



DEAD OF NIGHT MAGAZINE



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The Dark Cry Of The Moon

The Werewolf In Fact, Fiction And Folklore



**PLUS: The Day The Aliens Invaded Huyton ,
The Monster Of Lake Seljord, Encounters With Angels,
The Invisible Terror Of India & Doomed Missions To Mars**

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A POSTCARD FROM THE EDGE OF DAWN

'This is the hour when the mysteries emerge. A strangeness so hard to reflect. A moment so moving, goes straight to your heart, the vision has never been met. The attraction is held like a weight deep inside, something I'll never forget.'

KOMAKINO
JOY DIVISION

Okay, before we get started here, let me just make it clear right at the outset that I'm more than aware of the way memory can taint past events with a hue that if it's not completely rose-red, is at the very least a washed-out shade of pink.

If you need confirmation of this, you only have to afford yourself a backwards glance at the childhood perception of the passing of the seasons; a selective process that, whatever your upbringing, we each of us subscribe to...

I'm sure I'm not just speaking for myself when I say it often seems as though every Winter we went skating madly along the sugar-frosted pavements, muffled against the biting cold that snapped hands and faces and caused our breath to puff to clouds, and on Valentine's Day there'd be a familiar butterfly-population-explosion in the pit of your stomach at the priceless thrill of love requited.

When at last spring came around, the sun would peek through a gap in the cloud bank, raising steam from the blacktop of the playground and making the drenched flowers glisten like coloured fragments.

The Summer days filled with a silent, heavy-heat, trees spinning gold on a glowing lawn.

The Autumn air resonant with the smell of woodsmoke and the dark-brown perfume of decaying leaves. The jagged grins of Jack o' Lanterns and fireworks shooting upwards into a canopy of diamond-chip stars....

So yeah, our recollections are as notoriously fallible as a scratched and faded cine film. The type that spools through your mind when you stumble upon some long-lost love letter in which the writer claimed to have meant every single word.

The fact remains however, that whenever I have occasion to recall that which I want to tell you about, namely the sequence of holidays spent at

Presthaven Sands, in North Wales, during the summers of 1982 through to '86 (especially '86. Jeezly ol' Crow on a kingsize ferris wheel, especially '86!!!), a bitterly powerful wave of nostalgia washes over me.

And such innocuous things can spark me off.

Ian Mac and the rest of The Bunnymen hammering out 'The Back Of Love'

A sliver of sunlight lancing across the floor of an only-just-opened-up bar room.

The salty, nose-wrinkling tang that, when the wind is right, blows in straight from the Mersey.

Oh, I'll gladly concede that Presthaven was hardly the most exotic of locations. I mean, it could hardly lay any claim to being the Welsh equivalent of the hip-hopped, funk punk 'paradises' of Ibiza or Tenerife (or even, Saints preserve us, Falaraki – a godforsaken destination I once had the misfortune to visit only to find it to be crawling with larrrd marffed cockernee's, a bunch of Sean Ryder wannabes, and a plethora of hideous grinning goons screaming 'Lookee, Lookee, you like?' as they pedalled their decidedly tacky wares).

Nope. Presthaven was certainly none of the above. It was more of a family holiday camp in the classic Geoffrey says 'HI DE HI' mould. A typically British amalgamation of 'Bluecoat' run 'entertainment.'

I guess you know the kind of stuff I'm talking about here, but what the hell, let's have ourselves a roll call, anyway:

The faintly fabulous smells of the theatre, the gaudy costumes of the pantomimes and the crystal clear acoustics wafting up from the orchestra pit. The house band, belting out the timeless standards, everything from Buddy Holly and Little Richard to the really modern stuff like, erm, The Searchers and The Beatles. The Bingo callers with feedback-inducing, tinny PA's. The cheering kids sat on the edge of the dancefloor staring up at a distinctly sinister-looking middle-aged man dressed in a clown suit that's definitely seen better days, sweating greasepaint as he doles out balloons twisted into shapes that vaguely resembled (albeit horribly deformed) animals. (Pennywise, John Wayne Gacey and Slipknot, eat your heart out!)

All were present and Kee-rect, Gunner Sergeant, sir, and ready for action.

It did have at least one redeeming feature, however (aside from the picturesque combination of sandhills, beach and rolling countryside)....

'The Presthaven Sands Teenage Disco.' The easiest place to score with a member of the opposite sex in the entire history of Western civilisation. With the possible exception of 'The Grafton' (If your idea of getting laid is to ride de-chute-de-shute with a person so old they look to have crawled from the nearest available crypt).

Almost from the moment that my brother, Grant and I, stepped across the threshold – after having first having fortified ourselves with a couple of pints of watered down, 'Burton Ale' served in cheap, plastic glasses – you simply couldn't fail to ahem, 'bag off with a Judy' (to coin the less-than-quaint phrase we Merseysider's used back then).

It's true, I promise you. I've seen dead ringers for Jason Vorhees, minus his trademark hockey mask, dancin' the fandango and getting' funky with Mr Spunky in the arms of beautiful lady, in THIS disco. If you couldn't 'tap' here, you may as well shave yourself a chrome dome and make your way to the nearest available monastery.

There may well have been a number of reasons for this state of affairs; The desperate yearning for the obligatory holiday romance. The taking of various illegal substances to compensate for the weaker-than-a-baby-gnat's-piss alcohol. Or the simple mathematics that decreed the girls outnumbered the lads by a ratio of ten to one.

Personally however, I think it had more to do with the fact that it was so pitch-dark in there, despite the tacky flash-four disco lights, it was very often difficult to make out the true features of your 'catch' until you got up real close. Like kissing close. And by then, ol' romeo, with the terminal acne, bloodshot eyes and hare-lip, would have his tongue stuck so far down the unfortunate girl's throat, she could hardly even have begun to start screaming in revulsion and horror.

Fact is, ladies 'n' gents, I have to confess that this all-pervading murkiness was largely to blame for the hugely embarrassing moment during our first holiday at the site, when, soon after setting foot in the premises, my brother and I thought we'd spotted two potential babes (Oh, eeeeeewww, excuse me while I puke into the nearest sickbucket – Anti-sexist Ed) seated at the edge of the dance floor. We sauntered over with all the affected confidence of a pair of latter-day John Travolta's circa 'SATURDAY NIGHT FEVER,' intent upon inviting them to join us in a spot of cheek-to-cheek smooching to one of the slower songs.

And it wasn't until our kid was actually in the process of asking the first of the two girls if she was 'getting up' that I realised with horror my prospective dance partner was in fact a lad sporting a jet-black floppy fringe and what looked to be two or three days worth of bum-fluff.

Now, I'm as liberal-minded as the next chap when it comes to a person's sexual preferences, but quite frankly, the thought of waltzing round the room arm in arm with a boy, whilst Grant danced with his girlfriend, would have really taken the biscuit - the biscuit in this case being a shit-soggy 'HOBNOB' the size of Nebraska.

After standing there for a few seconds of squirming embarrassment, I'd mumbled (in my deepest, gruffest, most manly voice something along the lines of; 'Alright, mate. Er, you're girlfriend's so nice, we both felt it would be an honour if she'd agree to favour us with a dance....' Before turning my back and beating a hasty retreat to the sanctuary of the darkest corner of the disco.

Our kid joined me five minutes or so later.

Amazingly, he'd danced with the girl anyway, and at the end of it, she apparently thanked him sincerely whilst the dumbstruck boyfriend sat there, doubtless wondering just what he'd done to deserve to be confronted with such bizarre behaviour.

But I digress.

Let's move on smartly here, shall we?

The room smelled strongly of dry ice, cheap perfume and hair gel, and The DJ would play a stunningly eclectic mix....

.... Oh, and here's a valuable lesson for today's narrow-minded, dance-obsessed, gobaloons, who think that a song(?) isn't a song unless it includes at least one cheesy-as-a-cheese-shop-in-the-cheesiest-corner-of-the-Cheddar-Gorge-sample, and has a hook-line that insists that all the problems of the world can be solved if the crowd just hollers 'bo, seleteta!!!'

Whoever, and indeed, whatever was in the charts (or hovering at the outer limits) would be afforded equal decktime. So, Michael Jackson's 'BILLIE JEAN' and ABC's 'LOOK OF LOVE' would be interspersed with shots of Echo & The Bunnymen's 'BACK OF LOVE' and The Clash's 'ROCK THE CASBAH.' Duran Duran's 'GIRL'S ON FILM' and Shalamar's 'NIGHT TO REMEMBER' would sit easily alongside Simple Mind's 'PROMISED YOU A MIRACLE' and New Order's 'TEMPTATION.' And Yazoo's 'DON'T GO' and Wham's! (never complete without that all-important exclamation mark!!!) 'YOUNG GUNS' co-existed nice 'n' easy Japenesey alongside The Smiths' "THIS CHARMING MAN" and U2's 'TWO HEARTS BEAT AS ONE.'

I could go on, but I guess you get my drift.....

One more thing about that den of musical diversity. The room was so small there was barely room to swing a gerbil. This meant that it was permanently hot and sweaty in the best traditions of all the greatest pubs and clubs down the ages, and though the cynics might suggest (perhaps quite rightly) that this was nothing more than a ruse aimed at ensuring there was a steady stream of thirsty customers queuing up at the bar, that sense of enforced intimacy only served to add to the atmosphere, the ambience, of the place.

Enough with the scene-setting already, I hear you cry, when are you gonna get to the interesting bits? The definition of 'interesting bits' in this case being any and all incidents involving full-on, hardcore, XXX-rated action featuring purple-tipped passion rockets ploughing their way heroically into the very centre of an assorted array of love puddings.

Sorry, here's a bad news announcement for the eternally slobbering raincoat brigade. This is 'DEAD OF NIGHT MAGAZINE,' not 'PORNO LUST BUNNIES (What do yer mean, mores' the pity?). But bear with me. As the sinister Crypt-Keeper in the 1972 version of 'TALES FROM THE CRYPT' (played by Sir Ralph Richardson, if you can believe that!!!) states to the group of middle-aged people trapped inside his er...crypt: 'I assure you, I have a purpose!'

As is often the way of such things, the best two holidays we spent at Presthaven, were the first and the last. In 1982 and '86 respectively.

Oh, I know I may have said at the outset that memory is extremely unreliable and selective, but what the hell, it seems to me now to that those particular years contained two of the longest, hottest summers of my life.

1982, of course, had the World Cup in Spain (during which England and Scotland were knocked out disappointingly early on and the most exciting team in the competition; Brazil, were eliminated in a game of epic proportions by the unfancied Italians), Israel invaded Lebanon, and the military Junta in Argentina elected to jackboot their way across a couple of islands virtually nobody in Britain had ever heard of provoking Maggie Thatcher, 'popularity' on the wane, into dispatching a task force to those remote chunks of rock in the middle of the South Atlantic.

It was also the first summer that my mum and dad decided that we should forsake the delights of our usual holiday destination, 'Butlins,' to sample the unknown pleasures of 'Presthaven Sands.' I remember were all less than ecstatic about this as for all we knew, we were heading to a site that was so boring it had the highest yawn count in Western Europe.

As it turned out however, and as you'll all doubtless be aware by now, we needn't have worried a jot. The location was idyllic, the entertainment more than adequate, and the spate of holiday romances, though as open-ended and inconsequential as the vast majority ever are, still proved to be inspiring enough to persuade my best friend Stevie Gee to get his dad to drive me and our Grant back there just a week or so after the official holiday (replete with a thousand personally happy memories, sadly, none of which will be of particular interest to you, Dear Constant Reader) had ended - Wasn't it J.R.R

Tolkien, who wrote something along the lines that the very best of times can only be truly appreciated through the experiencing of such moments. They do not, sad to say, translate well into stories. The bad times, however.... Well now, they're quite an er, different story altogether).

The only snag was, none of us were working back then and so money was more than a little tight. We certainly couldn't afford to hire a caravan and so, that being the case, we hit upon the seemingly jolly good wheeze of spending the vacation camping out amidst the sandhills overlooking the site. This we duly did, and upon our arrival on a Friday evening in late July, the beach bathed in the amber light of sundown, we found ourselves a suitably secluded location, and set about burying our tent and bags of clothing. We marked the spot with a series of deliberately vague symbols in the sand and criss-crossed strips of saw grass.

It seems hard to believe now, but it never occurred to us that we would later have to try and find the gear and dig it back up again aided by nothing more than a few slivers of moonlight, if we were lucky and it didn't cloud over. We were so excited, we felt like 'THE COCKLESHELL HEROES,' embarking upon a do-or-die mission into enemy territory. After all, hadn't we succeeded in sneaking our way onto the site undetected? Unfortunately, this euphoria only contributed to our neglecting to realise the fact that we'd very likely be a good three quarters of the way along the Midnight Express route to Hangover Hell by the time we staggered our way back up the wooden path that led to the sandhills. Money was tight, sure. But we had more than enough to get well acquainted with the tasty waters of oblivion.

And so, in this state of blissful ignorance, we sought out a mirror in one of the camp toilets to check we looked at least reasonably respectable, before queuing at the site's reception desk to acquire our passes for the nightclub/disco. We obtained these on the pretence that we were staying at my mum's mate's caravan. We had the number and it's location in the park from our initial, wholly legitimate holiday, so getting the passes presented no trouble whatsoever.

Trying to appear nonchalant as we walked past the two, all-the-charm of a pair of Neanderthal-throwback bouncers, proved to be a tad harder, however. I half-expected at any moment that they would suss us out like those pesky Red Army guards patrolling the border and the last freedom bus to 'western paradise' at the tension-filled climax of countless war movies.

But they never did.

And just twenty minutes after entering the disco, Grant and I were dancing with two girls from the Lake District; Pam and Carol.

Everything was going swimmingly until Stevie Gee got talking to some (admittedly stunning-looking) girl who wanted to get her mate into the disco despite the fact that she too, had bunked on the site. She needed a pass. Fluttering her eyelids in that maddeningly endearing manner, guaranteed to melt the hardest of hearts, she asked if she could she borrow Steve's? Perhaps understandably, given her winsome feminine charms, he handed it right over lickety-split.

And from that moment, it was curtains for him. Unbeknownst to Steve, this innocent-seeming girl was something of an old hand at trying to blag her way onto the camp and was well known by the security guards. Perhaps it's no surprise then that the moment she tried to set foot on the premises, she as given the proverbial boot.

I guess we all had a fair smidgen of sympathy for her, (not least because she was a bit of a stunner), but we didn't really appreciate the full implications of her expulsion until mid-way through the night, when Stevie Gee went to the bar – situated in the Presthaven Ballroom – and never came back. We were not unduly concerned at first. Grant and I simply assumed he had gotten into conversation with someone at the bar. There was certainly no cause for alarm.

It wasn't until a song we particularly hated came on the disco, and we took a breather from the dancefloor along with the two girls, that I was struck by an all-too familiar sinking feeling in the pit of my stomach. I've long-since learned to trust such (quite literal) gut feelings as being genuine presentiments of doom, and I was suddenly so concerned that I leaned over Pam's shoulder and mouthed to our Grant, 'Where the hell's Stevie Gee got to?'

No sooner had the words escaped my lips than I'd become aware of the sounds of a commotion from just behind me. I saw Grant's eyes widen in surprise and I turned just in time to see Steve, looking decidedly dishevelled as he was manhandled into the disco by two of the meanest, bull-headed bouncers this side of the sadistic maniacs on duty at the entrance to 'THE TITTY BAR' in 'FROM DUSK TILL DAWN.'

They'd gripped Steve by opposite shoulders and had quite literally lifted him clean off the floor so that his legs were kicking frantically, like Wile E. Coyote running across thin air before he realises the bridge between the cliffs is out...

I looked back at our Grant again, and from his expression it was plain that there was no need for words.

We'd both gotten the message loud and clear: All was not too groovy!!!

The bouncers began pointing at people who were sat on the benches that ran along all sides of the disco, and each time Stevie Gee shook his head.

They were obviously looking for the infiltrator's accomplices; me and Our Kid, in other words.

I guess I knew, right from the outset, that Stevie Gee was too much of a friend to blow our cover. I was more concerned that I would give myself away, somehow.

You know the feeling, I'm sure.

The irrational guilt like when a police car slows behind you when you're walking home on the wrong side of midnight.

The burning cheeks and hot flush that assail you when you walk into a bar and a peal of shrill, hysterical laughter greets your entrance.

The refusal to meet the eyes of the school-ma'am-ish librarian as you walk past her on the way out with a bag full of course work and your own reference books...

(No-no-no-they're-not-stolen-absolutely-not-they're-mine-not-the-libraries-mine-you-hear-MINE!!!)

...because you're absurdly positive the alarm bell is going to start ringing before you reach the exit. By the same twisted, paranoid logic, I was convinced beyond doubting that I would be recognised as being one of the intruders and I'd be spending the remainder of the holiday trying to figure out a way I could extricate myself from the size twelve, steel-toe capped boot that had been kicked right up my arse!!!!

As the bouncers neared, I took the only course I considered to be open to me. I tapped Pam on the shoulder, and before she could say anything, I threw my arms around her and planted a smacker fully on her lips.

Miraculously, Pam didn't holler for the police, smack me in the chops or vomit down my throat. On the contrary, she must have assumed I was one of those hot-blooded, fast-moving Romeos who'd been overcome by a sudden bout of passion, and she responded in kind.

By the time we'd untangled our tongues and broke off the kiss in order to draw breath, the bouncers and their hapless captive had gone.

I glanced over at Grant and his girl. It appeared, our kid had had pretty much the same idea as yours truly, seeing as how he was busy rubbing his fingers across his mouth to rid himself of the smudges of bright pink lipstick deposited there by Carol..

I tipped a wink and he grinned back at me, and any guilt we felt at having abandoned Stevie Gee to his fate was tempered by the fact that it seemed to us to be inevitable that our escape tonight had been nothing more than a stay of execution. The likelihood was we'd all be kicked off the camp within a matter of hours anyway – The holiday was going to be an unmitigated disaster – we might as well make the most of what little time we had left.

Somewhat crestfallen, we walked Pam and Carol back to their caravan. They were best mates who'd travelled down from the Lake District with Pam's parents. We arranged to meet them the following day down on the beach, assuming the weather was anything like decent, before making the trek back up the wooden pathway that led to sandhills, and, assuming we could find it, our tent.

Luckily for us, it had turned into a beautiful, clear night

As it turned out, we had little trouble locating the tent. Stevie Gee had already dug it up and (oh, and didn't this just make Grant and I feel even more guilty) had not only erected the tent, but he had taken the time and trouble to arrange our sleeping bags for us.

Steve was well away, but I didn't honestly think I'd be able to join him in the land of noddy blinky. I was too depressed at the way things had turned out, and I'd been sure any shut-eye I did manage to grab would be haunted by entire battalions of bad dreams. In the event however, I was asleep almost from the moment my head touched the pile of jeans I'd used as an impromptu pillow.

And if I dreamt at all, the memory of them faded immediately upon waking.

We arose to the perfect summer morning. It was only 8 o' clock, but jeezly ol' crows, the temperatures must have already been in the mid-seventies. It was hard to feel down on such a day. An all but deserted beach stretched away beneath a sky the shade of gun-metal blue. The air was filled with a dizzying array of aromas; from the briny tang of the ocean, the newly-cut grass over on the camp footie pitch, to the mouth-watering smell of bacon and eggs as an early riser set about cooking breakfast in one of the nearest caravans.

Yes, folks, it's fair to say all of this combined to send the hangover disappearing lickety-split, hand in hand with the throes of depression.

And hot on the heels of this lifting of the spirits dawned the realisation that whilst we were unlikely to be permitted onto the site after sundown, there would be no security guards to prevent us gaining access during the day. Even better, the main club was open from 10am right the way through till the Witching Hour of Midnight. They ran pre-recorded horse racing afternoons, or talent competitions or whist drives for the older folk. Real cheap thrills in the monkeyhouse by way of entertainment, I'm sure you'll agree. But the fact remained if we could get ourselves safely through the doors before the boss sounds of the disco officially kicked off at 7pm, and the security didn't recognise Stevie Gee...

That was two ifs too many, perhaps, but still...

We squatted on our hands and knees and set about re-burying the tent.

We worked fast, despite the rapidly increasing heat and we were just smoothing out the sand to disguise any trace that the tent had ever been there, when a dark shadow suddenly fell upon us. I found myself staring amazed at a pair of impossibly shiny boots that seemed as though they'd stepped out of nowhere. They were so polished I swear I could see our reflections in their surface, our mouths open in a sequence of comical O's.

I looked up slowly, following the trail ever upwards along the length of a pair of khaki trousers, a similarly-coloured shirt, and a man's well-tanned face dominated by black sunglasses and a humourless, sardonic smile.

Standing there motionless with his 'PRESTHAVEN SECURITY' badge glittering in the sun, he put me in mind of the chain-gang prison guard, the nemesis of Paul Newman in 'COOL HAND LUKE.'

For the longest time nobody said anything. For a while even the gulls fell silent. The sun went behind a cloud and somewhere in the distance a dog howled mournfully.

'Well, now, tell you what, lads.' Mr Sunglasses finally said in surprisingly cheerful tones.

'You've made a hell of a good job of burying that tent.' He shook his head and half-smiled to himself as if he'd stumbled upon something 'golly-gosh-isn't-that-just-fascinating' like the teeming life at the bottom of a rock pool or some insect hauling a piece of discarded sandwich a hundred times its own body weight across the scorching sands.

He let out a low whistle of admiration. 'Hell of a jobs, lads. Hell of a job.'

For one crazy moment I honestly thought that somehow we were going to get away with it. I remember I grinned up at this khaki-clad giant and (saints preserve us), actually tipped him a wink. I figured that a touch of that famous 'cheeky hard-faced Scouse' brashness (copyright Jimmy Tarbuck – circa 1965) would come in handy right then.

I couldn't have been more wrong.

The slimy smile dropped from his face like a stone, and he removed his sunglasses to regard us with eyes as cold as a dead fish on a slab.

That was bad. What was worse was that his voice never lost that mock-cheery quality.

'Yeah. Must have took you three ages to bury your stuff and hide it so well. It's almost a pity you'll have to dig it all back up again. But that's what you're gonna do, isn't it lads? As fast as you can now. A job soon begun is a job half done.'

None of us even bothered to raise a voice in argument. Without a word we set about digging up the tent and the bags of clothes.

I remember thinking it surely was strange how your fortune can change so quickly. One minute,

you can be standing in the shelter of a seemingly endless row of undulating sandhills, your spirits soaring with the promise of a whole week spent in this North Welsh version of Paradise... And mere seconds later you're walking head-bowed over that same stretch of shoreline with a tent strapped to your back, a hold-all in either hand, sweating the proverbial cobs in the company of a sadistic security guard busy regaling us with a never-ending stream of cheesy 'witticisms' (prime example; 'Cheer up, lads. It might never happen... Oooh, hold on, a minute. It Has!!! Hahahahaha).

The minute we stepped off the beach and turned into an unfenced field, we were convinced that all that lay ahead, was the gloomy prospect of spending the remainder of our 'holiday' walking the streets of Rhyl with its endless rows of shops selling teeth-shattering bars of rock, slightly risqué postcards, buckets, spades, and plastic windmills... Oh, and maybe later we'd have the all-time thrill of getting our heads down for the night in the cramped space beneath the dilapidated bandstand in the local park.

Yes, I think, looking back, if the weather hadn't have been so favourable, we'd have traipsed dejectedly to the nearest station and caught the first train back to Merseyside, right there and then.

As it turned out however, five minutes or so after leaving the gatehouse that marked the boundary of the camp site far behind, (and after glancing over our shoulders to check if Mr Ray-Bans had quit his vigil – The last we saw of him, he'd been standing, hands on hips, chuckling away to himself at the rapier-like sharpness of his 'wit,') all three of us, as if by silent agreement, threw our packs to one side and slumped to the ground.

It was a long while before anyone spoke. To tell the truth, there didn't seem to be that much left to say. We just gazed out to sea and watched as a super tanker crossed the distant horizon, doubtless sailing to some far-off land.

I don't know about my two companions, but I couldn't help wistfully thinking how much I'd give to be aboard that ship, doubtless en route to an exotic port in a country mercifully free of laff-a-minute security guards.

Of course, knowing our luck, we'd have probably boarded the only oil tanker in the world at that moment, steaming hell for leather towards war-torn Beirut.

We sat there for a good half hour or so before rising wordlessly to our feet (that almost telepathic signal passing between us once more), picking up our gear and continuing on our half-arsed journey Rhyl-ward.

I guess we were roughly halfway across the field, headed for the coast road, before we realised we were actually in the middle of a golf course. We'd

been too deep in thought to notice the otherwise obviously artificial hillocks or the red and yellow flags indicating the numbered holes.

Now, we saw that the course, like the beach, was pretty much deserted save for a couple of early-birds, all 'Pringle' sweaters and flapping kecks, dragging their caddy's along the edge of the green.

You know, Dear Readers, doesn't it often seem to be the case that the most stupid-seeming of ideas turn out, in the event, to be the very best of wheezes. To give a few examples; Lieutenant Chard's masterstroke of military strategy when faced with 5,000 battle-crazy Zulu's to er... Stand behind a bunch of mealy bags.

Issac Newton's notion that whilst he was engaged in a serious bout of mental debate regarding the laws of gravity, it would surely be a blessed relief to sit beneath the shade of that tree over laden with riper than ripe, simply itching to fall apples

Bob Paisley's decision to play Ray Kennedy, at the time of his signing a Double-Winner and prolific striker for Arsenal, on the right-hand side of midfield!!!

And Gary Barlow's brainwave to leave TAKE THAT to embark upon an infinitely more successful solo career and to be treated as a 'serious' artist.

Well, okay. Strike that last one from the list of examples, but you get the general idea.

Certainly, when the suggestion was made by one of our party that sunbright August morning, to pitch our tent in the middle of a sand-filled golf bunker, my first reaction was that that person (and it wasn't me, guv'nor. Nosiree. Scout's honour) was crazier than a shit-house rat caught in a U-bend.

I probably told them so. I'm sure I did. Doubtless I Stamped my feet and insisted that it made no sense to camp within virtual spitting distance of the holiday site. Where the tent and the rest of the gear could be buried as easily as it was amidst the sandhills. Where the predominantly flat fields and clear view afforded us a great deal of advance warning of approaching security guards, and where access to the beach and the local chippy and the grocery store and the....HANG ON!!!

It took us only a few minutes to select a favourable bunker (one facing the just-discernible entrance to Presthaven Sands, and far enough away from the golf clubhouse) dig out a couple of feet of sand, and bury the camping gear for a record-breaking THIRD time.

And glory be, as things turned out, we couldn't have picked a better spec. We were never caught camping at the edge of that rolling green course. Oh, we had a few hairy moments when golfers, out for a daybreak round, screamed 'Fore' and

Sent wayward shots flying in our direction before we'd had a chance to conceal our stuff. But, low-flying golf balls aside, the remainder of our holiday was a hugely enjoyable experience. Okay, so we had to continue to run the gauntlet with those pesky, omnipotent security guards, and sneaking on and off the site was fraught with the ever-present risk of discovery (and surely, this time, they wouldn't let us off quite so lightly – They might even get the police involved, and that was a prospect that filled us all with dread), but hell, we figured it was worth the risk.

In fact, the so-crazy-it-was brilliant plan to spend the week camping in a golf bunker proved to be so successful, we resurrected the scheme four years later, when once more, the respective holiday funds were so low, it looked for a while as though we would be forced to cancel.

At the height of the summer of '86, the year of another disappointingly early World Cup exit for England and Scotland (although it took a combination of blatant cheating/marvellous opportunism; delete where your views deem applicable, and the greatest individual goal this writer has ever seen to knock Inger-Land out in the Quarter Finals), we set off, camping equipment in hand, to embark upon another do-or-die mission in the untamed wilds of North Wales

A Wrong Turn, Then Teardrops...

1

Four years had passed by since last we'd stood on this stretch of beach, at the edge of the golf course, but in truth, so little had changed, it seemed as if time had stood still here.

We were even able to secure the exact same bunker and set up camp with no difficulty whatsoever.

The site was just as we remembered it, too. The Under-18 Disco, the cheesy, cabaret-oriented Adults Club, lawks-a-mussy, even that pervy-looking, garishly made up clown was still busy terrifying the kids with his mutated-animal balloons...All remained constant. As familiar to the Presthaven landscape, as the Pyramids to the banks of the Nile.

And as for the holiday itself, well, it passed by fast like sex, cheques, and special effects, as holidays are wont to do, and the thing that I most want to tell you about occurred on the very last night before we were due to head on back to Merseyside.

I remember we stumbled out of the disco in the company of three local floozies with the fading chords of the last slowie ringing in our ears.

The girls had invited us back to their caravan "for a coffee, and we hadn't taken a lot of persuading. I'm not going to lie here and say that this collection of 'hot dates' were apt to be challenging Sophie Ellis-Bextor in the looks department any time soon. But then neither were they obvious candidates for an appearance on 'STARS IN YOUR EYES,' to announce with bright-eyed excitement; 'Tonight Matthew, we're aaaalllll going to be Anne Widdecombe!!!"

And besides, there hadn't exactly been a whole pile of alternatives on offer. It was after midnight. There were only a few more hours left in 'Paradise.' And the clock was ticking.

The ancient Greek philosophers have probably got a phrase for such situations, but in all due deference to Plato and Archimedes et al, I guess I'll make do with one of my own: 'It was shit or bust.'

En route to the caravan park, we happened to pass 'Sam's Fish 'n' Chip Emporium,' and the selection of mouth-watering aromas that wafted our way sparked a sudden bout of 'We've got the munchies!!!'

We walked in and began checking out the menu. I was trying to make up my mind whether to splash out and get fish, chips, *and* mushy peas, or whether that truly amounted to a pig out of Lard Ass Hogan proportions, when someone tapped me on the shoulder, disturbing my reverie.

I spun around, fully expecting to see the girl I was supposed to be with, Cheryl, or Michelle, or Rochelle, whatever her name was (okay, I know how awful that sounds, but cut me some slack here, Jack, we *are* talking about events that took place *fourteen* years ago) fluttering her eyelashes and smiling her most winsome smile in the hope of cadging a free meal.

But as it turned out, I was only three quarters of the way right. It *was* a girl. She *was* fluttering her eyelashes like a *Barbie Doll* throwing a dicky fit. And she *was* smiling a slow, seductive smile. But it certainly *wasn't* the girl I'd left the disco with.

No way, kid.

This was someone else entirely.

This was a girl who was so gorgeous she looked like she'd just surfed down to Earth on Halley's Comet.

You can be sure I pretty quickly forgot about my craving for food.

'Hiya,' she said in a broad Liverpool accent that was at once alluringly sexy and reassuringly familiar. 'I saw youse and yer mates in the disco. I was hopin' yer'd come over an' ask me to dance, but I suppose yer more interested in tha' girl yer with over there.'

For one crazy moment, I hadn't the slightest idea who it was she was referring to, and the confusion must have been written plain on my face, because she inclined her head and half-pointed to Miss-

Whatever-Her-Name-Was, stood at the counter, already wolfing a sausage batch.

She'd caught me looking and tipped me a wink, and I saw there was a mixture of tomato sauce, mustard and tiny slivers of onion smeared on her lips, and I'd felt my stomach give an involuntary lurch.

I hurriedly turned my attention back to the Scouse Beauty before me, and tried desperately to think of something witty or profound to say in response. Something that would impress her or make her laugh. Or both. But all that came out was the pathetically inadequate; 'Oh, her? Erm, She's not with me. No. I mean, er, That is, I er, I don't even know who she is.'

'God, that's weird,' Miss Scouse Beauty said, and now her smile was half-amused, half gently-mocking. 'Seein' as how yer spent most of the evenin' dancin' with her.'

'Did I? Er, yeah, well, I was just maintaining our famous Merseyside reputation for being dead friendly towards the resident woollybacks. y'see.'

'Is that right, yeah?'

'Oh aye.'

I see, an' tha' "friendliness" extends towards neckin' the Woolies like it's goin' out of fashion, does it?'

'Oh, only in an emergency, like. She needed resuscitating. It was so hot on the dancefloor. She nearly passed out bang in the middle of 'HOLIDAY' by Madonna, if you can believe that. I mean, I had no option but to blow some air into her lungs...'

That's a great sense of community spirit yer've got there, mate. Yer should 'ave been a Samaritan.'

'Yeah, I missed me callin' alright. Still, never let it be said that when someone's needed help, I turned me back and ignored 'em.'

Is that so, Sir Knight?' And here, Miss Scouse Beauty had suddenly slipped her hand in mine and said in a soft, Maiden-in-distress-like whisper; 'Well, in that case, would you be so kind as to help a slightly inebriated lady back to her caravan? The path is dark and filled with hidden dangers, and I'm feeling a little unsteady on my feet.'

Why, certainly,' I replied, quickly ushering her towards the exit whilst Grant, Stevie Gee and the three girls were still placing their chippy orders. They told me later that they hadn't even seen us leave.

'Just one thing, my Lady,' I said as we set off along the path that ran through the centre of the site. 'It may be that your "unsteadiness of feet" will require some urgent medical attention. Blowing air into one's lungs. A touch of resuscitation. It's a good cure. You might like me to try it later.'

It turned out she did. But though I did my damndest, I couldn't have cured her presumed drunken wobbliness if I'd have been a fully-fledged miracle worker.

2

By the time we'd reached her six-berth caravan, a homely, welcoming light spilling from its windows, I'd learned several things about my stunning companion.

She told me her name was Claire, she was 21 years of age, and she lived in Netherfield Road in the heart of Everton. She was currently enjoying a summer break before going back to university to continue her two year Art and Design course. She liked to read crime novels, her favourite bands were 'THE SMITHS' and 'THE PET SHOP BOYS,' and unusually for a girl back then, she actually didn't mind footy and sort of supported LFC, although by her own admission, she was more interested in ogling Craig Johnston's legs than in following any of the play.

All of which proved to be endlessly fascinating to yours truly, if not for the world at large, but what had really stuck in my mind like a glued moose in a 'SUGAR PUFF' factory, was that which Claire had told me virtually at the outset of our little journey. Namely, that she didn't have a steady boyfriend, and that her best mate, Donna, had hired the caravan for a fortnight, in her parent's name...

'An Donna will be staying with some lad she met at the beginning of the week,' Claire had informed me with an air of affected casualness.

The fact that we would have the caravan to ourselves (and it hadn't required too great a stretch of the imagination to picture just what that might portend!!!) bade me attempt to walk as fast as was possible without appearing as though I simply couldn't wait to jump her bones. I mean, if I'm brutally honest, that much was undeniably true, but it would hardly have been polite to have insisted she stop yapping and get a move on 'cos ol' Horny was barking at the gate, now would it?

And besides, Claire really had appeared to be having some trouble walking properly. Her co-ordination wasn't all that it should have been, and I surmised that she had definitely given the booze a right good hammering.

Still, at least it meant I had a good excuse for placing my arm around her on the pretext that it would help keep her balance. She seemed to grow ever more unsteady with each step, a fact Claire found incredibly funny. She was laughing like a hyena on helium as she all but fell through the caravan door and collapsed in a heap on the nearest available seat.

I offered to make the coffee, but Claire shook her head and said she wanted something stronger.

'There's a bottle of *Bacardi* in the fridge, if Donna hasn't nabbed it,' she managed between fits of the giggles.

I honestly thought about telling her that as lousy ideas went, having yet another drink was right up there with er, camping on a golf course. But I was her guest and I figured I wasn't in any position to tell her what to do.

I started to pour her a glass, but she suddenly staggered to her feet, grabbed the bottle and clutched it to her chest.

'ang on a sec,' she said in a husky voice that turned my insides to quivering jelly. 'Why don't we drink this in me bedroom? It's much more comfy in there.'

She grabbed my hand, gave it a gentle squeeze and began leading me towards the half-open door. I've got to be honest, I was more than a little nervous setting foot inside that compact, box-like room, pitch dark except for the jagged slivers of moonlight slanting across the double bed. Indeed, anyone watching could have been forgiven for thinking that I had displayed all the enthusiasm of a horse trotting into a glue factory.

The reasons for this are simple. I mean, it's all very well playing it cool and pretending you're appearing in the passionate love scene from a Hollywood movie when your co-star is at best ordinarily plain and at worst an ugly old boiler. But when you're confronted with a vision of damn near flawless beauty, all such celluloid fantasies are blasted into seven shades of irrelevance. They're replaced with a mental questionnaire the answers to which are seldom forthcoming (and even when they are, they're rarely the ones you'd ever want to hear):

'Is she highly sexually experienced? And if so, how will I figure in her personal 'Hit Parade'? 'Will I be in at Number One with a bullet? Or will I struggle to even make an (ahem) entry?'

