, whilst undoubtedly intriguing, is never going to provide that maddeningly elusive proof positive. And pretty much the same applies to still photographs.

One series of snapshots featuring a classic Daylight Disc, was shot over a mountain range on the border of Austria and Germany in 1970. The narrator informs us that whilst on holiday in the region, Rudi Nagora and his wife had a strange encounter amidst the snow-capped peaks; *'I heard a strange whistling tone that was coming from nearby,'* says Nagora. *'I thought somebody was playing with their radio in a car. It wasn't the case. Then I could hear that the sound was coming from above. I looked up, and in the sky I suddenly saw a round, moving object. It certainly didn't move like an aeroplane. A plane doesn't suddenly stop and stay still. It wasn't a helicopter either, because you would have been able to see the movement of the rotor blades. There were none.'*

*'It stood still in the air and made a humming noise. It wasn't in one spot all the time. It would suddenly be behind me. I had to keep turning around. But in the end I managed to take 12 pictures.'*

Rudi's photographs were subsequently submitted for analysis by 'expert's' in both Germany and the US. No evidence of a well-engineered hoax was ever uncovered.

We head next to Mexico, scene of the biggest UFO flap of recent times, though just lately, sceptics are increasingly casting doubt as to the veracity of at least some of the

reports and accompanying video footage coming out of that country...

Raul Dominguez, a Mexican landowner and businessman, is interviewed about his very own Close Encounter Of The Second Kind. His decidedly dodgy-looking UFO photographs (the 'craft' bears all the hallmarks of a hat with a band of lights stuck on to the rim of it) are presented as 'proof' of his testimony. What he actually has to say however, is a tad more convincing than the series of hastily-snapped polaroids;

*'It was a machine 25 metres in diameter. The lower half revolved. I didn't notice any noise until it was very close to me. I heard it when it was 10 or 12 metres above my head. And I heard a sound like bees buzzing. I felt my hair bristling, and my clothes moved as well as my hair. Immediately afterwards, these marks appeared on my face and hands. I was ill with stomach pains and bad indigestion, for a long time. The whole thing affected me very much. Both physically and psychologically. It has changed me. I'm certain now that UFOs exist.'*

Scratching our heads in puzzlement, we are whisked along, courtesy of a sequence of 'DR WHO'-type graphics, to Arecibo in Puerto Rico. Time for another chat with Seth Shostack, the sceptical astronomer who works for SETI.

He voices his belief that he really does believe that alien intelligence exists somewhere out there in the vast cosmos, but that he does not accept that they have visited our planet at this as yet. His reasoning behind this is centered upon the great distances involved in any potential interstellar space travel.

The continuing Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence has so far yielded absolutely nothing in the way of hard evidence, but that doesn't dampen the enthusiasm of those who watch the screens for traces of an alien radio signal, any. Seth gives his reasons for believing that the venture, no matter how costly and time consuming, remains worthwhile; *'Primarily, it's just the largeness of the cosmos. There are a half trillion stars in our galaxy. There are fifty billion other galaxies, each with a half trillion stars. That's a lot of real estate. And it would be bizarre in the extreme to think that this is the only bit of real estate where anything interesting is happening.'*

Reports of UFOs in outer space are next up on the agenda...

Starting with another of the guests we were introduced to earlier, Farouk Baz, now based in Boston University, but who for six unforgettable years, was a member of the team that sent man to the Moon via the legendary Apollo missions.

Archive footage of the programmes, including shots of a youthful-looking Baz, based at Mission Control, are shown, with a view to relating an incident involving astronaut Ken Mattingley, whilst he was flying over the surface of the Moon aboard the Lunar Orbiter.

During the Apollo 16 Mission, mysterious flashes of light were apparently witnessed by the astronaut on the dark side of the Moon. The 'experts' back on Earth, assumed that the cause was undoubtedly a meteor smashing into the surface of that lifeless chunk of space rock. Fortunately for them, they had seismic instruments already in place at the Apollo landing site, and they therefore hoped that the highly sensitive equipment would detect the impact of any further flash-inducing meteorite....

On his second orbit, Mattingley reported not one, but two flashes. The monitors on the Moon failed to pick up any trace of a meteor impact, however, and the source of the anomalous flashes remains a mystery to this day.

A video clip of an equally enigmatic shadow racing across the lunar surface is screened, quickly followed by another of those damned flashes emanating from the lip of a crater as an apparent UFO flies overhead.

The head of physics at Nebraska University, Dr Jack Kasher, then gives his opinion on an even more disquieting image (not made any less forbidding by the cheap electronic sound effect that accompanies the clip - It wouldn't have sounded out of place on one of those Italian horror movies that were (mostly) banned during the mass censorship clampdown of the early 1980's).

He believes the object, which appears to change shape, is extraterrestrial in origin.

Kasher's scientific credentials, as it seems, impeccable, and he comes across as being a fairly level-headed individual. However, that doesn't mean that some of his more exotic theories are any more tenable than those of the most gullible Ufologist.

He studies the now famous film shot by the crew of the Space Shuttle on Mission SDS48. The footage, which Kasher contends, shows a UFO leisurely crossing the screen, only to be forced, following yet another of those annoying flashes, into rapid evasive action when a missile is launched from Earth, is certainly intriguing, and it doesn't require too great a leap of the imagination to see pretty much the same thing.

Story Musgrave, however, who you'll also remember from before (or at least you will if you've been paying due attention), contends that the film shows nothing more than ice particles that were being blown around in space by the shuttle's altitude adjuster rockets.

Kasher believes otherwise; *'I have concluded that these are probably spacecraft, out in space, away from the shuttle. I think they're spacecraft because they change direction, apparently in response to the flashes. And so, they're manoeuvring, accelerating, changing direction out in space, and that's my definition of spacecraft.'*

'The experts' are equally adamant though, in their contention that we're dealing with nothing more exciting than sun-reflected snowflakes. Despite the fact that they can't explain how it is that one snowflake (the one that seems intent upon avoiding the streaking missile from the Earth's surface) manages to perform a 90 degree turn!!!

Dr Kasher goes on to state that it is his opinion that *'NASA would keep quiet about anything that would tend to have an extraterrestrial interpretation. I think that it's like the rest of the branches of the Government, I think that there's a cover-up, and that they are keeping things concerning UFOs, from us.'*

As if to add weight to his words, we next see footage taken from another shuttle launch. It depicts a weird-shaped, glowing object set against a jet black background.

On another occasion, on Mission STS 73, a female astronaut is heard to announce loud and clear that she has just sighted a UFO, to Mission Control. Their response, if any, is not recorded.

One of the most puzzling conversations humming down the wires from space, concerns Mission STS 82, to service the Hubble Telescope. Astronauts Steve Smith and Mark Lee, were reportedly re-entering the air-lock of the shuttle, when they seem to announce that they have sighted a series of strange flashes.

*'What was that flash?'*

*'What Mark?'*

*'I saw a light flash past me just here. Did you see it?'*

*'I thought it must have been me.'*

*'What?'*

*'I just thought it was my imagination.'*

*'Yeah... I saw it too, so it's not.'*

*'There was two of them.'*

*'There's another one.'*

*'What are they?'*

*'I thought I saw the lights flickering in here.'*

*'Who'd be taking pictures?'*

*'What is this?'*

*'It's just gone past in front of us.'*

*'Where are the lights?'*

*'Which ones?'*

*'I lost surveillance for a second, but I had velleance the whole time.'*

*'Yeah, I had that one too.'*

*'Gone up.'*

Fascinating stuff, you might think, but wait just a minute, here comes one of the astronauts concerned, Mr Steve Smith, to attempt to explain what that mysterious conversation was all about;

*'Well, Mark and I were in the airlock at this point, (when mention of the lights is first made), and whilst we were in there, all of a sudden, we saw a couple of lights flashing in the airlock. When we were first asked about this conversation, a couple of months later, we had forgotten about this... (A recording of the conversation is then played back to Steve)... 'Anyway, I said "is that a light flashing?" (to Mark), 'and Mark says "What are they?" asking, you know, is there a light coming from you to the airlock? And then Mark asks; "are they taking pictures of us through the airlock window?" They would have a flash. We take about 10,000 pictures on each flight, so...'*

*'All I can think of is that it's pretty hard to turn in this thing, (the airlock chamber) 'cos you're like in a closet... And we couldn't tell what light it was, and I think Mark probably had turned at a certain point, and said "Oh, there's the one in front of me" or something.... And here, just for a second, the cocksure Mr Smith pauses, a look of puzzlement clouding his features, as the words 'Surveillance' and 'Velleance' are intoned on the recording. 'I don't know what that is... I've never heard the word "Velleance" or "Surveillance" used...'* One assumes, unless his command of the English language is somewhat less than rudimentary, he means in that particular context. The mystery is given added impetus by the programme's narrator, who helpfully points out, that whatever the true origin of those lights, NASA appears to have cut the conversation off in mid-flow, for reasons unknown.

We then come to consider the Gremlin-addled Mir Space Station, for a Russian perspective on the Near-Earth-Orbit UFO phenomenon.

Musa Manarov, a Russian Cosmonaut, is interviewed concerning a piece of video footage he obtained during a docking mission with Mir. Yet another seemingly anomalous object, cylindrically-shaped on this occasion, cavorts across the screen, whilst Musa relates his account of what he saw. *'At some point in our routine filming, I caught sight of something that seemed to have seperated from the ship. Moreover, it was rotating as it moved away, and changing its brightness. I can't say exactly how far away it was. I can only say it was not very close, because the camera was focused on infinity.'*

*'At first it seemed to me that something had seperated from the ship. But then, when I examined the ship, I realised that there was nothing that could have broken away. What's more, there were no alarms going off. Everything was calm. Later, there were lengthy arguments as to what it could possibly have been.'*

Another Cosmonaut, Gennadi Strekalov, is then asked for his account regarding a sighting of a most unusual UFO whilst on board the Mir Space Station; *'I saw a huge sphere. I think it appeared when we were over Newfoundland. It was shining, sparkling, of an absolutely even shape. It shone, like the balls that hang on trees at Christmas. Greenish in colour, and all shimmering. It was impossible to take your eyes off it. I watched it for maybe five or seven seconds. But I didn't have a camera, and if I'd gone to get one, I would have lost it. For just as suddenly as it appeared, so it just disappeared.'*

# Nostradamus:

*(Screened As Part Of The Discovery Channel's 'Unexplained Night' 26th May, 1999)*

This timely programme opens, (ahem) predictably enough, with scenes of impending apocalypse and the horrors of yesteryear: Grainy film of a nuclear bomb detonating in a mushroom cloud in the midst of some American desert. Firemen fighting the flames as London burns at the height of the German Blitz. Panzer Divisions sweeping across Europe. Hitler ranting and raving with chilling charisma at a Nazi Party rally.