'And what if she's a virgin? They say you always remember the first time. In later years will she come to look back at this encounter with dewy-eyed nostalgia, or will it be the cause of wild gales of laughter at the fag end of a girl's night out?'

And of course, lurking just behind these sickly-white pearls of paranoia were the more 'usual' fears:

'Will my stomach groan like a depressed moose?'

'Will my breath reek of stale ale?'

'Will I fart the second we dive beneath the covers: an earth-shaking rip-snorter powerful enough to shift tectonic plates?'

All of this went spinning through my mind at roughly the speed of light, and its dizzying effect made me feel sweaty and nauseous.

I pulled my hand from hers, and tried to ignore her expression of hurt surprise as I mumbled that I wouldn't be a minute, I had to use the loo.

So saying, I ducked into the tiny toilet and locked the door behind me. I hastily splashed cold water on my face, took several deep breaths, and sought to regain at least some level of composure. I checked myself in the mirror and nearly jumped out of my skin at the sight of the bug-eyed, pasty-faced boy staring back at me.

'Get a grip on yerself, yer balloon,' I told my reflection. 'Yer actin' like a kid on his first date!'

At that moment, Claire shouted from the bedroom, 'Lee, 'ave you fallen down the 'ole, or wha?'

Well, as seduction lines go, it surely was original. I mean, I can't see it ever appearing in anyone's list of favourite 'sweet nothings.'

But strangely enough, that was all it took for the fear and doubt to fall away like a discarded cloak.

I was reminded, by the force of such an irreverent, off-hand remark, that it didn't matter a jot that Claire was a dead-ringer for Sarah Michelle Geller (and yes, I know this true-life story is taking place in 1986, and Ms Geller was likely still attending kindergarten classes back then, but I've got to compare her to someone our younger readers can relate to, okay).

She was simply a down-to-earth girl, blessed with good looks, who, though it be a mystery of *X-Files*-ian proportions, had taken a fancy to yours truly.

I unlocked the door and poked my head around it to see what Claire was up to. She was sitting in bed with the blankets barely covering her breasts.

She dropped me a wink and I didn't need a second invitation.

I threw off my T-shirt and jeans, cast aside my shoes and socks, and retaining only my 'boxies' ran headlong into the bedroom, screaming 'Stand by to repel boarders!!!'

I attempted a swallow dive, intending to land right beside her, but seriously misjudging the distance, I clouted my head on the far wall and landed with all the grace of a shot albatross.

It hurt like hell, and I didn't just see stars, I saw whole constellations. And when I put my hand gingerly to my forehead, I could feel a lump the size of a golf ball (*'Hey...No fair! No fair! Nobody even shouted "Fore"!!!* a Loony Toons voice yelled from some impossible distance) had already formed there.

Claire, who it seemed that night would have laughed at a child's funeral, howled till she was fit to bust. That's not to say that she wasn't concerned for me. On the contrary, she made a show of gently rubbing the affected area just above my eye, whilst murmuring 'Oh, you poor baby. You poor baby,' before leaning back a touch the better to see the lump, and that would start her off again, braying uncontrollably like a donkey in a farmer's field with a red hot poker shoved right up its arse.

It took her some time to get a hold of herself and I was literally on the verge of screaming at her to quit when she suddenly bent down and landed a kiss fully smack on my lips.

The spasm of anger that had shaken me rapidly dissipated, and was replaced by the realisation that the curtain was about to go up on the Big Picture: "Mr Rock Meet Mrs Roll – They're ready to get it on!!!"

And then, as Claire and I became entwined in a passionate embrace, she broke off the kiss to whisper in my ear that there was something she had to tell me before we got too carried away.

'It's not *that* important, like,' she began, and something in her voice served to immediately grab my attention.

'It does seem to put some people off, though. So I suppose we'd better get it outta the way...'

'What is it, Claire?' I asked, trying to read her expression though the moon chose that moment to hide behind a cloud plunging the room into total darkness.

'It's just that... Well, I'm sure yer noticed that I was walkin' like I was 'arf-bladdered on our way back to the caravan? Well, it wasn't just the booze that had me rockin' like a big ship.'

'What else was it then?'

'It's me right leg,' she sighed. 'It's false from the knee down. I had to 'ave an amputation a couple of years ago. I was in a car accident. The doctor's couldn't do nothin' to save the bottom 'arf of me leg. It's supposed to be prosthetic, but to me it feels like cheap plastic. I prefer to sleep without it at night. You don't mind if I take it off, do yer? I'd feel more comfortable.'

So saying, she reached down beneath the covers and began dismantling the false leg, *unscrewing* it for all I knew. I distinctly heard it come away, imagined the clammy plastic feel of it in her hands, then actually saw the thing as she placed it carefully on the bedside table. It rocked for just a second in the bony moonlight that suddenly spilled through the curtains as if bang on cue.

And try as I might, I couldn't take my eyes off it. Oh, I'd like to be able to tell you that Claire's midnight revelation had made not the slightest difference to the way I felt about her. That I admired her courage in speaking out, so sparing me the embarrassment of stumbling upon the discovery for myself.

I'd like to. But I'd be lying. And here we get to it at last, ladies and gentlemen: Lee Walker's Great And Terrible Confession.

You see, though I hated myself for it, both there and then and in the years that have passed by since, I was filled with horrified revulsion.

That '*Loony-Toon's*' character suddenly piped up again, screeching maniacally, '*Excuuuse me, madam!!! I've heard of a girl going out on a limb for a guy, but a dame actually plucking one off*

and dropping it at the side of her bed is a definite no-no!!!'

'And while we're at it, let me tell ya, toots, spreading your legs is one thing. Separating them completely ain't in no Karma Sutra I've ever read.'

'What do you do for an encore? Pull off the rest of your limbs, line them up as skittles and use your head as a bowling ball? And what about....'

I tried to close my ears to its incessant, sadistic rambling but even if I'd have been successful, there still remained the inescapable reality of the false leg, lying inanimate on the table, as devoid of life as a lump of lunar rock, yet still somehow ominous, almost as though it were waiting for me to turn my back. And when I tore my gaze from it for a second, I couldn't help but imagine the leg quivering with impatience, kicking out, feebly at first, but growing steadily stronger, until at last it possessed the strength to fall to the floor with a barely audible plop, before creeping silently towards us, eager to be reunited with warm living flesh....

Oh Lordy, the situation had suddenly become about as seductive a prospect as being tied to a chair and forced to watch endless video re-runs of your nan strip-teasing to the sound of '*YOU SEXY THING*,' down the local Conservative Club.'

Almost before I was aware I was doing it, I began hurriedly making my excuses and scrambling around for my clothes. I can't remember what I said precisely, though doubtless it was something along the lines of how I'd had a great time, but that I'd best be getting back, I needed an early start for the journey home, I'd see her around sometime, thanks very much, see ya later, goodbye....

I do remember that I never once glanced in her direction as I took my leave. I couldn't bear to see the look of anguish I knew would be etched upon her face. And before anyone starts, I don't say this for any egotistical reason. I think I was merely the latest in a long and winding line of potential boyfriends who had thoughtlessly rejected her because of this one minor deformity.

I guess it wouldn't provide even the scantest of consolations were she to somehow learn that it has been a constant source of regret that I never stayed that night, and that I still think of her fondly whenever Summer comes around and the evenings draw out long and warm...

As it is however, my last abiding memory of Claire is of the tiny cry that escaped her lips as I quietly closed the bedroom door: an aching haunting sound like a lost and lonesome wind blowing through the bones of my dreams....

Lee Walker, New Ferry, Merseyside
September, 2000

THE FORTEAN STEPPES

Family connections with Eastern Europe have allowed me to read many English translations of curious forgotten books blown in from far-off Steppes as if by a howling Siberian gale.

Someone borrows the books and lo! they are gone again.



Where, I wonder, is the book I read as a boy, about life in the Soviet Arctic? I have a firm and vivid memory of reading a supposedly true account of a Neanderthal Yeti who lived in a volcanic crater and fed on the flesh of musk oxen. Russian scientists examined them and then (frustratingly enough) let them go.

In more recent times, I came upon a book on Bulgarian wildlife which had this to say about the lynx;

'Little has been recorded about the lynx in Bulgaria, since from the earliest times this animal has been regarded as a "Forest Demon" whose very name it is unlucky to pronounce.'

Can this remark offer a clue to the history of the lynx in Britain?

Did the lynx survive here into historic times?

Prehistoric lynx remains have been found in this country, I believe, but no one can tell when or if this European big cat became extinct. Lions, elephants and hyenas have been driven away by successive Ice Ages, but why should even such dramatic climatic changes as these have affected the lynx, an animal that lives as far north as the Arctic edge of the tree-line?

Lynxes live in France, and if frozen out of England may have found the post Ice Age Channel a barrier to their return.

What if the lynx survived into the age of the Medieval greenwood, never mentioned by peasants or woodsmen because it was regarded as a forest Demon? Old books and records sometimes refer to an animal known as a Catamount, or 'cat o mountain.' Historians and naturalists today believe that 'Catamount' meant 'Wildcat' - *Felis Sylvestris* - the small forest feline still to be found in Scotland (Did anyone say 'Sylvestria and Tweety Pie?')

In my opinion, 'Catamount' is the olden day euphemism for a taboo word; 'Lynx.'

In America, English settlers referred to pumas as 'Catamounts.' Pioneers tried to match Old World names to New World animals. Thus they called the skunk a 'polecat,' because a skunk-stink is a vastly exaggerated version of a polecat's musky odour. Black vultures, unknown in England, were given the name 'buzzard,' because the most un-vulture-like English buzzard is a carrion-feeder. No American equivalent of the European or Scottish Wildcat lives in North America, and the settlers gave the name 'wildcat' to the small lynx of the eastern states, the Bobcat. When the pioneers encountered the much larger puma, they gave it the name of the Big Cat they knew, the

European lynx or catamount!!! Perhaps the last English lynx was shot by a gun, not an arrow, at the same time as the wolf and wild boar perished, namely, the Seventeenth Century.

'Woe is me, I've killed a catamount!' the fearful hunter may have exclaimed.

'*GYPSIES IN POLAND*' is the title of yet another fascinating book, now irretrievably borrowed. It contains a picture by one of my German ancestors, showing the King Of The Gypsies riding to meet the Tsar of Russia in a carriage drawn by bears, with monkey footmen.

The Polish author appears never to have read Browning's famous poem about the Pied Piper. In the pre-Nazi heyday of Polish Gypsies, I read; 'One of their trades was that of rat-charmer.'

With no mention of the Piper, the author goes on to say that gypsy rat-charmers were often hired to lure rats to their doom by playing a monotonous droning note which the rodents found to be irresistible. At the sound of the gypsy pipe, rats emerged from their holes, tried at first to resist the music, then gave up the attempt and danced out to their destruction.

East European gypsies, as Londoners are now only too aware, delight in fantastic costumes of wildly contrasting colours.

Our own Romanies prefer Pied, or black and white horses, to any other. Obviously Browning's Pied Piper was a gypsy, perhaps a Polish gypsy. The last known Polish gypsy rat-charmer was one Joseph Beck, who was still working in the 1930's.

What has happened to the Gypsies of Poland?

A sad Gypsy song tells us all....

*'They led us in at the gate,
They let us out through the chimneys.'*

Along with the Jews, gypsies were sent to the hell on earth that was the Nazi Concentration Camps, there to be gassed and incinerated. In Nazi eyes, they were not Aryans, even though the mythical Aryan Race was said to have originated in India, first home of the gypsies....

Today, theories on the Aryan Race have vanished, without ever being 'officially' discredited.

For all I know, the Nordic legend of Teutonic origins may be true, and frozen men were licked out of glaciers by a giant cow.

MINSTER WELLS AT SHEPPEY

With Homer-Sykes, the author-photographer at the wheel, our car plunged through the leafy oak tunnels of the Weald, through Sussex, through Kent and on to a place where we had never been before; The Isle Of Sheppey.

All of a sudden, hills and trees gave way to lines of marching pylons and Thames estuary industrialism. A strange structure loomed in the hazy distance ahead - two giant concrete suitcase handles side by side. The suitcase itself, dropped by Gog or Magog on a visit to this myth-laden region, had evidently sunk into the mud of the River Swale.

Our road descended to the sea-level Isle, and the two handles became the giant grim archways of Kingsferry Bridge, gateway to Sheppey. They made an impressive entrance to the Land That England Forgot. Split by creeks and riverlets, the Isle was divided into three; Sheppey, Hartly, and Elmley, home of sheep, harts and elms (though today, only the sheep remain).

After a while, the Isle began to shrug off the weight of mud and abandoned cranes and rose into a neglected

hump-backed pastureland with wild ragged hedges. A white farmyard duck, looking lost, peered at us from the side of the road. At a crossroads, a sign pointed to 'H.M. Prison,' where two sons of two friends of mine have been incarcerated at different times, for armed robbery, vice of the rebellious young. My friends' visits to the prison first alerted me to the fact that the Isle of Sheppey existed. Later, I learned more from the books and pamphlets of Brian Slade, former head of the Sheppey Archaeological Society.

As I do not have a son, our way led not to the prison, but to the small village of Eastchurch, home of the self-taught historian Slade.

Though Sheppey is unlovely, it is redeemed by its ancient grey stone churches so steeped in lore and sacred legend, Augustine passed this way, bringing the Gospel to Saxon England.

Brian Slade has recently been rehoused at the end-bungalow of a modern strip of old people's residences. Though infirm, he rushed eagerly from his door to meet us. Soon we were drinking tea in a tiny dark front room covered in mementos of historic Sheppey. Considering that Brian had only just moved in, his front room was in excellent order. It resembled a museum, and no wonder, as until his retirement, Brian Slade had been the curator of the Minster Gatehouse Museum.

Replica guns, maps and pictures of Old Sheppey hung from the walls. One of Brian's easy chairs was in use as a showcase, with historic items placed on the cushion, along with a chubby blue-eyed doll dressed as a nun, still in her cellophane doll-box. The nun was never explained. She could have been Saint Sexburga, the Seventh Century Saxon Queen who became Abbess of the nunnery she founded.

On the other hand, she could have been one of the Benedictine nuns of the Middle Ages, after the Dane-wrecked Minster's restoration in the Twelfth Century. Minster Abbey looms large in Brian Slade's imagination. Homer and I nursed our cups of tea and listened to our host's fascinating, non-stop conversation, uttered in a rapid Kentish squeal. Brian is not an incomer from Dartford who has fallen under the Island's spell.

Minster Abbey and its sacred environs have become the passion of Brian's life. Of the once-extensive nunnery, only two buildings remain.

One is the parish church, the other is the Gatehouse Tower, now a museum run by the council. Brian's brand of excitable antiquarian enthusiasm has antagonised both the church people and the museum people, and he now considers himself 'barred' from both establishments. It all began with three wells....

'Well, well, well,!' I kept saying idiotically and inadvertently, whenever Brian paused in his narrative.

Apparently, Brian had heard old people talk about the three wells, not long after he moved to Minster. (Minster is the name of the town as well as the site of the former Abbey. Brian lived there for many years before moving to Eastchurch, a village also named after its church, which lies east of the Minster). So, aided by intuition and a dowser's rod, he set out to rediscover the three wells.

This he did. Moreover, Brian discovered that the Minster Abbey site was once surrounded by a prehistoric stone circle. It is believed that the Abbey has been built on the remains of a Roman temple. Roman bricks can still be seen among the Saxon and the Norman stonework.

As if to whet my appetite further, for I still had not seen the Minster, Brian pointed to the highlight of his nun-in-a-chair display, a framed oil-painting of an idealised blue Minster floating in the air as a castle in the clouds. From its celestial doorway, a line of black-cowled mysterious figures queued to pay homage to the figure of a three-headed goddess hovering beside a well. The work of

a local artist, Aaron Dudley, the picture had been presented to Brian by a group of his many admirers.

Like the Three Fates, the Three-Headed Goddess has had an overwhelming impact on Brian's life. Until she intervened, he was a well-respected antiquarian, popular for his guided tours around the Minster church. His veneration for the Three-Headed Goddess has made him unpopular among Orthodox Christians and newly-popular among self-styled Pagans and broomless Witches.

'I have named the three wells, since their original names have been forgotten,' Brian told us. 'Only one, the Abbess's Well, can be properly examined. The other two, the Well of The Triple Goddess and the Birth Bracelet Well-named after the things I found in them - have been sealed up. The Triple Goddess Well is in the courtyard of the Abbey Gatehouse, and it's there that I found the metal figure of a three-headed pregnant woman, right at the bottom. She was the first sacred object to have been placed in the well, long before the Romans came. Similar figures made of beeswax have been dropped in afterwards. You can see them all at my friend Len Stanford's house. He is the Custodian of the Abbess's Well. I have written and published twenty seven books about the Isle of Sheppey and the Minster.'

This I knew, since I had looked at two of them, 'MYSTERIOUS MINSTER' and 'MINSTER'S BIRTH BRACELET WELL.' Clearly the work of a man gripped by an obsession, the latter book makes fervent claims for the author's beloved wells and their treasures. Water from the wells have healing powers, and women who for years have yearned for children become pregnant after drinking the waters or touching the figure of the Three Headed Goddess. Brian refers to his inspiration as 'the Triple Goddess - Maiden, Mother and Crone.'

'Crone' seems a rather unkind name for a Goddess of mature years, but elderly Californian she-hippies apparently not only refer to themselves as 'cronies' nowadays, but hold 'croning ceremonies' to confirm their cronehood. Brian's self-penned poem says it all;

*'When the Goddess adopted Minster as her home
She was known as Maiden Mother Crone
Although for centuries the Goddess remained the same
Each visiting language gave her a different name
Thus during Minster's Roman years
Minster's wells wept Triple Diana tears
Then with the coming of Christianity
The Goddess shape changed herself to masculinity
Disguised as Father, Son and Holy Ghost
The Goddess has stayed at her post
Thus Maiden, Mother and wise old Crone
Contrived to retain their rightful throne.'*

Brian's prose writings are a bewildering mixture of history essays, sensational headlines, tributes to himself by different authors and quack-doctor style testimonies to the magic powers of his wells. Capital letters suddenly shriek from the page;

**'THE TRIPLE GODDESS IS WITHIN EVERY WOMAN'
'MY BOOKLETS HAVE BEEN BANNED BY THE CHURCH' and 'INCREDIBLE BUT TRUE'**

(A phone call to the vicar later revealed that Brian Slade's booklets have been banned from the church. The Church of England no longer has the powers to ban books nationwide) His life beset by illness and personal tragedy, Brian's voice shook as he spoke with increasing rapidity of his discoveries. A man of true genius as an archaeologist and intuitive historian, discoverer of many of Sheppey's lost treasures, Brian Slade's reputation should not rest merely on his abilities as a writer. Look at what the man has done...Excavated wells, recognised true history in every mound and well of Sheppey and re-discovered the lost

horse-head weather vane of Sheppey Minster. The horse-head represents the Grey Dolphin steed of legend, killed by its knightly owner because a Witch (or crone) prophesied that the horse would kill him. Years later, the arrogant nobleman kicked his once faithful horse's skull, hurt his foot, and died in agony.

I would direct the interested reader to Barham's *'INGOLDSBY LEGENDS,'* but not in the pages of Brian Slade. Slade should be judged by deeds. Strange that one so fond of the supernatural should not have employed a ghost-writer.

'Look at what the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. Carey, wrote about me in 1997,' Brian said, in a tone of amused indignation. He had printed the message from the Archbishop in his *'BIRTH BRACELET'* book.

'There may indeed have been genuine experiences of the supernatural associated with the Sheppey Wells. But a Christian can be utterly confident that the mere fact that some may gullibly credit these occurrences to a Pagan "Triple Goddess" carries no more weight than if they had been attributed to the intervention of Winnie The Pooh, say.'

The Bish could do with a ghost writer too, it seems.

A cult of Winnie The Pooh did indeed flourish in university towns in the late 'Sixties, and the bear's adventures have been translated into Latin. Bear Gods abounded in ancient days. Luckily, Brian Slade has ignored Dr. Carey's hints and has so far left Christopher Robin out of his booklets.

As you can guess, the build-up for the Goddess, augmented by a video on the same subject, made me yearn to see Her for myself. Brian Slade put on a hat that made him look like a fisherman, we stepped into Homer Sykes's car and were off to Minster!

Our first stop was at Falcon Gardens, a suburban street at the edge of the Minster hill. Here lives Leon Stanford, Custodian of the Abbess's Well. His large back garden once formed part of the nunnery grounds.

A big, portly white-bearded, florid-faced man, of cheerful aspect, Leon led us into the garden, where I looked around for a well.

'It's in the shed,' Leon explained.

And so it was, for a garden shed now enclosed the well. Leon opened the door, put on a light, and I stared around in astonishment. At the rear of the shed could be seen a deep, mysterious-looking well, the walls lined with stone, in Medieval style, and water twinkling in the darkness far below. On a shelf near the well stood an extraordinary device covered in tubes, together with rows of bottles. I could have been in a Kentucky moonshine still.

'That's the purification system the law says I have to use before I can give the bottled water to couples who want babies,' Leon explained. 'I don't allow people to throw money into the well, but they can leave votive offerings and candles outside. Some Pagans bring corn dollies. A white frog lives in the well.'

I rushed to see it, but it stayed hidden.

'Do many people come here to see the well and drink from it?' I asked

'Oh yes. We had a Coven of Witches the other day. One Witch donated a hundred pounds to help restore the well. She was a lawyer by trade. Someone from the 'Body Shop' wanted to buy the water to use in some lotion or other, but I turned her down.

'There's a success rate of ten per cent. That's in babies born, I mean.'

Running a magic well seemed a satisfying hobby for Leon Stanford, and certainly made a change from keeping Koi carp or attending a Country and Western club, the usual pursuits of big, genial men. Brian told us that Leon had spent five thousand pounds setting up the well. All donations were voluntary.

'Where can I see the Triple Headed Goddess?' I enquired.

'Oh, it's in the house. Hold on, I'll get it!' said Leon.

He popped inside and then came out with a large flat case with a closed lid. It resembled a tool box. When opened, it became a museum showcase, its centrepiece being the Goddess Herself. She was six inches high and made of brown rusty iron. Beeswax images of similar shape, but fragmented, were shown nearby.

'All these were found at the Well of the Triple Goddess, up at the Minster,' said Brian.

'How fascinating!' photographer Homer Sykes remarked. 'You must show me the place. But first of all, we must take the Goddess out to be photographed. Got a screwdriver?'

Leon obliged, and we all looked as Homer removed a screw from the centre of the Goddess and lifted her tenderly out of the case. I examined Her with interest. At first, I thought She might be a Victorian neo-Gothic ornamental bracket, but comparison with other Goddess figures eventually convinced me of Her divinity. The three twiddly prongs did not obviously resemble women, but a likeness could be seen, though the noses were rather beaky. Sacred 'Pagan' designs, once pictures with meaning, often become much-copied decorations by uncomprehending Christian artists. Grape vine letter headings may stem from Bacchanalian illustrations, and Sheppey's Goddess may be an ancient ornament copied from something still older.



For Brian and Leon's sake, I will believe that She is a Goddess. I'm not sure that She is pregnant, however. Her curves suggest a clasp of some kind. Did Leon bore a hole to screw her down, or was the hole there already?

Holding the Goddess triumphantly on high, Brian jauntily led the way to the Minster.

'I can't come with you, I've got to go out,' said Leon. 'Leave the Goddess at my house - somewhere where I can see her.'

'Are you going to slder Her under the door or put her under the mat?' I asked incredulously.

It seemed a cavalier way to treat such a valuable Goddess. (In the event, a relative of Leon's took the Goddess indoors after the photo session). In one of his printed testimonies, Leon had declared that the Goddess had cured his lameness and enabled him to throw away his walking stick. However, I couldn't help noticing that he was still a little lame, and used a stick. Even a Goddess, it seems, is not infallible.

Without doubt a sacred site of great antiquity, the Minster hill rises up suddenly from the surrounding streets. The town has been built around the former nunnery. As we walked towards the old church in the centre of the grassy park, groups of fat, scowling brightly-dressed teenagers watched us with scornful curiosity. I had seldom seen unpleasant-looking youngsters, but no doubt the Isle of Sheppey is not a stimulating place in which to grow up. A stone wall lined with headstones enclosed the Minster. Obviously, as in so many places, a churchyard had been

rearranged to form a recreation ground. We were walking over unmarked graves whose historic markers had become a kind of wall decoration. One of the headstones had been singed black by a fire in a litter bin where teenagers lounged and glared.

A wedding was taking place at the Minster church, so we couldn't go inside. Bridesmaids in pink silk gowns waited outside for the bride and groom to emerge.

The wedding party, mostly young people, looked reassuringly bright, kind and friendly. They ignored the fire-raising loafers a few yards away.

Still talking animatedly and waving the Goddess around, Brian Slade led Homer and Myself towards the Gatehouse where the Triple Goddess Well had been found.

'The initials of the three islands of Sheppey form the letters S, H and E,' he said. 'That spells "SHE," the name of the Goddess! When I lived at Minster, I kept the Goddess in a special room where seekers after fertility could sit and meditate, after which the women would become pregnant. The power of the Goddess has brought me many enemies. One day, I received a curse through the post. I later found out who had sent it - a pillar of the Church!'

Just beyond the church, the Abbey Gatehouse stands alone, a sturdy turreted tower with a cobbled yard and an arched entrance leading nowhere. Everything else had been dissolved at the Dissolution (or irrevocably reformed at the Reformation). Triumphant, Brian pointed to a paving slab adjoining the tower wall. It was encrusted with pigeon droppings, and Homer wrinkled his nose fastidiously.

'They have replaced the slab, but you can see a narrow crack,' Brian Slade pointed out. 'Under there is the Well of the Triple Goddess. Ian White, whose wife had suffered four miscarriages, led the excavation team and discovered the Goddess. All the time he was wallowing in the sacred waters of Fertility, he was wishing he could become a father.'

He was praying to the Goddess and he didn't even know it! Imagine his joy when nine months later he became a father! You saw on my video his wife Sharon proudly holding up their little girl Emily! When I had the Goddess, a couple came all the way from Egypt to seek fertility. A local schoolgirl knocked at my door and said, "Have you got the Goddess?" There's two people from Egypt come to find it.'

'This place is no good for a photograph,' Homer Sykes decided. 'Let's go back to the Minster and you can pose standing near the church.'

So Brian Slade stood on the grassy open ground near the smouldering litter bin and held the Goddess aloft as Homer clicked away.

'One of the youngsters rode around us on a bike once or twice, but soon grew bored and moved away. I too departed, for now was my chance to visit the Gatehouse Museum, a place which Brian Slade would not, or could not enter.'

In the tiny entrance hall I bought a ticket from a stocky butler-like man and was shown the way upstairs by a gentle librarian-like lady. Fearful of losing Homer and Brian Slade, who didn't know where I was, I hurried up and down the two upper floors and decided against climbing the ladder to the rooftop turret with its view over all Sheppey. Looms, spinning wheels, old photographs and Victoriana filled the museum.

As I took my leave of the 'butler' and the 'librarian,' I mentioned that Brian Slade, former curator, was outside with his Goddess.

'Ah, he don't come here no more,' observed the 'butler,' in a slow, deep, rural accent.

'Have you seen the Goddess he found in your well?' I enquired.

'No!' they chorussed urgently.

'Well, come out and see it - he's having it photographed.'

'No! Not us! We don't want to see it!' they exclaimed together, backing away in evident alarm.

'It might not be a real olden-day Goddess,' I remarked. 'It could be a Victorian decoration of some kind.'

'Oh, do you think so?' cried the museum-lady, a note of glad relief in her voice.

For these two, Pagan things and perhaps Brian Slade himself, were of the Devil.

Returning to the church, where the wedding was still going on, I met Homer, Brian and the Goddess. Brian was talking about the day that water from the Abbess's Well had cured 'a horse with ulcerated legs. That proves it's not just faith-healing, as horses don't have faith.'

We were on our way to see the last of the three Minster wells, the Birth Bracelet Well, so called because a small metal ring, of a size that would fit a new-born baby's wrist, had been found at the bottom and been duly endowed with fertility powers.

A steep path led straight down through a gateway to the shopping street and pub directly beneath the Minster slope. Brian paused to show us a large boulder embedded in the wall beside the gate.

'Look, I believe that stone is a remnant of the stone circle that once surrounded the Minster hill. This way, follow me to the Birth Bracelet Well.'

To my surprise, he led us to Audrey's Fish and Chip Shop. I was hungry, but the shop was closed. Steps led down to the car park, and here, beside a neglected rockery, stood a round modern brick well-rim, the top concreted over. A garden ornament lion head looked down from the well-lid as if about to spout water from its mouth.

'This used to be a garden centre, and in those days, the Well was open for wishes,' Brian explained.

Apparently, the well had become overgrown and forgotten, until rediscovered in the mid-nineteen eighties by a Mr Harris.

In 1993, Brian Slade's archeological team, led by the redoubtable Ian White, excavated the well and found the Bracelet, along with a great many other relics and pieces of broken pottery.

As Brian spoke, we were joined by Audrey of Fish and Chip Shop fame. A humorous lassie from Lancashire, Audrey showed great interest in the well, and wished that she could afford to restore it and perhaps sell its waters in her cafe.

And there we must leave Brian Slade, Master of the Wells, chatting happily to Audrey and brandishing the Triple Headed Goddess who has taken over his life.

'Pagan' is a confusing word of many meanings.

Some use it to mean 'atheist,' as in 'I'm afraid I'm a Pagan!' Many people use it to refer to smaller, lesser-known religions, as in 'Most Nigerians are Christians or Moslems, but in remote areas Paganism flourishes.'

Others use the word to recall ancient times, Celtic, Nordic or Classical, as in 'The pre-Christian Pagan Irish,' or 'The Norse Gods of the Pagan Vikings.' 'The Gods of Pagan Greece and Rome' would be understood but unusual, as these Gods are a bit too grand to be Pagan. However, it is from Rome that the word 'Pagan' derives - the countryside Gods once worshipped by Italian peasants who regarded Christianity as newfangled.

I would retire the word 'Pagan' if I could, as it is the cause of much confusion. It seems to mean 'the extinct unknown religion,' yet there are many people who claim to belong to this non-religion and can provide you with a written doctrine. If Bushmen, Melanesians and Eskimos were once all 'Pagans,' why is it that their traditional religious beliefs are different? There can be no one 'Pagan Religion.'

Once upon a time in England, the Protestant Reformation was assumed to be of the greatest importance. Before the Reformation, many believed, all was darkness. After the Reformation, all was light. Others saw things differently -

for brave Catholics hiding in priest-holes, all was light before the Reformation and all had become darkness since. But today the Reformation is seen by most English people as an episode in the development of religion, one that led to some gains and some losses.

The time may have come when we can regard the Conversion of England in the same way, not as an ending or beginning but as part of a story that is still being told. Some believe that before the missionary St. Augustine came to the Isle of Sheppey, all was darkness and Evil, a Satanic time now revived in part by Brian Slade and his Goddess. Others believe that the pre-Christian age when three-headed Goddesses and other deities were worshipped was a Golden Age of happiness that ended when the sourpuss Augustine stepped from his boat onto Sheppey soil and planted the Cross.



These controversies of dark and light evidently loom large in the minds of Sheppey Islanders locked in a claustrophobic mental battle between the Church and so-called Paganism. Church criticism inflames Brian Slade's Pagan fervour, and Brian Slade's Pagan fervour alarms and irritates the Church.

As for the troops of 'Pagans and Witches' who queue at the door of Leon Stanford's garden shed, I have a somewhat wry view of their antics. Why is it that artists, computer operators and bohemians so often become 'Pagans' and attempt to revive forgotten religions whose aim seems to have been the promotion of fertility for cattle and crops?

People with such beliefs should be farmers not city people. Church-going farmers of today will find prayers for harvests, rain, sunshine and fruitfulness in the Book of Common Prayer. Who now is the Pagan?

Those who believe in the 'Religion Of The Witches' seldom look at countries in West Africa and the Carribean where the peasant majority are Witchcraft believers.

Jealousy and suspicion abound, innocent crones may be murdered, as spell and counter-spell fly to and fro.

Witchcraft was never a religion. Whether for good or bad, it flourishes alongside religion in peasant lands such as Jamaica now and England before the Industrial Revolution.

Nor do I believe in a prehistoric Age of Monotheism, or belief in the Goddess, SHE Who Must Be Obeyed. Gods and Goddesses frolicked through all the ages of human belief until the Jews adopted monotheism. Christians and Moslems followed. Just because they declared with confidence that the One Deity was a man doesn't necessarily mean that the Deity is a woman. (As a matter of fact, monotheism or the One God-ism has never yet existed, for who is the Devil if not The God We Must Not Worship?)

The Isle of Sheppey, as seen through the eyes of Brian Slade and those who know him, is a troubled place. If life were an Ealing Comedy, as it surely ought to be, then I would set forth at night, steal the Triple Headed Goddess, prise open her Well at the Minster and drop her back where she belongs.

Church and Goddess would be satisfied and Golden Age would return to Sheppey.

Both Articles, Roy Kerridge.

London. 1999-2000

WITCHCRAFT AND DEMONOLOGY IN THE WORLD TODAY



Just prior to the last Halloween of the 20th Century, the following snippet appeared in the pages of the local press. It concerns a certain Mike Pearse, a Scouse Pagan whose beliefs lie very much in the Irish-Celtic tradition.

'Pagans are asked three questions most,' he told 'LIVERPOOL ECHO' reporter Dawn Collinson. 'We're questioned about naked rituals, blood rites and cursing people but that's basically because of the media and the Christian church.'

'What the Christian church did to our faith, Saatchi Saatchi couldn't have done better. It was misrepresentation wholesale. With the Millennium coming up we've had 2000 years of bad press and it's stuck.'

Mike, who hails from the Waterloo district of the city, related that his eight-year-long interest in Paganism was

fuelled by a series of visits to various mystical sites across the length and breadth of Britain.

'They provoked me, rather than the people, although I quite naively took it for granted that there would be a lot of people similar to myself feeling the way I did, which isn't necessarily so.'

Fortunately for Mike, however, he managed to meet up with other like-minded members of a North Liverpool Pagan Group which is said to bring together the religion's various traditions.

They gather for Moots every month at each other homes, and there, in the midst of what passes for everyday normality in leafy green suburbia, they pay homage to the female deity (Brian Slade's friend and ours); the Goddess and her consort.

Not all Pagans share exactly the same set of beliefs but as Mike is quick to point out;

'We have some rituals where everyone is involved together because there are certain things which bind us, like the Goddess. The ways in which many of us differ are too numerous to mention but for instance, I don't wear robes as Druids and Wiccans do, and Wiccans worship on a Lunar cycle which Celts don't.'

In a valiant, though doubtless fruitless attempt to dispel the dark and sinister reputation surrounding anything remotely *cultish* or *ritualistic*, Mike, 44, stated that; *'A ritual can be anything from working in a fantastic temple in robes, conversing in the tongue of Angels, to going down to the beach in a T-shirt and jeans to put fruit and wine on the ebb tide.'*

'They are both rituals, neither is right or wrong, and while one is higher than the other, doesn't make it better.'

Mike was said to be marking the festival of Samhain, alone at home, but Wiccan members of the group were determined to venture forth for a family party followed by a religious celebration and feast, honouring ancestors and looking forward at the end of the Pagan Year...

One of these more social Wiccans, 31-year-old Karen, who comes from North Liverpool, was quoted as saying, in mock serious tones; *'There will be no killing, no sex, and we'll all have our clothes on.'*

Karen, who was brought up as a Catholic, converted to Paganism back in 1994, when she was expecting her daughter.

'I realised that my religion (Catholicism) wasn't giving me any solace or free will'

'When I became pregnant, I wanted something better for her and I was restless because I knew Catholicism wasn't what I wanted. I'd used Tarot Cards when I was a teenager and been told it was the Devil's work, but my interest in the Occult was always there, so it was only natural that was the way I veered'

'I read in a magazine about what Pagans believed and about Goddess worship and I thought "that's me!"'

Although both Karen and her partner are self-confessed Witches - *'I like that term. I just wish it didn't have such ridiculous connotations'* Karen says - her daughter has a broad religious upbringing.

'We celebrate Christian festivals such as Easter and Christmas for her because I don't want her losing out on any of the traditional aspects of childhood.'

'She was in her Nativity last year and I even bought the baby Jesus doll. I think it's important for children to understand all the religions so that when they're old enough they can make an informed decision.'

Karen was introduced to the group by Colleen, a fellow Wiccan who she met through a mutual friend at her daughter's school. They both claim to have encountered more than their fair share of detractors who have nothing better to do than make at best dismissive remarks

regarding the group's religious beliefs, and at worst, are hostile to the point of virtual persecution.

'I think people would be more open to the religion if they didn't believe we were all running off into the woods to have sex,' Karen told the reporter laughingly. *'That just never happens.'*

30th October, 1999 Liverpool, Merseyside 'LIVERPOOL ECHO'

'Witch' Curses Earl Spencer

'The people must have something good to read... On a Sunday!!!'

That cynical, sneering line courtesy of one of my all-time favourite bands; THE CLASH, never seemed to ring more true than in the aftermath of my reading this humdinger of an article, one wet, miserable November weekend...

According to the *SUNDAY EXPRESS*, Earl Spencer, brother of the sadly-departed Princess of Wales, was attracting a great deal of unwelcome publicity for allegedly sacking one of his maids at his South African home.

Nothing too remarkable about that, you might well say, until you consider that the reason he dispensed with the unfortunate woman's services was that he suspected her of Witchcraft.

At least that's how the story goes.

Virginia Ganyaza, a mother-of-two, was forced to quit her £5.60 per day job mere minutes before the Earl's house was hit by a bolt of lightning and badly damaged.

The Earl, who you may think is in dire danger of being dragged away screaming by the Credibility Police, apparently claims that the inferno was caused not by the forces of nature but by the direct intervention of a Witch, the hapless Mrs Ganyaza. He was said to believe that her motive for all-but razing his domain to the ground lay in the fact that he had dismissed her for stealing.

'It happened five minutes after I had sacked the cleaner for theft,' he told reporters. *'The woman hasn't mustered up a smile in two years of working for me, but apparently rustled up a thunderbolt at will.'*

Virginia, perhaps not surprisingly given the nature of the allegation, was tearstruck and could only seek to deny she'd resorted to wreak revenge by employing Witchcraft. *'I cannot believe that he is saying I was responsible for the fire that burned his house.'*

'I was outside the maid's room still reading the letter he gave me when the lightning struck. I am not a Witch. I go to church and I believe in God. I cannot just summon lightning like he says.'

What is certain is that the errant bolt struck the thatched roof of the Earl's spacious, Tarrystone House in Constantia, back in December, 1998. Mrs Ganyaza, who began working there for little more than a pittance, in October, 1996. She claimed that her wealthy, undeniably skinflint boss had accused her of stealing a (shock, horror) plastic toy ring.

'Mr Spencer accused me of stealing a piece of jewellery but what really happened is that I found a cheap toy ring made from beads strung on elastic that belonged to the Earl's daughter Miss Kitty, while I was cleaning the house one day.'

'Kitty told her father that I had taken the ring and when I arrived at work the next day he accused me of stealing it.'

'He was very cross and I was very scared. At first I said I did not know what he was talking about, but then I

admitted what had happened and brought it to work the next day. Then he gave me a letter and told me to go.'

9th November, 1999 Constantia, South Africa 'SUNDAY EXPRESS'

New Nightmares For Old Ones



And speaking of sensationalist Sunday tabloid excesses, consider if you will, the following item, culled from the less-than-reliable pages of 'THE NEWS OF THE WORLD' (a giant, asteroid-sozed misnomer, if ever there was one!). The article opens with reference to what the hack describes as a 'Satanic Sex Monster' prowling the streets of Stacksteads in the heart of Lancashire.

Ray Bogart, (a literal *Bogeyman*, if ever there was one), was fortunate in the extreme not to receive a custodial sentence for indecently assaulting an 11-year-old girl, and, says the tabloid press, is now free to continue with his 'Devil Worshipping' antics.

To add insult to injury, Bogart's home, the paper is only too keen to point out, stands no more than a few yards from two primary schools. Perhaps understandably, local parents, outraged by the fact that Bogart was placed on probation, have felt compelled to draw up a 1,000-name petition to Home Secretary Jack Straw, demanding a recall of the case and the imposing of a prison sentence so that justice can be seen to be done (*though bearing in mind Mr Straw's less than fair-minded sense of justice-witness the despicable u-turn in respect of the pre-election promise of a fresh inquiry into the Hillsborough tragedy - I wouldn't hold out too great a hope for a positive response -Ed*).

Bogart, who once called himself 'Ramon,' was first labelled as a 'Satanist' back in 1972, when he lived in Manchester, setting himself up as High Priest of an 100-strong sect he christened the Satanic Templars. He allegedly told reporters from 'THE NEWS OF THE WORLD' that he had personally overseen a human blood sacrifice. He was quoted as saying at the time;

'We sometimes have a nude priestess as a living altar, but only when someone requires a baby. The priest, usually me, cuts his arms and puts some drops of blood and wine in a chalice and pours it over her naked body. It infuses one with vitality.'

He also made use of the publicity to show off his collection of knives, swords and pins which he claimed were used for sticking into wax effigies of potential victims, who he hoped to bewitch. Although, perversely, 'Ramon,' it seemed was a Witch with a conscience...

'We don't like doing it unless we have to. The same with the sacrifices, when I have to cut a dove's throat.'

He also attempted to gain himself some much needed respectability by insisting that he wanted to rid his sect of perverts that gave Witchcraft a bad name and 'clean it all up.'

Just five years after giving that interview however, two undercover female reporters working for the (ahem) public-spirited, crusading publication enquired of Mr Bogart the details of his 'dark rites.' Believing that they were both 15-year-old schoolgirl virgins, he told them that they must be prepared to keep a secret and that they would have to do things they may not want to.

'When you join a Coven in my order you have to have sex with the high priest. I think the law is stupid saying girls can't have sex when they are 15. Their bodies are ready before then. I have girls of all ages coming to me. Pubescent girls who are just starting to develop get embarrassed when their taking all their clothes off at first, but once I start massaging them with oils they relax.'

Disturbingly, despite Judge Raymond Bennett's ruling that one of the conditions of Bogart's probation is that he not be left alone with any girl under the age of 16, Audrey Reece, a 45-year-old neighbour, stated that *'Earlier this year (1999), I saw a lot of young girls going into his house. It seemed odd.'*

18th December, 1999 Stacksteads, Lancashire NEWS OF THE WORLD'

The Bewitched Knicker Pest

A thief with a fetish for stealing the knickers from the washing line of a 31-year-old woman by the name of Nancy Turner, was said to have been driven off by Witchcraft.

An increasingly exasperated Nancy was finally forced to call on a local 'wise woman' who agreed to her requests that a sequence of spells be cast in her back garden.

And I guess the magic, whatever form it may have taken, proved to be extremely efficacious, because nothing has been taken since.

19th December, 1999 Holsworthy, Devon 'THE SUNDAY MANC'

Harry Potter ~ Servant Of The Devil

It truly seems that absolutely nothing is sacred these days...One of the most popular characters in children's literature, J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter, has been labelled by certain 'experts' as maybe exerting an evil influence on the all-too gullible kiddies.

That might seem to the more rational amongst us to be pretty much bordering on the type of religious intolerance indulged in by our Victorian ancestors, but what's even worse is that the charges against the innocuous-seeming trainee wizard have been set out on the Internet.

Inter alia www.exposingsatanism.org/harrypotter warns in suitably sonorous tones that the lightning flash on Harry's head- ostensibly caused, as readers of the novels will doubtless be aware, by a battle with the evil Lord Voldemort whilst in infancy - in fact, a symbol of the bespectacled youngster's possession by dark forces.

'Look at the Satanic "S" on Harry's head shown on the latest book's cover,' the author of the self-righteous site exclaims in puritanical fury, directing, as it does, the reader to an archive of occult symbols

'A lightning bolt that means "destroyer." Worn to have power over others

'Also worn by the feared SS of Nazi Germany.'

Holy Evangelical Crusade, chums, it's enough to give a chap an attack of the willies!!!

CREATURES FROM THE OUTER EDGE The Latest Alien Animal Encounters

I am deeply indebted to Mark Fraser, former Editor of the now-sadly defunct 'HAUNTED SCOTLAND,' for the following series of Allen Animal Snippets, from North of the Border.

I'm happy to report however, that Mark is still very much involved in the fields of Fortean research, running, as he does, an excellent Website dedicated to collating all forms of paranormal phenomena, the details of which can be found at the conclusion of this article..

According to a personal account posted on Mark's Web Site, on December 13th, 1999, an unnamed male witness was travelling from Kilmarnock to Glasgow, at approximately 9:50pm, when he sighted a big cat emerging from clump of trees. In the witness's own words;

'It was skulking down, and moving slowly but steadily from the secluded area of the trees, into a section of hilly land. The area was covered in snow at least 2-3 inches thick, that's why the black creature stood out so distinctively against the white background.

'It was some distance from the road and therefore it was quite difficult to estimate its true height. The head however, appeared unmistakably cat-like, and the shoulders were quite large, as it disappeared over a ledge or a hill. I also caught sight of a long black tail. It then disappeared from view.

Mark is quick to point out that the location of this sighting; Fenwick Moors, has long been rumoured to be the home of an unidentified Big Cat.

Accounts date back to at least the 1960's, and interestingly, the area also has more than its fair share of UFO sightings. Are we dealing with a potential Window Area, here?..

'TIGER' AND 'BABOON' SIGHTED IN AYSHIRE

**** Another personal account hummed down the wires from the Newmilns Ski Slope in Ayrshire. An anonymous man was out walking his dog and was crossing a field directly behind the ski slope when he was astonished to see a creature he later described as being a tiger.*

'I thought at first it was a black Labrador dog walking through a gap in the hedge into the next field alongside Newmilns Cemetery.

'I pursued the 'dog' as I thought it was a stray, and to my absolute amazement I saw what I am one hundred per cent sure was a tiger-like creature walking slowly across the field. At that stage, I must admit that I was slightly frightened by what I saw and the dog wasn't happy either.

Ever since I have been trying to catch another glimpse of the animal.'

Meanwhile, also in Ayrshire, a hunt for what was described as a 'baboon-like creature' was initiated after a motorist told police he nearly collided with a 'large monkey' on a road near Prestwick Airport.

Two officers called to the scene were also reported to have sighted the animal (whatever it was) before it ran off. A police spokesman said; 'They couldn't be sure what it was.'

Conversely however, just a few days later, Ayr police were confident that the 'baboon' was in fact a 'big black hairy dog.' The police claimed that the two officers who went to investigate the reports of a strange animal in Shaw Farm Road, Ayr, on Wednesday, 6th January, saw nothing but a mongrel dog.

The police also said that they'd checked with Prestwick Airport to see if they had any animals in transit and were missing a baboon, but they weren't.

Quite how anyone can mistake a common or garden mutt for an exotic baboon is beyond me, but there you go...

18th January, 2000 Prestwick Airport, Ayr, Scotland 'THE SCUM'



**** The following account was sent by e-mail to Mr Fraser;*

'I have a story which I feel may be of interest to you...

Last week, I joined my parents in the New Forest for the annual family holiday and was surprised to find that my younger brother Andrew, aged 17, had seen a large cat.

'It transpires that at about 12pm, he was walking from the place where we were staying; Hackney Park in Sway, across the valley to a wood called Shirley Holmes Wood.

The wood is a little off the beaten track and although the local people walk their dogs in the locality. I wouldn't describe it as a tourist haven. In front of the wood on its downward slope made up of bracken and heath and the wood itself is quite dark and a tad foreboding. At the top of the hill, next to the wood is a path which leads to some houses and then further to a railway line.

'It transpires that Andrew had walked up the hill and had for a short period with his back to the wood and surveyed the scene before him. He then walked towards the wood and decided to poke his head through an opening in the trees. At this point a large animal ran out from a clump of bushes (from what he has said this was to the right of him) and ran diagonally about 20 yards before it disappeared in another section of the wood.

The incident only lasted 1.5 to 2 seconds, but his description was good.

'The animal was black. had a round head like a cat, and ran like a cat rather than bounding like a dog, in terms of

"The animal was black, had a round head like a cat, and ran like a cat rather than bounding like a dog, in terms of length he described it as being about a third longer than a large Alsatian or about the width of your average car. He said the speed was incredible and the animal was very sleek. I reached Hackney Park at 3pm, and after having heard the story I urged Andrew to speak to a Mrs Beal, who owns Hackney Park, and to call the police. Sway police commented that there had been a previous sighting about three weeks earlier, and Mrs Beal claimed that her husband had seen a large cat near the wood.

Andrew said that at the time he did not feel scared but was very shocked and only later did he start to think about what could have been a rather nasty experience.

Rather stupidly, that evening, the whole family (fuelled by my over-zealous self and mother) decided to go up to the wood, much to Andrew's chagrin. I ran off about 35 yards along the path from the car park to a point where the wood was on one side and a large bush on the other. At this I heard a really strange sound in the bush beside me. A very large cat shriek. At this point we all ran quickly.

I suspect however, that the noise I heard was that of a normal cat fuelled by paranoia. I over-reacted, but even so Andrew refused point blank to go to the wood again and I would have second thoughts!!!

I have discussed this incident with Andrew on many occasions and he is certain that what he saw was a cat and not a large dog, or worse still, a shuck (heaven forbid!!!).

Black Leopard Sighted In Much Hadham

The owner of the Wildford Road, Mill Riding Club, reportedly encountered an ABC said to have resembled a black leopard, late last October....

Gill Kennett, who became the 21st witness of Allen Big Cat phenomena in the locale since 1997, spotted the creature from a distance of approximately 25 yards.

'It was lying, hiding below the hedge. As we were walking up there, it must have taken fright and we saw it jump through the hedge.'

She said it was jet black and about the size of a small Alsatian dog. *'I knew it wasn't a dog because of the way it arched its back as it leapt.'*

Mrs Kennett initially thought it was responsible for an animal screaming on the previous Saturday and then a Muntjac Deer's leg left in her riding arena on the following Tuesday evening. But national 'expert' Quentin Rose was quoted as saying that in his humble opinion cats killed by grabbing the throat, preventing the prey from crying out. He admitted to feeling more than a little puzzled however by the fact that; *'The animal she (Mrs Kennett) saw was a good description of a black leopard. I was convinced by its behaviour and description of its body and tail.'*

26th October, 1999 Much Hadham 'THE OBSERVER'

*** The highly-respected paranormal researcher Jenny Randles, wrote to *'THE BUXTON ADVERTISER'* with news of the so-called Peak Panther, rumoured to haunt the locale surrounding (surprisingly enough) the Peak District...

'Almost ten years to the day since the reports of a panther in the Peak District, a similar beast has returned to the area, it is reported.'

Jo Royle (no relation to ol' Big Fat Box 'Ead Himself, the current incumbent at Man City, one presumes - Ed), a camping equipment shop owner from Buxton, reports that "I was running uphill and I saw it walking along a wall. I thought it was a fox at first, but when I got closer it was a cat - no doubt about it. I stopped dead because I was

scared. I thought it could attack me at any time. It must have sensed me stopping because it turned and looked straight at me.

Jo added that at just 30 feet distance she could clearly see lighter markings on its very dark face.

'It started to run along this wall and it was a beautiful sight. I realise I am one of the few people to have seen it and I feel honoured.'

The report does not actually state where or when it was seen, save 'last week' and, by implication, Ollerset Moor between Chinley and Hayfield.

Keith Wood, a retired ranger, has been chasing the cat since reports began there back in 1981, and says that there are many caves from stone quarrying in this area that could house a panther. However, police have no reports of animal kills or unusual footprints or droppings to help confirm these stories. As usual, the ABC behaves more like a phantom than a real animal.

The earlier flap was in November, 1989, when armed police spent some hours chasing the panther on Ollerset Moor after several sightings. I recall a case that we at NARO looked into at the time (I lived in Stockport then) in which a woman claimed the panther entered the kitchen of her home in New Mills (which is in the same area as all these sightings). It sauntered in as she gazed in amazement and then strolled out again.

This part of the north west Peak District is best known for another alien animal - a colony of wallabies. They seem to have spread across the moors earlier this year, possibly from an initially released pair. At one time it was believed that at least 50 roamed the local hills but a recent report by the park rangers office said that recent sightings have been so few that it is possible that they have all died out. Does anyone know whether panthers fancy wallabies for tea?

A little closer to home, a Dennis O' Grady, of St John's Road, Buxton, reported a huge black cat in the bushes that leapt away, when disturbed.

The gravel path was finally found heavily indented in a way normal cats and dogs do not. The result was as if a small horse had walked along it.

Another paw print was found some weeks earlier by Tony Whittaker of Wormhill. It was five inches across. In this same area several badgers have recently been found dead. In one case, earlier this year (1999), a dead badger was found behind a wall surrounded by a mass of hair that had been ripped from the creature indicating a large predator at work.

At Chapel-en-le-Frith, one witness (who doesn't want naming) says that a large black animal has been seen wandering fields between Chapel and Chinley on several recent occasions. It is estimated as five feet long and 'lopes' rather than walks. He does not believe it is a dog or a large fox. He has lived in this rural spot for years and says this animal is definitely not native to the area.

A specifically dated sighting occurred on Sunday 30th May, 1999, at Start Lane in Whaley Bridge. A large black cat was seen crossing fields towards Toddbrook Reservoir. It was between the size of a spaniel and a Labrador but definitely a cat. Alastair MacDonald watched it via binoculars for several minutes as it edged into woodland but never came out.

Derbyshire Wildlife Trust have admitted a flood of sightings from the High Peak area during 1999 and say that the sightings are too widespread to result from just one animal. They suspect that it could be a number of Scottish Wildcat - but not a panther.

This is based on a close up sighting of the face (reported from the Chinley/Buxworth area of Ollerset Moor). Panthers do not have marks here, but this animal did in similar proportions to a Wildcat.

But DWT are satisfied some real species of animal is being seen as there are too many consistent reports to easily dismiss.

JENNY RANGLES

September-October, 1999

More Than A Wartime Legend

One of those seemingly countless 'Nessie' stories that have almost slipped into the misted realm of folklore (along with the Doctor MacCrae 'Definitive Photographs' locked away in some bank vault, the Sunday School skivers who encountered a hideous, squat hippo-like creature in the woods above Foyers and the brave soul who tried to swim across the Loch and was said to have been dragged under by something unseen) may have more than a mere kernel of truth in it, after all.



For fifty-odd years now, rumours have abounded that at the height of the Second World War, a warship involved in a military exercise on the Loch had an encounter with something decidedly mysterious.

Vivian Owers, aged 77, a former motor launch commander in the Royal Navy, has finally elected to go public about the incident after reading an article about the well-respected researcher Dr Robert Rines published in a recent issue of *'THE INVERNESS COURIER'*.

Mr Owers was apparently visiting his old home in Contin during a holiday in the area when he came across the piece and was filled with an overwhelming need to get the story off his chest.

He explained that during manoeuvres on the Loch back in 1944, one of the craft in the eight-strong 21st Flotilla was seriously damaged by by an Unidentified Submarine Object (USO).

He can't recall the exact date, but it occurred sometime in the January of 1944. The flotilla, which was then based at Scapa Flow, had been due off to Nairn to practice for the forthcoming D-Day landings. But on that particular day the weather was so poor that the exercise had to be transferred to Loch Ness. Mr Owers told a modern-day reporter from the *'COURIER'* that everything had seemed to be going according to plan until one of the craft, skippered by an Australian friend of his nicknamed 'Digger,' struck something unseen in the water.

Once the 112-foot-long motor launch had docked at Thronbrush slipway in Inverness for repairs, it was discovered that two of the propeller blades had been lost but the third, along with the rudder post, was still intact, showing no signs of any damage.

Mr Owers was quoted as saying; *'It was very strange. There was no debris floating in the water.'*

'We couldn't think of it being anything other than the monster. There is plenty of power in those propellers so it must have been something substantial to do that kind of damage. We were convinced that it must have been the monster.'

Due to a 50-year ban imposed by the Admiralty on disclosing certain classified information on wartime activities, Mr Owers felt he was unable to discuss the incident outside his circle of friends in the Navy. Until now, that is.

But the crew of Motor Launch 442 talked at some considerable length about their experience at the time, which perhaps predictably, soon became something of a running joke in the 21st Flotilla.

Mr Owers, who skippered No. 446, said; *'There were eight boats in the flotilla and everybody got to hear about it. From then on, "Digger" was known as the man who tried to kill the Loch Ness Monster.'*

An official report was made to the Admiralty about the damage to the craft but the flotilla heard no more about it.

Originally hailing from Essex, Mr Owers worked in the north of Scotland as a business counsellor for the Highlands and Islands Development Board, predecessor to Highlands and Islands Enterprise.

Fifty-five years on from the incident, Mr Owers, who now stays in Fife, hopes that his story will appeal not only to locals but also to the explorers studying Loch Ness.

'Because we were not allowed to talk about it, nobody else knew about the encounter,' he was quoted as saying.

17th August, 1999 Loch Ness, Scotland 'THE INVERNESS COURIER'

The Piranha That Came From Nowhere

One of those maddening enigmas beloved of the late, great Charles Fort allegedly occurred in an aquarium in West Yorkshire at the tail end of February.

A two-foot-long Pacu, the largest member of the Piranha family, had somehow managed to introduce itself (perhaps 'gatecrashed' would be a better word?) into one of the resident fish tanks.

Mark Pearson, manager of the Centre Vale Park Aquarium in Todmorden, was quoted as saying; *'A member of the public came up to me and said that one of the fish looked a bit ill.'*

'When I looked in the tank I thought, "Well, that wasn't there yesterday."

An inspection of the premises seemed to reveal that an intruder, or maybe intruders, had forced open a rear door, and had then, for reasons unknown, deposited the Pacu in the tank, before making good their escape.

Paul Lucas, of Calderdale Council, which has overall responsibility for the aquarium, told reporters; *'We have no idea put the piranha in, or why. Someone must have walked in with a two-foot fish in a carrier bag before dumping it.'*

'Pacus grow rapidly and a fully-developed one can be expected to reach four-feet long and weigh more than forty pounds. At two foot, the visiting Pacu has some way to go but it is still so big it can't turn around in the aquarium. At the moment we are a bit flummoxed as to what to do with it as we don't have a spare tank large enough to put it in.'

'At least the fish seems happy and thankfully it has not eaten any of the others. None of us are experts on these matters (you got that right. Pacus are vegetarian- Zoology Ed) so we might come in tomorrow and find it has grown to three-feet!'
29th February, 2000 Todmorden, West Yorkshire 'DAILYMAIL'

In Search Of Selma; The Monster Of Lake Seljord

The so-called (at least by the more tourist-conscious amongst the locals and publicity-seeking 'investigators') Norwegian version of 'Nessie,' has been rumoured to haunt Lake Seljord, in the southern part of the country known as Telemark, for untold centuries.

Perhaps the most famous of the historical accounts dates back to 1750, when a local man by the name of Gunleik Verpe encountered a creature he later described as a 'huge sea horse' whilst rowing in the middle of the lake. Gunleik also claimed that his tiny boat was attacked by the monster, and as such this case has a curious parallel with an alleged incident said to have occurred in 1969 on Loch Morar, Scotland, when a long-necked 'something' almost upset a small fishing boat. In this modern instance however, the two men managed to ward off the creature with a combination of their oars and a pot shot with a rifle.



Gunleik Andersson-Verpe (to give him his *full* name) wasn't nearly as fortunate. He was tipped into the ice-cold water and though he managed to scramble to the safety of the shore, his cargo of house contents, along with the boat, sank straight to the bottom.

In the immediate aftermath of Gunleik's experience, the locals flatly refused to sail on the lake, but the furore soon died down when there were no further reported sightings, and as is often the way of things, people began to openly scoff at the very idea of a monster existing in the picturesque stretch of water.

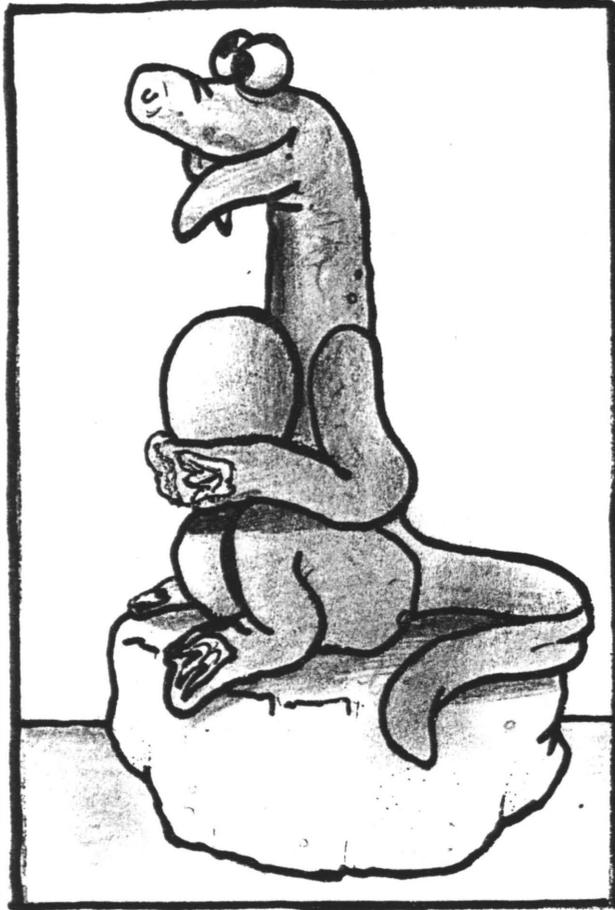
For the next recorded encounter we have to travel forward a hundred and twenty years to 1880.

Another resident of Telemark, Bjorn Bjorge, along with his mother, made public his claim that he had killed a baby specimen. He was washing his clothes in the lake one afternoon when an unidentified creature resembling a lizard, and about 40 inches in length, swam past him. With the help of his mother he managed to kill the monster with a stick. Typically, no one thought to attempt to preserve the remains, which were instead left to rot on the beach.

There were further reports of the monster, most of which described the creature as as resembling 'a serpent with horse-like head.'

In 1920, a witness by the name of Eivind Fjodstuff, claimed he saw a large creature emerge from the lake with a somewhat lumbering gait and made its way onto the shore. It paid him no heed at first, but when at last it caught sight of

Elvind, who had come down to the lake to indulge in a spot of fishing, it immediately slid back into the water and began to swim purposefully towards him. Fjodstuf didn't wait around too long after that, but he was able to give a detailed description of the beast for posterity. It was apparently 50-60ft long, with a head resembling that of a crocodile. It had fin-like forefeet and was black in colour with no visible facial features.



Interest in the monster reached a peak in 1977, when the first organised search for 'Selma' was undertaken by Jan-Ove Sundberg, Adolf Refvik and Oystein Molstad-Andresen. They succeeded, like the Loch Ness Investigation Bureau, back in the 1960's, in acquiring a large amount of pretty reliable anecdotal evidence, including first-hand eyewitness accounts, arguably the most impressive of which was that related by Ivar Hesmyr. According to her testimony, on Easter Monday, 1977, he was fishing in a small boat in the company of his 13-year-old daughter, Solveig and a neighbour's son when suddenly three gleaming humps rose out of the water a mere hundred yards away from their boat. Mr Hesmyr managed to retain his composure sufficiently enough to estimate that the total length of the creature was somewhere in the region of 30ft. Just beyond the line of humps, he was able to make out a long neck supporting a disproportionately small head. Curiously, all the witnesses remarked that they also discerned that the monster had small, cat-like ears.

Ivar later swore that he would never again venture out onto the lake.

In 1986, there were at least two notable accounts. The first concerns Bjarne Haugstol, who in the July of that year sighted a monster with three humps in pursuit of a shoal of fish near a place called Lauvsnes. He stated that the water in front of the humps was 'boiling' with them.

The second incident took place just one month later when Aasmund Skori, claims that he saw a 'sort of bow' appear on the entirely calm surface. He later told investigators;

'The bow was one and a half metres long, as thick as a thigh and looked deep black. The body divided the water in front, and behind it the lake was frothing.

'As I drew near, approximately 10-12 metres, it sank into the depths.'

Even more recently, three teenage boys told how they were sailing across the lake in their dinghy when they experienced the terrifying sensation of having their craft pushed a whole metre above the waves before crashing down with a suddenness that served to give them all nightmares for months to come.

And to move things very nearly bang up to date, last Summer (1999), four men from Britain, Adam Davies, Keith Townley, Stuart Steedman and Andy Sanderson, elected to respond to a Internet request for volunteers for an expedition to Lake Seljord. It was, it transpires, Adam's idea. The 31-year-old has always harboured an interest in all things Cryptozoological. He has served 'tours of duty' in such far-lung corners of the globe as Sumatra in search of the Orang-Pendek, and so is well-versed in the field of on-site investigation.

Adam told reporters; *'It has fired my imagination from when I was very young. This whole idea of these things existing and yet people not being sure that they are really there. It may be seen as Boys' Own stuff, but my idea has always been to live these things through in a valuable manner, with an noble purpose.'*

He found a kindred spirit in Andy Sanderson, 28, and once they'd decided to form a group of like-minded individuals they set up the (nowadays) inevitable website, and soon after made contact with a London-based former Royal Marine, Terence Bellingham and others. They christened themselves Extreme Expeditions, and planned a series of mouth-watering projects for the more adventurous amongst us all of which involved travelling to locations throughout the world in search of Alien Animals.

Their current agenda features such Cryptozoological luminaries as the Mongolian Death Worm, the Yeti and Mokele M'bembe; the Brontosaurus-like creature reputedly alive and well and living in the swamps of Congo's Likouala region.

The trip to Lake Seljord was initially seen as being something of an 'icebreaker' by the team, currently consumed by the quest to obtain financial backing for an expedition to the aforementioned Congo,

The team of investigators was to be headed by Jan-Ove Sundberg, a Swedish author and long-time Monster Hunter.

And so, during the Summer-dozzy dog days of August, Andy and Adam, along with two friends, Keith Townley, 25, from Stockport and Stuart Steedman, 28, flew to Oslo intent upon obtaining positive proof of the existence of Selma - the monster of Lake Seljord.

The rest of the team were a pretty cosmopolitan bunch, made up as they were of Belgians, Swedes, Dutch and Norwegians. They set up camp at the side of the lake, but the British contingent, for reasons best known themselves (one hopes that they weren't being in any way xenophobic, here) decided to form their own group within the ten-strong group that were to spend the next nine days engaged in the search.

Andy Sanderson (a good Fortean surname, if ever there was one. Mr Ivan T. would doubtless have approved of the spirit of adventure displayed by his namesake), later related that; *'There is a lot more out there in the world than people are willing to accept. A creature is not a stone relic, it is living and breathing, and it was a mystery, and here was a chance to say "Let's find out."*

The search began with the coming of the dawn of that first day. The British plunged straight in by out a small motorboat onto the lake whilst other team members set about creating up shore observation points or monitored

recording devices linked to underwater microphones that Andy and his friends were intending to drop beneath the placid surface.

'As the first sun came up, we were out on the lake in dead calm.' Keith told a reporter from *'THE MAIL ON SUNDAY.'* *'You could see the tracks the fish made, and strange wakes, It was very atmospheric. Such a huge lake'* (It's eight miles long and 500 feet deep in places, tiny in comparison with say, Loch Ness, - not to mention the Great Lakes of America, Okanagan and Champlain, for example, but still big enough to contain a mystery or two, one would think - Ed).

In common with just about every monster-haunted lake, the world over, the investigators were very often on the brink of being fooled by purely natural phenomena playing on the surface of the water; Odd bow waves, birds seen from a distance, tricks of wind and current, errant pieces of flotsam and jetsam. On one particular occasion, the whole team were jolted into frenzied action by the sight of a violent commotion in the water. They raced towards the source of the activity and were disappointed to discover that it was nothing more exotic than a beaver cave.

For the best part of three days, the team stuck to the same routine with not the slightest hint of success. Morale remained high, however, and their patience was about to be rewarded as the light slowly bled from the sky and darkness began to fall across the lake and the surrounding mountains. The search didn't cease with the onset of dusk, however. Far from it, in fact. The four intrepid British members of the group hired two boats from a local campsite owner. They decided to scan opposite ends of lake. Keith and Stuart took the northern end, whilst Andy and Adam headed towards the south. The latter couple were drifting not far from a clump of weeds, about 500 yards offshore when their attention was drawn to a sudden movement in the water.

'I saw something rise out of the water,' Andy would later tell reporters, barely able to keep his voice from trembling *'It was black and rose out of the water - we could see three hoops at one time, coming out of the water. I turned round to Andy and said "What the hell's that?"*

Andy replied, "I don't know!"

I said, "Come on, let's get this boat started and get after it."

They succeeded in capturing a (typically, frustratingly) inconclusive piece of video evidence. Andy Sanderson however, is convinced beyond doubting that the film shows a genuine, unidentified creature.

'We knew it couldn't be a boat wave because we we had been sitting there for one-and-a-half hours. Something is seen on the film, moving fast across the surface from right to left, towards the middle of the lake. The trouble was, we couldn't get the boat started. Adam yanked at the outboard, and when it suddenly fired, we rocketed forward. At that stage, I was trying desperately to shoot the film, and I got knocked off my feet. As a result of this, the video footage goes all over the place (another example of the type of ill fortune that often appears to plague even the most seasoned of Cryptozoologists - Witness the late Tim Dinsdale's coining of the term 'Loch Ness Hoodoo,' in response to the seeming curse that would thwart the investigator's best efforts - Ed)

'At the very last moment however, I managed to steady myself, and you can clearly see three humps sticking out of the water in a dead straight line.

'We saw the thing for about 30 seconds before it dived. It was about 20 feet long, black in colour, light underneath, and about a foot wide. This would seem to rule out, say, a big freshwater eel, which reels from side to side.'

The sighting and the attendant footage were given further credence by the fact that a series of unexplained soundings were picked up by the hydrophones that had been dropped

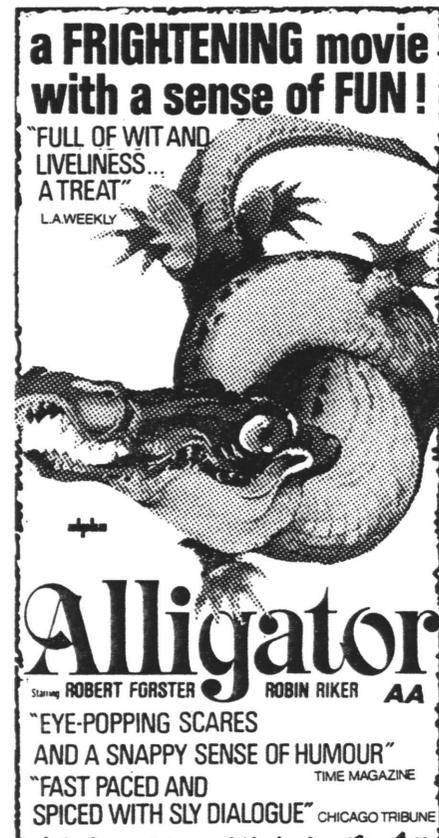
into the water earlier that day. It was described by a reporter from the *'DAILY MAIL'S WEEKEND MAGAZINE'* as sounding like *'a huge gruff thing grunting.'*

And this sound has now been recorded onto the Internet, so -people can make up their own minds concerning the origins of the noises. You simply need to contact www.bhanhof.sea/wizard.com, to maybe hear the sound of Selma....

4th March, 2000 Lake Seljord, Norway 'DAILY MAIL WEEKEND MAGAZINE'

'ALLIGATOR' SIGHTED IN NEWCASTLE

The mystery reptiles that plagued the centre of Birmingham during the spring of last year,, (See 'DON' # 18) seem to have resurfaced in the equally unlikely surroundings of deepest, darkest Geordie Land. Or at least *one* of them appears to have done so.



According to reports in the press, a six foot alligator was believed to have been on the loose in one of the city's parks. An unnamed woman apparently heard the animal rustling in a clump of undergrowth in Heaton Park, Newcastle upon Tyne. It is not recorded in the clipping that I came across whether she actually saw the creature or only *heard* something moving in the tangled mass of vegetation. And if this 'sighting' was merely auditory in nature, it kind of begs the question, how does she know what it truly was?

Fortunately, the account is given at least a degree of credence by the fact that several other people reported encountering a reptilian creature, and the police took the incidents seriously enough to launch an investigation.