We then switch to a pastoral scene wherein a young Nostradamus swigs at a flask of water beneath bare, winter-naked trees. The narrator informs us that Nostradamus was born Michel De Notredame in the town of St Remy de Provence, on Thursday, December 14th, 1503.

He was the son of French-Jewish parents, who had converted to Christianity. His maternal grandfather, Jean St Remy, became a huge influence on Michel, exercising a considerable sway with his interests in astronomy and mathematics. He personally oversaw his grandson's education. He taught Michel, amongst other things, how to gather and prepare herbs for use in medicine, potions, and ointments. One event, which it is said influenced the young man's life forever, was the introduction to the astrolae, a globe-like device used for predicting the alignment of the planets in relation to the practice of astrology.



During the 16th Century, there really was no obvious dividing line between the disciplines of astrology and astronomy. Time passes. And we see a considerably older Nostradamus, now bearded and wearing a scholarly cap and gown. In the pursuit of greater knowledge, he sets off for the University of Avignon.

Actors in costume barter for goods (including, bizarrely enough, a less-than appetising selection of dead rats) at the city market. Michel was said to have excelled at the University, and remained insistent, during his time there, that the Earth was round. This was remarkable, not least because he fostered this belief about a hundred years before Galileo established this as scientific fact.

Michel qualified easily in medicine, and this proves to be extremely propitious, because no sooner had he left the

University, than a plague had erupted in the town. Michel, very quickly has his work cut out for himself.

Barely discernible through a thick cloud of smoke, we see him striding purposefully towards a group of plague victims, intent upon offering them the benefit of his medical expertise. He helped to save many lives, and soon, news of his remarkable potions, concocted from his own formulae, spread like the er...plague. And so his reputation rapidly grew.

As the epidemic eventually subsided, Michel returned to the University to further his studies. Unfortunately, he was unable to reconcile himself with the marked differences between the day-to-day ritual of what passed for accepted scientific knowledge and his own beliefs.

He decided, almost on a whim, to take to the road as a travelling physician.

For the best part of two years, he journeyed between Laungedoc and Provence ministering to the sick, whilst poring over various occult works in his spare time.

In 1533, Michel met up with the woman who was later to become his first wife, and he ceased his wanderings for a while. Tragedy dealt him a savage blow however. He was to lose both his wife and the two children she bore him, ironically enough, to the plague. In the wake of this disaster, he once more took to the open road.

At this point, we are introduced, for the first time, to a Dr Les Prince, of the University Of Birmingham, something of a Nostradamus 'expert.' Decked out in authentic-looking 16th Century regalia, and illuminated by a single candle for added effect, he has this to say about Nostradamus's early life;

*'There are one or two things we can say with reasonable certainty. For example, we know that he studied both medicine and philosophy.*

*'Secondly, we know that he had remarkable skills as a physician. These are well celebrated in his journeys around the countryside trying to attend to victims of the plague. We also know that he invented his own medicines, that he had quite an interest in things like perfumery and so on. All these things he was notable for.*

*'On the other hand, there are several aspects of his early life, particularly his youth, which remain obscure. And the commentators disagree on significant details of this period. For example, some commentators claim that both his grandfathers were notable physicians and astrologers, whereas others claim a much humbler origin for him. One claiming that paternal grandfather was in fact a grain-dealer.*

*'So, I think it's fair to say that the early life of Nostradamus is shrouded in considerable mystery. But that only contributes to his reputation.'*

We then travel back in time once more, to witness Michel riding a mule, along a muddy track that winds its way through a wood. He dismounts when confronted by the sight of a group of robed friars walking towards him. He suddenly kneels before one of the monks, a former swineherd, who turns to his companions with an expression of disbelief on his face.

'Your Holiness, Your Holiness,' Michel repeats over and over to the bemused friar.

Amazingly however, this lowly individual was to become, ten years down the line, Pope Sixtus V.

Nostradamus's gift for prediction had apparently begun make itself apparent.

The plague, seemingly a constant companion to Michel during his youth, visits its curse upon Marseilles during 1544, and in Aix-en-Provence, just two years later. Nostradamus once more plunges himself into working amongst the afflicted. An outbreak of whooping cough in Lyon, resulted in him employing some truly visionary hygienic practices, and this won him undying gratitude

from the inhabitants of that city. He was rewarded by the city fathers who granted him a life pension.

In 1547, Nostradamus married for the second time in the town of Salon. His new bride was a wealthy widow, and, as we see him stood beneath the Tree Of Passing Years once more, we learn that whilst he continued to work as a physician, he was now financially well-off enough to be able to study more arcane subjects.

Now, white-bearded, and appearing almost wizard-like appearance, Michel begins compiling his series of almanacs, and eventually, the *quatrains* for which he was to become famous.

We see him seated in his study in the dead of night, nodding and smiling to himself as he pens the recipe for a potion he'd once prescribed for a bishop.

Two, pretty gorgeous-looking ladies recite the potion with a goodly dose of amusement.

*'This potion, restores youth to a man and banishes melancholia and timidity and replaces them with boldness and gladness.'*

*'If a man's beard is turning grey, it retards that ageing process. It also prevents headaches and constipation. And multiplies his sperm to such an extent that a man may enjoy martial pleasures as frequently as he desires, without impairing his health.'*

We then see an actor playing the part of the classical scholar Jean Aime de Chavigny. He became a student of Nostradamus. In his published work; *'THE LIFE OF NOSTRADAMUS,'* de Chavigny describes the man he deeply admired;

*'He was of little less than middle height. Robust, cheerful and vigorous. His brow was high and open. The nose straight. The grey eyes gentle. Though, in wrath, they would flame. A severe and laughing face, so that one saw, allied with the severity, a great humanity. His cheeks were ruddy, even into extreme age. His beard was long and thick. His health was good. And all his senses alert.'*

*'As for his mind, it grasped and understood easily all he wished.'*

We return to visit the grey-bearded Michel, seated once more at his candle-lit table, poring over a rare book he had acquired on his travels; *'De Mysteries Egyptorum.'* This work inspired him to dabble in occult matters.

He began to experience the first of his now infamous visions, and set about, over a four-year period, recording these predictions of things yet to be. The inaugural part of this work was to become known as *'THE CENTURIES,'* and was published on May 4th, 1555. The author took on the Latinised version of his surname. The moniker by which he was to become world-renowned; Nostradamus.

The extraordinary reaction to the publication of this tome is described once more by de Chavigny, as his enraptured pupil looks on;

*'Foreseeing the signal mutations and changes that should come throughout Europe. And even the bloody civil wars and pernicious troubles of this kingdom of France, which inexorably drew near, full of enthusiasm, and as it were, wrapped in a new madness, he set to write his Centuries.'*

*'He kept them a long time, without wishing to publish them, believing that their controversial nature would undoubtedly attract derisive criticism and abusive attack. As indeed happened.'*

*'In the end, swayed by the desire he had to be useful to the public, he published them. And immediately, they became the talk of France, and of the rest of Western Europe.'*

Nostradamus's prophecies eventually made up a total of ten separate works. Each of these volumes contained a hundred separate *Quatrains*; four-lined verses.

These verses were deliberately obscured, given that Michel lived in a time when religious persecution was still very

much to the fore. He utilised a mixture of clever puns couched in different languages, and the events he listed were never placed in chronological order.

In the Preface to the book, dedicated to his son, Cesar, Nostradamus explains in fuller terms, the reasons behind this obscuring of the text;

*'Regarding these prophecies, I had thought to withhold my tongue from the vulgar and my pen from the paper. Then, later on, I thought I would for the common good, describe the most important of the revolutionary changes that I foresee. So as not to upset my present readers, I would do this in a cloudy manner with abstruse and twisted sentences rather than plainly prophetic.'*

He used a combination of mathematics, astrological tables and even alchemy to assist his visionary prowess.

Les Prince reappears to give his opinion on the methods employed by the prophet;

*'Astrology seems to have been the main instrument. However, there are stories about him in his youth which seem to suggest that he had a form of second-sight. There are two main ones that are often quoted...'*

*The first refers to the former swineherd who became Pope Sixtus V. Pope Sixtus was not installed until years after Nostradamus had died, and nobody at the time ever suspected that this swineherd was a possible candidate for the Papacy.'*

*'The second one, refers to two pigs; a black pig and a white pig. The story goes that Michel was staying with a host and the host, to test Nostradamus, asked him "Which of the pigs will we eat tonight?"'*

*'Nostradamus replied; "You will eat the black one because the white one will be eaten by a wolf."*

*The host, in order to prevent this taking place, slaughtered the white pig so that it would be served up for dinner. But, a wolf cub came and ate the carcass before it was possible to serve it up. So the prediction came true.'*

Les is not sure whether we should take these stories at face value, or whether we should simply take them with the proverbial pinch of salt as being nothing more than apocryphal tales - the 16th Century equivalent of urban folklore.

Over a curious image of a coral snake slithering slowly across an hour glass, we are informed that Nostradamus's most important method in seeking to predict the future was Divination. In the first two *Quatrains* of *'CENTURY I,'* he writes; *'Sitting alone at night, secret study, its placed on a brass tripod. A slight flame comes out of the emptiness. Makes successful that which should not be believed in vain. A wand in the hand is placed between the tripod's legs. Water he sprinkles at the hems of the garment and his foot. A voice. Fear. He trembles in his robes. Divine splendor. The God sits nearby.'*

This description of his method is typical in its ambiguity. Most commentators believe however, that it is likely that Nostadamus would have most often simply gazed into a bowl of clear water, thereby achieving the requisite trance-like state. He would then murmur ancient spells and incantations, conjuring up spirits real or imagined, who would dutifully dictate the resultant prophecies.