Members of the Reptile Trust in Burnopfield, County Durham, spent a whole night searching for the creature...But as is so often the nature of such things, not a trace of the 'alligator' was found.

These 'experts' stated their belief however, that the creature could in fact be a Spectacled Cayman Alligator.

1st March, 2000 Newcastle Upon Tyne 'THE DAILY TELEGRAPH'

THE LOST WORLD IN THE HEART OF CAMBODIA

Proof, it were ever truly needed, that there still exist undiscovered places upon planet Earth, was provided in spades by the news humming down the wires from the depths of the Cambodian jungle.

A team of British scientists made the discovery after having been involved in an expedition crossing the Cardamon Mountain Range an area that had formerly been controlled by the much-feared Khmer Rouge, Pol Pot's guerilla army. Despite the constant fear of landmines, the team travelled into the very heart of the jungle. And they were rewarded a thousand times over for their efforts when they quite literally stumbled upon a realm straight out of a Conan Doyle novel. They were astonished by the sight that met their eyes. Amongst the wonders that lay all about were unidentified animals, incredible plant life, and a previously-thought-to-be-long-extinct species of crocodile.



One of the adventurers, Jennifer Daltry, a biologist with the Cambridge-based Fauna and Flora International (FFI), was so awe-struck she found it difficult to describe the experience to reporters. *'Every single day I found a new species I hadn't seen before.'*

'I've worked a lot in Thailand and but there are so many animals in this area that I simply don't recognise. The Siamese Crocodile was thought to be extinct in the wild. But we came across three of the creatures as we made our way along the rivers and marshes in a valley at the base of the mountain range.'

'To have a multiple sighting of these very shy reptiles is a very promising sign. Three in such a short time suggests they are not uncommon in this area.'

'The crocodiles, native to Thailand, have been hunted to the point of extinction over the past 100 years and only a few now live in captivity. It's just spectacular to find a viable population surviving in this area.'

'These could be classified as a special population, the last of their kind left in the world.'

One of the main reasons that this particular section of the Cambodian jungle has remained largely unexplored by Westerners is of course that for years beyond counting war has raged unchecked, making access all but impossible. Ironically, as man was far too preoccupied killing his fellow man, the various species of animals that exist here have been rendered all but safe from their would-be hunters.

British ecologist Peter Cutter, another worker with the FFI, told reporters; *'We found copious signs of barking deer, some wild pig, leopard and tiger. In addition, we saw the fresh remains of both Asian black bear and smooth-coated otter.'*

'But what really thrilled us was when, in the mud we stumbled across the relatively fresh remains of at least two elephants and when I knelt down to clear out the leaf litter to take a measurement I uncovered the track of a large tiger.'

'It was imprinted into the track of the elephant, as if framed by the elephant's track. The tiger had obviously stepped into the same piece of mud after the elephant had passed through.'

The expedition has already succeeded in identifying more than 100 bird species and yet more are predicted with the recent arrival in Cambodia of Frank Steinheimer, a curator and bird specialist from the British Museum of Natural History.

The discovery of (so far, at least) unidentified plant life has also excited biologists. Meng Monyrak, a Cambodian plant 'expert,' working with the team was unable to name only 40 per cent of the species they encountered.

'I'm confident we have found entirely new species,' he said. 'We are sending those off to botanists around the world for further identifications.'

Derek Gow, curator of the centre was quoted as saying; *'Beavers died out all over Europe but recently have been reintroduced successfully in Holland, France, Germany and Belgium.'*

'The United Kingdom is one of the very few European nations with no beaver population.'

'The long term aims for the Bring Back The Beaver Project are to establish a number of breeding colonies. They are delightful creatures which are extremely important from an ecological standpoint.'

12th January 2000 Britain, General *'THE DAILY TELEGRAPH'*

ANOTHER FISH FROM 'NOWHERE'

And would you believe it, for the second time this issue, we are left shaking our heads in bewilderment over the origins of a species of fish - this time a goldfish - in Northampton.

This creature actually made a full recovery after falling down a chimney, bouncing off the coals and landing on the hearth right in front of a gobsmacked family.

The official explanation for the fishes fall from the blue is that it must have been dropped by a passing bird, although typically there were no witnesses to this supposed act of avian clumsiness.

The mother of the family, Maureen Brewin, had the presence of mind to scoop up the fish and place it in a bowl of water until the RSPCA arrived. Mrs Brewin told the officers; *'It had obviously fallen down the chimney, bounced off the coals in the fireplace and landed in the hearth.'*

'It was lying perfectly still, then its tail started moving.'

'I think it is amazing that the fish survived. It was a very, very lucky fish, and if I had the right facilities I would have adopted it, but unfortunately, I don't.'

RSPCA Chief Inspector Dave Brown was quoted as saying; *'This was the first time I have been called out to a fish that had fallen down a chimney.'*

'Apart from a few superficial injuries to its scales, which might have been attributable to its having been in a bird's mouth, the fish was unharmed.'

The fish is now recovering in a pond in Northamptonshire. 17th December, 1999 Northampton *'DAILY EXPRESS'*

THE PARROT WITH A CASE OF TOURETTE'S SYNDROME

An Amazonian Green Parrot by the name of Percy, had envisioned a career on the stage, seeking out a part in a Christmas pantomime.

However, despite successfully learning his one line like a true thesp, he subsequently shocked fellow cast members during the final dress rehearsal, by suddenly screaming a whole welter of obscenities.

Perched on Long John Silver's shoulder, Percy should have squawked out the classic ol' cliché 'Pieces of eight'. Instead, for reasons best known to himself, he positively shrieked out 'FUCK OFF, MATE!!!'

The cast of *'TREASURE ISLAND'* were reduced to fits of laughter, he was encouraged enough to blurt out 'Bugger Off, Bugger Off.'

Organisers at the Jake's Ladder Theatre Company in Blandford Forum, Dorset, gave him the old heave-ho, fearing a repeat performance in front of an audience of kids.

Mark Hyde, who was playing Long John Silver said later; *'I could not believe what I was hearing. One minute the*

rehearsal was going perfectly, then Percy comes out with this. We all stood there in stunned silence before we burst out laughing.'

Percy, aged just 17 months, was awarded the part when his owner answered an advertisement in a local paper. Not surprisingly, due to his embarrassment, he requested reporters that he remain anonymous.

Alison Glenn, a spokeswoman for the theatre company said; *'His owner fears someone taught Percy to swear as some kind of sick joke.'*

Or maybe he just felt compelled to let off some steam.

1st December, 1999 Blandford Forum, Dorset *'THE TIMES'*

A Real-Life Cat Burglar

Ziggy the cat is in the habit of stealing items while the good people of the world are tucked up in their beds. He'll pinch whatever takes his fancy from chenille cardies to shirts or even a pair of Y-fronts.

'At first Ziggy would bring home small things like elastic bands and pieces of paper,' his owner Helen Lucarelli told reporters. *'But he has become more and more ambitious.'*

'Now he is stealing things so big he has trouble getting them through the cat-flap. They are much bigger and heavier than him.'

'We've had live frogs, disgusting Y-fronts, unopened burgers and even a police incident tape.'

'But clothes are a firm favourite. He has brought us plenty of clean washing. Most ends up in charity shop windows, but there was one chenille cardigan that was far too nice to give away. Now it's a favourite with a friend of mine.'

'We live more than two miles from the centre of Newcastle, yet he brings home napkins from restaurants and surgical gloves from the city hospital. He must roam for miles every night.'

To make matters worse, Ziggy also seems intent upon depositing various items of rubbish from the city streets onto the couples living room carpet.

'It may be great for everyone else in our road but I have to sweep up a refuse tip every morning.'

16th January, 2000 Newcastle *'DAILYMANC'*

The Nut-Crazy Squirrel

A squirrel, apparently searching for peanuts, managed to cause damage estimated at hundreds of pounds when it quite literally ransacked a house in Long Bennington, Lincolnshire.

The damage was so extensive that the house owners Roy and Janet Sadler, elected to call the police believing that burglars must be responsible. They'd returned home to a scene of devastation after a Saturday night out.

'All the pots and pans were on the floor, two glass ornaments had been smashed and there was damage in the dining room and study,' said Mr Sadler, 58.

'Then we noticed the tiny footprints up the wall and after that we saw soot beneath the fire and realised he must have come in down the chimney.'

'We also found wood chippings near several windows where the animal had tried to gnaw its way to freedom.'

Mr Sadler eventually succeeded in tracking down the pesky critter, and the grey squirrel which was hiding under a chair, made good its escape into the garden.

Mr Sadler later stated that he believed the creature was searching for peanuts which he often put in the garden for the birds. *'We have a family of squirrels in the garden and you often look out and see them stealing the peanuts. I guess he had eaten what we left out and was still hungry for more.'*

8th February, 2000 Long Bennington, Lincolnshire *'DAILY EXPRESS'*

And the team believe that they may have only barely scratched the surface.

'If you look at the size of the area we have surveyed so far, it's just a tiny portion of where we want to look. The rest is probably going to be even better.'

We await further news from the locale with great anticipation.

18th March, 2000 Cardamom Mountain Range, Cambodia 'DAILY MAIL'

ANOTHER ALIEN BIG CAT-THIS TIME IN GLOUCESTER

A collie was horribly savaged and a house almost clawed into by a panther-like Big Cat according to the results of a police investigation in Newent, Gloucester, during February.

Helping out with their enquiries, a vet believed a large cat could have caused the dog's serious neck wounds. Not long after the attack, a local villager discovered 'something' had ripped chunks off a door in an unsuccessful attempt to gain entry through a catflap in the dead of night.

6th February, 2000 Newent, Gloucestershire 'SUNDAY PEOPLE'

The Lonley Donkey That Brays Backwards

'Experts' in animal behaviour were called in to consider the enigmatic case of the 13-year-old donkey named Dixie, who it seems, was afflicted with what can only be described as a backwards bray....In other words, instead of hee-hawing, she emits the decidedly unusual haw-hee!!!

She was sent to a new home at the Ramshaw Rescue Centre, near Durham, when her previous owners could no longer look after her.

The Centre owner, Katie Wilson was quoted as saying; *'Dixie is truly one in a million. She must be the only donkey in Britain who brays back to front.'*

Dr Robert Barton, one of those aforementioned 'experts' in animal behaviour, based at Durham University, proffered the opinion that Dixie is very probably a disconsolately donkey simply trying to make herself in a cruel, indifferent world.

'The most likely explanation is that she didn't hear other donkeys when she was growing up and developing.'

'Donkeys do need to hear other donkeys to produce the normal sounds. She's probably been all on her own and has made a noise something like the rest of the species.'

15th February, 2000 Durham 'DAILY SLUR'

New Species Of Centipede Discovered By Student

The first centipede with an even number of pairs of legs has been discovered by Chris Kettle, 22, a doctoral student at the University of Sunderland.

Until this discovery, the so-called 'experts' had only ever found centipedes with an odd number of leg pairs - which can vary from 15 to 191 pairs - despite over 100 years of studying the world's 3,000 known species.

Even though they are called centipedes, the creatures do not actually have 100 legs.

Mr Kettle, who found the new centipede in Whitburn, near Sunderland, was quoted as saying; *'I've collected thousands - but I never expected to make a find as exciting this.'*

He is apparently of the opinion that the creature is likely to be a genetic mutation, producing the extra pair of legs - giving it 48 pairs.

29th October, 1998 Whitburn, Nr Sunderland 'THE TIMES'

'YETI' NABBED BY THE BOYS IN BLUE

Police in China managed to detain a group of unscrupulous peasants who had claimed to have captured a real-life Yeti. They were leading the 'beast' through the streets of Xiangcheng in Henan Province, at the end of a chain. They didn't get very far, however.



The police promptly detained the 'Yeti' along with its handlers, as they were embarking upon asking passers-by for money.

Not surprisingly, the 'Abominable Snowman' turned out to be nothing more exotic than a villager of decidedly small stature named Fang Xiwang, or 'Hopeful Fang,' dressed up in a black fur suit.

16th February, 2000 Henan Province, China 'THE TIMES'

Nice Beaver!!! Critters Make Comeback After 500 Years

The first breeding group of beavers in not-so-merrle-olde-England in over five centuries were well on the way to becoming established in the wild.

According to reports in the national press, the nucleus of a colony of European Beavers - three adults and four newborns - were, at the time of going to press, in quarantine at the Wildwood Centre in Canterbury, Kent, after being brought from the Masurian lakelands in Poland.

Beavers were formerly hunted for their pelts and musk glands. As per usual, they were hunted to extinction by man's all-consuming greed, during the Middle Ages, in England. The Scots were slightly more lenient, and the unfortunate creatures never became extinct there for another 200 years.

THE ANIMALS STRIKE BACK:

Squirrels, Ostriches, Hawks, Elephants And Moose On The Rampage



As we've already seen in this issue, sometimes even those creatures that we humans like to think of as being cute 'n' cuddly, can pack a punch every bit as surprising and unexpected as finding Zebras parading round your living room on a Monday evening...Witness the following cases.

Another of those pesky grey squirrels was apparently terrifying the residents of Godstone, Surrey by ambushing unwary walkers in a popular stretch of woodland. The critter delights in bolting up women's skirts and giving them a less-than-playful nip on their thighs, before making good its escape up the nearest available tree.

The usual bunch of wildlife 'experts' were said to be baffled by the creature's anti social actions. All they could do was seek to advise the local women to wear long trousers when strolling in the woods.

19th February, 2000 Godstone, Surrey 'SUNDAY PEOPLE'

*** At least four members of a family were trampled to death when a herd of bladdered elephants went on a drunken rampage in Assam, India.

A local wildlife official said six other people were critically injured as the 15 elephants broke into their huts after drinking an unknown quantity of rice beer kept in casks in the village of Prjapatibasti.

The Indian government has banned the capture of wild elephants, leading to a sharp increase in their numbers. There are currently about 5,500 in Assam alone.

22nd October, 1999 Prjapatibasti, India 'ASSOCIATED PRESS'

*** A French zoo director was crushed to death by a hippopotamus that had managed to escape from its quarters.

Jean Ducuing was cycling around the park in Pessac, near Bordeaux, when Komir, a seven-year-old male hippo, scrambled from its enclosure after an employee driving a tractor stopped to distribute food.

'Komir was jealous of that tractor,' the employee said. 'He saw it as competition.'

Cosmic Jokingly enough, M Ducuing, in his sixties, had trained Komir, and posters for the zoo feature a picture of Komir with M Ducuing's head in his mouth. So maybe, the accident was somewhat preordained.

15th November, 2000 Pessac, France ASSOCIATED PRESS

*** Thousands of dirty rats have totally overrun an island just off the Pembrokeshire coast and are therefore threatening rare birds which nest there. Volunteers from the Royal Society For The Protection of Birds, armed with two tons of extremely potent poison, to instigate a three-month offensive against the marauding rodents. They have apparently become so numerous they are eating the eggs and defenceless chicks of Manx Shearwaters and other birds on the two-mile long Ramsey Island

16th January, 2000 Ramsey Island DAILY TELEGRAPH'

*** A herd of pigs who were accidentally fed a meal of mashed grapes from a vineyard's fermentation went every bit as berserk as those aforementioned elephants and trampled a farmer leaving him with broken ribs and a broken leg. The 37-year-old killed ten pigs, convinced that they had a contagious disease, before a vet arrived and told them they were simply the worse for drink

8th January, 2000 Kroponic, Romania 'DAILY EXPRESS'

*** A bunch of thirsty in drought-blighted Kenya stoned to death All Adam Hussein as he was watering his livestock. All had stopped along with other herdsman at a local pool when suddenly, they were attacked by a group of wild monkeys. The irate apes hurled stones at them and Hussein died as a result of his injuries after he was taken to a village clinic.

25th February Kenya 'EAST AFRICAN STANDARD'

*** And another twenty monkeys stormed a police station in Bangladesh carrying one of their band which had had its tail cut off by a villager.

They were eventually pacified by the officers and led from the station in an orderly manner.

12th February, 2000 Bangladesh ASSOCIATED PRESS

*** An ostrich killed a 90-year-old farmer and managed to critically injure his 86-year-old wife in Spearsville, Louisiana, USA.

26th February, 2000 Spearsville, Louisiana, USA 'LIVERPOOL ECHO'

*** A man by the name of Raymond Johansen, was befuddled as to how he should go about filing his insurance claim after his car was walked over by a moose which, just for good measure, then kicked through its windscreen.

As it can't be officially classed as a collision and obviously, the moose can't be accused of Interfering With A Motor Vehicle or Criminal Damage, Ray faces something of a dilemma.

Mr Johansen described the animal as having suffered from some form of road rage as he and his girlfriend were driving home to Oslo when they stopped to allow the moose to cross the road. Bad move.

1st March, 2000 Oslo, Finland 'LIVERPOOL DAILY POST'

*** A nine-year-old schoolgirl named Emma Goldstraw was attacked by a huge Harris hawk whilst she was playing in a local field.

The bird, equipped with a five-foot wingspan swooped without warning, raking its razor-sharp talons across the

poor girl's face. It clawed at her eyes in a bid to try and carry her off. Fortunately, it did not succeed in doing this, although the 'experts' later stated that Emma was extremely fortunate that she wasn't blinded.

The bird eventually flew off to its owner, leaving the little girl requiring 12 stitches.

Emma's mother, who was planning to sue the hawk's owner, told reporters; *'Emma camerunning into the house screaming.'*

'She was in a terrible state. There was blood coming from her eyes and inside her mouth. The hawk is obviously dangerous. I will not let it rest. My daughter could have been blinded.'

RSPCA Inspector Tim Minty was quoted as saying; *'They are very powerful birds. Even holding one requires a leather gauntlet.'*

21st March, 2000 Halfway, Sheffield *'DAILY SLUR'*

*** And just a month earlier, a European Eagle Owl, which has a massive 6-foot wing span, swooped on a dog as its owner took it for a walk in a park in Halifax, West Yorkshire.

The bird dug its claws into the back of the Jack Russell-collie cross, and actually managed to lift it off the ground. Luckily, the pet succeeded in wriggling free from the clutches of the bird, after it had flown a few yards. Amazingly its shocked owner tried in vain to fight the bird off at the height of the struggle in the town's Shibden Park. 20th February, 2000 Halifax, West Yorkshire *'THE TIMES'*.

Hamster Horrors

Carla Holloway, 14, stopped breathing after being bitten by a decidedly less-than-cute-'n'-cuddly hamster, she had received as a Christmas present.

Carla suffers from asthma, and was rendered breathless and covered in a rash after the pet bit her on her right thumb.

The girl's father, Mark, 39, was quoted as saying; *'We used her asthma inhalers, but they were not helping, so I took her to the doctors. She was put on a nebuliser but, within seconds, she went into shock and stopped breathing.'* Fortunately, the team of doctors were able to get Carla, from Totton, near Southampton, breathing again and she later made a full recovery.

The £4.40 hamster was returned to the pet shop from whence it came.

17th January, 2000 Totton, Nr Southampton *'LIVERPOOL ECHO'*

*** And just a month or so later, Clare Norquay, from Reading, Berkshire, experienced a shock when she investigated the reason why her vacuum cleaner had stopped sucking... Her five-year-old daughter's pet hamster was stuck firmly up the hose.

Clare rushed Barbie the hamster to a vet, where thankfully, he was found to be none the worse for his ordeal.

Clare later told reporters; *'I have to clean the cage and thought I'd Hoover it to save time. I thought the tube was blocked and when I plucked it up to check there were these little legs poking out. Barbie won't come near me now.'*

Can't say we blame her.

8th February, 2000 Reading, Berkshire *'DAILY EXPRESS'*

*** And just to round off this little section of hamster-happenings, a pet named Claudia, made a remarkable recovery when it appeared to have risen from the dead.

The three-year-old hamster had been laid to rest two feet under a garden, and yet it managed to claw its way to

freedom and scamper the 500 yards to scratch at her owner's door.

The animal was presumed dead when nine-year-old Tasia Hadfield, found her cold and bereft of life. Her mother, Jane, organised a funeral at the girl's grandmother's house. But just a few hours after the ceremony had been completed, Claudia emerged from her spell in the Pet Sematary and crossed two gardens, two fences and a busy road in Droylsden, Manchester.

It later emerged that a cold snap had sent the animal into unexpected hibernation.

Interestingly enough, on or about the same date, another hamster, named Dellilah, also returned to life after a fire in Strood, Kent. This one was saved when the group of firefighters blew oxygen into her mouth.

21st January, 2000 Droylsden, Manchester *'THE TIMES'*

CATS TO THE RESCUE

Zarah the cat, risked life (one of nine?) and limb to save her owner when his flat caught fire in Vetlanda, southern Sweden.

Zarah managed to wake Micke Sahlstrom, 39, in the dead of night by yowling and hitting his face with her paws.

Mr Sahlstrom managed to wake up in time and ran pell mell for the door, leaving poor ol' Zarah behind in his panic.

Minutes later, he was more than just a tad relieved when he saw a firewoman carrying his saviour from the building. 17th February, 2000 Vetlanda, southern Sweden *'ASSOCIATED PRESS'*

*** And John Chislett, 59, also had reason to be eternally grateful to his cat, Coffee, who saved his life by alerting John to the fact that his house was on fire.

Coffee sniffed the fumes when a chip pan caught fire and then bit his sleeping owner's nose and butted him until he woke up. Now the two-year-old tabby has been nominated for the Brave Pet Of The Year Award by the veterinary surgery which treated him for breathing problems.

Mr Chislett, from Warrington, Cheshire, had become unwell and fell asleep, leaving the chip pan on the cooker. The house filled with smoke and Coffee immediately jumped into action.

John said later; *'Coffee really is a hero. I don't like to think what would have happened if Coffee hadn't have woken me up. He is such a brave cat and really deserves this award.'*

'Coffee is my best mate. I've fed him since he was eight weeks old. Everyone loves him.'

24th March, 2000 Warrington, Cheshire *'DAILY MAIL'*

The Poodle Who Gave The Game Away

Angela Rodrigues Sodre, 29, a Brazilian hairdresser, was working on the side as a part time robber, holding up petrol stations at gunpoint. She was finally caught by police when witnesses managed to identify her fluffy white poodle.

Angela had carried out two robberies in Brasilia, armed with a toy gun and her pet poodle, Pinty.

On the third occasion however, police, accompanied by two petrol station attendants tracked her down to her home and found her sitting in an armchair with Pinty seated on her lap.

20th March, 2000 Brasilia, Brazil *'THE TIMES'*

RIDDLE OF THE DEAD DOLPHINS

Scientists were trying their damndest to try and figure out why it was three dolphin carcasses a day were being

Antonio Sanchez-Migallon, 78, was left marvelling at being able to see his wife's face, and to behold his nine children (as well as all 22 of his grandchildren) for the first time but on the down side, his first gaze into a mirror brought nothing but heartache.

'I thought I would look better,' he was quoted as saying. 'But I look really ugly and old.'

17th March, 2000 Manzanares, Spain 'LIVERPOOL ECHO'

*** An elderly couple were run over and killed mere minutes after leaving a prayer meeting.

Walter Reed, 77, and his wife Gladys, 84, were hit by two cars travelling in opposite directions outside St Michael's Church in Ramsey, Essex.

22nd March, 2000 Ramsey, Essex 'DAILY TELEGRAPH'

*** Wendy Elson was left speechless after picking up a postcard of Chobham, Surrey, at a specialist fair, only to find that it was one she herself had written 45 years earlier.

27th February, 2000 Chobham, Surrey 'NEWS OF THE WORLD'

*** Last January, police were hunting a thief who dumped a fortune in used bank notes.

They were of the opinion that the person who stole the money may have abandoned the £25,000 three months earlier wrongly believing it to be worthless. But in fact, the bundles of old £10 and £5 notes could have been exchanged at the Bank Of England. The money had to be claimed before the end of the month or it was due to be returned to the pensioner who originally found it near Colchester football ground.

16th January, 2000 Colchester 'THE TIMES'

*** And finally, two rottweillers bought as guard dogs to protect an isolated six bedroom home from thieves have themselves been stolen.

Their owners, Jim Skaer and his partner, Michelle Bernier, from Newport, south Wales, were forced to offer a £250 reward for their return.

22nd October, 1999 Newport, South Wales 'THE GUARDIAN'

WEIRD HUMAN BEHAVIOUR

Calamitous Crime Capers, Possessed Police Officers And Holiday Madness

A 14-year-old gunman was arrested and handed into the custody of his mother after he had the audacity to hold up a sweetshop in Virginia, USA, armed with a lollipop.

27th February, 2000 Virginia, USA 'SUNDAY PEOPLE'

*** And how about this for a tale that would shame even Sid The Sexist...A Zambian farmer who yoked his three wives to a plough ordinarily drawn by a team of oxen to cultivate his maize fields was not prosecuted by that country's government.

The man claimed he was obliged to utilise his wives to plough because he lost his 20 oxen to a disease. A labour minister was later quoted as saying; 'None of the wives complained, so we recommended that the farmer pay them for their labour.'

Oh, so that's alright then.

28th February, 2000 Zambia 'THE TIMES'

*** A police officer was called to deal with a woman who believed everyone in the world was possessed by the Devil

Himself, was compelled to cover up his number in a bid to allay her fears. You've guessed it. It was 666.

PC Dave Sharp was bitten by the hysterical woman who had clambered onto the top of a school bus in Newark, Nottinghamshire.

He finally succeeded in restraining her and she was subsequently taken away for psychiatric treatment.

The officer was later given a special bravery award.

One of his colleagues was moved to comment, 'It was an amazing coincidence that the call should go to someone with his number.'

22nd March, 2000 Newark, Nottinghamshire 'DAILY MANC'



*** According to an article in the 'SUNDAY MANC' holidaymakers are experiencing a series of weird mental reactions whilst engaged on sightseeing trips in foreign climes.

In Jerusalem, more than 100 people a year are treated for the condition, called Unhinged Tourist Syndrome. Some victims had to be physically restrained after attacking holy men and damaging religious relics (hey, maybe that crazy woman from Newark with the Devil fixation wasn't so er, crazy after all - Ed). Others were labouring under the illusion that they were actual characters from the Bible.

An unnamed American in his 40's believed he was Samson and tried in vain to move one of the large stones in the Walling Wall. The police had to be called and he was eventually taken to hospital.

Meanwhile, in Florence, visitors to art galleries have been hit by the illness, becoming unbalanced after gazing upon battle scenes.

People at airports who don't know where they are going, and are constantly bumping into others, may well be suffering from the syndrome.

A report in 'THE BRITISH JOURNAL OF PSYCHIATRY' claims that the condition may be caused by the unfamiliar surroundings, closeness to strangers, a sense of isolation and a clash of cultures.

In most cases the symptoms seem to last for no more than seven days...

27th February, 2000 General 'SUNDAY MANC'

*** A 31-year-old Brazilian man admitted chopping off his own hand in order to claim insurance money.

Sebastiao Rodrigues arrived at Sao Paulo Hospital with his hand severed and the stump covered in a bloody towel.

But he aroused suspicions when he told police that he had gone to buy an ice cream at 11pm when he was attacked in the street by three men who stole his money and chopped off his hand with an axe.

An axe was seen as an unusual choice of weapon in a country where guns are rife amongst street gangs.

It also seemed strange, to say the least, that he would have a craving for an ice cream when the temperature was a less-than-balmy 55F - one of the coldest nights of the year. And he was unable to explain where he had found a towel in which to wrap his hand.

Mr Rodrigues, who buys and sells telephones, admitted that he had chopped off his hand to claim £170,000 of disability insurance. He told the police that he had devised the plan after amassing £250,000 worth of debts. Police searching his home found that all his bills had gone unpaid, except, amazingly enough, for the insurance policy.

He went out and purchased an axe and, despite the pleadings of his wife, Claudia, paid a friend £100 to chop off his hand. He then put it in a plastic bag and threw it into a local river.

'It was a stupid thing to do,' lamented Claudia. 'We're still in debt....And now he doesn't have a hand.'

22nd October, 1999 Sao Paulo, Brazil 'THE GUARDIAN'

The Less-Than-Usual Suspects: A Host Of Hopeless Thieves And Robbers

*** Shoppers were left gobsmacked by the sight of a refugee attacked store workers who had tried to nab her during a shoplifting spree by squirting them with her very own breast milk.

The woman, and two accomplices, all Romanian refugees, whipped out her left ahem, gazanga, and let fly, showering staff.

And when a police officer arrived on the scene intent upon arresting her, she promptly squirted him too.

The gang had attempted to steal toiletries to the value of £1,100 from a Safeway store in Scunthorpe, Lincolnshire.

Store workers had caught sight of them hiding their ill-gotten gains in pouches under their clothes.

During the subsequent court appearance, Prosecutor John Harris told Scunthorpe magistrates; *'When they were stopped they started shouting, screaming and struggling.'*

'One of the defendants started squirting breast milk at the staff. Police were called and one of the officers was sprayed.'

The court were also informed that the terrible trio - who spoke not a word of English- arrived in the country from Romania in November, 1999, and had claimed political refugee status.

The defending solicitor, Rodger Price said by way of mitigation; *'Because they were refugees they did not receive benefits, and were instead given vouchers to exchange for goods in shops.'*

'The women had needed ointment and lotion for their respective children.'

Mariora Bus, 20, Maria Olteanu, 36, and Claudia Raducanu, 29, were each fined £150, and ordered to pay £50 costs, and warned they'd be jailed for seven days if they didn't hand over the cash.

A police officer was quoted as saying; *'Her atm was deadly.'*

5th February, 2000 Scunthorpe, Lincolnshire 'DAILY SLUR'

*** A man who robbed a bank in Salt Lake City, Utah, was caught due to the fact that he carelessly left behind the envelope from which he pulled his gun for the hold up.

Inside the envelope was graduation certificate for a course he had taken during a previous spell in prison.

Ironically enough, the training at least may have been very useful to him; it was a course in anger management.

30th January, 2000 Salt Lake City, Utah 'SUNDAY EXPRESS'

*** Actually, not quite so clueless were the gang stole who £45,000 from a post office by delivering a dwarf secreted in a parcel. The 4ft 7in gunman arrived in a van and the packet, measuring just over 2ft square, was pushed by two accomplices through posing as staff through a hatch leading to a strongroom.

Once safely inside the armoured room, the masked dwarf burst out of the parcel, brandished a pistol and shouted; *'Nobody move. This is a hold up.'*

He then proceeded to let in his accomplices through a side door and staff at the office in Rome meekly handed over the cash without a struggle before the gang escaped on mopeds.

6th January, 2000 Rome, Italy 'DAILY EXPRESS'

*** In Nairobi, a Kenyan woman was jailed for a total of seven years for the heinous crime of selling her husband's cow in order to pay off debts and feed her children.

Ellinah Ndungu, 30, was sentenced by a bunch of heartless magistrates in central Kenya. The Kenya Federation of Women Lawyers were predictably incensed by the sentence; *'She had to pay off debts that included hiring a vehicle to take her husband to hospital.'*

The unfortunate woman was convicted under laws drawn up to prosecute rustlers.

3rd November, 1999 Nairobi, Kenya 'THE TIMES'

*** Police in the Northern Italian city of Genoa were forced to intervene when a man aged 82 began striking his wife with a stick after she refused to have sex with him.

The husband, who must have been on the oil 'Olivio,' later told the officers that the couple had *'not had intimate relations for seven months.'*

Both were taken to hospital; the woman to the casualty department, her husband to see a neurologist.

12th January, 2000 Genoa, Italy 'THE GUARDIAN'

*** A would-be robber held up a chemist and issued a decidedly-less than blood-freezing threat by insisting that the assistant simply hand over three aspirin for a humdinger of headache in Madrid, Spain.

31st January, 2000 Madrid, Spain 'DAILY SLUR'

*** Equally bizarre was the case of Bruce Hall, 48, who may be blind, but that didn't serve to deter him any from trying to rob a bank in Memphis, Tennessee, after calmly asking the guard to take him to the counter.

He then handed staff a note demanding cash and was apprehended by security as he attempted to leave.

16th January, 2000 Memphis, Tennessee 'SUNDAY MANC'

*** A student by the name of Fung Chun Kwan, aged 22, successfully defended his Rat Eating Title in Hong Kong, during March of this year. He chowed down on a grand total of 62 roasted rodents in just 31 minutes and 24 seconds. He said later, doubtless stifling a burp; *'They're good once you get past the first two.'*

6th March, 2000 Hong Kong 'DAILY MANC'

*** Alvaro Rubio got so pissed off with his wife Ella, he took the step of divorcing her after 13 years of marriage in San Christobal, Venezuela. And the reason for his refusal to take anymore....Apparently, Ella had taught their pet parrot to call him "Gordo" - Spanish for fatso!!!

19th February, 2000 San Christobal, Venezuela 'NEWS OF THE WORLD'

*** You've heard the expression 'shooting oneself in the foot.' Well, here's a bunch of people who have done just that, or else have shot themselves in some other part of their anatomy....

A less-than-sober Bonnie Booth was rushed to hospital in Muncie, Indiana, after blasting away at her foot whilst using a gun to try to remove a troublesome corn.

Police later said she had been drinking a heady mixture of vodka and beer.

13th February, 2000 Muncie, Indiana 'MAIL ON SUNDAY'

*** And a farmer by the name of Armando Oritz, 43, was recovering in hospital after he attempted to remove a painful tooth by shooting it out with a pistol. I don't suppose you'll be too amazed to learn that all he managed to do was blow away most of his lower jaw.

25th October, 2000 Broda, Portugal 'NEWS OF THE WORLD'

*** Finally, Hank Chandler, 25, thought it might be a jolly good wheeze to repair a blown fuse on his pick-up by using a bullet, but when he started up the truck in Austin, Texas, surprise, surprise he got shot in the knee.

19th March, 2000 Austin, Texas 'MAIL ON SUNDAY'

*** Lee Si Chung, 26, who attempted to save his Beijing - to-London fare by posting himself, got caught, surprisingly enough, in the sorting office. He was later jailed for four weeks.

14th November, 2000 Beijing, China 'SUNDAY PEOPLE'

*** James Bunce was so obsessed with acquiring old ovens that he amassed a collection of 251 of the things in his house in Cirencester, Gloucestershire. Eventually, it got so bad that he could no longer find the space to sit on his toilet bowl, and in the interests of hygiene he was forced to clear the premises.

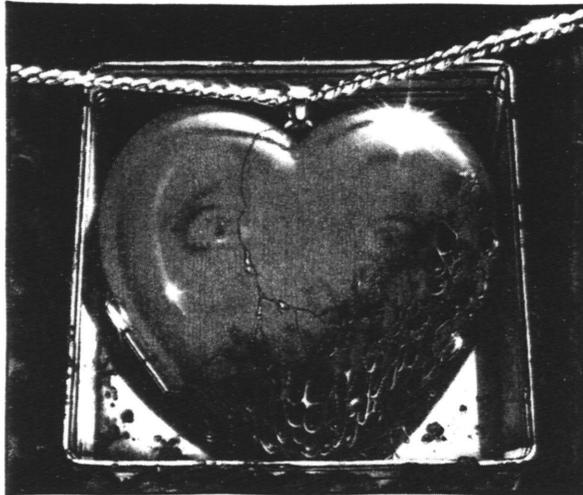
He formerly had two in the bathroom, ten in the living room, and three in his bedroom. Lord alone knows where the remaining 236 were kept!!!

Now the surveyor, aged 34, stores the ovens at a Wiltshire barn and is hoping to start an exciting as Hell museum.

'It's an obsession,' he told reporters. 'You can't stop.'

19th March, 2000, Cirencester, Glos 'NEWS OF THE WORLD'

Real Life Hannibal The Cannibal



A fan of the infamous Thomas Harris creation; Hannibal Lecter, was facing an attempted murder charge at the time of going to press, after making a hash of a plot to eat two of his friends.

Stephen Lindquist crept up behind a 21-year-old woman and her brother before setting upon them armed with a cosh.

Fortunately for them, they managed to overpower their attacker, aged 22, who later confessed to the police that had he succeeded in knocking them unconscious he intended to eat them prior to committing suicide.

Lindquist, of Auburn, California, was said to be obsessed with serial killers and horror movies.

6th March, 2000 Auburn, California 'DAILY SLUR'

TALES FROM WHERE THE SHADOWS WAIT



The Casket Of Pure Evil

Following on from the success of the really quite excellent movie 'THE SIXTH SENSE.' (second only to 'BLAIR WITCH' in the late Autumn horror film hype), the tabloid press, ever eager to cash in on current trends, ran a series of articles dealing with real-life psychics and the phenomena they claim to have encountered.

Here is a brief selection of some of the more interesting ones...

We start with the case of Sue Anne, who, when she was just seven years old, says she awoke to find her bedroom filled with an unnatural chill, despite the fact that she could feel a trickle of sweat running along her spine. When she bravely raised her head (instantly forsaking the unspoken rule of childhood - and let's tell the truth and shame the Devil here shall we, it's a rule that lingers on well into adulthood, and probably remains with us till the day we die - that decrees you should never risk peeking over our shoulder or opening our eyes the tiniest fraction to gaze upon The Terror That Comes By Night, because if you do you give the thing form, and worse, let it know that you're wide awake and aware of its presence.

And from that moment, like the person foolish enough to say the Lord's Prayer backwards whilst glancing into a

mirror, you are doomed) she was confronted with the grey ghost of a long-dead woman emanating a sense of the purest Evil.

'I had a row with my mum and I'd been banished to my room,' she was quoted as saying. 'I was feeling sorry for myself when suddenly the room went very cold.

'I shivered and gathered my sheets around me. Then I couldn't believe what I saw. This woman in a grey, Victorian dress started to glide towards me. She had a very sad look on her face. I was paralysed. Terrified.

'I remember feeling so sick. She glided right up to my bed and placed a box in front of me. I still don't know what it means but I knew it was Evil. I didn't open it. I knew I shouldn't. The lady seemed to glide backwards.

'I leaped off my bed and ran downstairs. It was horrendous. As soon as my Mum saw me she knew there was something terribly wrong. I was screaming about a box but, of course, there was no box. That affected me for ages. I was inconsolable.'



Sue Anne, now aged 45, has since grown to become a psychic, but not long after the previously related harrowing experience, at the age of eight, she had a dream that one of the dinner ladies at her school a Mrs Hunt, was sadly waving goodbye to her.

'Mrs Hunt was lovely,' Sue Anne said. 'and I woke up crying. It was a very vivid dream.

'The next day I told everyone in the playground that she was leaving. Lots of the kids were crying. I got called in by the head teacher who told me that Mrs Hunt was not leaving and to stop upsetting the other children.

'A week later, Mrs Hunt died from a heart attack on a school trip. I felt sick. After that I knew I was different.

'In the same year I was about to step across the road on a pedestrian crossing. The light for pedestrians was on green but suddenly I felt myself being pulled back as though there was a hand on my shoulder.

'A car suddenly shot straight past me. It had gone through the red light. If I hadn't have stepped back it would have hit me. My Dad would look at me sometimes and mutter "She's got The Gift."

'I didn't really understand what that meant and at the time I didn't always realise what I was doing. For example, when I was young we had a lurcher dog called Rusty.

'One day, I kept saying to my Dad, "Rusty's limping." He wasn't. But a week later he was hit by a car and had a bone broken in his back leg.

'It was the same with my Aunt Nancy, who I'd never meant. She was over in Ireland. I started telling my Mum that she was ill and I was told not to be so stupid, she was in perfect health.

'Three weeks later they got the telegram that said she'd had a stroke and died. My Mum just looked at me in horror.

'I eventually learned to learn to harness my gift and use it for good - and even to my advantage.

'When I was a teenager, I would read a would-be boyfriend's Tarot Cards for him. He had a terrible, grotty reading and I stayed clear of him after that. It later turned out that he was in all sorts of trouble with the police.

'I believe most children are psychic. It's only when they become adults that their minds become closed to it.'

Psychic For Hire

Francesca Klimpton, 35, who hails from West Kensington, London, is so comfortable with her 'special Gift' that she openly hires out her services to 'big business.

Somewhat worryingly she reckons that she can 'see' rival companies legal paperwork and can even help pick future employees who are best suited to the particular job.

The firms, (yeah, apparently there are those out there who are quite content to accept the veracity of her powers) include pretty big, forward-thinking city firms and even exclusive sports-car dealers...

'I started out with many of my clients just by giving them readings,' she rather immodestly pointed out to reporters. 'But quickly they realised the value of corporate clairvoyance and it all took off from there.'

She further claims that she inherited her 'Gift' from her equally clairvoyant mother, Josephine.

'At the age of three I can remember every morning there would be a man by the window in the drawing room who would speak to me.

'I first realised I was getting visits from the spirit world when, around the same age, I was in bed one night with the lights out and two people appeared in my room.

'For a long time I was very scared. But they eventually explained that they were people that had passed over.

'I also remember being in my pram in the garden and I know that you aren't supposed to be able to remember that far back.

'But I can recall falling from my pram. And a man, whom I feel was my father who had recently had passed away, caught me. He held me to him before putting me back into the pram.

'As soon as I could crawl, walk and talk I saw people around me and used to chat to people that no one else could see.

'At the time I was living in West Sussex, and it was normal for us to leave the door open and for people to pop in.

'But while two or three people might walk through the door I would see four or five. I believe these would be spirits accompanying them.

'For me, it was perfectly natural as I was growing up to be able to see and talk to spirits.

'And now the greatest pleasure I have is in giving people who ask for guidance help that may, in some way, give them comfort.

'I feel my mediumship was much better then because children have so much less cluttering their minds. You'll often see babies laughing at apparently nothing when really they are talking to spirits.'

Sometimes They Come Back...

When Ian Lawman was a child, he awoke one night to hear his heart pummeling away in his chest like an out-of-control jackhammer for reasons that he couldn't at first fathom. Eventually however, he was confronted with what he at first assumed was a person at his bedside.

He was only four then. In later years, he came to realise that he had been blessed (or cursed) with a 'Gift' for seeing 'this gentleman who told me his name was Charles. He was

much smaller than a normal person, which I thought was strange.

Ian, now aged 30, was quoted as saying; *'But then I discovered only I could see him and my family thought he was just an imaginary friend.'*

As a young child, he was understandably terrified by the appearance of the 'gentleman,' not least because he didn't understand what was happening to him.

'Then, when I was sixteen, a friend of mine was killed in an accident

'Two days later he walked into my bedroom with Charles. They both told me they'd come back to tell me there was another side.

'It seems I can always remember people coming and sitting on my bed, but no one else could see them. And for years, I had a premonition that my sister was going to be killed in a car accident. It happened for real when I was nineteen.

'Sometimes you just want to get some sleep in the evenings and a spirit is insisting on coming through,' he stated sounding incredibly world weary. 'No matter how hard you try, they'll keep on pestering you.'

THE WOMAN WHO SPEAKS WITH THE DEAD



And yet another self-professed psychic who claims to have been aware of their 'Gift' since the early, otherwise carefree days of childhood is Shilline Rogers. It seems she would while away her formative years wandering into her local graveyard to engage the resident ghosts in conversation.

Her friends would often come across her standing before a tomb apparently talking to herself. Shilline was convinced however, that this was no one-way communication.

'As a child I was different,' she says, somewhat unnecessarily, you may think. 'I was drawn to the cemetery and I used to look at the graves and softly touch them. I must have been seven or eight when I started to see the dead people's faces.

'They appeared in front of me. They were young, old...Always the same age as when they died.

'I asked them if they were at peace and the always said yes. One of the first memories I have is of three little boys who had drowned. They told me they'd been in trouble and they'd run away from school.

'I remember they were wearing normal boys' clothes. They were happy now, and playing. They wanted to talk to me.'

Shilline is now aged 47, and is a clairvoyant and healer. She states that she met her first spirit near her home town of Clacton in Essex.

'I was late home and I suddenly realised I had a companion. It was a little Red Indian girl who was happily hopping alongside me.

'She was wearing Indian clothes and had long, plaited hair. She told me not to worry. I realised that she was a spirit when I tried to introduce her to my mother - and she promptly disappeared.

'Talking to the dead has always seemed a natural thing for me. I was never scared.

'We're all spirits in a physical body, just borrowing an overcoat to walk the earth.'

*** And finally, just to round this section off, Debbie Lawman, the wife of the aforementioned Ian Lawman, was contemplating divorcing her husband after becoming totally fed up with Ian's obsession with ghosts.

She had put up with it for five long years before issuing Ian with the final ultimatum; *'It's either spooks or me.'*

Unbelievably, he chose the spirits prompting Debbie to sigh wistfully; *'It has always come first.*

'Wherever we are and whatever we're doing Ian is being contacted by spirits - in bed, shopping, eating.'

She finally upped and left him, taking their baby daughter with her, leaving Ian to spend up to eighteen hours a day conversing with the denizens of the spirit world

14th November, 1999/23rd January, 2000 Various Locations 'SUNDAY PEOPLE'/'NEWS OF THE WORLD'

Ghosts And Devils Over Merseyside: SPIRITS IN THE BLUECOAT

Workers at Liverpool's oldest building, the Bluecoat Chambers, on School Lane, sifted through hours of video tape in an ultimately doomed attempt to procure definitive proof of the ghost(s) that is said to haunt the site.

Last Halloween, film from the closed-circuit cameras was deemed to be the best hope for providing at least some explanation for the strange goings-on that have plagued the building of late.

Bluecoat official Alex Hurley told the local press; *'We have closed-circuit cameras all over the building and we will be carefully monitoring the screens for any sightings.*

'I am not a believer in ghosts myself, but too many members of the Bluecoat staff have seen something that they can't explain to make it mere coincidence.'

Listed here is a selection of the most recently reported phenomena;

*** The police were called and raced to the buildings in the dead of night after the alarm mysteriously went off. Two alsatian police dogs who entered the premises cowered and refused point blank to enter the suspect room. Needless to say, no trace of any living person was found in the buildings.



*** An unnamed female office worker sighted a woman in a brown dress, and thought initially, it was only a colleague. Then she realised that her colleague was in another part of the building - whereupon the mysterious woman promptly vanished.

*** A cleaner heard the sound of a child crying in an upstairs room and went to investigate. Other people also heard the distraught girl's cries. Yet again however, the room was empty.

Interestingly enough, it was later discovered that the room in question had once been the Punishment Room back in the 1700's, when the Bluecoat was a school.

*** An office worker was heading downstairs, when two girls walked past her. She went after them to tell them that all of the rooms were locked up for the night, but the girls dematerialised before her very eyes.

The terrified worker legged it from the building and never again set foot on the premises.

*** A chef also saw the same, or disconcertingly similar, girls standing on what is now the Cafe Bar area. He described the uniforms they were wearing, unwittingly giving a concise of the Bluecoat's school uniform from two centuries ago.

Alex Hurley summed up the situation by telling local reporters; *'Stories of ghosts and hauntings are legendary but I like to think that if we do have any ghosts they are very friendly. It will be fascinating to keep checking those video tapes.'*

1st November, 1999 Bluecoat Chambers, Liverpool
'LIVERPOOL ECHO'

PET SEMATARY III

The considerably-less-than-terrifying ghost of a shaggy brown dog is said to haunt the home of Kathryn Reynolds and Mark Duffy. The couple of firmly of the belief that it is the spirit of one of Kim, a mongrel who had died 15 years earlier.

Her owners once lived in the 150-year-old former railway worker's house situated in Alderley Edge, Cheshire. They were both so distraught when Kim finally passed away that they buried her in the garden under a white lilac tree.

Kathryn, Mark and their three children have all reportedly both witnessed and actually felt the presence of the dog in their hallway and kitchen.

'It all started when we moved in here eight years ago,' Kathryn, 31, was quoted as saying.

'It was Mark who saw Kim first. He caught sight of the shadowy figure of a dog out of the corner of his eye, but he simply shrugged it off.'

'Then a 15-year-old daughter of a friend of mine came to stay the night. The following morning she said "I didn't know you had a dog" and we found out that she had seen the animal at the foot of the stairs.'

'Mark realised that he wasn't going mad after all and then we learnt about Kim from some of our older neighbours. We made sure we kept the lilac tree over her grave rather than rip it up to make way for an ornamental wall.'

Mark, a 35-year-old record producer, reckons he's seen Kim on at least 20 separate occasions in the hall. And Kathryn, her son Timothy and other family and friends have felt 'her' brush against them or prod them. Mark's computers in the room he uses as a recording studio also frequently stop working because of unexplained electrical interference.

'If anyone was scared of Kim we would do something to get rid of her, but it's not like that,' Kathryn asserts.

'She was a much-loved pet and very friendly. It's just like having a normal dog - only we don't have to take it for walks. We love her being here and the dog is part of the family.'

The Ghostly Lover

Ken Peacock, 67, who lives with his partner Julia Evans, has claimed to have been accosted by a phantom flirt who likes nothing better than ruffling his hair or stroking his cheeks and thighs.

Ken has actually witnessed the apparition walking past him in the passageways of his medieval country house in Llanfihangel Crucornau, in Mid-Wales. He has also noticed 'her' looking down at him from an upstairs window while he was busy working outside in the yard.

The ghost, dressed in 16th century-style cape and hood, mostly manifests in and around one particular room where courts used to be held. A medium called in to attempt contact with the spirit believes she may have died by being strangled or hanged.

Not that this untimely demise seems to have affected her sex drive any!!!

As Ken can all too readily attest.

His partner, Julia, is not exactly brimming with jealousy about the ghosts' attentions though; *'I'm quite happy for her to have a bit of a flirt as long as she doesn't become malicious'*

'Having a ghost around gives the place a bit of character, but it is obvious that she prefers men. I have only heard her. We were in our bedroom one night when there were footsteps in the attic above and the sound of furniture being dragged across the floor. Yet that room is always locked and the floorboards are rotten.'

Julia's younger daughter Sloned,13, has caught sight of her and 15-year-old son Rhodri has heard hr drawing curtains in a room whivh doesn't have any.

'My elder daughter Lucinda will not sleep in that end of the house at all when she comes to stay - she would sooner sleep on the kitchen floor.

'Guests have also seen and heard strange things. They have told us about unseen hands stroking their feet in bed, doors opening and closing by themselves and footsteps echoing in the corridors when there is no one there.'

Ken, meanwhile, is of the belief that the ghost has chosen to make contact with him personally as his father was a seventh son and this factor has given him a special gift.

'I can't imagine she finds me attractive. I'm far too old for a young girl like that.'

Both previous accounts; 'SUNDAYMANC' January 2000

A Spiritual Delivery

Sue, 33, from Bristol, claims that five months into her pregnancy, she awoke with a strange urge to call her mother. Obeying her instincts, she picked up the phone and rang her and her mother told her that she was looking forward to coming to Bristol when the baby was born.

'The next day, I kept having flashes of an odd image: a person falling out of a van, and hitting their head on the pavement. I couldn't see their face, but it left me feeling uneasy.'

'I received a phone call from my mother's boyfriend that very afternoon. He told me my mum had suffered a fatal heart attack while they were out in his van. When he'd stopped the vehicle and opened the door she had slid out of the seat and onto the ground of the car park. I decided there and then that if I had a baby girl I would call her after my mother. Four months later, my daughter was born.'

'When I was getting ready to be transferred out of the delivery room, I opened the door to look for the nurse - and my mother was standing there. I smiled and said; "Your granddaughter is here. She's beautiful and healthy.'

She smiled right back and nodded. My friends who were standing around the bed were totally dumbfounded. They asked if I'd seen my mother and I said Yes. I was totally relaxed and happy. My mother had said she'd visit her new grandchild, and sure enough, she did.'

Poltergeist On The Prowl In The 'Wellington'

Another personal account, also first featured in last Halloween's issue of 'ELLE MAGAZINE,' was sent in by a formerly sceptical, 34-year-old woman by the name of Erika. We include both this, as well as several other accounts here for your delectation....

'Three years ago, I lived in a flat over a pub called "The Duke Of Wellington", in the centre of London. It was built way back in 1794. My landlord was very proud of its history and liked nothing better than relating stories about a young man called D'Arcy. He was apparently one of the earliest residents, who had been stabbed to death. Allegedly, ever since, the restless spirit of D'Arcy had crawled into bed with women who slept in his old room. That room was mine.'

'Late one night, I was in my living room reading about a woman who, ten years earlier, had moved out of the house after D'Arcy had paid her a night-time visit. I was standing in the middle of the room laughing - I didn't believe a word of it - when somebody, or something shoved me really hard. I turned around to give whoever had done it a piece of my mind, but there was no one there.'

I was suddenly terrified, shaking all over. There was nobody in the room at all.

The Lady In White

Karen, 30, from Coventry, has the following tale to tell...*'A few years ago, I was visiting my boyfriend's family at their house in the Lake District - a beautiful place built in the 1920's.*

I was fast asleep when something disturbed me. I looked around the room and there, at the end of my bed, was a woman. My first thought was that she must be a guest I didn't know about who had wandered into my room by mistake. I was about to speak when I realised something very strange. This tiny woman in her 40's or 50's, wearing a long white linen gown, was translucent.

My blood ran cold. She was holding a candle and leaning over the bed, staring right at me. She looked at me quizzically - as though she were trying to work out who I was. I tried once more to speak, but simply couldn't. There was a strange pressure on my body. I could feel adrenalin pumping around my veins, but my muscles were frozen. Then she turned round and walked out. I ran down the hall to get my boyfriend. I was terrified, but he just laughed it off saying I must have been dreaming.

'Next morning I told my boyfriend's mother what had happened.

"I know who that was," she told me.

It transpired that her father had had a mistress he was passionately in love with. But she became ill and died. Her father was so mortified he went outside and shot himself in the head.

'The ghostly woman I'd seen the night before matched the description of his mistress exactly. Apparently, she was returning to look for her lover.'

The Haunted Hotel

When Sarah, who hails from Edinburgh, was just 18, when she her parent's friends purchased a hotel in Devon.

Both she and her mother had a series of enigmatic experiences almost from the very first moment that they set foot in the building.

'On our first visit, after eating dinner at the hotel, the owner took us on a tour of the grounds. The gardens were in darkness apart from a floodlit lake. We all admired the view and set off back outside, but something made me look back at the lake. Standing by the water I saw a figure in a long, dark cloak with a hood. He looked strange, like a medieval monk, but weirdly enough, I wasn't at all afraid. I caught up with the others and asked who the person was. They looked back, but the figure had vanished.

"It must have been a ghost," said our friend. "The hotel is built on the site of an old monastery and there are catacombs beneath the building."

'I was understandably spooked by this revelation - it was definitely a ghost that I had seen.

'That autumn, I left home to go to college for the first time. One weekend in October, about five weeks into my term, my parents decided to spend a weekend break at the same haunted hotel.

'On the Saturday night, my mother was awoken around 3am by a series of loud knocking sounds which seemed to be reverberating around the room. She looked at my father, but he was sound asleep and oblivious. The loudest knocking came from the door to their en-suite bathroom, so it was with some trepidation that my mother opened it and switched the light on. By this point she could hear voices, and she said she was also thinking about me, but couldn't make out what the voices were saying.

'As she walked into the bathroom, through the door, all the fear she felt disappeared, as did the knocking.

'She phoned me the next morning to say hello, and was amazed when I told her I'd been woken in the night by the other girls in my halls of residence. The fire alarms had gone off, and they were knocking on everyone's doors to get them up. As I opened the door to my room, terrified, someone said it was a false alarm and we were in no danger. The time was 3am - the exact time my mother had heard the knocking. We've never been back to the hotel, but I am convinced that we tapped into some kind of psychic energy there.'

All above accounts appeared in the October, 1999 issue of 'ELLE' Magazine

Tom Slemen - The Liverpool Ghostbuster

A regular contributor to local radio and author of three books entitled 'HAUNTED LIVERPOOL 1-3,' Tom Slemen is probably the most famous paranormal investigator within the environs of your humble editor's home county of Merseyside.

Not that personally taking on cases of alleged supernatural activity has failed to leave the mark of fear upon him. Far from it in fact. Tom openly admits to leaving the night light on after dark as matters play on his mind. Foremost amongst his thoughts is the occasion that he entered an empty house on Liverpool's Huskisson Street. He was so terrified on hearing the sound of approaching spectral footsteps that he fled from the premises without first switching on his tape recorder.

Despite these all-too-human failings however, Tom was still intent upon spending the night of Samhain in the condemned cells of St George's Hall. Then again, it was for a good cause seeing as how the so-called Spookathon was in aid of the Marie Curie Cancer Appeal.

The stately building is said to be haunted by the ghosts of suicides. In fact, extra high stair rails had to be erected to reduce the number of people taking their own life after setting foot in the hall.

Tom was also due to give a talk at the city's Philharmonic Hall, where a further 100 volunteers were planning on spending the night. I am reminded at this point of the words of one of those two fishermen related to Heather, Josh and Mikey at the outset of 'THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT,' "You damn fool kids will never learn."

Although a relatively young building, (it's only 60 years old) the venue is said to be quite literally crawling with phantoms. Tom is not of the opinion that ghosts cannot physically hurt you...

'I was investigating a Poltergeist in Moses Street, Toxteth, when a mirror suddenly came off the wall and struck me hard on the head. It fell in slow motion. I was trembling, although it was morning.'

'I thought the woman householder was deranged and was working hidden wires but there was nothing. She also complained herself that at night cold fingers stroked her throat.'

'On the stair wall a message in chalk appeared which said "I am a ghost, sir," which I photographed, before it dematerialised.'

There is also said to be an evil presence. Nightwatchmen flashing their torches across the pitch dark auditorium picked out an 18-year-old woman in Regency dress, jewels sparkling around her neck, waving from the balcony. Whoever set eyes upon her was said to later suffer great misfortune, as Tom confirms;

'My Uncle Frank was a security guard and he saw several ghosts there, but died shortly after seeing the young woman.'

Meanwhile, the godforsaken chambers of St George's Hall are said to be haunted by the restless spirit of Dark Annie, an elderly woman wrongly convicted and subsequently hanged at Kirkdale Gaol for the murder of her husband.

As she was led from the dock, she cursed Judge Crompton, who sentenced her. He suffered appalling nightmares and died of 'night-terror.'

Just recently, a guard checking the cells spotted an elderly woman. He went around a corner after her but she disappeared into thin air.

Tom claims that he never consciously intended to become a paranormal investigator. He started out as a freelance journalist with a passion for local history, and was obsessed with crime reporting.

However, whether by accident or design, he found himself penning those aforementioned books and they proved so successful that he surrendered to the calling...

Now, already popular in America with his book of Fortean phenomena; 'STRANGE ENCOUNTERS' Steven Spielberg's associate producer, William Dennis Hauck is currently canvassing Tom for story ideas and there are invitations for him to address students at the University of Los Angeles on its folklore course. Ironically enough, Liverpool's very own University Psychology Department, rejected his plea to scientifically investigate the paranormal.

He was raised on Myrtle Street in the very heart of Liverpool. He maintains that he first encountered ghostly phenomena when his mother one night heard a rustle of skirts as she lay in bed. Suddenly, a Victorian maid bustled across the room carrying a platter, passing straight through the wall, her bed and even her legs.

The houses were built on an old orphanage's site and Tom believes there are spirits who remain earthbound due to unfinished business, or unhappiness.

Brought up as a Roman Catholic, he has since abandoned his faith but is attracted to Judaism, which ironically does not condone a belief in the afterlife.

February, 2000 Liverpool 'LIVERPOOLECHO'

Wirral Para. Science On The Trail Of Merseyside's Spectre's

A new (to this writer, at least) organisation whose purpose is to investigate all manner of strange phenomena has been formed on almost on your humble Editor's doorstep.

Wirral Para. Science, who hail from Rock Ferry, were gracing the pages of the local the newspapers late last year. Steve Parsons, the Investigations Co-ordinator, told reporters; 'The best time for spotting ghosts is not actually the Wüching Hour of midnight, but at dawn or dusk.'

He then went on to provide a list of the Wirral's 'top spook spots;

'There have been many sightings of shadowy monks at Birkenhead Priory,' (see previous issues of 'DON' for more on the legend of the Priory and its attendant ghosts - Ed).

'The spirit of a dead Irish labourer is said to haunt the Birkenhead side of the Mersey Tunnel, years after he was killed during its construction and apparitions have been seen in the railway tunnels of Hamilton Square Station.'

'Bebington hosts a ghostly clergyman floating through the graveyard at St Andrew's Church and a Roman centurion still guards Storeton Quarry.'

'The cries for help from ghostly shipwrecked sailors can, it is claimed, also be heard around the shores of Leasowe and Hülbre.'

31st October, 1999 Wirral, Merseyside 'WIRRAL NEWS'

The Regal Spectre Of Hampton Court

The enduring legend that the ghost of Catherine Howard, Henry VIII's fifth wife, haunts Hampton Court Palace, was to be the subject of an on-site investigation by the parapsychology 'expert' Dr Richard Wiseman, last April.

The corridors of the palace, along which the ill-fated woman was led on the way to her execution, are said to be the main location for the sightings, including two recent accounts from a couple of tourists being shown around the historic building. On entirely separate occasions, the women fainted at exactly the same spot in the 'Haunted Gallery' where the former Queen is said to 'reside.'

Both of these latest victims reported feeling an intense chill and passed out after feeling as though they had been punched.

When they were finally revived, both women claimed that they now felt unaccountably hot and were openly perspiring. These incidents proved to be the catalyst for officials to bring in 'the experts' to help get to the bottom of the mystery.

There's certainly a whole welter of anecdotal evidence to consider. For hundreds of years the gamut of witnesses have included everyone from humble servants, noblemen and even modern-day wardens. All have reportedly sighted a ghost that uncannily resembles Catherine Howard, dressed in a white gown, flying down the hall with her face twisted as she utters a silent, unearthly scream.

This is supposedly a ghostly reenactment of the moment when she was dragged by palace guards from Henry VIII's presence, condemned to death for her alleged adultery.

A teenager when she married the King in 1540, she was never released after the signing of her death warrant and was executed in 1542.

Mr Wiseman, formerly an avowed sceptic, (or at least he has been on every paranormal documentary I've ever seen him in - Ed), has apparently had something of a change of heart. He was quoted as saying; *'I think these ladies are perfectly honest about their experiences and I in no way dismiss their claims.'*

'At the same time, I have never found anything that I could not explain in the past so I am naturally sceptical (whoops, I take back what I just said - Ed) about any ghostly links to what they suffered.'

'I would be amazed if we found anything which proved the presence of a spirit but the palace has asked me to look into it for them and I will do exactly that.'

Previous accounts of phenomena occurring at the palace include reports of a ringed hand materialising and knocking on one of the palace doors. A warden who spotted the hand sketched the ring he could see and it was later matched to one worn by Catherine Howard in a painting.

In the book *'A SHORT HISTORY OF HAMPTON COURT'*, historian Ernest Law wrote; *'In the Gallery it is said a female form dressed in white has been seen coming towards the door of the Royal Pew and then hurrying back with disordered garments and a ghastly look of despair, uttering at the same time the most unearthly shrieks.'*

A Royal Palace's spokesman was quoted as saying; *'There are legends of around thirty ghosts in the Palace but Catherine Howard's is one of the most sustained and well documented.'*

'Even so, it is the first time we have called in an expert.'

Dr Wiseman was intending to conduct up to four nightly vigils at the hall armed with two £50,000 thermal imaging cameras placed to detect any localised temperature changes, the most commonly reported phenomena associated with the supernatural.

As well as those damned expensive cameras, the good Doctor will be canvassing around 600 visitors in an attempt to pinpoint the character type most likely to report having encountered a ghost.

I don't know, some people get all the good jobs...

26th April, 2000 Hampton Court Palace 'DAILY MAIL'

Spirits In 'The Red Lion'

The toilets of the 14th Century 'Red Lion' public house in Romford, Essex, are apparently haunted by 'an unnatural chill,' according to customers of that humble establishment. The pub was built on a network of tunnels that once led to an execution site, so the area is steeped in local history. And, one would think, a multitude of restless spirits, less than happy with the circumstances of their untimely demise.

Meanwhile, the living clientele have complained to the management of doors slamming of their own accord, and an uncanny feeling of being watched.

The pub's boss, Sue Campbell, told reporters; *'Regulars often leave cross-legged and go to a loo down the road rather than risk ours.'*

6th January, 2000 Romford, Essex 'SUNDAY PEOPLE'

The Twilight OF Reason

Almost half the population of Britain - once dubbed the 'most haunted nation on earth,' believe in ghosts and guardian angels, according to a new poll.

More than four out of ten people - 42 per cent - openly admitted that they thought supernatural entities existed for real.



Perhaps not surprisingly, the younger generations proved to be more likely to believe than older people, according to the NOP telephone poll for GMTV

In the 15-34 age group, 46 per cent considered themselves believers, with 47 per cent in the same category aged between 35 and 54.

But only 33 per cent of the more cynical generation of those aged over 55 or over believed in apparitions.

Perceived ghostly experiences were more likely to happen to people in the north, according to the survey, with 59 per cent of those questioned in Scotland and northern England claiming to have either seen firsthand or else sensed the presence of otherworldly beings.

20th March, 2000 (Britain General) 'LIVERPOOLECHO'

Snowball then asked him what the conditions were like on the other side. The ghost replied by telling him about his companions, a soldier and a priest. The soldier, he said, would suffer till Judgement Day; the priest, on the other hand, will meet his own Snowball, a young boy who will 'conjure' him and provide a 'remedy.'

Snowball was then moved to enquire what the future would hold for him personally. The ghost reminded him that he still possessed the cloak of an old army friend from near Almwick, and that if he failed to return it he would pay dearly.

At this point, the tale gets more than a tad cryptic...

"What is my worst sin?" asked the tailor.

"Your worst sin is on my account," answered the ghost.

"What is that?" he asked.

"You bring people into sin by your evasions, and other dead men are slandered; for they say; "Is this the dead man whom he has conjured? Or is it this one? Or another?" He asked the spirit, "What shall I do then? I shall reveal your name therefore."

"No, said the spirit. "But if you stay in such-and-such a place you will be rich, and if you stay in such-and-such a place you will be poor and have many enemies."

Having imparted this maddeningly less-than clear advice, the ghost simply disappeared, Snowball returned home, and was ill for many days thereafter.

As the author of the article is moved to comment, there are many strange aspects to this already weird-enough story. The theology surrounding it is filled with anomalies. It has never been permitted to shrive a man already dead, as he is already believed to be in the hands of the Almighty, and whilst it is acceptable to write down the fact of absolution, it is unheard of to confess through a third party. Strangest of all, though, is the way that the Byland Monk names not only the places, but even the people. Medieval ghost stories are usually ascribed to some great Classical writer, of the 'LIFE' of some Saint or other, so that both the inherent silliness of such tales and the sulphurous whiff of heresy are kept from the teller.

The Byland Monk displays no such qualms. On the contrary, he describes the locations so minutely we can today pin-point many of them to within a few yards. Plus, he also gives the names of both the living and the dead, so that they could be identified by contemporaries such as 'Robert, son of Robert de Boltby, of Kilburn,' and sometimes we can identify their very families, living to this day in the exact same places.

Dick Collins, who compiled this piece for the aforementioned 'MEDIEVAL LIFE' magazine, also points out, with a dose of wry humour, that the Byland Ghost Stories were written for both the oldest and most enjoyable of reasons: to annoy the neighbours.

The first monks to inhabit Byland Abbey were a group of rebels from Furness Abbey. They had been sent to Calder to found a new House, but returned, having been pillaged by the Scots. Back at Furness however their leader, Gerald, refused to give up the dignity of abbot, and Archbishop Thurston decided to take them to the new abbey at Fountains.

On the surface then, these ghostly tales are moral fables. They seem chiefly concerned with the power of confession and absolution, although what they actually have to say is extremely dubious doctrine.

One man seems to have left more than just the faintest trace as the centuries have sped by. Snowball the Tailor seems to have taken the ghost's advice. A hundred years later, the family was found to be living wealthily enough in a place called Ayton. In the later Byland stories the scene shifts from Ryedale to Ayton, and it seems that Abbot Robert is exacting literary revenge on a parvenu tailor, as well as on Newburgh's brightest son. It was short-lived. Byland Abbey was dissolved in 1539, and soon fell into

ruins: William of Newburgh is still read to this day, and the Snowball family flourishes.

And, in one of those remarkable 'coincidences' you often find permeating history, the present Rector of Great Ayton is a certain Mr Snowball!!!

'MEDIEVAL LIFE' Byland Abbey, North Yorkshire
December 1999

A Cabinet Of Curiosities:

'7EVEN' And 'SCREAM'

Trilogy Blamed For Killings

Following on from a seemingly never-ending list of movies that have been said to have at the very least, 'influenced' an equally lengthy list of murderers, sex offenders and plain loony-toon's, (see 'CHILD'S PLAY III' 'THE EXORCIST' and 'THE DEVIL'S MASS' to name but three), now the cult movie 'SEVEN,' the entire 'SCREAM' trilogy have been blamed for a series of unconnected killings over in the States.



Firstly, back in March, two men slit a woman's throat and later planned to post her decapitated head to a former lover after watching the aforementioned movie. They were both apprehended by the police after being interrupted as they were busy carrying out their nefarious deed, and one of the unnamed men later told the officers; 'After we watched 'SEVEN' we decided to start killing people...'

So, I guess there's not a lot of room for ambiguity regarding motive, here then. The fact that these two individuals were quite clearly as crazy as a pair of bedbugs prior to viewing the film seems to have conveniently been forgotten, however...

And pretty much the same can be said about the second incident involving a French boy who stabbed his parents after watching the latest instalment in the self-referential slasher series.

This particular fruitcake took it upon himself to dress up in a black cape and face mask to carry out a copycat murder which, apparently mirrored some of the events in the film. He attacked both of his folks with a carving knife, then leapt from a first-floor balcony before making good his escape. He was however, later apprehended and police subsequently discovered poster of all three 'SCREAM' films plastered on his bedroom wall.

15th March - 4th May 2000 USA 'HEAT MAGAZINE'

The Case Of The Vanishing Ambulance

Police in Bracknell, Berkshire, were mystified by a phantom ambulance which apparently vanished from the scene of a road accident mere seconds before the real paramedics arrived.

The old-fashioned Hanlon van (of the type that have been officially out of service for the past ten years) arrived ten minutes after a cyclist was knocked off his bike and was sent sprawling into the road. By the time the bona fide ambulance men arrived, the rider had been moved to a grass verge and given first aid.

A spokesman for Bracknell Police was quoted as saying; 'We haven't heard of anything like this before. We're treating it as a one off.'

5th December, 1999 Bracknell, Berkshire 'SUNDAY MANC.'

*** Equally perplexing was an incident that occurred, appropriately enough outside a pub called The Wizard, in Alderley Edge, Cheshire.

In an amazing coincidence of true Cosmic Joker proportions, police arrived at the scene of an accident involving two cars of the same make, same colour, same age and same mileage.

The two motorists, both complete strangers at the time of the crash, even shared the same house number.

The head on collision between the two identical green-coloured Rover 214Sis occurred in an area long-renowned as an accident black spot. Interestingly, the locale is also one of Britain's most revered Pagan worshipping sites.

One of the investigating police officers remarked to reporters; 'When we got to the crash site we couldn't believe what we saw. It was like something out of 'THE X FILES.' The cars involved must have been next to each other on the assembly line.

'We've never seen anything like it before.'

In one Rover was a couple from Handforth, near Wilmslow. Ian Aldridge, 54, from Whirley, near Macclesfield, was in the other car with his family.

Fittingly enough, the actual cause of the crash remains unsolved.

30th April, 2000 Alderley Edge, Cheshire 'NEWS OF THE WORLD'

The Earth May Not Be Flat, But It Looks Like The Universe Could Be

According to a recent press release from cosmologists the universe is as flat as the proverbial pancake.

The most detailed study of its kind has revealed that space is not curved, as has been the predominant theory for years beyond counting. The finding, heralded as a major advance in astronomy, also rules out a cataclysmic 'big crunch' in which the universe will eventually collapse in on itself.

If it is proved beyond doubting that it is flat, then it seems that the accepted rules of Euclidean geometry we were

taught at school apply to most of the universe. But if it is curved as many astronomers have argued, then straight lines are really curved and light travels in arcs.

Now pay attention, constant readers, here comes the science bit....

Clues as to the shape of the universe come from ripples, in the microwave radiation left behind 300,000 years after the Big Bang. These fossil records show the structure of the universe when it was 1,000 times smaller and hotter than it is today.

The map of the infant universe was put together by researchers working on (time to draw a big breath) Boomerang, the Balloon Observations of Millimetric Extragalactic Radiation and Geophysics, who reported their conclusions in the highly respected journal 'NATURE'

The project used a telescope suspended from a balloon to circumnavigate the Antarctic at a height of 120,000 for 11 days in 1998. The telescope succeeded in recording around one billion faint signals.

An analysis of the signals and subtle differences in temperature showed the geometry of the infant universe. It also added credence to the inflationary theory which states that the universe expanded by a quite remarkable amount in the split-second following the Big Bang 12 to 15 billion years ago.