The vast majority of the predictions do not make for light, cheery reading; Consider, if you will, the following 91st *Quatrain* of *'CENTURY II'*

*'A great fire will be seen as the sun rises,  
Noise and light extending far northward,  
Death and cries are heard within the globe  
Death by iron, Fire, Famine awaiting them'*

A nightmare vision of nuclear catastrophe? Or a prophecy of doom wrought by a rogue asteroid or comet?

Whatever the interpretation placed upon any of the *Quatrains*, the verse that finally made Nostradamus famous concerns the then King of France.

Queen Catherine De Medici summoned Michel to the French court to explain the contents of a *Quatrain* that seemed to predict the death of her husband; Henri II.

*'The young lion will vanquish the elder one, in single combat on the battlefield; he will pierce the eyes in their golden cage, two wounds in one, thence to meet a cruel death'*

Amazingly enough, the King was killed in a joust, in a manner unnervingly similar to that predicted by Nostradamus; the lance pierced the visor of his helmet.

An even more stunning, as far as its perceived accuracy is concerned, vision was contained within the following *Quatrain*;

*'An Emperor will be born in Italy, who will cost the empire very dearly*

*They will say when they see his allies, that he has less a prince than a butcher.'*

Amidst cine footage from some Napoleonic epic, we learn that it is believed, by various commentators, Nostradamus very often referred to Bonaparte throughout his *Centuries*. Napoleon is said to be only the first of the three Antichrists who would rise to plague humanity.

He is also said to have predicted 'Boney's' downfall in the wake of his disastrous Russian campaign, and the final defeat at Waterloo, as well as the English Civil War, the rise of Oliver Cromwell, and the execution of Charles I.

Les Prince then puts in another appearance;

*'Some of the Quatrains, as they've been interpreted, seem to predict events such as the Great Fire Of London and some events in the English Civil War.*

*'Certain of the commentators, what we might term 'fans' of Nostradamus, claim that he predicted the twin atom bombs dropped on Nagasaki and Hiroshima, and there is always the persistent claim that he predicted aerial warfare and submarines.*

*'However, hostile critics have pointed out that Nostradamus appears to have missed two of the greatest events of the 20th century; namely the First World War and the Second World War. There is some controversy about the Second World War, but certainly, as far as I'm aware, no commentators have managed to identify any of the Quatrains that refer to the First World War.*

*'Now, bearing in mind that a lot of the prophecies made by Nostradamus related to his native country, France, and taking into account the fact that France suffered previously in the First World War, it seems a strange omission.'*

Undeterred, the narrator ploughs on with reference to the man whom it is claimed Nostradamus revealed the identity of the second Antichrist in *Quatrain 24 of Century II*;

*'Beasts wild with hunger will cross the woods  
The greater part of the battlefield will be against Hister  
He will drag the leader in an iron cage  
When the child, Germany, observes no law'*

The conclusion that Nostradamus was actually referring not to Hister, but to Hitler, is kind of hard to ignore, despite the fact that sceptics have pointed out that the prophet was likely making mention of the River Hister, not a person.

Hitler was, it seems, aware of the predictions of Nostradamus, and he readily made use of the relevant *Quatrains* in Nazi propaganda.

But modern-day commentators, and not a few of the 'End-Is Nigh' brigade are more concerned with that which Nostradamus forecasts for the end of the Millennium...

In *Quatrain 46 Century II*, he makes explicit reference to what awaits us as the Year 2000 approaches;

*'After great misery for mankind, an even greater approaches  
When the great cycle of the centuries is renewed  
It will rain blood, milk, famine, war and disease  
In the sky will be seen a fire, dragging a great trail of sparks.'*

The fire in the sky has been interpreted as being a reference to either Halley's Comet, or else some other heavenly body we so far have no warning of.

Nostradamus makes constant mention of 'The Terror From The Skies' throughout his prophecies.

In a genuinely chilling sequence, we see the now terribly old looking man, tossing and turning in his sleep, as that slithering coral snake writhes across his bare feet. A clock chimes mournfully. Visions of bright burning flames lighten the all-pervading darkness. In sonorous tones, the prophet narrates the less-than cheery contents of *Quatrain 72 Century 10*;

*'In the year 1999, and seven months, there will come from the skies, a great King Of Terror  
He will bring back to life the great King Of The Mongols  
Before and after, war reigns happily'*

He suddenly jolts bolt upright in his bed as a piercing scream echoes on the soundtrack

'My God' he murmurs, and a shiver of fear runs up and down this reviewer's spine like a monkey on a ladder....

And what are we to make of this unusually precise (insomuch as he actually refers to a specific date) prediction. The imminent arrival of the third, as yet unnamed Antichrist? The rise to power of some Asian warlord? An alien invasion?

The ever-reliable Les Prince has his own ideas;

*'Nostradamus is best known nowadays for his Apocalyptic visions at the end of the Millennium. And great play is made of the fact that he mentions the year 1999, a great conflict, the coming of the third Antichrist, and so on.*

*'Now, it's true to say that 1999 is one of the few years that Nostradamus actually does mention in one of his Quatrains. But I think we need to put this into a bit of a broader context.*

*The are two main themes that we need to take into account here; The first is that it is well-known that at the end of centuries people start to have apocalyptic visions. It happened at the end of the 18th Century. It happened at the end of the 19th Century. Now the end of the 20th Century of course, is also the turn of the Millennium.*

*'So it's hardly surprising that people in general would start to have apocalyptic worries. It's the kind of thing that historically, recurs everytime the calendar changes in such a significant way*

*'But it's also worth bearing in mind that to the Medieval mind, Nostradamus was still essentially, a Medieval scholar.*

*'The end of the second Millennium; the Year 2000, was thought to herald the end of the world. Now, this goes back to calculations on when the world was founded, supposedly, according to various archbishops, it was founded in 4,000 BC.*

*'The same beliefs dictate that the world would last for 6,000 years, bringing us to the end of the Millennium.*

*'So we've got two features here.*

*'First of all we've got the natural anxiety about significant changes in the calendar, which always recur. And secondly, this Medieval view that the end of the world would occur in 1999, or the Year 2000.*

*'Now it's an open question as to whether Nostradamus was actually seeing tragedy at the end of the Second Millennium.*

*'Or whether in fact he was simply repeating a Medieval view of when the world would end.'*

Whatever the truth of the matter, despite his almost exclusively depressing predictions for the Year 2000 and beyond, Nostradamus does foresee a time, during the next century when things will improve dramatically for the whole of mankind.

He even implies the second coming of Christ and an almost permanent state of peace and goodwill.

And contrary to what some doom-mongers would have us believe, Nostradamus does not predict that the world will end with the dawning of the new Millennium. The specific date he gives us for that apocalyptic event is 3797.

So we've a little ways to go yet it seems.

Oh, and here comes our old friend Les Prince once more;

*'Strictly speaking, there are two quite separate issues with regard to Nostradamus: The first question is whether Nostradamus really could see into the future. I think that remains an open question.*

*'I don't believe that we will ever be able to settle whether he could or whether he couldn't.*

*'The second regards the interpretation of his Quatrains. Now his Quatrains were obscure in the extreme. He used a great deal of symbolism, and they were wide open to interpretation.*

*'Now, the historical "Hits" that he is known for, notably those referring to the French Revolution and Napoleon, are only remarkable historical "Hits" in retrospect.*

*'People have reinterpreted the Quatrains to fit the events that they experience. You can see this if you compare different interpretations of the Quatrains prepared by different people, you will find that they lay different emphasis upon different symbols and so on.*

*'So we're really in the hands of the interpreters here.*

*'Let me give you an example; if I were to say now,*

*"In tranquility, a small step for man,  
a giant leap for mankind.  
A footstep will stay forever.  
The eagle has landed"*

*'Most people nowadays would know precisely what I was talking about. I'm talking about the first landing on the Moon.*

*'But if I'd issued that statement in 1962, it wouldn't make any sense at all, and it would only be after the event that anybody could understand what I was saying. And I think we're in precisely that situation with regards to Nostradamus's predictions.*

*'I think many of them make sense with hindsight, and some of them have to be twisted, that has to be admitted, and there are indeed remarkable historical "Hits" - But again, it is the interpretation of the Quatrains that is significant here.*

*'Let me give you another example;*

*'A great play is often made on the three Quatrains mentioning the name Hister. Now, fans of Nostradamus interpret those Quatrains as referring to Adolf Hitler, to the Axis, and to events that occurred during the Second World War.*

*'However, Robert Graves, who has also looked at the same Quatrains, points out that Hister is a Latin name for the River Danube. And he interprets those same Quatrains in terms of the life of Charles V.*

*'So in essence what we've got are three Quatrains that can be interpreted both in terms of the 20th Century and in terms of the 16th Century. And I think that is the nub of the problem with Nostradamus.*

*'So if we ask the question: "Did Nostradamus predict the future?" the answer I would give is "Yes, with considerable hindsight."*

We next see the great prophet descending the steps of some impressive-looking building, a palace perhaps, to the accompaniment of the raucous cries of a rook.

We are told that by the early 1560's, Nostradamus had become physician in ordinary and counsellor to the King of France.

On July 1st, 1566, with his health beginning to fall, he takes to his bed. We see him instructing an enraptured Jean Alme de Chavigny.

He then sends for a priest to hear his confession prior to administering the Last Rites.

He tells de Chavigny that he would never again see the sun rise over the rim of the world...He dies later that same night.

You might not be too surprised to hear that one of Nostradamus's own verses appears to describe the exact manner of his death.

*'On returning from an embassy, the King's gifts safely stored  
No more will I about for I have gone to God  
By my close relations, friends, brothers, I shall be found  
dead near my bed and the bench'*

He lies back on four-poster bed atop the covers, fully clothed, waiting to die and thereby fulfil this most personal of prophecies.