That expansion stretched the universe in all directions to such a large extent, that it became effectively flat.

The shape of the universe depends on its mass. Over the past few decades, cosmologists have come up with a total of three possible shapes for the universe:

- 1): It is curved and open like a bowl.
- 2): It's curved and closed like a sphere.
- 3): It is flat.

Above a certain critical mass, the universe must be closed. Eventually, it will stop its constant expanding and collapse back on itself. A two-dimensional analogy is a sphere.

Below a critical mass, the universe has to be open and will keep on expanding for eternity. An open universe cannot be represented by an open bowl.

But if the universe is perfectly balanced between these two, it is described as flat. It will continue to expand, but at a slower rate.

Although the Euclidean geometry applies to most of the universe, there are regions where space is curved by a strong gravitational field, for instance around a Black Hole.

The findings also raise more questions about the nature of universe. Astronomers cannot account for all the matter or energy needed to make the universe flat.

To cope with this massive discrepancy, they have proposed the existence of mysterious dark matter and dark energy, which sound for all the world like terms ripped from the pages of a HP Lovecraft Cthulhu story...

The latter would be almost like anti-gravity, and would push space itself apart.

27th April, 2000 General 'THE DAILY TELEGRAPH'

The Curse Of Immortality Soon To Be Reality

I guess it had to happen sooner or later, what with the major advances in science and technology we seem to be reading out with the passing of each and every day. According to reports in the so-called 'serious' press, in the not-too distant future, it won't only be Vampires, Angels and Demons who can lay claim to life immortal...

An increase in the quality of treatment of various diseases could well lead to 'generational cleansing' as people increasingly live longer, scientists and medical 'experts' have gone on record again.

The elderly could be condemned to death by suicide or euthanasia after an allotted lifespan as medical advances raise the maximum age beyond 120, according to a Doctor John Harris, professor of bioethics at Manchester University.

He claimed that a side effect of research to treat the diseases of old age, such as dementia, cancer and arthritis, could be to extend the maximum age to immortality.

He was quoted as saying; *'New research now allows a glimpse into a world in which ageing - and even death - may no longer be inevitable. The ability to grow replacement cells and tissues by therapeutic could aid the process'*

'This "creeping longevity" would have profound implications for what we mean by the sanctity of human life, a debate that has already started with technologies such as in-vitro fertilisation.'

'The benefits of extended life expectancy would mostly be felt in technologically advanced societies.'

'There are many reasons why society would not want one everlasting generation, competing with the young for jobs, space and other resources. There would also be the desire to procreate, the pleasures of children and advantages of new people and new ideas.'

'But this could lead to a nightmare future in which people might be driven to a form of "generational cleansing." Society would have to make compromises, for instance by deciding that when individuals have had "a fair innings" they must die (a la' the people over 33 in LOGAN'S RUN'), either by suicide, euthanasia or even by reactivating the ageing process.'

'This would be difficult to envisage. How could a society resolve deliberately to curtail healthy life while maintaining a commitment to sanctity of life?'

'The contemplation of making sure that people who wish to go on living cannot do so is terrible indeed.'

'The consequence could be a society where people are offered the chance of a long life, if they have no children, or where people who reproduce might be required to forfeit their right to medical care. However, reproductive liberty is a powerful right protected by international conventions. We should start thinking now about how we can live decently and creatively with the prospect of such lives.'

27th April, 2000 General *'THE GUARDIAN'*

There Were Giant's In The Earth In Those Days

.Proof of the existence of the long-fabled giant, a seven-foot man who, legend dictates, wandered the moors of Northern England in the 6th century, may finally have been unearthed.

According to newspaper accounts, a couple of 20 inch human thigh bones quite likely belonged to an abnormally tall human being that would fit the bill for the semi-mythical Yorkshire Giant.

Predictably enough, the archaeologists who discovered the leg bones along with the remains from a 6ft long female skeleton at an ancient burial site at Thrisk, North Yorkshire, were not willing to lend any credence to such romantic notions. They would prefer to deal with the facts that state that he was very likely a farmer, relatively cultured and intelligent and living in a timber home in comparative comfort.

The remains of a total of seven people were found during a routine excavation on the site back in 1994. Archaeologist Anne Finney stumbled on a previously unknown burial ground beneath the site of a former Norman castle. The graves had at some time been disturbed by the Normans, but had not been robbed.

The bones of several adults and at least three children were found. A skull, which was smashed by vandals during the excavation, was found but no complete skeletons could be constructed.

Because tallness often runs in the family, archaeologists believe the male and female 'giants' may very well have been related.

The clues as to their lifestyle come courtesy of the early Anglo-Saxon artefacts found alongside the bodies. The best piece was a large bronze brooch decorated with a stylised horse's head. There were two pairs of sleeve-clasps - the equivalent of modern-day cufflinks - and some pots, one of which was almost complete. These may have been buried containing food or possibly a 'last drink.'

All of the items have now been placed on public display at Thrisk Museum. Curator Cooper Harding was quoted as saying; *'People are very excited about these bones and have started talking about giants. There is some local folklore along these lines.'*

Mr Harding further stated that he believed the 7ft-tall giant to be a Scandinavian settler. *'A lot of Scandinavian came to the area during this period in history. The likelihood is many were tall, fair-haired and blue-eyed, and the native population would have been on balance shorter in stature and dark-haired.'*

Professor Tony O'Connor, an archaeological 'expert' from York University, said Anglo-Saxon men of the period averaged about 5ft 7inches, slightly shorter than today.

'This man's height is exceptional and even today he would be pretty remarkable. We know very little about how physical characteristics were regarded at that time. But he may have been notorious for being tall.'

'However, these were probably just two unusually tall people. I don't think it means a lots of giant people were once living in Yorkshire.'

11th April, 2000 Thrisk, North Yorkshire *'DAILY MAIL'*

THE ICE-TITAN COMETH

Oh nosiree, it's sure as hell nothing to do with all those conspiracy-mongers populating the Global Warming Brigade, mind...but nevertheless, an iceberg roughly half the size of Wales has elected to tear itself away from Antarctica and begin drifting menacingly towards the some of the world's busiest shipping lanes.

The humongous slab of ice covers more than 4,000 square miles and at 183 miles long and 22 miles wide will be one of the largest bergs on record in the Southern Seas.

Scientists were first alerted to the berg courtesy of satellite pictures which revealed massive fissures around the 900ft thick chunk.

They have predicted with unnerving confidence that it's only a matter of time before the block of ice breaks totally free to become the largest of a string to have separated from the Antarctic ice shelf in recent years.

Those self-same 'expert's have also proved to be more than a tad more than disconcerting in stating that they becoming increasingly worried about climate changes across the continent of Antarctica where temperatures have risen by 2.5 degrees Centigrade over the span of the past 50 years. Five ice shelves have collapsed since 1930.

Matthew Lazzara, of the University of Wisconsin's Antarctic Meteorological Research Centre which analysed the satellite data, was quoted as saying: *'This is a very big iceberg, close to a record if not a new record. It's not often you see them of this magnitude.'*

'Once free from the Ross Ice Shelf it could travel up to 15 miles a day. It will either head north towards Brazil or be dragged by deep ocean currents towards South Africa.'

'The danger would come if it entered warmer water where it would be broken up into smaller pieces that would pose a far greater hazard to shipping. 'Drifting icebergs also cause

major changes in weather patterns as they move into warmer climates. Temperatures drop by up to five degrees Centigrade and fog forms around the ice.'

Dr David Vaughan, of the British Antarctic Society based in Cambridge, told reporters: 'There is no doubt that this is the birth of a very large iceberg. It is interesting because the Ross shelf rarely produces them. It is probably around 100 years since one broke away.'

'The big question is how often are these icebergs breaking off? If something of this magnitude was happening every year then I would start to be worried, but at the moment it is not.'

Wish I shared your confidence, Dr Vaughan....Just keep watching the ice!!!

24th March, 2000 Antarctica 'DAILY EXPRESS'

Weird Weather Affects The Globe

With apocalyptic fears still very much to the fore during the first few months of the new Millennium, it was with more than a little concern that people viewed a spate of decidedly unusual weather that assailed the four continents.

Perhaps the most dramatic, not to say tragic, example of weather anomaly occurred in Mozambique, which was quite literally battered by a series of devastating storms and floods that left countless dead in its wake.

But there were other notable instances, too. With the dawning of the new year, a total of 90 people were killed and huge tracts of forest were flattened by a sequence of storms that raged across France. In conditions not seen for years beyond counting, £7 billion worth of damage was caused.

Meanwhile in the Alps, massive avalanches caused havoc in several ski resorts, and the tropical storms and hurricanes that plague the Caribbean, the Gulf of Mexico and the American Mid-West, struck hard and struck earlier in the year than is usual.

The highest ever wind speed of an astounding 318mph was recorded during a tornado which claimed the lives of more than 40 people in Oklahoma and Kansas.

Jerusalem fell prey to the heaviest snowfall in the heart of the Holy Land for almost 50 years. And even New 'Yorkers,' well used to harsh winters, were unprepared for January's cold spell when temperatures dropped to below -20C.

Conversely, we here in Britain have enjoyed just about the earliest Spring imaginable. I swear there were buds on the trees and crocus shoots poking through the soft earth in the middle of January.

Global Warming, that old familiar bugbear, has been blamed by many for these odd meteorological anomalies. Scientists were quick to point out that global average temperatures have risen by seven-tenths of a degree or so in the past hundred years, and as temperatures continue to rise, so more energy is pumped into the atmosphere. In theory, this means that hurricanes could become more powerful and more frequent and snowfall should increase in mountainous areas as warmer air can carry more moisture. The patterns of storms and monsoons in tropical regions should also become more disrupted and consequently difficult to predict.

Mike Hulme, of the Climate Research Unit based in East Anglia, is firmly of the belief that the blame for Global Warming lies with humankind.

'We are witnessing events that are now clearly tainted by human actions. The African floods, the French gales and the absence of Winter in Britain are the direct result of man-made Global Warming.'

'Only dramatic action to curb carbon dioxide emissions will save our planet from climatological catastrophe.'

Not all scientists are convinced of this deeply depressing point of view, however.

Dr Geoff Jenkins, head of the Climate Prediction Programme at the Met Office, believes Global Warming is a certain fact, but it is too early to say whether or not it can be blamed for specific events.

'When we come to look at things like rainfall in specific areas like Mozambique, it is very hard to put your hand on your heart and say this is due to human activity. Certainly, the potential is there for increased rainfall, but we can't say for specific areas that we are going to have more rainfall.'

'One of the problems is that we don't have a good record for those areas going back 100 years, like we do in Britain, so it's hard to see just how extreme these storms are.'

'Natural causes may be behind the floods and the storms. Three years ago, a climatic anomaly called El Niño brought chaos to the Pacific region. Unusually warm waters brought storms to Mexico and California and devastated the Peruvian fishing industry. Plankton, which serves as fish food, hates warm water. Now El Niño is, quite literally, on the rebound, and a phenomenon called La Niña, causing unusually cold waters, may be behind the recent disturbances.'

'Whether El Niño was exacerbated by Global Warming, or whether it was the other way round, is still open to question. There is also the fact that natural disasters - be they caused by storms, earthquakes or volcanoes - have tended to become more severe for the simple reason that our population is increasing, and often increasing fastest in the very areas where disaster is most likely to strike.'

29th February, 2000 Worldwide 'DAILY EXPRESS'

STANDING AT THE GATES OF ATLANTIS?

And once again, it seems, an author has laid claim to have discovered the fabulous realm of Atlantis. Andrew Collins, is the latest in a long line of writers to drum up a theory as to the actual location of that most legendary of cities.

According to Plato, Atlantis was an empire founded by the sea God Poseidon on a land mass the size of Libya and Asia put together. It possessed a thriving capital, with sumptuous palaces, royal courts and harbours constantly receiving vessels from all over the world. For many generations, it ruled the Atlantic Ocean as well as parts of what Plato called 'the opposite continent,' what we now term to be the Americas.

Its tragic downfall came when its city fathers set their sights on conquering the Mediterranean. The Greeks rose in defiance and, following a terrible naval battle, defeated the Atlanteans. In the wake of this defeat, the God Zeus unleashed a series of devastating earthquakes and floods that eventually combined to submerge the island in a single 'terrible day and night.'

Plato, confusingly enough, gives two dates for this catastrophe: 8,570 BC in the Tlameas, and 9,421 BC in the Critias.

More than 2,000 books have been written about Plato's lost kingdom, placing it at various sites across the globe, including the Americas, the mid-Atlantic, North Africa, Northern Europe and Antarctica. The current favourite location in academic circles is Crete.

Collins begs to differ however. He believes the true location is the place where Plato said it was all along, namely the Atlantic. In the Critias, Plato records that the island had a vast, irrigated plain that stretched 'for three thousand stadia (552km) in one direction, and at its centre, for two thousand (368km) inland from the coast.'

To the north, west and east were 'mountain ranges' stretching to the shoreline, and the southern end of the plain was at sea level and housed the great capitol.

Plato was therefore describing an east-west oriented island, perhaps as little as 700km by 400km in size.

The great size attributed to Atlantis by Plato refers not to the 'home' island, but to the extent of the empire over which the kings of Atlantis held dominion. The Empire consisted of a series of islands that lay in front of the 'opposite continent.' But if the opposite continent was the Americas, and thus the series of islands referred to situated on the West Atlantic seaboard, then how could Plato, writing in 350BC, know of their existence?

After all, so far as we know, America was 'discovered' by Christopher Columbus in 1492.

Yet there is evidence to suggest that there was transatlantic contact thousands of years before Columbus. In Paris in 1976, the mummy of the ancient Egyptian Pharaoh **Rameses II** was found to contain tobacco. The implication being that the tobacco plant, thought to have been introduced to the west by Sir Walter (*'what a big ship I've got!'*) Raleigh, may have actually been known in the Ancient World as early as 1200 BC. In 1992, the German toxicologist Svetlana Balabanova examined mummies in the Munich Museum. Extensive evidence was found of high amounts of cocaine having been absorbed into the bodies. Cocaine is the active ingredient of the coca plant, native only to the Americas. Thus the possibility stands that coca leaves were being imported to Ancient Egypt via transoceanic contact with the Americas.

Also, in the eastern provinces of Mexico, are great stone heads, each weighing several tonnes, positioned at the centres of the Olmec peoples who thrived between 1200 and 400 BC. They display negroid features, suggesting the presence of black Africans in the American continent at this time. Other statues show Semitic features, suggesting contact with Mediterranean seafarers.

And the evidence it seems, continues to mount. As a consequence of the submergence of Atlantis, Plato tells us 'the outer ocean (the Atlantic) cannot be crossed or explored, the way being blocked by mud, just below the surface, left by the settling down of the island. This can only have been what we call the Sargasso Sea: the free floating seaweed stretching between the Azores and the Bahamas. The Bahamas are notorious for shallow banks and take their name from the Spanish 'baja mar,' meaning shallow sea.

It seems certain, concludes Mr Collins, that Plato's Atlantis was on the western Atlantic seaboard, somewhere in the Caribbean. In the *Timaeus*, Plato tells us that the island was situated within easy reach of other islands that acted like stepping stones for voyagers. Such a description matches the chains of the Caribbean. The idea that Atlantis may have been the Caribbean is not new.

Far from it, in fact.

Way back in 1798, Italian scholar Paul Cabrera identified Atlantis with Hispaniola, or Haiti and the Dominican Republic as the land mass is now called. He thought so 'not only on account of its position and magnitude exceeding all others, but also from its fertility and numerous navigable rivers.'

However, he picked the wrong island....

Plato tells us 'the district as a whole was of great elevation and its coast precipitous,' an adequate enough description of Hispaniola's mountainous coastline. However, the island had no strategic importance to seafarers, unlike neighbouring Cuba, whose many lobe-like bays made for far better parts. Furthermore, Cuba's coastal waters guard the northerly and southerly entrances to the Gulf Of Mexico, making it ideal for journeys to Mexico or North America.

Cabrera's claim the Hispaniola was 'in magnitude exceeding all others,' is also wrong. At around 640km by 256km, it is around two thirds the size of Cuba. He also mentions Hispaniola's 'fertility' and Cuba is the most

fertile island of the Caribbean, famous for tobacco and sugar. Cuba also has 'numerous navigable rivers.'

All this suggests Cuba is the location of Atlantis. According to Plato, 'around the city was a plain, enclosing it and its itself enclosed in turn by mountain ranges which came down to the sea.'

The description matches Cuba's western plain, that stretches from Havana westwards to Pinar del Rio. Until around 9,000 years ago, the plain extended southwards, across what is today the bay of Batabano to the Isle of Youth. In other words, a great plain, drowned in part during the time Plato wrote of.

And it is the great drowning, the terrible 'day and night,' that provides the last piece in the puzzle. Just such a cataclysm did annihilate the western Atlantic at the time Plato posits for the destruction of Atlantis.

In around 8500 BC, a comet exploded above North America. The fragments made more than 50,000 craters, known as the Carolina Bays, ranging from a few hundred metres to 11km in length. Each explosion held the force of a small nuclear blast, causing a huge tidal wave drowning the Caribbean and Bahamas. Any great civilisation on Cuba would almost certainly have been razed, ruined, and lost to the sea - as if Zeus Himself had struck it down.

14th February, 2000 Cuba, Caribbean *'THE DAILY EXPRESS'*

WAITING FOR ARMAGEDDON

Well, it's been a long time coming, but finally the Government seems to have woken up to the fact that it might be a good idea to watch the skies for at least some advance warning of any rogue comet, hell-bent on colliding with the Earth, (for all the good it may do us...)

Early this year, Science Minister Lord Sainsbury unveiled his plans to form a panel whose aims are to attempt to assess the very real hazards posed by Near Earth Objects.

The panel, consisting of three 'experts,' were due to work with counterparts over in the States and in other countries in a bid to raise awareness of the risks posed by asteroids and other space debris.

Researchers at the Natural History Museum have recently revealed that asteroids with the destructive power of the biggest nuclear bombs hit the Earth on average once every century.

Now there's a comforting thought to sleep on, and I don't think.

It's thought that the last such impact occurred in the remote Tunguska region of Siberia back in 1908. However, Lord Sainsbury was sure not intent upon causing any sort of panic. He told reporters; *'The risk of an asteroid or comet causing substantial damage is extremely remote - this is not something people should lie awake at night worrying about.'*

'But we cannot ignore the risk, however remote, and a case can be made for monitoring the situation on an international basis.'

The body will be headed by New Zealand-born scientist Dr Harry Atkinson, who has worked in Whitehall and for the Science Research Council.

He was due to be joined by Sir Crispin Tickell, the distinguished diplomat and Chancellor of Kent University who has worked on a range of environmental bodies including the Climate Institute for Environment and Development.

The final member is Professor David Williams, who is president of the Royal Astronomical Society and holds the Perren Chair of Astronomy at University College, London. The decision to appoint the group was welcomed by Liberal Democrat MP Lembit Opik, who has campaigned

for greater international efforts to monitor the risks of asteroids and led a delegation of astronomers that met Lord Sainsbury to urge Government action.

He told reporters; *'You are 750 times more likely to die from an asteroid than win the National Lottery this weekend. Without a doubt this measure increases our chances of surviving the next 1,000 years.'*

1st January, 2000 General 'DAILY MAIL'

Cult Member Mummified In Hotel Room

A Japanese religious cult, called Life Space, apparently mummified a member's corpse and kept it in a Tokyo hotelroom for four months, according to Japanese police.

When detectives arrived, members told them not to touch the body because the man was still alive.



The cops, acting on an anonymous call, found Shinichi Kobayashi, 66, lying on a bed dressed in a bathrobe. He was surrounded by burning incense and his wife and son, who are also members of Life Space, were watching over him.

Investigators said he had clearly been dead for several months.

Mrs Kobayashi had checked into the hotel on July 2nd, 1999, and had told staff that her husband had fallen ill so she would clean the room herself to prevent disturbances.

He had been in hospital with a brain haemorrhage but was taken away by his son midway through the treatment.

2nd December, 2000 Tokyo, Japan 'THE TIMES'

A Pattern Of Sunspots Above The Heart Of The Ocean

According to research carried out by one Edward Lawrence, a scientist at the Meteorological Office for more than 30 years, a combination of unusual solar activity and pure bad timing joined forces to help sink the 'unsinkable' Titanic.

The doomed liner apparently set off on its one way journey at the worst possible time for iceberg collisions (with the possible exception of er, right now - see the earlier snippet dealing with the half-the-size-of Wales iceberg just about ready to break free of the shelf of the Antarctic).

The paper, published in the Royal Meteorological Society journal 'WEATHER,' also reports that a sudden and dramatic drop in temperature recorded by the crew a

matter of hours before the collision was a sure sign that icebergs were nearby.

Although the politics, personalities and procedures surrounding the terrible sinking of the Titanic in the wee small hours of April 15th, 1912, have been documented in intense detail, Mr Lawrence believes that the role of the weather has been neglected for far too long.

'Everyone thought that the weather was so lovely that it couldn't have had anything to do with it,' Edward told reporters. *'But it was a weather phenomenon.'*

His study of records suggest that there was a strong connection between the number of icebergs in the area where Titanic sank and the 11-year cycle of rising and falling sunspots - the dark patches that appear on the surface of the sun.

The maiden voyage of Titanic in 1912 came just over twelve months before the sun spot cycle reached its minimum in July, 1913. At this time, there were more icebergs than usual, and the ocean was colder than normal, according to Mr Lawrence.

20th March, 2000 North Atlantic 'THE TIMES'

CROP CIRCLE BEER ON TAP

I guess it had to happen sooner or later...A small traditional maltster is assisting in the production of a batch of a highly unusual brand of real ale; a drink brewed using barley grown in fields featuring Crop Circles.

Warmminster Maltings in Wiltshire, was approached by a local farmer after an American company (who else?) expressed an interest in the barley grown in his numerous Circle-struck fields.

The Californian-based Crop Circle Beer was anxious that its specially selected barley should not be mixed with crops from 'ordinary' land. So farm owner Tim Carson, of Alton Barnea, near Devizes, contacted his local maltings, which still uses the traditional method of steeping the grain in vats of water, and then spreading it on the floor to ensure germination.

Head maltster Chris Garratt stated that the American brewer was insistent that the Crop Circle barley should be clearly identifiable and traceable throughout the malting process. That is now complete and the barley is being transported to California for brewing.

The beer will not be available in this country (what a surprise), but Mr Garratt said he planned to make every effort to visit the Californian brewery to try it. He was quoted as saying; *'It was a unique moment to have this batch isolated and we knew it would turn into something special.'*

14th February, 2000 Warmminster, Wiltshire 'THE LIVERPOOL DAILY POST'

Walking On Fire

Fire walking has, since time immemorial, been regarded as an example of the power of the human mind triumphing over the accepted laws of physics.

It's counted right up there with Manchester City's odds-defying win over Blackburn to clinch promotion to the Premier League this season.

Unfortunately, an attempt to set a new fire walking record, last March, failed pretty miserably.

John Shango, one of Britain's leading exponents, was forced to abandon his attempt after he'd walked a mere 30 feet, a whole 20 feet short of the record. Perhaps not surprisingly, the temperatures of 1,000F were simply too much to bear.

The demonstration was meant to be part of the 'TOMORROW'S WORLD' Live Lab, and had been organised to fuel the debate about whether the secrets of

endurance lie in mind over matter or in physics. Mr Shango, who runs courses on fire walking, is of the belief that the explanation for such (ahem) 'feats' does not lie within the environs of conventional science.

He (oh dear) warmed up for the attempt by strolling across 6ft of broken glass. But after the failed stab at the record, a refusing-to-be-downhearted Mr Shango told reporters; *'I have been burnt more in the past, but conditions here were not ideal. I still think a walk of 60ft may be possible.'*

Mr Shango, now aged 53, first took up fire walking ten years ago, and has spent five years perfecting his technique.

He believes these feats of endurance are spiritual acts. *'Although physicists say anyone can do it safely, if you are not careful you can hurt people. A relaxed, energized state of mind allows the walker to tolerate heat from the embers without burning the soles.'*

But, oh joy of joys, here comes our old sceptical friend Dr Richard Wiseman (who you'll doubtless recognise from the *Phantoms of Hampton Court* segment elsewhere in this issue) to pee on the fire walking conflagration....

It'll come as little shock to hear that he believes the rituals can be explained by simple physics.

Glass walking is possible because weight is spread over several pieces of glass. The sharp edges cause enough pressure to pierce the skin.

And fire walking is possible because carbon is a bad conductor of heat. Although coals can be extremely hot, human skin has to be in contact with them for some time before it starts to burn.

Just the same, it's probably advisable Dr Richard, (and everyone else for that matter) that you don't try this at home.

23rd March, 2000 Worcester, England 'DAILY TELEGRAPH'

A Walk Across England's Ley Lines

John Timpson, the BBC radio presenter, has it seems, held an (up to now, at least) secret fascination for the intriguing possibility that Ley Lines, those semi-legendary sources of energy thought to criss cross the earth, actually exist.

In a recent article published in the *'DAILY MAIL'S WEEKEND MAGAZINE'*, Mr Timpson was keen to provide something of a sadly all-too brief gazetteer of some of Britain's most famous Ley-Line-crossed sites.

First however, he related the opening caveat....

'Even the most enthusiastic Ley-Man has to admit that ley lines would make very impractical roads. They are inclined to go straight through swamps and lakes and over the top of very steep hills. So a theory developed that ley lines energy currents passing through the earth, which our early ancestors could somehow detect and tap into by means of standing stones and other sacred sites.'

'This idea got a big boost in the Swinging Sixties, when the idea of energy currents in ley lines was adapted to fit almost any theory, from mystical happenings on Glastonbury Tor to landing sites for flying saucers.'

'This New Age approach was a lot more colourful than Alfred Watkins's theorising about prehistoric tracks, and many ley-hunters still favour it. I am rather taken by it myself, though some of its more extreme versions are too bizarre even for me. In recent years, ley lines have been linked with German Ghost paths, Chinese feng shui, sacrile trials in Ireland and the Nazca Lines in Peru.'

'Before I was led too far up the spirit path, I felt I should try to get the whole ley line picture into perspective. So I went ley-hunting. Not because I am convinced by any of these theories, nor because I want to disprove them, but just to discover where these lines might take me.'

'At the end of it all, having followed those "old straight tracks" all over England - sometimes successfully, sometimes a little sceptically, but always with the chance of another unlikely discovery ahead - I still cannot come to a definite conclusion about the validity of Alfred Watkins's leyline: whether such a thing really does exist, and if so, how it originated and what its purpose was.'

'Ley-hunting makes for a great day out but I am still asking myself: "What's it all about, Alfie?"'

Whitby Abbey

One of the most famous locations in North Yorkshire, due in no small part to its featuring in Bram Stoker's classic (though, quite honestly, difficult as all Hell to actually read) novel *'DRACULA'*, the abbey was founded by St. Hilda, in the Seventh Century.

A leyline is said to head westwards out of Whitby and on it is an ancient mound called Wade's or Wada's, Castle. Many people believe that it dates from pre-Norman times when Wade - or Wada - was either a hero or a villain, a warrior or a giant, depending perhaps on how he spelled his name. One of the most entertaining legends of Wade the Giant concern his equally imposing wife, Bell. On tale relates how Wade built the castle at Mulgrave while Bell built another at Dishington, and as they only had one hammer between them, they were forced to toss it a distance of 17 miles to each other, whenever they needed it.

St Michael's Mount

South-west Cornwall is all but littered with ancient standing stones. There are also a couple of prehistoric villages and an assortment of holy wells. Perhaps most striking of all however, is St Michael's Mount, once joined to the mainland but nowadays only accessible via a causeway at low tide. It was formerly the site of a Benedictine monastery. This was during Saxon times, but it is thought that it was regarded as being a sacred site long before that.

It is also believed to be situated on a leyline.

Exploring the whole site requires a great deal of time, but, according to Mr Timpson, is well worth the effort. Of especial interest are the prehistoric settlements at Chysanter and Mulfra, an Iron Age hillfort called Castle-an-Dinas, a standing stone and the strange wheel-shaped stone known as Men-an-Tol, the 'Stone of the Hole.'

It is credited with supernatural powers ranging from curing scrofulous children - who were passed three times through the two-foot hole, then dragged around the stone three times, and ~~clockwise~~ - to acting as an oracle.

Brass pins were laid on it and, in answer to questions, they mysteriously vibrated to provide the answer.

A Waterbaby Born In Herefordshire

The Ross-on-Wye line starts at the Iron Age hillfort at Wall Hills, and goes through Much Marcle. Here at St Bartholomew's Church, are the base and stump of an old preaching cross, and one of the oldest yew trees in the country, possibly 2,000 years old. Also on the route is St Dubricius's Church at Whitchurch. It stands close to the river which is the basis of the legend of the Saint's birth. The local king found his daughter was pregnant and ordered her to be put in a sack and drowned for her 'sins.' Fortunately, she the hapless girl was washed up on a sandbank. The king, not to be outdone, then ordered her to be burnt to death, but she proved to be decidedly fire-resistant, 'presumably as she was still soaking wet,' the church comments somewhat (ahem) drily.

The next morning her baby was born and named Dubricius, or Dyfrig in Welsh, meaning 'Waterbaby.' He grew up to be a great teacher, bishop and Saint.

The Palace Of The Faery King

Glastonbury Tor is rumoured, amongst countless other things, to be the location of the Faery King's palace, where the enchantress Ceridwen kept her cauldron of poetic inspiration, and where King Arthur came to the rescue of his wife Guinevere who was then in the clutches of Melwas, King of Somerset.

It is also one of the many places where Arthur is said to have been buried. In more recent times the area around the Tor has been used for UFO spotting and as a gathering place for New Age travellers. With this wealth of faerie-tale folklore, early religious connections and unconventional activity, ley-hunters find Glastonbury Tor well-nigh irresistible. There is one ley-line that takes in not only the Tor but the Abbey remains and St John The Baptist Church with its Holy Thorn - a complete set, as it were, of Glastonbury's three notable religious sites.

From West Pennard Church, a few miles east of Glastonbury, the line runs to Glastonbury Tor and on to the town itself. All that remains of the Abbey is the curiously shaped Abbot's Kitchen, where meals were prepared over open fires in each corner, and the four chimney flues converged on the central stone lantern in the roof.

Many people believe that Glastonbury Abbey stood on the earliest Christian site in Britain, where Joseph of Arimathea built the first wattle-and-daub church, long before a monastery was built in the 6th or 7th century. Legend has it that King Arthur and Queen Guinevere were re-buried there.

The present 15th century building has many reminders of Glastonbury's long religious history, including a Glastonbury thorn bush in the churchyard, a 'clone' of the one that is said to have grown where Joseph of Arimathea's staff took root.

The Pregnant Goddess Of Wiltshire

The county of Wiltshire has four of the best-known prehistoric sites in the whole of England, namely: Stonehenge, Avebury, Old Sarum and Silbury Hill. Our guide, Mr Timpson, readily confesses that the village of Avebury that fascinates him the most, with its prehistoric sites, mysterious standing stones intermingling with a traditional English village.

He considers that fact that even though the stone have been interpreted in various sexual ways, the whole arrangement of ditches and banks and standing stones, covering 27 acres, still defies the scurried ranks of 'experts.'

One leyline crosses the western flank of Silbury Hill. Archaeologists believe that it was built in three stages, starting in about 2,500BC, but theories about its purpose range from a massive burial ground to a solar observatory and, of course, there is always the pregnant Earth Goddess school of thought, overriding all.

Chanctonbury Ring: A Step Into The Twilight Zone

This ancient site on the South Downs of Sussex, is a hill approximately 700ft above sea level, and is surrounded by a circle of Beech trees. It is steeped in legend and occult history and has long been associated with Witchcraft, mysterious occurrences and UFO sightings.

I've not yet been there myself (although that's something I have long intended to rectify -Ed) but according to researcher Toyne Newtown, writing for the classic Orbit series *'THE UNEXPLAINED'*, (Issue 76 Page: 1519), *'On the outside, the ring of trees seems perfectly normal, and yet on entering, one is immediately aware of an uncanny silence, for no birds or animals are found here. Dead and dying trees, some felled off, add to the air of general decay,*

as if stepping from the outside to the inside of the ring has deposited one in a strange and different world.'

He further relates how various visitors to the ring have been pushed to the ground by unseen forces and have, in one case, actually conspired to levitate a man, suspending him in the air for 60 seconds and causing injuries to his back when he was finally dropped unceremoniously back to the earth.

The trees themselves were planted back in 1760 to encircle an Iron-Age hillfort, and more significantly for the ley-hunter at least, the Romans put a small temple in the centre of it.

As the trees grew, the strange stories grew with them. It is still held that it is impossible to accurately count the number of trees- and it's probably just as well, because according to one legend, anyone who did succeed in counting them may very well encounter the restless spirits of the Roman soldiers who once manned the fort and worshipped at their pagan temple. Other manifestations include a vague shapeless form that fits in between the trees, the ominous sound of thudding hooves courtesy of (one presumes) invisible horsemen, and a white bearded Druid searching for something he mislaid a thousand years earlier.

You can even, should you be brave or foolish enough to wish to encounter the Devil, walk backwards around the Ring at midnight on Midsummer Eve. Lucifer Himself will appear and offer you, of all things, a bowl of porridge. If you decide to partake of it, he will take your soul in return. Small wonder then that it makes quite a distinctive ley-marker.

26th February, 2000 Various Sites In England 'DAILY MAIL'

One Of Liverpool's Great Unanswered Questions: Was James Maybrick Jack The Ripper?

Despite numerous attempts at debunking the infamous 'Ripper Diaries' by just about every wannabe 'expert' you care to name, the questions as to their authenticity still persist.

The latest luminary prepared to stick his neck out and claim that he at least, has (albeit tentatively) confirmed the identity of the Ripper as being none other than Liverpool's very own James Maybrick, is the grandly-named William D. Rubenstein, Professor of Modern History at the University Of Wales.

'Detectives never brought the killer to justice, although countless amateur sleuths reckon they've got the case cracked, 'the New York born professor told reporters. 'Far from shrinking, the "Ripperology" industry is growing, and will continue to grow, until a piece of cast-iron evidence emerges. In other words, the twelfth of never.

'Okay, something might just turn up in an old trunk in someone's attic, but I think the guessing game will continue.

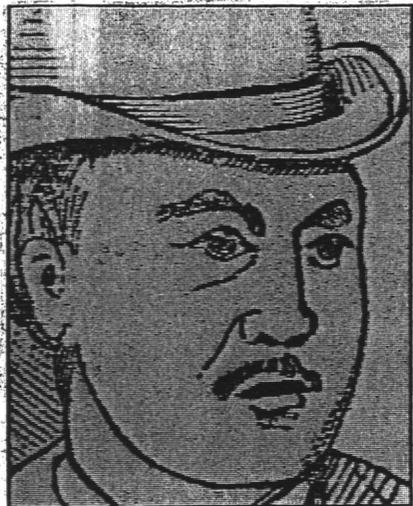
'But, having studied the case in great detail on behalf of the 'HISTORY TODAY' magazine, I am almost certain that the suspect unmasked for the first time just eight years ago is the guilty party.

'There are about 15 leading candidates for the true identity of the Ripper. None is wholly satisfactory, although one suspect in particular is highly convincing.

'That man in Liverpool cotton broker James Maybrick (1838-1889) a man whose name first appeared in the headlines after he died of apparent arsenic poisoning.

'His wife, Florence (1862-1941) was found guilty of his murder and sentenced to death. But she was reprieved, served 15 years in prison and spent the rest of her life in America, where she was born. James Maybrick had never been linked to the Ripper case, but all that changed in 1992 when a hand-written 63-page diary turned up, out of the blue, in Liverpool.

'The Journal, dated May 3rd, 1889, (eight days before Maybrick's death), gives apparently accurate information on Maybrick's life as a well-to-do cotton broker living in Baitlocrease House, Algburth, together with gruesome details of the Ripper killings, including a penchant for cannibalism.



(Above): A contemporary portrait of a man who could be the Ripper shows a remarkable similarity to James Maybrick...Coincidence or proof irrefutable? I guess you've got to draw your own conclusions, Constant Reader.

'According to the diary, Maybrick embarked on his killing spree as a form of revenge aimed at his wife who was said to be having an affair with another Liverpool merchant, Alfred Brierley. The discovery of an unknown "Diary Of Jack The Ripper," quickly marketed by mainstream publishers 104 after the crimes, rightly gave rise to the deepest suspicions. It was denounced as a crude forgery, dating from a year or two before it was made public.

'As a work it is, in many respects, highly unsatisfactory. It is not a diary in the normal sense, containing no dates prior to that given in the very last line.

'But, all attempts to show that the diary is a forgery and who its creator may be have failed.

'In the eight years since its appearance, no one has come forward to smirk at the gullibility of so many "experts"...no evidence discounting the possibility that Maybrick could be the Ripper has ever come to light.

The diary also appears to contain information that is virtually impossible for any recent forger to have known.

As is well-known, Mary Ann Nichols, Annie Chapman, Elizabeth Stride, Catherine Eddowes and Mary Jane Kelly were all butchered between August 31st and November 9th, 1888. 'THE LIVERPOOL ECHO' for Wednesday, October 10th (five weeks and five days before the final murder) makes for interesting reading.

'With police continuing to arrest, question and then release a series of suspects in London, it was reported that a detective had recently travelled to Liverpool in a bid to trace the movements of a man which had proved to be of a somewhat mysterious kind.'

The report goes on to say that although the man stayed in a West End hotel, he would spend time scouring the East End shams. Accompanying this article, featuring the headline 'A LIVERPOOL FANATIC,' was a letter from

someone responding to a suggestion that the Ripper could be about to strike in Dublin.

The correspondent wrote; 'I beg to state that the letters published in yours of yesterday are lies. It is somebody gulling the public. I am the Whitechapel purger.'

It was signed 'Jack The Ripper' (Genuine). DIEGO LAURENZ "

Professor Rubenstein says; "Diego" is Spanish for James, while "Laurenz" is meant to rhyme with "Florence." If this is what it means, then this constitutes virtual proof that James Maybrick was Jack The Ripper.

'Maybrick's diary states that he confessed to his wife that he was Jack The Ripper. In a letter written about the same time, his wife told Alfred Brierley that her husband was delirious. She added, mysteriously, "The tale he told me was pure fabrication and only intended to frighten the truth out of me."

'Now, I am more than convinced that James Maybrick was Jack The Ripper. Both evidence and inference appear overwhelmingly to point to him.

'However, if it can be proved that he was definitely not the Ripper, the identity of Jack The Ripper remains a mystery. None of the other suspects is remotely convincing.'

30th May, 2000 Liverpool 'LIVERPOOLECHO'

The 'Manc' With A Nail In His Brain

Another of those pseudo-Manc glory-seeker's, this one hailing from Newport, Gwent, was watching his adopted team play in the 'Theatre Of Broken Dreams,' when he suddenly collapsed (the more capricious amongst us might like to think that fainting away might be connected in some way with Redondo's marvellous piece of skill that left Henning Berg twisting in the wind and helped set up Raul's killer third goal for Real Madrid, but sadly, the article I came across doesn't specify who the opposition actually were -Ed).

Tony Smart, 38, was injured whilst he was working in a factory and had a three-inch nail embedded in his brain for 10 whole days without knowing it was there.

The nail was accidentally dropped at work, but, amazingly, Tony felt not the slightest degree of pain at the time. It was finally removed after an operation. The nail, not the brain, one presumes.

13th April, 2000 Newport, Gwent 'THE TIMES'

The Lost And Found Asteroid

The Planet Earth has a second Moon, named Cruithne, which it will orbit us for at least 5,000 years, a British team of astronomers has apparently discovered.

Although the asteroid was already known to astronomers, the new work reveals that is a moon and provides a way mathematically to categorise the motions of all objects in the Solar System.

It also helps to shed some light on the risk of a catastrophic asteroid collision with the Earth, currently under investigation by the Government Task Force mentioned elsewhere in this very issue.

A team from Queen Mary and Westfield College, London, has shown that the gravitational forces of our planet and of the Sun meet and allow the Earth to capture passing asteroids. Cruithne, which is three miles across and completes its eccentric horseshoe orbit every 770 years, is one of these Trojan asteroids.

Dr Fathi Namouni, Dr Apostolos Christou and Professor Carl Murray claim with (hopefully not Titanic-ally

ill-founded) confidence that 'it is almost impossible for asteroids in such orbits to hit us. We need not fear that every asteroid will do so because it may end up on eccentric orbits.

25th January, 2000 General 'THE GUARDIAN'

...But Liverpool-Based Astronomer Predicts Armageddon 2022

In total disagreement with the aforementioned Professors, regarding the likelihood of our planet being hit by a life-destroying chunk of celestial matter is an astronomer from Liverpool's John Moores University.

Dr Jim Scotti, a former PhD student at the university believes that, even as I sit and write these words, an asteroid is hurtling it way through space towards us, and the impact date is set for 2022...Jeepers, that's just 21 years and counting!!!

Dr Scotti and his three-man team made the discovery of the asteroid, codenamed 2000 BF19 on January 31st of this year. Worryingly enough, it is calculated to be about 500-700 metres wide and could cause an incredible amount of damage to our fragile planet if it collides with us.

The team managed to track the asteroid on the Spacewatch Telescope based at Kitt Peak in Arizona, USA, when, perhaps even more worryingly, it disappeared from view. The very same day, the International Astronomical Union announced its discovery omitting to mention the potential risk of hitting the Earth.

But the possibility of a collision was raised by another JMU scientist, Dr Benny Peiser, a social anthropologist who specialises in the study of asteroids.

He was quoted as telling reporters; *'New calculations from the Pisa Observatory in Italy suggest that the orbit of the asteroid could intersect with the Earth in 2022. Although the chances of it hitting is very remote, it cannot be ruled out altogether.'*

'We need to do further observations in order to see the exact orbit the asteroid is taking. It is due to come close to the Earth in about 11 years time and the gravitation pull from the Earth could change the orbit of this asteroid.'

'If, as a result, it is attracted to another orbit, it could be brought so close to the Earth that it impacts by 2022.'

And while you're pondering on that less than cheery fact, consider this: This particular asteroid is merely the fifth to be discovered that may well hit the planet.

And Dr Peiser, who has been working at the university for more than six years, stressed that if 2000 BF19 did crash into the Earth the consequences would be devastating.

'If it was to hit it would not actually destroy the Earth, but it is definitely large enough to cause a major disaster.'

'The impact would lead to severe ecological and social upheaval'

Dr Peiser said Italian astronomers were currently attempting to monitor the route of the asteroid because more sightings would hopefully help them eliminate the chance of it hitting the Earth.

'At the moment we haven't got the observational data to say it won't pose a hazard whatsoever.'

9th February, 2000 General 'LIVERPOOL DAILY POST'

'We Wanna Be Together'

I've heard of grief-struck relatives exhibiting a natural reluctance to be parted from their dearly, er, departed, but the following is patently taking things more than a little too far...

Joelle Leroy, 50, and her 52-year-old-brother, Michel, who are both teachers and are unmarried, couldn't bear to be separated from their dear mother, Lise, and wanted to

keep her frozen corpse in a glass-fronted freezer at their home.

However, they were thwarted in their efforts by a French appeals court, who refused them permission to instal their mother in the basement of their house on the French Indian Ocean island of Reunion.

The judge sitting at the Bordeaux court decreed that; *'the conservation of a dead person through freezing is not considered as a way of treating a body in the eyes of the law.'*

31st May, 2000 Bordeaux, France 'REUTERS'

Count Dracula Was Irish

According to Celtic historian Bob Curran, writing in the latest issue of the academic journal 'HISTORY IRELAND', Bram Stoker, the Irishman who wrote 'DRACULA' in 1897, may have based his Vampire on a bloodthirsty 5th Century chieftan of Irish folklore rather than the Romanian Vlad The Impaler, as has previously been supposed.

Chief Abhartach, Bob Curran insists, is the inspiration for the modern-day Horror icon.

We wonder whether this revelation will have an adverse effect upon the Transylvanian tourist industry...

26th May, 2000 Ireland 'THE DAILY TELEGRAPH'

INTO THE VALLEY OF THE UNKNOWN SPECIES

Remains of the oldest known Dinosaur in the world have been uncovered at a fossil site in Madagascar. The discovery may help explain the true origin of the biggest creatures ever to walk the earth.

Palaeontologists were led by a Malagasy youth called Mena from a remote village on the island to the fossil collection, which scientists described as 'spectacular' in research published in the journal *SCIENCE*.

The fossils - named Mena, in honour of their discoverer - date from the middle to late Triassic Period, between 225 and 230 million year ago. They are believed to be older than the 228 million years of the current record holders, Herrerasaurus and Eoraptor.

The team's leader, John Flynn, a palaeontologist at the Field Museum in Chicago, told reporters that many of the fossilised species found at the site were new science.

'They are exquisitely preserved. They show a level of detail far superior to everything else from that time.'

Andrew Wyss, a fellow investigator and associate professor of geology at the University of California, Santa Barbara, recounted the surprise find: *'A boy said that his older brother had found some bones. So we waited around for half a day for the brother, Mena, and sure enough he showed us a hill with a mound of them.'*

At the time of going to press, the group had managed to unearth the jawbones of two Dinosaurs, which have revealed that the creatures belonged to a group known as the prosauropods - herbivores with small heads and long necks that could walk on either two or four legs. The prosauropods are believed to have been the ancestors - or closely related to the ancestors - of the mighty sauropods such as Apatosaurus and Diplodocus, which evolved millions of years later.

The fossils also contain a rich collection of bones belonging to three members of a branch vertebrate animals that includes modern-day reptiles and five members of a line that led to mammals.

The scientists had not at the time of the account, carried out any radiolotope dating but they had two reasons to believe that the Dinosaur is over 228 million years old. First, the anatomical details of two of the accompanying

fossils suggest that they are older than creatures known to have existed 228 million years ago. Second, an armoured reptile called the aetosaur, abundant at that time, is conspicuously absent from the Mena fossils.

Dr Flynn went on record as saying that the find may even help to explain how the break-up of the ancient super-continent Pangaea, which began in the Triassic period, affected the course of evolution.

22nd October, 1999 Madagascar 'THE GUARDIAN'

Religious Phenomena

The Inconvenient Angel

Christmas comes to London, brightly-lit decorations dangle above High Streets of slow-moving traffic, and charming Nativity Plays are performed to packed school halls. West Indian Pentecostal churches try their hardest to be seasonal, but often fail. All through the year, such churches provide rip-roaring Revivals with hellfire sermons, endless concerts, 'programmes,' talent-shows, church plays and other delights for the faithful and the outsider alike. Tables groan beneath the weight of chicken, rice and coleslaw dinners, but the Christmas entertainment may be somewhat uninspired. Negro churches in America have the same trouble, as in slavery days the Masters of cotton and sugar plantations share a perverse delight in getting the slaves drunk from buckets of whisky or rum. Wild dances would follow, shunned by serious-minded and religious slaves, who regarded such a Christmas as un-Christian.

In one London church, not long ago, the Nativity Play featured a noisy and apparently painful childbirth for Mary, who braced her legs apart, and was delivered of a doll. The audience tittered uneasily.

Another church allowed the young people to write their own play, underestimating the effect of rap music and its ferocious lyrics upon the young.

Scene One: 'In God's front parlour,' introduced God as a Gangsta-Rapper to the startled, half-amused audience. Scowling, Gangsta God in His dark glasses and leather jacket bristling with zips, angrily called the meeting to order and called for the Star of Bethlehem. A sweet little girl in a ballet frock scampered on, a large spangly star-shape on her back.

"Tsst! Is that the best Star you can get? That's really scraping the bottom of the barrel," God complained wearily, glaring from behind His spectacles. "Okay, send her out, nuh."

Worse was to follow, as Joseph refused to believe Mary's story and kept shouting "Who's the father? Who's the father?" in a towering rage. A scene in an Arab-style market place revealed him to be an ultra-jealous husband, continually bawling "Did you touch my wife?" at hapless vendors.

However, a midnight visit from an Angel, who explained it all, calmed the outraged husband and the play thereafter ran on traditional lines.

Last Christmas I received an invitation to a Nativity Play held at the Mount Pisgah Baptist Church. This is a very old-fashioned church by West Indian standards, one in which Negro spirituals are frequently sung. Modern-minded West Indians use 'spirituals' in a derogatory sense, meaning 'low songs that are "too black." Futhermore, Mount Pisgah have converted a dingy former shop into a mysterious candle-lit wonderland of wooden beams and rustic sanctuary rails that already resemble the manger where Jesus lay. As I entered, big women in long

dresses and red turbans were singing traditional English carols in majestic tones usually reserved for "Steal Away" and "Swing Low Sweet Chariot." I felt decidedly Christmassy.

Church children, with rapt expressions, sat in the semi-darkness below the wooden altar rail. Each clutched a candle, and when these were lit by big gruff brother, Delbert, the oldest boy there, the effect was enchanting.

'Away In A Manger' sang the church ladies, or Sisters, with mysteriously blending harmonies that improved the already near-perfect song. Imperceptibly, the play began, and I found myself looking at a tiny Mary in a pink-and-white checked apron, doing the housework. So hard did the little seven year old seem to work, with brush and pan, that I fancied I was looking at Cinderella.

All at once, an Angel appeared and told her the glad news. To my surprise, Mary threw her arms up, rolled her eyes up, gave a squeak and fainted most realistically, with a bump. She remained stretched out on the floor, flat on her back, as the Sisters burst into another Carol.

Such goings on sometimes formed part of a normal church service at Mount Pisgah. For members regularly pray aloud to Angels, often to Gabriel. When overcome by the Spirit, adults faint and lie on the floor. Evergreen leaves, in vases or pots, decorate Mount Pisgah all the year round. Mother Holly and Mother Ivy are prominent church members, who look modest when their Carol is sung.

Meanwhile, back in the play, Mary wandered alone and dolorous, with a balloon under her dress. Enter Brother Delbert in white Bedouin head-dress as Joseph.

'Don't worry, Mary - I'll take care of you,' he said gently.

On came the shepherds, who carried real wooden crooks, normally held by the Pastor-Bishop when in full regalia. Today the crooks had been Christmas-ised with swathes of silver paper.

'Where is the Bishop?' somebody in the audience asked, in a loud voice.

'Shh, he's up on the stage, asleep in a corner.'

'Poor man, he must work too hard.'

The highlight of the play was Brother Delbert solemnly walking round and round the room on all fours. Mary, with a real baby, sat happily on his back, as all the children with lit candles followed, singing 'Little Donkey.'

Although only three months old, the child made a wonderful Baby Jesus, gurgling pleasantly throughout. When placed in his crib, he stuck his legs straight up in the air and lay there, laughing. His real mother watched carefully over him from the sidelines. She had just left school and lacked a Joseph of her own, but the whole church acted as godmother and godfather to little Kevin.

Wise men and shepherds came and went, and at last the Mount Pisgah play ended. Delbert reappeared as Father Christmas and began distributing presents, reading labels on parcels and calling children by name, as he delved within his sack. The Bishop awoke, stretched and smoothed his robes before descending to the floor. All at once, loud laughs bangs and thumps could be heard in the church rooms upstairs.

'It must be Father Christmas's reindeer on the roof,' I said, believing the noise to be someone play-acting. Others thought the same, and exchanged knowing smiles, waiting for a white-bearded figure and a cry of 'Ho ho ho!!!'

Instead, to everyone's shock and surprise, a robed figure of an elderly lady half fell into the room, eyes rolling and open mouth uttering repetitive barks, yelps and croaks.

'Mother Martyr! And she possessed!' a woman cried.

It was indeed Mother Martha (pronounced 'Martyr' by West Indians and Irish people!), and she was indeed possessed, but who by? In frenzies of rage, the skull-faced woman, her turban awry, spun around screaming wild threats at the discomfited church. Sadly, the children sat on the floor and looked wistfully at the half-bag of undelivered

presents. Everyone tried to restrain the furious Mother. I had an unworthy thought - could the Mother's possession be caused by jealousy at seeing the children as centres of attention? A banana tree in a pot was dragged forward. Mother Martyr was fanned with its holy palm leaves, but refused to be soothed.

Gravely, the tall imposing Bishop surveyed the angrily jiggging Mother Martyr, who was roaring and banging into chairs and people, children fleeing before her.

'He is going to chastise her.' somebody whispered.

This meant that Mother Martyr was possessed by the Devil, not St. Nicholas, but Old Nick Himself!



Mother Holly and Mother Ivy swished at the recalcitrant Mother with bunches of wicker lictors' rods, but the Bishop produced a hefty stick. Evidently, he believed in sterner measures. Whack! The stick actually broke over Mother Martyr's back, but instead of living up to her name, she seemed stronger than ever. Another Mother began to beat her with a besom broom.

Brother Delbert, a gentle giant of seventeen, stepped in, took the afflicted Mother's arm, and led her into the back room. A moment later he emerged wild-eyed, and ran up and down the church barking like a dog! Mother Martyr's mania was infectious! Delbert sank into a chair and slowly recovered. Mother Martyr came hot on his heels, and seemed about to attack him in her screaming and dancing fury. Suddenly, for no apparent reason, she began to stare wildly at a corner of the room. Seizing a bunch of rods from the hand of astonished Mother Holly, she began furiously to attack the empty corner.

A feeling of some relief came over the church. Mother Martyr was not possessed by the Devil, it was whispered, but was being controlled by an Angelic-Spirit, possibly Gabriel Himself. The Angel had pointed out invisible Demons to Mother

Martyr, who alone could see them and was now trying to destroy them. Grabbing a piece of chalk, Mother Martyr began to scribble magic signs all over the carpet, wherever the Demons appeared to her. With an air of great significance, a young turbaned Sister also seized a chalk and nimbly drew over the possessed one's marks, transforming them from feeble scrawls into bold geometric figures which could be interpreted later. Fat night-light candles were placed on all the spots attacked by Mother Martyr, and the Demons appeared to be safely placed under church control.

'Me a-go, go go!

Me a-go!

Mother Martyr swayed to the gentler rhythm of her own voice, as she sang these words. Everyone felt that the crisis was over.

'Greetings, greetings!' she addressed one and all, now with her eyes shut. In a sing-song voice, she spoke in 'tongues' that sounded like West African languages, the tongues of her ancestors. All the same, the children's party had been spoiled by this Inconvenient Angel, and the rest of the presents were quietly distributed in informal fashion, as mothers collected their little ones and slipped outside to parked cars or darkened bus-stops.

'See me through, Lord, see me through!' sang the Bishop and Mothers, softly and rhythmically, until at last Mother Martyr fully came to herself and spoke quietly of the Angel that had appeared to her.

'The Angel said to me, "Bless Mount Pisgah, but beware of enemies out to get the Bishop! Especially be wary of the crossroads, the junction where four roads meet."'

Now quite restored, Mother Martyr left the church, singing as she made her way to the Tube Station;

*'My enemies are coming like a snake in the
grass,*

There's one more river to cross.

One more river, journeyman!

One more river to cross.'

Glad to see her go, the benevolent Jamaican Bishop, unafraid of Demons, shook his head.

'Peace on Earth, goodwill to men,' he muttered.

**Roy Kerridge, London
March, 2000**

White Faith In A Dark World Real Life Encounters With Angels

Even at the dawn of the 21st Century, a sizeable portion of the increasingly materialistic human race, have still somehow managed to retain their faith in the existence of otherworldly beings, be they ghosts, Demons, or, as in the following series of cases, Angels.

Okay, so the accounts you're about to read all feature celebrities, of one kind or another, but rest assured this is for no other reason than that they chose to relate their tales to some hack in one of those tabloid Sunday magazines. First up is Gabby Yorath, daughter of the former Leeds United footballer Terry Yorath, and current presenter of the (let's face facts, sports fans, piss-poor) ITV Saturday programme 'ON THE BALL' (actually, she's a co-presenter. The other hapless berk is none other than ex-LFC ahem, 'hotshot', Barry Venison).

And this, as they say, is Gabby's story;

'My proper Christian name is Gabriel, so, with all the kids at school calling me "Angel Gabriel," you could say I've always been at home with their presence. I definitely feel there is a presence out there that I talk to.

'I think that there is a difference between Angels and people in the spirit world. Angels are altogether less human and lot wiser. When my brother Daniel died seven years ago, I converted him into an angel too. He was playing football in the garden when he was suddenly struck down by a rare heart condition and died shortly afterwards. He was only 15 at the time.

'A few months after he died, I had a dream in which everyone had gone on a walk, stopping in a shop to get some sweets, but Daniel just carried on walking. I tried to call him back but the glass in the shop window was in between us. He kept walking ahead, saying; "It's okay, I'll see you later." I woke up in a massive panic, but then suddenly felt that he was alright. A couple of days later, I told my mother about my dream, and she said that she had had exactly the same one.

'After Daniel died, I found myself wanting him back, but whenever I needed him around for extra support, suddenly I would become aware of an extra warmth and safety, and things that I worried about, like relationships that had gone wrong, didn't seem quite so bad. When you lose somebody close to you to the spirit world, you learn how to cope better.

'Lots of people see Angels in the form of lights, but I feel more of a glow and a presence more than anything else. When I was filming my first football programme for Sky, I was seized with panic. But then a wave of contentment came over me. The only way I can describe it is to say that it felt like a big inward sigh of relief. I feel that Daniel was there watching over me. He loved football too, so maybe he was there just to check that I didn't muck up.

'I also felt a kind of Angelic presence looking over me during some much more dangerous. Almost two years ago, I was involved in a very serious car accident. It was a sunny afternoon and I was driving past Ascot, when suddenly the car went out of control and the brakes stopped working. I ended up having to drive into a ditch to stop it, and missed a telegraph pole by about an inch. If I'd have hit it, I dread to think what would have happened. Just before and after the accident, the road was teeming with traffic, but the car spun off the road just at the moment when there was no traffic coming either way. Someone or something was obviously protecting me.'

Next up, we have the actor who played Ken Barlow, the archetypal 'worm that turned' in the Manc soap 'CORONATION STREET,' step forward, Mr William Roache...

'Twelve years ago, my daughter Edwina died of a bronchial infection, and it was an enormous shock. She was just 18 months old at the time. Although my wife and I have tried extremely hard to be positive about the short time we had with her, naturally the grief of losing her was overwhelming. I never realised how physical grief could actually be.

'As a parent, you feel incredible devastation when your child dies, but also guilt because you know they are your responsibility. When it came to the funeral, I literally had no idea how I would get through it. And then it happened. I saw a gold shining form with her face in the middle, smiling at me. All of a sudden, I felt better, and my wife did, too.

'I don't believe Edwina is an Angel, but there was an Angelic force that made her appear to me. In my understanding, spiritual beings are Angels. Just seeing her was a comfort, though. She looked happy, and I could tell

that she had to go on and do other things, and that we had to get on with our lives, too.

'I'd never seen Angels before that, but I have felt their presence. Whenever I have been down and have asked for their help, I do feel a warm glow inside. We all have Guardian Angels, but we also have free will - an Angel will wait to be asked for help before intervening. But when Angels do help us, they usually come to us through feelings. be they inspirational or intuitive. Often, I wake up with an idea or a feeling of whether the day will go badly or well, and generally, my feelings, are right.

'A belief in Angels is becoming ever more popular. Maybe it's because the Angels themselves are making their presence felt because they feel the human race should understand how much we have poisoned the atmosphere and the Earth, and lost touch with our own spiritual selves. Caron Keating, an object of teenage desire (at least as far as your humble Editor is concerned) during the days she co-presented 'BLUE PETER,' is up next...

'When I came up with the idea to do a TV programme on Angels, I wasn't sure how it would be received. Angels are a very difficult subject, because (unless you're a modern-day Dr John Dee -Sarky Ed) you can't conjure one up and say: "That's what they look like," or "This is how they sound." 'Ultimately, you can't prove that they exist. But I knew from the response during Angel PhoneIns on THIS MORNING, that thousands of people were having Angelic experiences. I thought then that there must be a reason why. In any case, it struck me as a very uplifting programme to make.

'I've always been quite interested in Angels. My mother, Gloria Hunniford, used to collect all sorts of Angelic ornaments. When she first arrived in England, Danny La Rue gave her a small porcelain Angel which had belonged to his mother, as a good luck token. Although she's never seen an Angel herself, they became a sort of talisman in our house.

'But it wasn't until years later, when I was at home reading an article by Diana Cooper, a leading writer on Angels, that they took on more of a physical presence.

"You'll know if an Angel is around" Ms Cooper once wrote, "because it will leave a white feather."

'I went into another room after reading this and there in the middle of the table was a single feather about a foot long.

'While we were pitching our idea for the programme, all sorts of small things happened. We would get into taxis and "THERE MUST BE AN ANGEL" would be playing on the radio. Another day, I turned on the TV and saw an Angel soaring from a window.

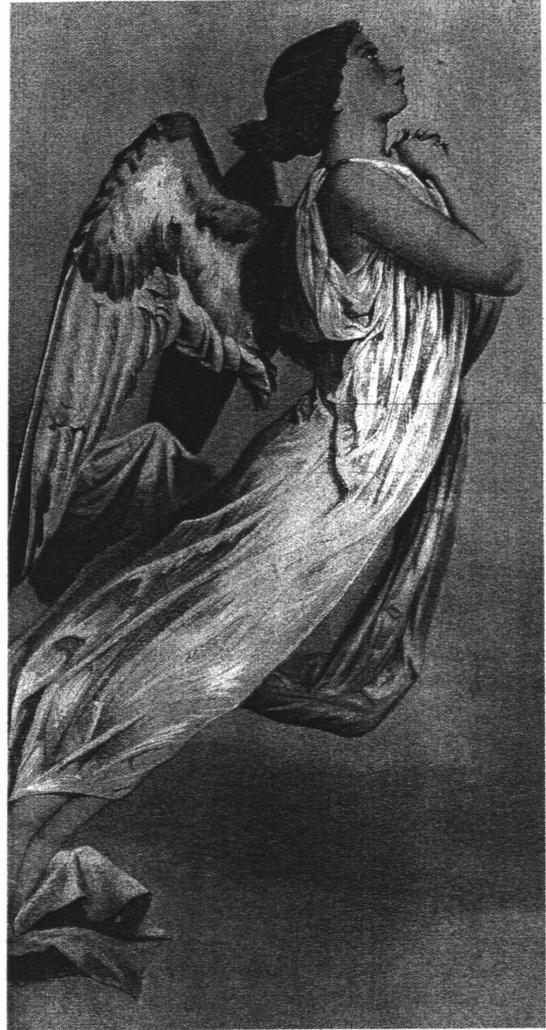
'Perhaps it was all just coincidence, but we took these as signs that our idea to make the programme was being supported.

'Personally, I have never seen an Angel, but at times, when I have asked for help, I have felt an almost physical calmness come over me and a real sense that I was not alone in dealing with the problem. I believe that we all have a Guardian Angel looking after us.

'When I was 11, I had an accident where an iron railing went through my neck - a quarter of an inch in either direction, and I could have died - so I've always thought that someone or something was protecting me. More recently, my husband was driving in his car with a group of friends. It was very dark, and by the time we saw the skip in the middle of the road, it was too late to avoid it. They all closed their eyes as he braked, and when they opened them again, they were on the other side of the skip, unharmed. To this day none of them knows how they got there.

'My father died two years ago, which made me start thinking deeply about spiritual matters and the concept of Angels. While I don't think he is an Angel, I do feel his presence quite strongly.

'There are, of course, those who are completely sceptical about the existence of Angels, but it seems to me that, if people's lives are enriched and uplifted by their belief in them, that can only be a good thing.'



Next on the rota call of those who believe in Angels is Matthew Manning, a hands on healer....

'As a healer I am accustomed to sitting with my eyes closed, in a receptive state, but a couple of years ago, I was just minding my own business, really, when I saw the most extraordinary image. I suppose it was an Angel, although, physically, he was about as far removed as you could get from one. He looked like a sumo wrestler, weighed about 70 stone, was extremely hairy, and absolutely naked. He then proceeded to do a series of backflips with a look of sheer joy on his face, and suddenly piped up, "The only reason I am so fat is because I am so full of love."

'I gave him the only name that seemed appropriate: The Fat Man.

'He has appeared a few times since, most importantly when my wife, Gig, was diagnosed with cancer last year. She had seven weeks of radiotherapy and two weeks of chemotherapy, and the doctors at Hammersmith Hospital said that the tumour would still be there at the end of the treatment.

'It was while I was performing my own healing on Gig that The Fat Man came in, dancing with a Samurai sword. Suddenly, he said, "When you're strong, you don't need the sword," which I took as a message that Gig would be alright. After I treated her, Gig said, "For some reason, I think the tumour has gone."

'When she next went to the hospital it truly had gone!!!'

'I use music when I heal, and the only time The Fat Man appears is when I am playing music by a man called Kitaro. I haven't seen The Fat Man for a year, but he came into my life at its lowest point, when Gig was ill. I now think he is my Guardian Angel..

Hold on there, just a sec...Didn't I say earlier that all of these accounts of Angelic encounters featured nought but celebrities. Well, I guess I made a slight mistake there 'cos here comes a tale courtesy of a common (in the nicest possible sense, of course) housewife.

And before we start, here's fair warning...I sobbed my heart out recounting this story...

Sonya Lynch, aged 37, hails from Barnes, in south-west London, with her husband, Steven, and her 18-month-old son, Will.

'My daughter, Gabriella, was only five when she died. She was diagnosed with a very rare form of cancer at the age of three, and although she lived quite a normal life between the ages of four and five, she suddenly went downhill in November, 1977.

'At one point, she was in such a bad state, all I could do was to say: "Please, Gabriella, just go with the Angels"

"But Mummy," she replied, "I'm too shy to go on my own." It was heartbreaking to tell her that I couldn't go with her.

'The only thing that lifted her was ballet - she loved it so much, she often dressed up as an Angel. In fact, it was she who first saw Angels when she was dying. My mum was sleeping with her in her room when Gabriella suddenly said "Can you see the Angels?"

'She described them as bright coloured lights, and said she saw them the following night, too.

'Her health really started going downhill when I became pregnant with Will, but, even so, she waited for him to be born before she died last April. The doctors were amazed because they didn't understand how she could have survived so long in so much pain.

'After her death, I saw her as an Angel. I was sleeping in her bed, next to Will's cot, when I suddenly awoke and thought I could see Will sitting up. Eventually, I realised I was looking at a light which was in the shape of a child. I'm convinced it was Gabriella, which I found very comforting.

'One of Gabriella's best friends was a girl called Francesca. As she was on holiday when Gabriella died, we didn't tell her because we didn't want to ruin her time.

'Then we heard that Francesca had dreamt about Gabriella in a field, picking flowers and saying goodbye. She immediately turned to her parents and said; "I know she's dead. Why haven't you told me?"

Gabriella often talks to friends to let them know things, especially if they are going through a difficult time, and I do feel that she is now protecting her brother, Will. Somehow, I don't fear for him because I know she is keeping them safe. I think about her a lot, and feel her presence around me, especially in my parents' house in Spain, because Gabriella loved it there.

'My husband, Steven, is a bit more sceptical about these things. When Gabriella was still alive, she had a healer called Tanya, who now receives messages from my daughter. Apparently, Gabriella is worried about how her daddy is coping, and told Tanya that if ever he feels sad, he is to look at those small ballet shoes that she had and he will feel better. It works too - he now carries a tiny ballet shoe keyring around with him, and whenever he loses it, he becomes quite frantic. Obviously, I miss Gabriella desperately. I would do anything to have her back, but as that is impossible, I have to look on the brighter side.'

Told you it was a tearjerker, guaranteed to melt the hardest heart...

And next up, we present nothing less than a modern Angelologist. William Bloom, aged 51, lives, appropriately enough, given his beliefs, in Glastonbury, Somerset.

'In 1972, I took a two-year retreat to Morocco with the sole purpose of meeting my Guardian Angel. My life before had been that of a real media person about town - I was senior editor at MacMillan, I'd had three novels published and was into the whole booze, cigarettes and drugs thing. I wanted to go on a path of exploration, however, so I gave up that lifestyle, set off for Morocco, and spent a huge amount of time meditating.

'I had always had what many people have, a sense that there was something else out there, and went off to Morocco to allow myself to feel it more deeply.

'I followed one particular ancient ritual for meeting one's Guardian Angel that I had read about in books, although I have to say that, while I was doing it, I didn't totally believe it would work.

'I started my meditation by building a little chapel right below the highest mountain in North Africa, about fifty miles from Marrakesh. It was just an empty hunting lodge with no water and no electricity, and it was there that I spent about four hours every day in meditation.

'Part of my meditation involved fasting. I became a vegetarian and cut down on the amount of food that I ate so that my mind would be clear. I spent a great deal of time in prayer - confessing my past history and asking for the blessing of meeting my Guardian Angel.

'At the end of the six months, I had said my final prayer...and hey presto! absolutely nothing happened.

'I had been feeling very tense at the time, and when my Guardian Angel failed to materialise, I felt a complete idiot. I wept, I slept and I suddenly felt a strong urge to return to the chapel. It was then that I really did make contact with my Guardian Angel.

'I was completely overwhelmed - not by the visuals, but more by the sensation it left me with. I felt a big, golden light that was more affectionate and loving than anything I had ever experienced before, more penetrating than any drug-induced high, and quite similar to the feeling you have after wonderful sex. It was like being embraced by the sun.

'When I returned to England, I wrote a book called 'THE SACRED MAGICIAN.' I published it under a pseudonym and I was quite worried about the attention it might receive; this was 25 years ago. As it turned out, to become something of a minor classic.

'I do believe that we all have Guardian Angels. Imagine that feeling of being all snuggled up under the duvet: that's what feeling your Angel around you is like. Every morning, we light a candle to the Angel of the household. It's a nice way to start the day....'

And finally, we come to the case of Dianne Davie, a widow who comes from Great Barford, Bedfordshire.

'I was the last person who ever expected to see an Angel. If anyone was to see them, I thought it would be someone who was a devout Christian, not someone like me who was always shouting at the dog and swearing.

'At the time, I didn't even believe in Angels, but when I was going through a particularly difficult period, I saw one. My husband, Rob, was very ill with lung cancer and had great difficulty in breathing. I came back from college one afternoon and walked into the living room to check on him. He was sleeping soundly in his chair, and behind him was a huge Angel with its wings wrapped around him protectively. The image was real and so solid that, as soon as I saw them, I felt I was interrupting, said "Excuse me," and walked out. I stood outside the door for a while thinking how silly I was being, walked in again, felt I was interrupting, and walked back out again.

'Finally, I went back in, and actually stared at the sight in front of me. The room was full of light and Bob looked very peaceful. Suddenly, I felt the Angel talking to me. "Don't worry," it was saying, "We'll look after your husband." I just felt so relieved. I only had a week of college to go, and felt good that someone would be with him.

'A couple of days later, I had another encounter. I was walking upstairs when I physically banged into two creatures on the landing. They looked like dark, grey prunes, about a metre tall, and although they didn't look like Angels, I knew they were because there was a lovely warmth about them. I knew they had come to get Bob, but I wasn't ready. As clear as anything I heard them say; "We have come to get Bob, but if you're not ready, we won't yet."

'He died two nights later.

'Ever since Bob's death I have felt an incredible protective presence around my son, George, and me. Any time I have needed help, it just seems to come. If I thought to myself, "I wish I could hear from my mother," she would ring almost straight away. If I needed a cuddle from someone, a friend would suddenly turn up on the doorstep. If I was at a complete loss as to what to do, a friend would visit and help me out with practical duties.

'Since then, I have spoken to my Guardian Angel every morning - she is called Griselda - and asked her for help and guidance. She looks like a conventional Angel, but there is a greenish light coming out of her, and she looks slightly Medieval.

'When he was alive, Bob and I never talked about the fact that I had seen his Angel. We had so many things to talk about and he seemed so peaceful at the time, it didn't seem necessary. Looking back, it seems odd, but when I saw Bob's Angel, it never occurred to me that he was going to die so quickly, so, in a way, I'm glad we didn't discuss it. The main thing was that when he died, he seemed totally at peace.'

19th December, 1999 'DAILY MAIL' WEEKEND MAGAZINE

Marks Of The Cross

With the release of the decidedly less-than-wonderful Horror movie, 'STIGMATA,' in January, this year, came a whole slew of articles purporting to deal with real-life cases, sparking endless speculation as to the genuineness (or otherwise) of the phenomenon.

'Experts,' such as Dr. Ted Harrison, PhD, were duly wheeled out to air their views, although, to be fair to the good Doctor, he at least displayed a healthy degree of scepticism.