He was later buried in Provence, in the walls of the Church of Cordellies. His headstone was engraved with the following epitaph;

**'HERE LIE THE BONES OF THE ILLUSTRIOUS  
MICHEL NOSTRADAMUS. THE ONLY ONE, IN  
JUDGEMENT OF ALL MORTALS, WORTHY TO  
WRITE IN THE PEN MOST DIVINE UNDER THE  
INFLUENCE OF THE STARS, OF EVENTS TO  
COME IN THE WHOLE WORLD  
POSTERITY DISTURB NOT HIS REPOSE'**

Onscreen, a clock stops ticking, the sand in the hourglass runs out, and the darkness descends like a velvet shroud.... The narrator winds up by making reference to the Greeks, who once believed that prophets, like poets, were men that had been struck by madness.

But it was considered a particular form of madness and a special gift from Heaven.

Amongst the greatest of blessings upon men.

Nostradamus combined this insane divination of the future with the sane foresight of his practical studies in the arts and sciences.

What more, may yet be revealed.

The programme concludes with scenes from Nostradamus's eventful life; swigging on that flagon of water as a young man.

Crossing himself as he stoops over the disease-ravaged corpse of a plague victim.

Dismounting from his horse and falling to his knees as the swineherd-eventually-to-become-Pope approaches on a tree-lined road.

Standing on the steps of a fairy-tale palace, his white beard blowing in the wind.

Lying in his bed, caught in the fevered grip of the 1999-dominated Quatrain - the nightmare that warns of the coming of 'The Great King Of Terror.'

Seated at the desk in his study, quill in hand, parchment awaiting the birth of another prediction.

The bright orange glare of some once and future conflagration...

And I find myself muttering a silent prayer that, as far as his predictions for the Millennium are concerned, Nostradamus has got it all hopelessly wrong...

**Reviewed by Lee Walker**

# Victorian Gothic

## Obeah Documents In The Empire And Commonwealth Museum



Nestling underneath the Exploratory, Bristol's hands-on science centre, in the appropriately gothic splendour of Temple Meads Old Station, is The Empire And Commonwealth Museum. Billed as the city's first such institution devoted to the history of the British Empire and its gradual evolution into the present day Commonwealth, with galleries, displays and school study areas devoted to showing successive post-imperial generations just how arguably the greatest Empire of all time managed to spread itself from one corner of the globe to the other.

The Gothic splendour of the building provides a curiously apt environment for the artefacts of an Empire which saw its height during the Victorian period, the very age during which Brunel constructed it as part of his legendary Great Western Railway.

It's a curious contrast; a monument to imperial expansion below, scientific enlightenment above, all contained in the architecture of The Age Of Faith, though the 19th Century gentlemen who designed it would have seen no conflict between these three elements, convinced as they were, of the justice of Britain's mission to spread her civilisation throughout the globe, founded upon the firm bedrock of scientific and technological enterprise and Christian morals.

The interior of the building is no less baroque. A series of early 20th Century oil paintings hang on the walls detailing Bristol's part in Britain's imperial adventure, from prehistoric British contacts with Carthaginian traders onwards.

Even the bannisters on the staircase are turreted, like some castle rampart. At the time of writing the museum is closed to the public, except for appointment, waiting for the Exploratory to move to new premises down by Bristol Docks, so it can expand into its space.

In the meantime, its staff pad through its carpeted rooms collating and cataloguing its numerous acquisitions, from the taped memories of former imperial colonists, administrators and engineers, to the huge Benin bronzes and African sculptures lying in store. Part of this was the vast archive of material in an extensive library of books on the imperial nations, and a complete set of Foreign Office records from the 1800's to 1950, resplendent in their officious red boxes. Looking through them, you half hope to see a small piece of paper fall out, betraying some hidden secret embarrassing to the government and guarantee extensive media coverage and book sales, a scrawled note suggesting the assassination of Nasser, or some other Middle Eastern opponent, perhaps. Sadly, or fortunately, no such thing has happened. Small bits of paper do fall out, but these are mostly debris from the decaying papers within, many of which have suffered extensively at the sweaty hands of generations of civil servants. The odd scrawled note has fallen out too but these have so far proven to be chits simply confirming that anything really sensitive has long since been removed, and that the documents involved are all deemed suitable for the low minds of the British public.

Anyone seeking to become a Peter Wright or a Shayler, using them is going to be desperately disappointed, though there's more than enough material for an A.J.P. Taylor.

Most of the records in them are actually quite dry; economic reports from the far corners of the Empire, lists of exports and imports, customs duties, lists of expenses, officials and their salaries, legal documents establishing local judicial infrastructures, sometimes even naturalists' reports on the flora and fauna of the new territories; the humdrum housekeeping of the grand imperial global family, worthy, but nothing to set the blood racing.

Here and there, though, there are other records, mentioning events and persons of interest even to the *recherche* tastes of the readers of this humble magazine (*Cheers for that glowing testimonial, Roy -Ed*). Such episodes are contained, for example, in the extensive records on colonial slavery.

These begin when successive British and colonial legislatures tried to ameliorate the conditions of slaves from the end of the 18th Century to the teens of the Twentieth, when Edwardian administrations continued the Victorian mission to police the globe against the 'abominable traffic.'

The records include naval officers' and governors' reports, the depositions of men active in its suppression, and legal and judicial records from the judges and magistrates entrusted with enforcing the laws, many of whom acted with considerable honour in suppressing the trade and infractions of the rights of the slaves themselves in the face of massive opposition from local colonists. Sometimes such hostility forced them to return to England, after bouts of personal violence and intimidation. Here and there the voices of the slaves themselves can be heard, in petitions to the local magistrates, in court cases heard by the above legal gentlemen, or the Caribbean Fiscals in their capacity as Protectors Of Slaves. These were special officials charged with enforcing the various acts protecting slaves from ill treatment. Their powers were extensive. They could fine or imprison slave owners who broke those laws, sometimes even forcibly removing a particular persecuted slave from their ownership. On the other hand, if they found the slaves' complaints unfounded, then the severity of the law, including flogging, could descend upon them. Usually, the complaints were those to be expected from

slavery; overwork, insufficient food, clothing and rest, with occasional accusations of theft between master and slave, or a slave and a free man of colour.

The chilling catalogue of floggings, killings and mutilation provides stark testimony to the harshness of plantation life, the brutality of which still throws a long shadow over relations between Black and White today.

From our point of view, the most interesting of these legal cases are those involving Obeah, the dark side of Vaudaun. The term Obeah is derived from the Ashanti words for Witch; obayifo, and Witchcraft itself; Obayl. Other terms for its sorcerers include confoe man, presumably derived from the Ashanti okomfo, which was precisely the priestly form of that tribe's religion, quite apart from the Dark Arts of the sorcerers in the bush. As the memories of Africa receded, however, both became confused in the minds of the slaves and their masters, who saw them as the same manifestation of benighted black superstition.

Recently, anthropologists studying the religion and its devotees have stressed the positive aspects of Voodoo in an attempt to counter the negative image retailed by a thousand horror movies and stories to establish it as a respectable religion. Part of this has been the emphasis on the name Vaudaun, a closer variant of the religion's name to its origin in *Vodun*, the Dahomean word for God or Spirit, as a way of avoiding the prejudices invoked by the term Voodoo.

That said, the West Indians I know have insisted on correcting me when I used Vaudaun instead of Voodoo. They knew it as the latter. As for Obeah, any mention of that was greeted with the earnest advice to avoid its Dark Side.

One man told me of a friend of his who'd become involved in the sinister aspect of the religion. His weight had shrunk from a formidable 23 stone to an emaciated seven. In Jamaica, Obeah is still forbidden by law, though folk charms and healing are quite legal. In Africa, the obayifo is a terrifying Witch or Vampire that sucks the blood of children, enters animals in order to destroy people and brings bad luck, sickness and death. The sorcerer using a fetish to achieve these ends is an obi okomfo.

Although many, in some districts, three quarters of all Jamaicans have consulted an Obeah man, a Christian Jamaican told a friend of mine at a religious conference about the real fear in which these people are still held. Such a fear is manifest in the records of the Protectors of Slaves. Not a few cases involve requests by the slaves on a plantation to have a certain member of their community removed, because they were afraid that he was an Obeah man.

The suspicion of Witchcraft could descend upon someone seen coming naked from seen coming naked, caked in mud, out of secluded creek at an unhallowed time, for no apparent, legitimate reason, for example. To some members of the pagan community, the persecution of Witches is a vicious product of Christian monotheism tolerating no other gods, used by ruthless ruling cliques to suppress the more caring folk beliefs of their social inferiors. Other, pagan, religions give appropriate respect to the magic user. There's something in this. In Jamaica, the laws against Obeah of the 1840's 1850's and before were no doubt rooted in the desire of the White Christian ruling classes to root out treasonous beliefs amongst their slaves. Voodoo priests and Obeah men were leading elements in slave uprisings. On the other hand, native African religions will also persecute Witches with a zeal that would have gratified Matthew Hopkins.

The Zulus have their Witch smellers, who scent out alleged Witches. In one instant they brought about the mass killing of 200 suspects.

The Dowayo of Cameroon, took their Witches to be hanged by the blacksmith in his forge. In the cases

recorded by the local magistratures, the Obeah men themselves could be responsible for murder. Such was the case of Willem, alias Quamina, alias Cuffee, and several plantation slave drivers, in Berbice in the 1820's, for the death of an old woman during an Obeah ceremony.

The immediate cause for the disturbance were the sudden, seemingly inexplicable deaths of several slaves on the plantation. Although modern forensic medicine would no doubt have found reasonable explanations for the deaths, through disease, overwork or simply poor health in atrocious living conditions, these causes were anything but obvious to the other slaves.

Suspecting Witchcraft, they called in the Obeah Man, Willem, from another plantation to root out the culprit. Like many of the victims of his Christian counterparts during the Middle Ages, the alleged source of the preternatural infection denounced by Willem was a woman, old, but still in good working health. Over two nights, this poor soul was beaten and flogged with branches during the Mousik/Misik/Mackecze Minje or Water Mama dance, led by Willem himself, and organised by several of the slave drivers.

To ensure the complicity of the other slaves, Willem told them that the ceremony had been arranged with the permission of the slave master, though forbade anyone to mention it to the Whites, including the plantation managers. Nobody noticed, or dared remark on the contradiction. The first day the woman was flogged, and had pepper rubbed into her genitals. The following day she appeared in some pain, but was well enough to work, although she was strongly advised by others who were unaware of what was going on to seek medical help.

The next night, she was hung by the wrists from a mangrove tree and beaten again. A fire was lit, and she was dragged towards it while the other slaves beat her. During the flogging she told her persecutors that they were killing her, but the Obeah Man told her that she was under his magical protection and so would not die, adding that he would beat the story out of her.

Possibly he thought that he was beating some sort of possessing spirit out of her, as do so many other Exorcists across all cultures and religions, including Christianity and Islam.

The result was the exactly the same too; she died.

After being dragged part way to the fire, they stopped flogging her and she was left on her own. When the slaves rose for work the next morning, they found her where they'd left her. She had died during the night. Later on during the day a party was organised by one of the drivers which quietly took the body away and threw it, weighted, into a creek. In time woman's absence was noticed, inquiries and an arrest by the local burgher constable was then made, and a full scale enquiry ordered. The result of this was that the colony's main court sat at the plantation due to the sheer number of witnesses needed to be called from among the slaves.

Their testimony was scrupulously collected and recorded, and the proceedings duly noted.

The punishment was swift and severe.

Willem and the slave who had helped him organise the dance, an act of treason in itself as it was strongly proscribed by colonial law, were condemned to hanging. Willem was hanged from the very same tree upon which the woman herself had been suspended. After the execution, he was beheaded, and the head was displayed on a pole as a dire warning to others, while his body was buried beneath the mangrove tree.

As to the other slave drivers who had been chief in organising the dance, and who urged the other slaves to beat the woman, they were each condemned to 150 lashes, stripped of their privileged position as drivers, and given heavy labour in chains for the next three years.

This, however, did not deter further outbreaks of Obeah on the island. Far from it in fact.

The next case was brought to the Protector of Slaves by a plantation manager and his chief carpenter against one Hans, a slave from another plantation who had organised another Water Mama Dance. The reason for the ceremony was the same as the above tragedy. There had been more unexplained deaths, for which Witchcraft was suspected. The Obeah Man, Hans, was called in to seek out the Witch. He had organised the dance which ended with the open accusation that the estate's chief carpenter was the direct cause.

This resulted in his garden and house being torn up by the other slaves as they looked for his magical bundle which the Obeah Man had assured them the carpenter had buried in order to work his Dark Arts. The carpenter, himself a slave, wasn't impressed either with the accusation or the destruction of his garden. He grabbed hold of the woman accusing him under the influences of the Obeah Man and took her off to see 'massa,' who took a similar low view of the proceedings and brought the case before the Fiscals.

The witnesses' testimony in court provides valuable eyewitness accounts of the Water Mama ceremony as performed in the early part of the 19th Century. During the dance, the slaves fell down in trances or convulsions, to be brought back to their senses by a suitable beating with rods. When they did not recover after the first stroke, the beating became harder and applied with other, crueller instruments.

Hans demanded a girl for the ceremony, who after being carried to, and lying down with him, was to act as an oracle who would reveal the identity of the Witch.

Two girls had to be fetched.

The first became too upset by the proceedings to be of any use to the sorcerer, so a second had to be found and brought forward. She testified to seeing the Obeah Man take several drinks out of a horn she had not seen before, a swig being taken each time an incantation was uttered. The girl, Venus, then had her face washed by Hans, her eyes being ritually washed clear so she could see the identity of the Witch. She picked out the carpenter as the source of the supernatural pollution. The trial mentions a pot of bones, herbs and other artefacts which was supposed to be the poison the carpenter had buried on the estate in order to destroy the slaves.

The records seem to imply that this pot was to be planted on the carpenter's property to provide spurious proof of his guilt. For some undisclosed reason this was not done, and when the girl did not discover the pot, she exclaimed that her eyes obviously hadn't been washed properly, and that she needed to go back to Hans to have this done. She protested that she hadn't meant to accuse the carpenter, but another slave called London. This cut no ice with him, who against presumably great pressure for him to join the girl's denunciation of London, declared that she hadn't accused London, she had accused him, and dragged her off to face the consequences of the slave's actions.

During the trial she confessed to remembering having been at the carpenter's house, but not knowing what she had done, or how she came to do it, as she had never attended such a ceremony before.

The court records debate the question of hysteria being involved.

This is quite likely.

The behaviour of the other slaves during the dance suggests the spirit possession which forms an integral part of Voodoo and similar African cults, including pocomania.

One explanation for that could be alternative states of consciousness, during which the devotees act out the behaviour expected of them when ridden by one of the loa, behaviour which would have been familiar to them through oral traditions handed down about the *vodun* and the

ceremonies. The social pressures brought to bear to attain these states in the ceremonies can be immense.

There is a story, recounted by one of the popular books on Witchcraft, of an American anthropologist blacking out during a Voodoo ritual she was analysing, only to be told when she had come to that she had acted under the influences of one of the loa.

On the other hand, the woman had been an important part of a severely proscribed rite for which she faced severe penalties unless she could find some way of excusing herself from such activities. Disavowing any conscious control over the ceremony naturally provided a suitable, and considering the number of witnesses to her presence, indeed, only excuse possible. The penalties against the slaves involved, especially the Obeah Man himself, Hans, were indeed harsh, though possibly not lethal.

As with the other trial for Obeah mentioned, the proceedings were scrupulously minuted and the testimony from the witnesses itemised. Equally importantly, they were published at the time as a public document, so that interested parties in the political nation could examine them and make suitable judgements on the justice, or not, of British policies.

These documents are important, not just for the light they cast on 19th Century British justice but as first hand accounts of African folk rites and the attitudes towards them from the colonial authorities and other Blacks. Thanks to the Black diaspora, Vaudaun and similar cults are becoming global religions with considerable influence through Black music like Blues and Rock, the most obvious example being Jimi Hendrix's Voodoo Chile, though no doubt readers of this magazine could think of a thousand others.

A careful examination of the Foreign Office documents therefore illumines not just the 19th Century, but our own, in casting much needed light on Obeah rituals as they developed and evolved.

It's hard to imagine contemporary Rock journalists getting down and boogying with the gradgrinds of the 19th Century civil service, but both are commentators in their way of the continuing power and influence of the African folk beliefs.

Let us hope that further generations of researchers continue to avail themselves of these documents in their effort to understand such a multifaceted phenomenon.

*Roy Kerridge London 1999*

## *Witchcraft In The*

## *World Today*

## *Covens In The US Army*

According to reports from the not-so-good-ol' US of A, for the last two years, a coven of soldiers has been quietly observing moonlit rituals at a base where American forces have been in training for peacekeeping duties.

These individuals claim to be disciples of the ancient pagan religion of Wicca, and are led by High Priestess Marcy Palmer, a military policewoman and former Soldier Of The Year. The sacred rites are carried out in a grassy clearing with full military approval.

Apparently encouraged by this permissive attitude towards minority groups, Wiccan cults have also been established at a number of other bases, five at the last count.

So far, the coven at Fort Hood, Texas, has conducted its activities quite openly, and strangely enough, has attracted little outside attention. However, now that its existence has been made public courtesy of newspaper articles and pictures of the Witches dancing around an open fire as

part of their Spring rite, the men bare-chested, the women in long, flowing robes, Christian groups and the more conservative elements of the government, have been predictably appalled by this presumed 'satanic infiltration' into the armed forces.

Local churches were quick to begin circulating selected passages of Scripture as part of a package entitled (in an attempting-to-be-positively-outraged-in-a-true 'FATHER TED'-styleee) 'WITCHCRAFT IS WICKED.' At the time of going to pitch they were also planning on organising protest marches to the base, doubtless carrying banners with similar sentiments to the one outlined above ie; 'DOWN WITH THIS SORT OF THING!' and 'CAREFUL NOW!'

Typical of this attitude of religious intolerance, is congressman Bob Barr, a right-wing Republican who hails from Georgia. This fine upstanding fellow expressed his disgust with the goings-on by penning a letter to the base commander, the contents of which included the lines; 'Stop this nonsense now. What next, armoured divisions travelling with sacrificial animals? Will Rastafarians demand marijuana cigarettes in their rations?'

Meanwhile, the Army, keen to be seen to be doing something to stem the tide of controversy has appointed its own chaplain act as a spiritual liaison with the 'Wicked Wiccans.'

And Lieutenant Colonel Ben Santos, the Fort Hood spokesman has issued a statement claiming that the Witches will send a powerful message about religious tolerance if they should be deployed in war-torn Kosovo.

They would, he said, demonstrate that people 'with different religious beliefs are all working together successfully.'

Speaking on behalf of the Wiccans themselves, (who hold classes at the base twice a week), their High Priestess was eager to point out that 'We see more discrimination in the civilian world. The military is now actually much more sensitive. Our time has finally come.'

There were however, a series of compromises that had to be ironed out prior to the army giving them a green light to practise their rites. The Wiccans agreed not to perform their rituals naked and to be discreet in wearing their signature penatagrams whilst in uniform. The army did however allow the use of the Athame (the Wiccan's ceremonial dagger).

The only real problem within the army, it seems, is that there is a direct conflict between being a soldier and the Wiccan belief in pacifism. David Oringsderff, who spent 30 years in the army and founded the civilian Wicca congregation with which the troops are affiliated, stated that Wiccans in combat may well be forced to kill but would do so 'with no malice in our hearts and no pleasure in the act.'

An attitude that, one would like to think, should apply to all soldiers, no matter what their creed or religious persuasion...

15th June, 1999 Fort Hood, Texas, USA 'DAILY EXPRESS'

## Earthquakes From Hell

Police in Istanbul ,Turkey, arrested two men after they readily confessed to killing a 21-year-old woman as a sacrifice to the Devil, in an ultimately doomed bid to stop the series of earthquakes that have recently rocked the south-west of the country.

They informed the astonished officers that they murdered Sehiban Coskunfrat because a third accomplice had claimed that the Devil had demanded a sacrifice.

The stabbed and half-buried body of Coskunfrat was found in a cemetery during the month of August.

21st September, 1999 Istanbul, Turkey 'THE TIMES'

## Victims Of Sex Crimes - Possessed By The Devil?

The Reverend Martin Brett, a modern-day Exorcist, has made the controversial, not to say bizarre claim that sex abuse victims may well be possessed by the Devil, and as a result he feels duty-bound to 'deliver the Demon from inside them.'



The Pentecostal minister, who hails from Dubstable in Bedfordshire, has hit upon the somewhat offensive notion that these victims will themselves become perverts unless they seek out his aid.

One abuse victim, an unnamed mother who lives near the vicar's home, in Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire, was livid at such suggestions; 'What he says is disgusting. It's a Victorian attitude that makes the victim feel they are to blame.'

The Reverend Brett responded by saying; 'We are not popular, but Jesus wasn't either.'

12th September, 1999 Milton Keynes, Bucks 'NEWS OF THE WORLD.'

## And Speaking Of Possession...

The man who attacked President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt with a knife was apparently possessed by the Devil, at least according to a neighbour, but had no known links to Islamic militants.

Said Hassan Suleiman was alleged to have borne a grudge against the government for failing to provide him with a new flat.

The public prosecutor's office described him as mentally unsound with a police record of assaults.

Suleiman, 40, a father of two, was shot dead by the presidential bodyguard after he'd hurled himself at Mr Mubarak in Port Said.

The religious fanatic had told the owner of a restaurant near the place where he sold clothes that he intended to 'die a martyr.'

His interpretation of Islam was so strict that he used to hang out the washing himself, rather than allow his wife to be seen by any strange man.

8th September, 1999 Port Said, Egypt 'DAILY TELEGRAPH'

## 'Who Put Ella In The Witch Elm?'

So asks a set of two-foot high letters on an 18th Century obelisk - a reference to the corpse of a woman located in the hollow of a tree near a Witches' Coven meeting place back in 1943.

The unfortunate woman whose hand had been amputated, was never formally identified. It may be though that locals have stumbled upon a secret witness who appears to have written the eerie phrase which was also discovered at the time of the murder.

*'Everyone here is talking about it - the older people feel spooked,'* retired reporter Harry Tromans, who covered the case at the time. *'It could well be someone who knows what happened.'*

The discovery of the woman's skeleton at Hagley, Worcestershire, sparked a major police investigation.

She was nicknamed Bella after the poisonous belladonna plant used as an ingredient for various spells in Witchcraft. Her murder bore all the hallmarks of a Black Magic execution.

But then a local paper received a somewhat curious letter from a witness who claimed the woman had been killed after accidentally discovering a German spy ring. The witness, if truly she is such, signed herself Anna - but never came forward.

Now West Mercia Police have re-opened the file. A spokesman was quoted as saying; *'The case has actually never been closed - we want to find out who is behind the graffiti.'*

15th August, 1999 Hagley, Worcestershire 'NEWS OF THE WORLD'

## Black Magic Conman Held By Police

An Athens city planning official, who claimed he could free people from evil spells, was arrested after having taken £2,000 from a policewoman posing as a distressed as a client.

Michalis Spyropoulos, 49, was charged with fraud after selling a religious icon and home-made 'magic box' containing dead bats to the undercover policewoman.

9th August, 1999 Athens, Greece. 'LIVERPOOLECHO'

## THE DEVIL'S MASS: A Truly Cursed Film?

Reputed to be Hollywood's closet brush with the 'real life' forces of Evil, *'THE DEVIL'S MASS,'* a little-seen horror movie, has been catapulted back into the news once more in the wake of the huge success of the 'true life' documentary *'THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT.'*

Joel Wengers, the film's scriptwriter, remains adamant that, despite accusations that he has merely tried to pump up the hype in a bid to attract publicity, events occurred precisely as he describes them.

*'People always assume that I am a bullshitter, or some acid casualty,'* he recently told a movie journalist from *'SFX MAGAZINE.'* *'I mean, I rarely go to parties these days - it's a different industry now - but if I do, I've learned not to*

*talk about the past. You talk about this too much and it just becomes a fucking circus, you know? I've got too much respect for people's memories.*

*'I told NBC to piss off a few months ago. Someone's even optioned this whole thing for a movie, for Christ's sake. Go figure. Too many assholes in this business.'*



Nick Setchfield, the journalist in question was speaking to Joel, who currently resides in Santa Monica, via telephone, and described his demeanour as being genial if a little on the edgy side.

It's almost as if, even 24 years on (*'THE DEVIL'S MASS'* was released in 1975) the memories of that which he experienced whilst working on the film, are still vivid enough to cause him to be plainly disturbed when engaged in conversation about them.

*'Ten years ago I told this story to everyone. It was therapy. Now I talk about the future, you know?'*

In late 1974, Wengers scripted the first draft of a film project tentatively entitled 'Black Sunday.' The plot centered upon a young drug addict named Julia, who was to be rescued from a life on the street by a sisterhood of nuns. The Mother Superior however, turns out to be anything but holy, and instead she attempts to lead her new recruit into the service of the Devil.

Briefly renamed 'Sister Angel Dust,' before adopting and retaining the title; *'THE DEVIL'S MASS,'* was eventually bought by Paladin Pictures, a company noted for its output of what can only be termed; exploitation films.

The actor Cole Shaw was cast as a veteran cop obsessed with reclaiming Julia's all-but-lost-soul, whilst Nancy Linklater was the victim of the piece, corrupted by The First Church Of Immaculate Darkness.

Filming eventually got under way in New England in the early Autumn of 1975.

Wengers is quick to point out that almost from the start, the production seemed to be beset with problems.

'Our main location was a house in Vermont. It was built during the time of the Civil War and there was a feeling there. We all knew it. I guess it was just a sense of something really wrong. It grew very cold in there. We had to haul electric fires in, wire them up to the generator. One day we came in and found dead insects all over our rig. A hundred fucking dead insects.'

Worse was soon to follow.



Footage from the location revealed a host of irregularities, spotted immediately by cinematographer Al Turturro.

'Al saw the dailies and freaked. There were shadows everywhere. Shapes over faces. Al showed me several individual frames that were just totally screwed. We changed the cameras, we changed the lab, but the rushes were ruined every time. The soundtrack too was marred by unaccountable drone of insect noise.'

Not long after these disturbing events, the first of the real tragedies occurred.

On 11th October, 1975, Al Turturro was blinded in what can only be described as a freak accident. An arc light suddenly exploded in his eyes, robbing him of his sight, and finishing his promising career as a cinematographer. He died penniless four years later in 1979.

Herve Gessner and Todd Linson, two young riggers on the production, were fatally injured when their station wagon collided with a tree on their way to a night shoot.

And then, on November 4th, the film's star, Nancy Linlater was horrifically burned alive while shooting the climatic fire sacrifice scene.

'We lost Nancy, Wengers recalls sadly, unwilling to revisit that particularly painful memory any time soon. 'The unions came in and closed us down.'

Despite the understandable protests of the movie's director Lloyd Hagan, the studio insisted that the film be released in a desperate bid to recoup at least some of their investment. A print was hastily assembled from whatever scraps of footage could be found and finally released as part of the Midnight Theatre and drive-in circuit in the spring of 1976.

'I last saw a copy of it in a video store in Detroit,' Wengers angrily told Mr Setchfield. 'I hear that all those dumbfucks on the Internet have made it some kind of cult.'

'It's not. Leave it alone. There was a presence on that set, I guess you could call it Evil - whatever, I don't dwell on it. I just keep working. And I keep moving.'

October 1999 Vermont, USA 'SFXMAGAZINE'

## 'Witch' Killed In Kenya

Last September, hundreds of Kenyan villagers were whipped up into a howling mob reminiscent of the ubiquitous baying vigilantes hot on the trail of the Frankenstein Monster, the Invisible Man, or the Wolfman in those classic old Universal horror movies.

And the reason? They were intent upon marching upon a police station after a five people were arrested for burning to death a suspected Witch...

They weren't angry because they wanted to personally lynch those responsible, however. Rather they wanted only to free them as they claimed the entire village had taken part in what they saw as a wholly legitimate execution of an evil Witch.

3rd September, 1999 Kenya, Africa 'THE DAILY TELEGRAPH'

## 'The Legacy Of 'THE EXORCIST': Danish Advert Banned

A Danish Bacon advert which parodies the classic horror movie 'THE EXORCIST' (soon to be released on sell-thru video - About bleedin' time), has been banned from UK TV screens....At least before the 9pm watershed.

Complaints were apparently received from a record 107 oh-so-sensitive members of the public regarding the advert. The 'offending' commercial features a Linda Blair look-alike in the throes of Demonic possession whose head is turned, quite literally, by the tempting aroma of cooking bacon.

August, 1999 General 'TOTAL FILM MAGAZINE'

\*\*\* Mother-of-seven Maria Nascimento elected to burn her £50,000 winning lottery ticket after she had consulted with her church minister in Brazil.

He told her that she would most assuredly go straight to Hell if she took 'The Devil's Money.'

15th August, 1999 Brazil 'SUNDAY PEOPLE'

\*\*\* And seven checkout girls at the Asda store in Wrexham, Wales, have fallen pregnant within an 11-month period....The strange thing about this case is that they were all working on till 13!!!

10th October, 1999 Wrexham, Wales 'DAILY SLUR'

## Religious Phenomena

Hundreds of Muslims were descending upon a house in Bradford, Yorkshire, simply to view a tomato which is said to contain a message from Allah Himself.

Shabana Hussain, 27, chopped into the tomato and read the 'words' 'There is no God but Allah' inscribed in Arabic in the veins of the fruit.

Mrs Hussain was quoted as saying; 'I was shocked. The message is very clear to everyone.'

10th September, 1999 Bradford, Yorkshire 'DAILY TELEGRAPH'

## "The Turin Shroud Is Genuine" Claim Scientists

The Turin Shroud, that most enigmatic of alleged holy relics, did originate in The Holy Land, according to two Israeli scientists.

'Experts' have been at each others throats for it seems like forever regarding the authenticity of the Shroud, but the scientists who hail from Jerusalem, now claim that they can prove its geographical origins.

They state that plant and pollen imprints show that it could only come from the Middle East. The Pope called last year for more tests to be carried out on the linen.

16th June, 1999 Jerusalem 'DAILY EXPRESS'

## A Cabinet Of Curiosities

### Stephen King In Synchronistic Car Crash

The biggest-selling horror author of all time, suffered as a result of a serious accident involving a minivan, the details of which might have come direct from the pages of one his consistently excellent novels.



In late June, this year, he was walking along Route 5 in his home county of Maine, at 4:30pm, on June 22nd, not far from the safety of his house, when the Dodge Caravan hit him, breaking the windscreen and hurling the 51-year-old author 14 feet into a roadside depression.

Stephen, who suffered multiple fractures, (from which, thankfully, he was able to make a full recovery), to his right leg, a broken hip, a broken pelvis, and a punctured lung. There was also the less-than-trivial matter of a scalp injury to contend with, yet he remained sufficiently conscious to give the police emergency numbers. He remained alert throughout, according to medical sources.

He was hospitalised for nearly a month, and had to undergo surgery on three occasions.

In one particularly gruelling operation, his badly shattered right leg had to have an external metal framework built around it to allow the bone to heal.

King's surgeon, David Brown, compared it to 'straightening a sock full of marbles.'

No charges were brought against the 41-year-old driver of the vehicle who was not believed to have been speeding and says he was distracted by a dog in his car.

Fans of the author, (and you can include Your's Truly, in that category) have been quick to point out the curious parallels that seem to mirror the plotlines of certain works of his fiction. Most notable amongst these are the accident itself (and you can choose for yourself between 'MISERY' or 'THE DEAD ZONE'), the minivan ('TRUCKS' or 'CHRISTINE') and the dog ('CUJO').

Thankfully, however, there do not appear to have been any Shape-Shifting Clowns, Smalltown-Wrecking Vampires, Reverend Werewolves, or Electricity-Obsessed Aliens involved in the incident.

At least I don't *think* any of the were.

11th July, 1999 Bangor, Maine, USA 'THE TIMES'

## The Hanover Horse-Ripper

In a sickening case from Hanover, Germany, equestrian clubs north of the city have been forced to organise a neighbourhood watch scheme, which eventually involved placing a 24-hour guard in the fields after a total of 18 horses were killed and 38 mutilated in a series of bizarre attacks.

The so-called 'Horse-Ripper' attacks up to four horses in a single night, stabbing them in the abdomen and inflicting wounds up to a foot long. Police were claiming at the time that the killer 'has perverse sadistic tendencies' and were setting about investigating similar cases in other parts of Germany to see if the killer, assuming he's the same individual, has recently moved to the Hanover area.

24th September, 1999 Hanover, Germany 'THE GUARDIAN'

## Struck By Bolts From The Blue

A bolt of lightning blew a hole through the roof of a couple's house and sent a chimney crashing on to their patio as they watched, coincidentally enopugh, a weather report on the TV.

Kenneth Flatman, 71, and his wife Murell, 68, saw 'an enormous red ball of fire' hanging suspended in the sky mere moments before it hit their home in Four Oaks, West Midlands.

8th August, 1999 Sutton Coldfield, West Midlands 'THE TIMES'

\*\*\* Not so lucky were two young women who died after the tree under which they were sheltering from a storm in Hude Park, London, was struck by a lethal bolt of lightning.

The bodies of the women, both thought to be of Middle Eastern origin, were fully-clothed and lying prostrate on the grass.

They were discovered by an Army officer exercising his horse in near the Serpentine Road, just north of the rose garden entrance to the park. It is thought that they had died at about tea time the previous day, but that they lay unnoticed by passers-by who failed to spot them.

Police attended at the scene, but were soon satisfied that the tree under which they lay had been struck by lightning.

A post mortem examination confirmed this as the cause of death. The couple were thought to have taken shelter when the lightning struck and threw them away from the trunk. They may even have been holding hands.

Lightning seeks the highest point to strike, so the Royal Society For The Prevention Of Accidents were compelled to impart the following advice to anyone caught out in the open during an electrical storm: Apparently you should crouch at a low point in the ground with your feet together and your rear end higher than your head. Lying down, however, can be dangerous because when lightning strikes the ground it can travel on the surface.

My guess is, if it truly wants to get you, it eventually will.

24th September, 1999 Hyde Park, London 'THE DAILY TELEGRAPH'

\*\*\* A couple of aerial strike of a decidedly-icy-kind struck different parts of England, last September.

Firstly, hailstones the size of golf balls fell on parts of London, during a brief but intense thunderstorm, according to the Meteorological Office.

A number of windows were broken and car alarms were activated as the storm passed over Surbiton, Kingston and Wimbledon.

Phillip Clarke, 31, of Sutton, said leaves on the trees were shredded by the force of the hail.

*'It was an incredible storm, he told reporters. 'It lasted for about half an hour and then afterwards the ground was a carpet of white.'*

6th September, 1999 London, England *'THE TIMES'*

\*\*\* And then, just a few days later, teacher Susan Townsend had a lucky escape when a 6lb block of ice came crashing through the roof of her school shed - a mere five-feet from where she was stood.

The ice, oh, surprise, surprise, is believed by the 'experts' to have fallen from an aircraft's wing, and never mind if there were no planes supposed to be flying overhead at the time.

12th September, 1999 Barlestone Primary School, Leicestershire *'DAILYMAIL'*

## Earthquake Strikes South-West Wales

An earthquake measuring 3.3 on the Richter Scale shook thousands of homes across Wales, during the first day of September.

The epicentre was in south-west Angelsey, but the tremor, which shook doors and rattled crockery, was felt 40 miles away in Barmouth, (interestingly enough, not far from the scene of the accounts of the Egryn Lights at the height of the Mary Jones-inspired Welsh Religious Revival in 1904) on the southern coast of Gwynedd.

Police received several worried calls, but there were no reports of any significant damage. One woman reported hearing a noise like a car crash.

A spokesman at the Seismology Unit at the British Geological Survey, Edinburgh, was quoted as saying; *'The area is criss-crossed by faults. It was a significant earthquake.'*

2nd September, 1999 Wales *'LIVERPOOLDAILYPOST'*

## Keep Watching The Skies II INVADERS FROM MARS

According to Phillipa Uwins, a British geologist who has been busy carrying out tests on the rocks taken from deep below the floor of the Indian Ocean, Martian bacteria may have infected certain members of the human race.

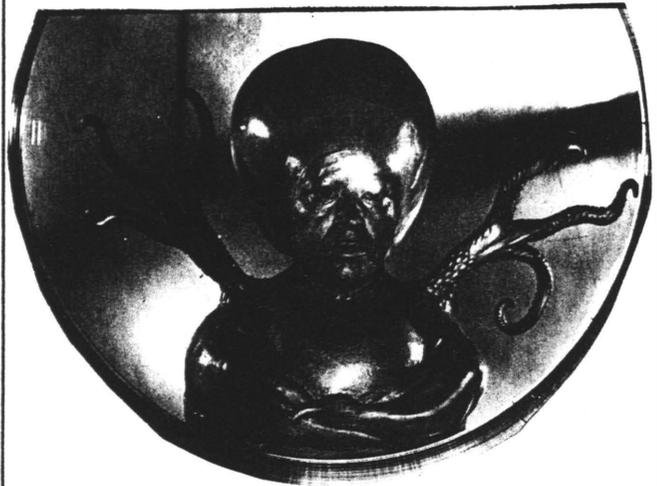
Ms Uwins has been studying the link between organisms from the surface of Mars and the chemical properties of kidney stones and other illnesses. It is thought that bacteria may have hitched a lift to Earth by riding in the mineral coating of Martian meteorites, including the one that made headline news back in 1996: ALH 84001.

The Space Agency NASA, announced at the time that microscopic nanofossils had been found within the meteorite.

In March, this year, Phillipa, working in Australia, announced that she had found strange, tubular structures within the aforementioned rocks from below the ocean floor.

Dubbed 'nanobes,' these structures, Dr Uwins claims, are minute bacteria, smaller than any lifeforms known to science.

Pointing to the similarity between the NASA Martian 'fossils' and Uwin's 'nanobes,' Olavi Kajander, at the University of Kuopio in Finland, stated that the nanobes - effectively an alien form of life - could have arrived here from Mars on meteorites, protected in mineral coatings which would shield them from the heat and radiation of interplanetary space.



He also claims these nanobes could be responsible for a whole host of common illnesses, particularly those caused by calcified deposits, such as kidney stones.

*'These organisms have many extraordinary features. They can endure many hard conditions. All the evidence points to the fact they come from somewhere else - maybe Mars,'* Dr Kajander told reporters.

*'They are very prevalent in kidney stones. Over 90 per cent of the kidney stones that we see contain them. I am very convinced that if we went looking for these things on Mars, we would find them, if we dug deep enough.'*

He went on to say that nanobes are capable of building castles of a mineral called apatite around them, which is the trigger seed for kidney stones - rather like a grain of sand producing a pearl in an oyster.

Initially most geologists were highly sceptical of Dr Uwin's findings, claiming that nanobes were no more than mineral grains or other inorganic structures. But she now claims that her nanobes contain DNA and can replicate.

Her team is currently carrying out further analysis to establish whether these creatures are part of Earth's tree of life, or whether they really came from somewhere else.

August, 1999 Australia *'DAILYEXPRESS'*

\*\*\* And speaking, as we just were, of the possibility of life on Mars, Professor Mike Russell, believes that evidence that there some form of primitive microbe once (and maybe still does), existed is quite literally, staring us in the face.

Huge deposits of a white mineral visible near the planet's equator were almost certainly made by trillions of Martian microbes.

Dr Russell, from Glasgow University, states that a 'white rock,' measuring 12x10 miles is near the rim of a crater which may once have held a lake.

The bacteria would have been thriving four billion years ago.

*'You see a pattern that can only be explained by living growth,'* said the professor.

18th August, 1999 Glasgow University *'DAILYEXPRESS'*

\*\*\* And finally, the last word, for now at least, on the eternal enigma of our neighbouring Red Planet, consider if you will the mystery of the Mars Probe spacecraft that went missing, presumed lost, during September.

The craft was supposed to make the first interplanetary weather reports, but NASA scientists lost contact with the

Mars Climate Orbiter just as it was about to go into orbit.

It was launched from Earth in December last year, and it joins a growing list of spacecraft that have experienced problems whilst surveying the Martian surface.

September, 1999 General 'THE DAILY MANC'

## 'Aliens' Sighted In The 'Falkirk Triangle'

A anonymous woman claims to have encountered a whole group of alien beings at, of all places, Falkirk Town Hall.

She told reporters that she was walking with her mother uphill towards the town centre when; *'We both noticed a group of about six or eight youngish persons on the other side of the road.'*

*'It was quite hot and I thought it was unusual that they all had their hoods up.'*

*'The leader's jacket was red, while the rest of the group wore grey tops that seemed new and out of place.'*

*'They walked in unison with an unusual rocking motion, as if being on four legs was natural rather than two, like a four-legged animal might walk on its hind legs.'*

*'Their backs were absolutely different from humans, as if the top halves of their bodies folded in advance of their legs.'*

The woman, known only as Mrs X, also claims that the leader had an awareness that was lacking in the other members of the group.

About 5ft 8in tall, he tried to conceal his face with a loose scarf. But the woman was astonished when she caught a glimpse of his face; *'The whites of his eyes were brown, the pupils being a different shade of brown.'*

*'I felt his thoughts entering my mind, telling me that I'd seen nothing.'*

Unfortunately, the woman's mother had a slightly different perspective to that of her daughter and as a result did not see their faces. The now infamous Billy Buchanan, the local councillor who has readily professed a belief in UFOs, was quoted as saying; *'I can understand this woman's fear of ridicule.'*

*'There have been lots of sightings of alien craft but this is the first of an alien being.'*

2nd September, 1999 Falkirk, Scotland 'THE DAILY RECORD'

## LOST IN SPACE

Whatever the veracity of the above story, real alien lifeforms may well be hurtling around the Galaxy on dark, nomadic planets that have been expelled from their solar systems.

*'It is conceivable that these are the most common sites of life in the Universe,'* says David Stevenson, a planetary scientist at the California Institute of Technology in Pasadena. Some astronomers believe that when a new solar system forms, the gravity of giant planets can catapult Earth-sized embryonic planets out of the system. These planets could have radioactive elements providing heat at their cores, and possibly hydrogen-rich atmospheres. Stevenson realised that they would prevent a planet's internal heat from radiating away quickly. *'The surfaces of the body do not cool down,'* he says.

Stevenson has now calculated that the temperature at the surface of a nomadic planet with a hydrogen-rich atmosphere would typically be a comfortable 300 kelvin. At this temperature, the planet could host liquid oceans.

*'If life can develop and be sustained without sunlight, maybe this is an environment where you can imagine life emerging,'* Stevenson says.

Although there would be no daylight on a nomadic planet, there could be energy from volcanoes and lightning.

Stevenson further suggests that astronomers might be able to pick up signs of nomadic planets if they pass in front of distant stars and dim the starlight. But he concedes that it would be difficult to detect the planets themselves, much less the signs of life.

He simply hopes his work will encourage scientists to keep an open mind about possible habitats for alien life. *'It's just an idea that has merit because it gets people thinking,'* he says.

*'It's one of those papers that seriously gets the brain working,'* agrees David Hughes, an astronomer at the University of Sheffield. However, he doubts that a huge amount of material is ejected from solar systems during their formation, and points out that a nomadic planet would gradually be cooling down.

*'I'm not convinced that this is going to be conducive to extraterrestrial life.'*

August, 1999 General 'NEWSCIENTIST'

## The Darker Side Of The Moon

A Moon mystery to rival anything the Planet Mars can conjure up was said to be baffling astronomers examining images of the lunar surface sent back by the US spacecraft Clementine.

Photographs beamed back to Earth appear to show that a small area of the Moon has darkened and reddened... And no one seems to know why.

At least at the time of going to press, anyway.



On April 23rd, 1994, about 100 amateur astronomers claimed to have seen a darkening of the Moon lasting for approximately 40 minutes near the edge of the bright lunar crater Aristarchus.

Bonnie Buratti, of NASA, has now taken a closer look at the Clementine data to look for any sign of the event reported by the amateur Moon-watchers.

He found that the crater did indeed appear to be redder than prior to the initial reports.

Of course, those who believe that the Moon is in reality, an alien base, or even that the satellite itself is artificial in origin, will have a field day with this news.

21st October, 1999 General 'LIVERPOOLECHO'

# STOP PRESS!!!

## 'Alien Baby' Found On The London Underground

One of the best examples of a Cosmic Joke, so far this year, occurred just as we were (finally) going to press..

A rubber toy called an 'Alien Egg,' was found on a station platform and rushed to hospital in the mistaken belief that it was a real human foetus.

London Underground's Buckhurst Hill station in Essex was closed after the novelty was stumbled upon by a station cleaner.

These toys, (one of which Your humble Editor would very much like to acquire this Christmas, sad I know - the eternal child in me, strikes again, I'm afraid), are about 4 inches long and are covered in a suitably slimy jelly substance. The actual figures, which are sold in an egg-shaped pod, are curled up in a disconcertingly foetal position. But even so, I'm sure there's a very embarrassed station cleaner who has been keeping his head down of late.

If it's any consolation to him though, he doesn't appear to have been the only one to be fooled by the object. A spokesman for the London Ambulance Service was quoted as saying that the Metropolitan Police, who were concerned that there could have been a suspicious death, had alerted paramedics.

*'No one was taking any chances,' he said. 'It's easy to judge in retrospect but everyone was very worried about what might have happened.'*

*'We took the item to hospital so that a doctor could have a proper look. He declared it to be an Allen toy (of indeterminate sex, one assumes).'*

Another spokesman, this one representing the British Transport Police, told reporters; *'If it can leave trained paramedics with room for doubt then it's going to have to be fairly lifelike.'*

The Allens are made by H. Grossman of Glasgow, and only cost £1.99 (a cheap Christmas present, hint, hint-Ed) and are tipped to be one of the most popular toys on sale this Yuletide.

Seven million have already been sold and 3-5 million are expected to be bought by Christmas.

Mr Grossman, the firm's managing director, refuted the claims that the Aliens were very realistic; *'I don't know how on earth a neon green or metallic grey alien with massive ears, three fingers and its legs stuck together can look like a human baby. They come in lots of variations but never flesh colour.'*

4th November, 1999 Buckhurst Hill Station, London  
*'THE DAILY TELEGRAPH'*

## The Mystery Of The Little Black Dots

The enigmatic appearance of hundreds of tiny black dots, attaching themselves to cars, pavements and even buildings, has perhaps been explained, to the 'experts' satisfaction anyway...

Resembling pinpoint specks of tar, the dots are believed to be spores from a fungus that grows in wood mulch, according to a report from Rutgers University in the USA. These selfsame 'experts' are of the opinion that they are not poisonous, nor in any way dangerous, but not for nothing is *Sphaerobolus stellatus* known as artillery, shotgun or cannon fungus.

It takes its aim at strong light-sources, such as sun-reflecting glass and light-coloured structures as well as cars. With its target in sight, it shoots its black sticky spores into the air at high speed, like a cannon. What the spores hit, they stay attached to.

*'Efforts to remove them from buildings or other surfaces are often futile,' the Rutgers Report maintains. 'Severe scrubbing often only removes paint or damages the finishes of the car.'*

The fungus, which thrives in damp, sunny areas, has been known to science for at least half a century. But it has garnered much more attention in the past five years, at least in the United States.

Donald Davis, a professor of plant pathology at Pennsylvania State University, was quoted as saying; *'In a way it is an epidemic because it used to be a mild curiosity. Now it seems to be everywhere. This is a national problem.'*  
2nd November, 1999 Pennsylvania, USA *'THE SUNDAY RECORD'*

## Saucer Flap Blamed On Meteorite Storm

Drikus Weideman, a marketer for a market company in South Africa, was driving home from Johannesburg to Suikerbosrand at 1:55 am when, in his own words; *'I saw what I first thought was an aircraft with incredibly strong landing lights. I pulled the car over to the side of the road, switched off the engine and climbed out to watch it. There was a very white light streaming backwards and in it were a string of smaller lights. I thought maybe it was a military aircraft with smaller craft flying in formation.'*

*'They were travelling diagonally, heading northeast, and moving incredibly fast, in a straight line.'*

He also claimed that he later made a call to Johannesburg International Airport, and that a spokesman there revealed that two aircraft had also spotted the lights.

*'One plane, which was headed towards Bloemfontein, was travelling at 31,000 feet, and the pilot said that it seemed that the lights were even higher up. They also had a call from Heidelberg.'*

However, an air traffic controller was quick to dismiss the reports as being nothing other than sightings of a meteorite shower. Strangely though, the SA observatory at Sutherland in the Northern Cape failed to sight the phenomenon, the reason given was that the skies there were overcast.

Confirmation that something unusual, at least, was traversing the heavens that night came from a couple in Schweizer-Reneke, in North West. The man and his wife were loading bread into a van when they both saw an object coming in low.

*'At first we thought it was a burning aircraft, but as it came closer we saw that it was a fireball, with a piece as big as a house in front and several smaller pieces the size of cars were following in its orange trail,' the male witness told reporters. 'It was travelling very fast and low in the direction of Warmbaths. It was very beautiful.'*

24th October, 1999 South Africa *'THE SOUTH AFRICAN SUNDAY TIMES'*

## Erratum Corner:

The Editor wishes to apologise for erroneously crediting Roy Kerridge with having penned the Obeah Magic article in this issue. Sincere apologies to the true author, but I've gone and lost the original document. If they'd care to get in touch, rest assured I'll give them full credit in the next issue, due out er...Soon, I hope. Lee Walker