He has apparently witnessed, first hand, nine 'genuine' cases of stigmata, and has this to say regarding the fictional stigmatic portrayed in the film by Patricia Arquette; *'If you take the claims of the story at face value, she (Arquette) is utterly atypical. For instance, she gets her first wound in public while being watched by priest on a subway train - that doesn't normally happen!'*

'The Roman Catholic Church considers stigmatics with its usual scepticism, because it doesn't like any challenge to its authority. The Church normally starts off by saying, "Let's be cautious about these marks - we'll have a very deep and learned investigation, and if at the end of two or three centuries, we can't come up with any conclusion, we'll make the person a Saint."

Less openly sarcastic, the Canon Roy Barker, speaking in one of your humble editor's local newspapers; *'THE LIVERPOOL ECHO,'* recounts an experience he underwent at Birkenhead General Hospital in the mid-1970's.

Ethel Chapman, a victim of multiple sclerosis and diabetes, was a patient there at the time, and was being treated for a bedsore.

But when she died in a Liverpool charity home, on July, 22nd, 1980, at the age of 59, she was said to have been the first Anglican to have a verifiable experience of stigmata.

Canon Baker, a former vicar based at Upton, Birkenhead, and residentiary canon of Chester Cathedral and Director of Ordinands for the Chester Diocese, told reporters, at the time, *'I met her a few times. She was on a public ward to which I went every week, and I saw her wounds.*

'They were a mild, gentle weeping of red. I have never come across anything like this before. I can only take it on face value.

'Ethel's hands bore the imprint of the nails of the crucifixion. Her left foot was also marked in this way and there were marks like rope burns around both wrists

'Every Easter, starting in 1974, she had the same vision of being lifted up onto the Cross.

'Ethel had become disenchanted with religion. Although she had attended church as a young girl, her later illness, which had put paid to her theatrical career, had dulled her senses of the spiritual.

'But while being treated at Birkenhead, she had met a woman who did a religious programme on hospital radio. With her, Ethel had been looking at an illustrated Bible which showed the Crucifixion scene in the classic manner.

In her Easter prayers, Ethel asked for some sort of sign.

'She was later to recall in BBC 2 Journalist Ted Harrison's book, 'THE MARKS OF THE CROSS,' "In the early hours of the morning - I thought it was a dream - I felt myself being drawn onto the cross. I felt the pain of the nails."

'Every Easter, this was said to happen: the first two on Easter Day itself, then once on Easter Monday, and after that on Good Fridays.

'Ethel told me; "It's exactly the same vision. I just take it for granted now. I know it's going to happen."

'In the case of Ethel Chapman, the then Bishop of Liverpool, David Shepherd, traditionally a low churchman, said in a letter to Ethel: "I realise you have been given a very special insight into His (Christ's) suffering. He is able, and you are able, to bring new hope to other people, 2

'But to most people, Ethel was ordinary enough; an ex-ENSA comedienne who did impressions of Grace Fields and Marie Lloyd, and worked with names like Hughie Green and Glenn Miller.

'Her case encouraged both believers and cynics to take up entrenched positions.

'Even today, the subject is not the stuff of light conversation, especially after the church came mightily unstuck after the scientific discrediting of the Shroud of Turin.'

The current Archdiocese of Liverpool, when questioned by *'THE ECHO,'* about the phenomena, had this to say; *'The Roman Catholic Church has never issued any infallible declaration about their (stigmata wounds) possession by anyone.*

'Judgement regarding the presence, significance and manner of causation of stigmata, would depend, among other things, on breifable experimental evidence.'

In summary, Canon Roy Barker, a former Cambridge lecturer, is more generous in his assessment of Ethel Chapman's case; *'I think this most definitely would have spiritual value. I was very, very, very greatly impressed.*

'I think a deeply spiritual experience could produce physical symptoms of this kind.

'We must be prepared to believe that.'

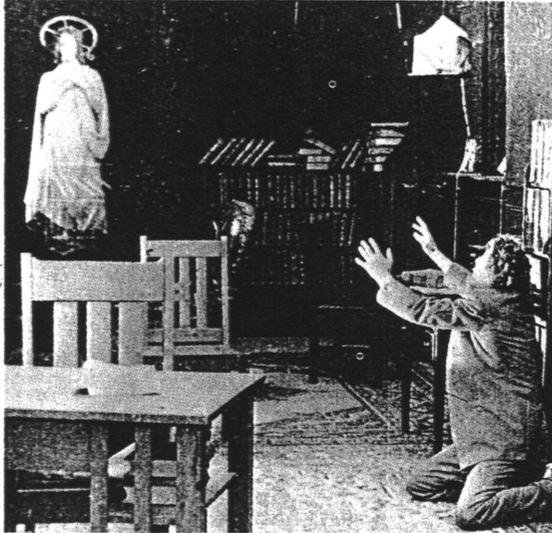
January, 2000 *EMPIRE MAGAZINE/LIVERPOOL ECHO*

The Seeds Of Faith

Aneela Khaliq reckons she's found the name of Allah inside a tomato, sparking the all-too predictable rush of people come to worship the 'Holy inscription.'

Aneela, who hails from Leeds, West Yorkshire, was slicing the tomato whilst making a sandwich when she spotted the Arabic characters which appear to spell out the name in the midst of the seeds.

Aneela was later quoted as saying, *'I feel blessed by God.'*
9th January, 2000 Leeds, Yorkshire **'NEWS OF THE WORLD.'**



*** And just a few days later, hordes of believers were busy flocking to a shrine created on the floor of a Texas housing complex. They believe that the revered Virgin of Guadalupe has chosen to reveal herself to the faithful in, of all things, a stain of melted ice cream.

Pilgrim Gloria Castro, 47, told reporters; *'She knows that we need her, I had to pray.'*

Many fear the smear, now in a sea of flowers, candles and crosses, may not last much longer. Locals agreed that the sticky mess next to a drinks machine resembled the trademark brilliant robes of their beloved Mexican saint.

15th January, 2000 Guadalupe **'DAILY EXPRESS'**

*** And finally, hundreds of yet more believers were high-tailing it round to a churchyard in the Romanian capital of Bucharest to see for themselves rumours of an apparition of the face Of Jesus Christ, etched in the bark of two poplar trees.

Those already convinced of the phenomenon, have stated that Christ as a child in the arms of the Virgin Mary appeared on a tree where a branch had been cut off.

25th May, 2000 Bucharest, Romania **'THE DAILY TELEGRAPH'**

The Third Secret Of Fatima 'Revealed' At Last

According to the Vatican, the much-feared, long-anticipated revelation regarding the Third Secret Of Fatima, (or at least part of it, anyway) concerns nothing more overly dramatic than it foretold the 1981 assassination attempt on the life of the Pope.

Oh, and it also predicted the Communist persecution of the Jews.

Now, forgive me for not allowing my jaw to hit the deck like an out of control elevator, but if these are the world-shaking events prophesised and kept secret these past 80 years, one can only stare open-mouthed with a sense of acute anti-climax.

Granted, the actual wording of the text is more than just a little open to interpretation, but it all still smacks of the downright farcical, to be quite honest.

The prophecy, of course, is named after the Portuguese town of Fatima, where three children claimed to have experienced a vision of the Virgin Mary back in 1917. Vatican Secretary of State Cardinal Angelo Sodano, made the revelatory announcement as crowds of hundreds of thousands gathered to witness the beatification of two of the children.

The first two Fatima prophecies had already been revealed (and, you may feel, were both a damn sight more dramatic than this latest effort) namely; the outbreak of World War Two and the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia.

For the record, here is the Vatican's official translation of the full text;

'The third part of the secret revealed at the Cova da Iria-Fatima, on 13th July, 1917.

I write in obedience to you, my God, who command me to do so through his Excellency the Bishop of Leira and through your most Holy Mother, and mine.

After the two parts which I have already explained, at the left of Our Lady, and a little above, we saw an Angel with a flaming sword in his left hand; flashing, it gave out flames that looked as though they would set the world on fire; but they died out in contact with the splendour that Our Lady radiated towards him from her right hand.

Pointing to the earth with his right hand, the Angel cried out in a loud voice; "Penance, Penance, Penance!"

And we saw in an immense light that is God: "something similar to how people appear in a mirror when they pass in front of it," a Bishop dressed in white "we had the impression that it was the Holy Father."

Other Bishops, Priests, men and women Religious going up a steep mountain, at the top of which there was a big Cross of rough-hewn trunks as of a cork-tree with the bark; "before reaching there, the Holy Father passed through a big city half in ruins and, half trembling with halting step, afflicted with pain and sorrow, he prayed for the souls of the corpses he met on his way: having reached the top of the mountain, on his knees at the foot of the big Cross, he was killed by a group of soldiers who fired bullets and arrows at him, and in the same way there died one after another the other Bishops, Priests, men and women Religious; and various lay people of different ranks and positions.

Beneath the two arms of The Cross, there were two Angels each with a crystal aspersorium in his hand, in which they gathered up the blood of the Martyrs and with it sprinkled the souls that were making their way to God.

A footnote says that in the translation; "the original text has been respected, even as regards the imprecise punctuation, which nevertheless does not impede an understanding of what the visionary wished to say."

Right. That's all very well.

But perhaps not surprisingly, the Vatican's interpretation has already been questioned by a growing number of 'experts'. Critics have raised their eyebrows at the suggestion that the text could be stretched to include the assassination attempt on the Pope, back in 1981.

Marco Politi, Vatican correspondent of **'LA REPUBBLICA'**, was pretty damning in his views on the 'revelations.'

'It has been a delusion. The content was very poor compared to the expectations. There is no reference to any great catastrophe, but the main thing is that the vision of a Pope being killed by soldiers and arrows has nothing to do with the assassination attempt.'

It was pretty much common knowledge that very senior Vatican officials had constantly opposed publication on the grounds that it would only serve to highlight the difference between the document's actual words and the Pope's interpretation of them.

The Vatican interpreted parts of the prophecy as representing the threat of the apocalypse as a result of mankind's technology running amok (a la' the SKYNET' computer in James Cameron's *'TERMINATOR II : JUDGEMENTDAY'*).

The full disclosure of the third and final secret was made in the form of a 43-page Vatican booklet complete with theological comment.

The decision to release the document came after the Vatican decided that the events predicted had already occurred, which consigned the whole sequence of prophecies to the pages of our history books.

I suppose we shouldn't be too shocked to learn that the Vatican's interpretation centres upon the conclusion that the document ultimately speaks of new hope for the world. Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, head of the Vatican's propagand.....oops, I do of course, mean *doctrinal* department, had this to say; *'It encourages us by showing that even in a world which was half-destroyed, there is a greater force and death does not have the last word.'*

However, the booklet's commentators have also expressed their belief that the third secret symbolically represents the threat of judgement which looms over the world.

The world still risks being reduced to ashes by that old Biblical favourite, *'the sea of fire,'* created by modern man's flaming sword, as a result of his inventions, unless the world, *'inspired by the splendour of the Mother of God,'* repented for its multifarious sins.

You have been warned.

Sort of.

14th May, 2000 Fatima, Portugal *'SUNDAYMANC'* / 27th June, 2000 *'DAILYTELEGRAPH'*

Another Batch Of Cosmic Belly-Laughs In The Wrong Place At The Wrong Time

A pilot preparing to land at Frankfurt Airport, Germany, was all but shocked out of his wits when a rabbit suddenly crashed through his cockpit window.

It was later surmised that the unfortunate creature must have been dropped by a passing eagle, although no one came forward to say that they had actually seen this occur, so we are left wondering...

2nd April, 2000 Frankfurt, Germany *'NEWS OF THE WORLD'*

*** Another German, Fritz Gruber, 33, was cleaning his rifle in his flat in Ulm, Germany, when, without warning, it went off, blowing a hole in the ceiling, and badly wounding a burglar who'd broken into the apartment upstairs.

2nd April, 2000 Ulm, Germany *'SUNDAYMANC'*

*** An unnamed 41-year-old man from Ohio, USA, choked to death when his catch, a four-inch-long Bluegill, somehow managed to wriggle off its hook, only to promptly jump into the hapless angler's mouth and slide right down his throat.

20th May, 2000 Ohio, USA *'NEWS OF THE WORLD'*

*** And every bit as galling is the case of another unnamed man, this time, a native of China.

This poor unfortunate was attacked by a two-foot long arrowfish which leapt from the sea and struck his abdomen. It skewered his lungs with its trademark pointed head, killing him instantly.

It seems that the young man from the south-eastern province of Fujian, was angling with a lamp suspended from a small boat, when the green-coloured fish, which his equipped with sharp spines and a long, sword-like beak, suddenly shot out of the water without warning.

An official from the Aquatic Administration Bureau of Dongshan county told reporters that it was likely the fish had been frightened by the light of the lamp.

27th June, 2000 Fujian, China *Associated Press*

*** Betty George, aged 70, was killed by her pile of laundry.

After hand-washing her husband's asbestos-covered work clothes every week, an inquest heard that Betty contracted mesothelioma from the fibres on the clothes worn by husband Graham, a cashier at Turner Asbestos, based in Manchester.

22nd April, 2000 Manchester, England *'DAILYMAIL'*

*** A man pretending to be a detective was arrested after he pulled over a motorist who turned out to be, yep, you guessed it, a real police officer.

Matthew Daly, 27, from New York, was wearing a bullet-proof vest and flaunting a fake detective's shield and replica gun when he allegedly walked up to the car of Officer Anthony Ferrone and told him he had just gone through a red light.

26th October, 1999 New York, USA *'LIVERPOOLECHO'*

*** A total of 29 people were killed by electrocution in the Indian state of Bihar, on April 13th, this year.. Nothing too strange about that, you might think, but the ironic part is that when the overhead power cable snapped, it fell upon a religious procession when it was touched by a flagpole. I guess what ever God they chose to worship, elected to reward their allegiance by sending the Angel of Death to whisk them away to 'Paradise.'

13th April, 2000 Bihar, New Delhi, India *Associated Press*

When Fate Smiles Down

A newly-wed was spared the extremely eye-watering fate of being castrated by wife's jealous ex-boyfriend by a collection of ordinary coins in his pocket.

Walking up the stairs to his apartment with his new wife, the ex-boyfriend jumped out at them and shot the groom in the groin. By a million to one shot, the bullet deflected off the loose change and he was merely bruised.

'He could have ended up a lot worse, a forensic technician later stated, somewhat unnecessarily, you might say.

'Among the coins we found one that was cupped and buckled.'

The attacker was later jailed for 18 months.

31st May, 2000 Sweden *Associated Press*

And When Fate Simply Snickers Into Cupped Hands

*** Chris Goodland, of Bridport, Dorset, is a would-be inventor, who was left feeling more than a little blue after thieves stole vital plans...for his erm, thief-proof lock. Oh dear.

30th April, 2000 Bridport, Dorset *'SUNDAY PEOPLE'*

*** And the award for unluckiest person, for this issue at least, has simply got to go to Henry Handy, 1 16-year-old from Fort Worth, Texas.

Young Henry was practising sign language with a deaf cousin when they were both shot at by a man who wrongly assumed they were using gang symbols!!!

Fortunately, Mr Handy's (now there's an appropriate name) wounds were not thought to be life threatening.

6th June, 2000 Fort Worth, Texas *'LIVERPOOLECHO'*

*** When young Ian Jones ended up in hospital with a broken ankle he didn't have to wait long for his sister to turn up at his bedside.

Within an hour of the 11-year-old arriving in casualty she was in the bed next to his... With exactly the same injury.

The freak double accident started with Ian playing footy in the street. A friend climbed onto a pile of paving stones to retrieve the ball, sending the flags crashing onto Ian's leg and breaking his left ankle.

His mother, Jane, took him to Liverpool's Alder Hey Children's Hospital, telling daughter Jade, ten, to head home with friends. But as Jade crossed the road she was hit by a car and suffered... a broken left ankle.

Their mother later told reporters; *'I was in hospital with Ian when I got a call about Jade. I just couldn't believe it. I don't know what the chances are of that happening on the same day.'*

16th May, 2000 *Everton, Liverpool* 'LIVERPOOLECHO'

*** The home of Michael Maltin, a retired pilot, aged 80, was attacked by, of all things, a Roman cannonball.

The six-inch wooden missile was launched from a giant catapult fired by a bunch of Roman enthusiasts. It was accidentally sent crashing through tiles into the roof of Michael's house at Woodchester, Gloucester.

At least Mr Maltin was able to retain his sense of honour about the incident. *'We were able to see the funny side of it.'* Chris Haines, one of the enthusiasts, was quoted as saying, somewhat sheepishly, *'The ball was aimed well away from the house until a gust of wind caught it.'*

23rd June, 2000 *Woodchester, Gloucestershire* 'DAILY SLUR'

*** A pensioner cursed with a considerably less than careful nature accidentally gave away a box of three cut glass ornaments to children collecting for a scouts' jumble sale. The items duly fetched the princely sum of a few pence.

Kate, 71, of Portsmouth, was offering a substantial reward if the buyer agreed to return what turned out to be an invaluable family heirloom.

15th June, 2000 'DAILY SLUR' Portsmouth

*** And finally, for this section, and for this issue, at least, consider if you will this classic case of most assuredly being in the wrong place at the wrong time....

A bunch of villagers in southern Mexico accidentally mistook an unnamed 18-year-old man who was doing nothing other than legitimately paying a visit to his fiancée's parents, for a robber and seeking to mete out their own peculiarly harsh form of vengeance, they beat him to death.

28th June, 2000 *Southern Mexico* 'LIVERPOOLECHO'

All This In And More, In A Pagan Place Stonehenge Back In The News Again

Not even another dose of the 'great' British weather could dampen the enthusiasm of the hordes of Witches, New Age travellers, and Pagans who, for the first time in 16 years, were allowed to wander freely amongst the sacred stones on the occasion of the Summer Solstice.

More than 6,000 people attended on the morning of June 21st, and whilst the Sun never put in an appearance, the seemingly never-ending teems of rain failed to put a dampner on proceedings.

According to journalists present at the scene, drummers encamped in the Inner Circle of the henge, and maintained

an incessant rhythm, right through the wee hours before dawn, backed up by the joyful yelps of an assembled array of dancers.

Thankfully, there were no reports of any trouble and the police did not make a single arrest, despite the air hanging heavy with the smell of cannabis.

With the coming of first light, a single female dancer with a troupe of minstrels, calling themselves the King's Drummer's, flung open her velvet robes to reveal a chain-mail bikini.

Inhibitions suitably shattered, a bladdered Scouser named Bob, took it upon himself to plunge himself into the middle of a solemn Druid ceremony, wearing not a stitch, save for a woolly hat, and clutching a bottle of cider. (Nice one Bob. Party on, la).

First light seeped across the Salisbury Plain at 4am.

Sean O'Neill, of 'THE DAILY TELEGRAPH,' takes up the story of what happened next...

'A clutch of rival fire processions and ceremonial events began as the dawn broke.

'Beneath one circle of flaming torches a woman with long blonde dreadlocks and dressed in a bandsman's uniform preached the need for a "complete restructuring of society, anew sisterhood and brotherhood."

'Ten yards away, under more torches, a group of people with their faces painted turquoise sang a repetitive dirge.

'Near the Heel Stone, Dylan Ap Thiun recited New Age poetry to his followers, a band of Druids in white robes who waved staffs adorned with horns, antlers, bells and greenery. Television cameras gathered around the Druids, much to the annoyance of a Coven of Witches sitting nearby on a tartan blanket.

"Everyone wants to talk to the bloody Druids," grumbled one. "What about us?"

'And amid all the alternative tribes on display there were many ordinary Britons.

'Lew and Ginny Pope, both from Torquay, Devon, left home at 10:15pm on Tuesday, to get to Stonehenge and soak up the atmosphere.

"I have wanted to come for years and years and years," said Mrs Pope, 58. "I have been to Stonehenge before but not close up to the stones and not at Solstice.

'The crowd is friendly, they leave you alone if you leave them alone. It can't be any worse than an England game. This is a spiritual thing for me. I believe the Sun is all important to us and to see the sunrise here is very special."

The magnificently named Rollo Maughling, the self-styled Archdruid of Stonehenge and Glastonbury, hailed the event as being a *'terrific success.. In the past few years we Druids felt so alone. We were doing it for ourselves and that is not the purpose of Druidry. It is meant to be a celebration for the whole of the public.'*

22nd June, 2000 *Stonehenge* 'THE DAILY TELEGRAPH'

*** And just a week earlier, an attempt to recreate the methods used to originally erect the standing stones of Stonehenge were thwarted after a three-ton monolith being transported 240 miles by raft sank to the bottom of the sea.

The huge bluestone dragged from the Preseli Hills in Pembrokeshire, had travelled a mere four miles by sea when it was somehow dislodged and consigned to a watery grave just off the village of Dale.

The Millennium Stone Project, backed by a grant of £100,000 courtesy of the Heritage Lottery Fund, seemed doomed to failure at the time of writing with the stone not likely to be recovered from its current resting place 60ft down on the muddy seabed.

This latest mishap has led some to believe (maybe only half jokingly) that there is a curse on any millennial scheme backed by the Lottery Fund. Witness the farcical results(?)

at the building of the Millennium Dome and the Millennium Bridge.

Menter Presli, the Welsh cultural group behind the idea, had hoped to lend their expertise in a bid to finally solve the mystery of precisely how it was bluestones were transported all the way from the Welsh hills to Salisbury Plain, 4,500 years ago.

Utilising teams of volunteers, they succeeded in dragging the stone overland on a sledge from Mynachloddu, near Haverfordwest, to the Welsh coast.

It was then mounted on a raft between two canvas currachs, rowing boats constructed to a 5,000-year-old design, ready to be taken over water to Avonmouth, near Bristol.

From there the massive stone was to be carried by barge along the River Avon and the Kennet and Avon Canal, before being dragged the final 26 miles to Stonehenge, where it was due to be blessed by the Druids on the date of the Autumn Solstice in September.

But almost from the outset, the project has been bedevilled by bouts of ill fortune. Health and safety watchdogs told the organisers they could not wear furs and hides nor pull the sledge with bare hands, but had to don protective clothing to avoid chafing injuries. Somehow, I can't imagine early man having recourse to such comparative luxury when they set about building the monument for real!!!

It soon became apparent to those involved that more volunteers than had originally been estimated were required to carry out the task. But even when the team acquired the necessary manpower, progress overland was a measly one mile a day, other than the three miles predicted at the start of the project.

Then the sledge that was being used to drag the stone was stolen and the speed slowed still further when some of those newly-press-ganged volunteers did a runner from the job.

And ultimately, an even worse disaster struck the remainder of the party when the crews of the two boats which were carrying the bluestone on a cradle between their craft, ran into a spell of decidedly inclement weather. Pat Morgan, 50, one of the helmsmen on one of the currachs, told reporters; *'We were going along pretty nicely.'*

'The stone didn't appear to be as tightly strapped on as before, but we were keeping an eye on it and there wasn't far to go. Suddenly, there was an enormous rumble and the whole craft seemed to shudder. There were five straps and the one across the widest part of the stone had frayed and broken. The stone just slipped out of the other four.'

'We carried on going forward and it went backward. It made the whole crew jump. I looked back and it was gone.'

'We were completely stunned and I think the disappointment hit everyone tremendously. We realised we had lost the most important part of the whole mission.'

Perhaps they shouldn't feel too despondent, however. They may be able to take at least some degree of consolation from the news that divers in the area say that there are several bluestones on the seabed in the area, suggesting that Neolithic Man experienced similar difficulties as his modern day descendants.

20th June, 2000 'THE TIMES'

*** And our piece of Stonehenge News, comes courtesy of a bunch of filmmakers who, it seems, are setting their sights on the true-life Neolithic tale of the erection of the stones. Constantin Film together with Impact Pictures (the production company on both the Godawful 'MORTAL KOMBAT,' and the much-better-than-average sci-fi/horror flick 'EVENT HORIZON' - Well, it scared your humble Editor shitless. Check out the *'Top One Hundred Scariest Moments From Horror Movies'* article elsewhere in this

issue) are said to be basing their film on 'SHARPE' writer Bernard Cornwell's novel titled, imaginatively enough, 'STONEHENGE.'

The basic plot concerns a fictional account of how the monument was constructed tied in with a story of love and rivalry between three brothers. So that's precisely nought out of ten for originality, then. Perhaps it's best we reserve judgement till we've seen the picture though.

June, 2000 'TOTAL FILM'

IN THE MOUTH OF SHEER MADNESS



More Weird Human Behaviour

Marcus Roy, 32, thought it might be a simply top-hole idea to make like Mary Poppins and use an umbrella as an impromptu parachute when he jumped from a 5th floor window in New York.

Granted, he was a trifle desperate at the time. He was trying his damndest to make good his escape from a drugs raid in the centre of New York.

Unfortunately for him, he only succeeded in breaking both legs and unable to run any further, was promptly arrested. 20th May, 2000 New York, USA 'NEWS OF THE WORLD'

*** A bunch of hopeless thieves carried out a completely pointless crime by stealing 80 shoes....There was not a single pair amongst them. They were taken from a car belonging to a shoe salesman in Plymouth who was carrying around nothing more than single samples.

A comedy police spokesman was apparently quoted as saying; *'They must have been hopping mad.'* 8th June, 2000 Plymouth, England 'DAILY EXPRESS'

*** Meanwhile, over in Berlin, Germany, an anonymous soldier elected to prove the strength of his undying love by stealing an army tank and driving at top speed towards a burger bar.

Unfortunately, his amorous antics resulted in two men being critically injured. The 22-year-old had decided to use the 16-ton tank to smash through a steel security barrier at a barracks in Stadallendorf, Hessen.

He then drove 30 miles to the burger bar where he expected to find the object of his affections - a love,

incidentally, that was unrequited - but, as luck would have it, she wasn't even there.

As the police finally caught up with him, the heartsick soldier drove the tank right over a car blocking his planned escape route. The car drivers, aged 19 and 20, were left with serious multiple injuries.

The soldier later gave himself up, doubtless cursing the power of love

16th June, Berlin, Germany 'DAILYMAIL'

*** Artis Harwick, a 42-year-old father, was charged with armed trespass after he fired a gun in a busy high school car park in Florida at a student who had had a fight with his 16-year-old son over, of all things, a hat!!!

18th March, 2000 Florida, USA 'LIVERPOOLECHO'

*** A mother who attended an American court as a character witness for her son, who was facing the death penalty, was so bladdered out of her brains that she herself was jailed. Alice Tirado, the mother of Francisco, 18, who had been convicted of the murder of two women, kidnapping and attempted murder during a gang initiation, was stopped as she went into the sentencing hearing in North Carolina, and an alcohol test revealed that she was more than three times over the drink driving limit.

Judge William Gore promptly sent her down on a temporary commitment order and ordered mental counselling.

That's some character witness!!!

6th April, 2000 Fayetteville, USA Associated Press

*** A student aged 19 shot dead his 52-year-old tutor in Denizli, Turkey, because he had been refused permission to attend Muslim afternoon prayers.

30th May, 2000 Denizli, Turkey 'THE TIMES'

*** Yet another of those hopeless burglars that raise a smile and give us a bit of unexpected good cheer, stole three pads of car MOT test certificates from a Birmingham garage...All of which quite clearly had the word FAILED stamped across them.

21st May, 2000 Birmingham, England 'DAILYSLUR'

*** Jean Serth, 31, from Jackson, Alabama, suffered suspected brain damage after hiding a frozen chicken under her hat in an ultimately doomed bid to smuggle it out of the supermarket.

She was rushed to hospital after she collapsed at the store.

3rd July, 2000 Jackson, Alabama, USA 'NEWS OF THE WORLD.'

*** A decidedly weird individual dubbed Leonardo Da Toenall, was finally caught by Los Angeles police officers after crawling under restaurant tables with 16 pots of nail polish to paint women's toes.

The kicker is however, he will not be able to be prosecuted because the women concerned are not prepared to give evidence against him.

3rd July, 2000 Los Angeles, USA 'SUNDAYMANC'

*** Seems like it's the in thing to abuse pythons these days...No sooner is Liz Hurley threatening to crush an unfortunate snake with her thighs (though I guess there are about a billion worse ways to die) than an anonymous man is using a python to terrify a petrol station attendant during a hold up in Melbourne, Australia.

The man selected a batch of magazines, thrust the snake at the attendant and promptly left without paying.

27th May, 2000 Melbourne, Australia Associated Press

*** Back over in the States, James Crebs, 42, was jailed for five years for shoving a piece of steak down his girlfriend's throat until she choked to death at the height of an argument over the state of her cooking.

The short-tempered Mr Krebs pleaded guilty to a charge of involuntary manslaughter at his trial in Clayton,

Missouri. He was originally charged with second-degree murder before reaching a deal with prosecutors.

10th May, 2000 Missouri, USA 'LIVERPOOLECHO.'

*** Gert Postel, had 37 people committed to a mental hospital in Bonn, Germany, before officials finally found out that he was merely a post worker posing, for reasons best known to himself as a psychiatrist

20th May, 2000 Bonn, Germany 'DAILYSLUR'

*** Gillian Allison committed suicide all because her boyfriend wanted to watch Man Ure (as we Merseysider's less-than-lovingly refer to our footballing rivals from the Theatre Of Nightmares) appearing on the box, (just for a change).

Gillian, 34, kicked him out of her flat in Weston-Super-Mare, Somerset, and then took 14 bottles of pills.

25th May, 2000 Weston-Super-Mare, Somerset 'DAILYMANC'

*** A 22-year-old Ugandan, who chooses, for reasons best known to himself, to chow-de-dow down on live reptiles and insects (well, I guess it helps him make a living!), died after consuming a chameleon.

21st April, 2000 Kampala 'THE TIMES'

KEEP WATCHING THE SKIES!!!

UFO UPDATE

Odds Against Finding Alien Life Falling Like An Er, Spaceship Over Roswell



Please forgive the phrase, Dear Constant Reader, but it seems to me the hordes of Flying Saucer Conspiracy Theorists out there must be quite literally wetting themselves, right now. It would appear, adopting a paranoid, Mulder-esque point of view, that Those In The Know Concerning The Reality Of Alien Existence are currently engaged in a programme aimed at raising public awareness as to the distinct possibility that we may not be alone in the universe.

First, at the dawn of the New Millennium, a bunch of eminent scientists went on record as stating that 'it is only a matter of time before contact with aliens is made.' Then a poll reveals that more people believe in ET's than have faith in God. A few months later, and there's a whole welter of stuff in the news and the entertainment industry about Mars, including the real possibility that there may well be water on the surface of HG Well's 'remote, forbidding planet'

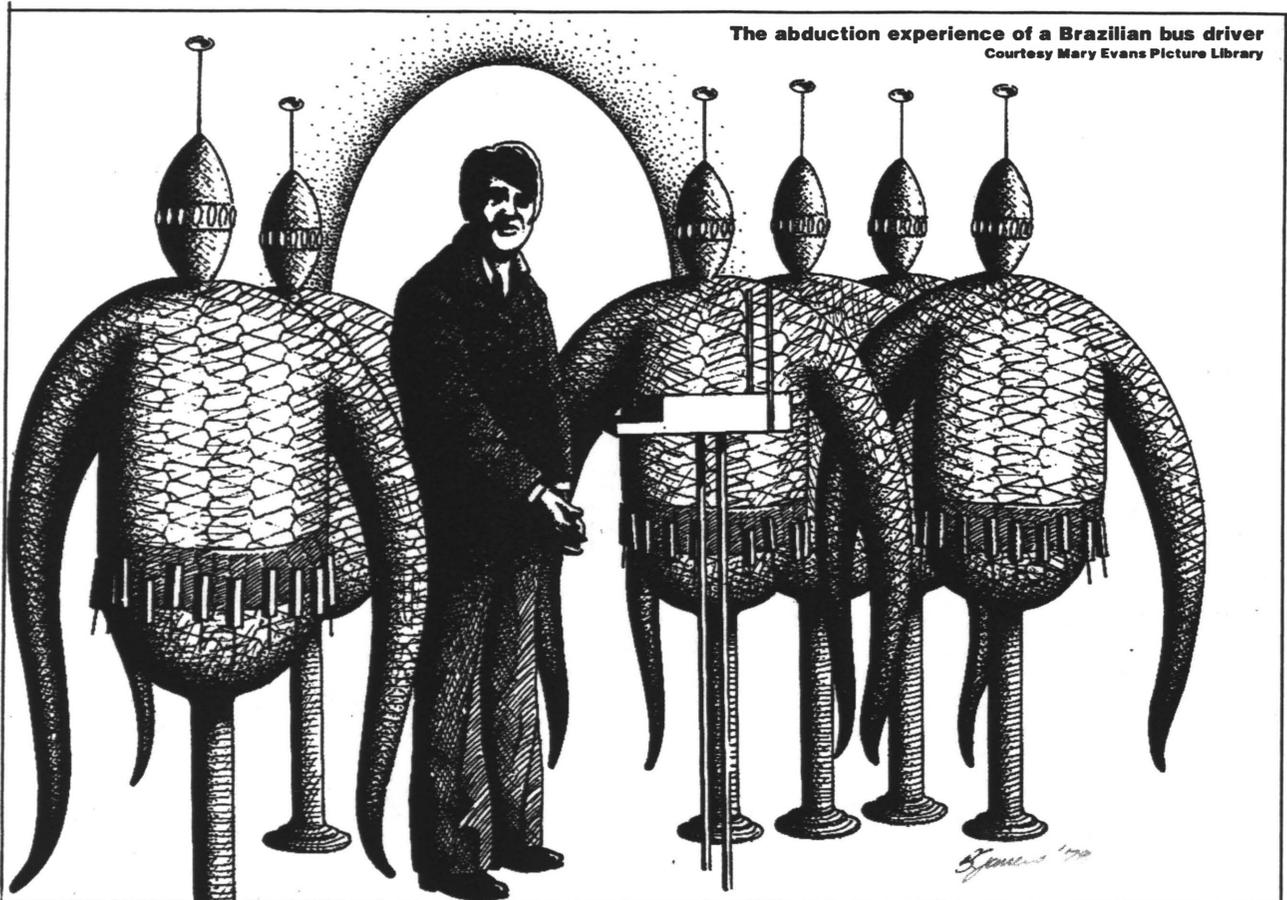
Now, most people with even the most slightly ajar of open minds, would readily concede that it would be more than

just a tad arrogant for mankind to assume that life is unique to This Island Earth. We hardly need a clarion, wake up call from the grey (no pun intended) faceless government ministers, the Illuminati, the Freemasons, or the MJ-12 to draw our attention to that, potentially, at least, there may be literally thousands of planets capable of supporting *some* form of extraterrestrial species.

It strikes me that we are as prepared now as we're ever likely to be to be entrusted with the revelation that ET exists, in some form or other.

Hell, what do I know, maybe we are in the midst of some orchestrated campaign to reveal the truth about alien life forms. I guess, in good ol' Fortean tradition, you'll just have to digest the following and decide for yourself...

First up, just prior to Christmas, 1999, the aforementioned poll was conducted by Roar, a consortium totalling six media groups—Carlton Screen Advertising, The Guardian/Observer, Kiss FM, Channel 4, EMAP Consumer Magazines and advertising agency BMP DDB.



The poll was conducted by 1,000 people aged between 15 and 24, and it revealed that up to 70 per cent of young Britons believe in the reality of Ghosts and 61 per cent in the existence of aliens. On the other hand, a mere 39 per cent have any degree of faith in Christianity.

This would seem to indicate that one in four adults accept that aliens are already paying visits to our humble planet, and in some cases, actually mix with humans.

Various commentators theorised that this propensity to believe in something for which, when you get right down to where the cheese binds, there actually exists very little (and some would say no) *solid* evidence, is down to one person. Step forward, Mr Steven Spielberg.

According to these would-be 'experts' in modern sociology, the fact that the star of one of the popular director's most loved movies, ET, has been appearing of late in a slew of corny TV ads for British Telecom, means we need look no further for a blame-all catalyst

Just for the record, one particular advert, features 10-year-old Charlie Lucas meeting the said ET complete with pushbike to ride around sampling the dubious delights of the Millennium Dome, prior to the pair taking to the skies to fly over the biggest waste of money since a printers firm ran off a bunch of Euro 2000 posters to display outside the nations pubs and bars, enticing the hopelessly gullible to *'WATCH ENGLAND CONQUER EUROPE HERE!'*

Not only that, but some bright spark had the brainwave that it would be good for business to have ET actually appear in the Dome guiding the hapless visitors around TALK, the area sponsored by BT.

I don't know about you, but that somewhat wayward stab at equating a willingness to waive our natural scepticism regarding the paranormal in the face of a series of adverts and promotional activities featuring everyone's favourite cuddly alien, is somewhat wide of the mark. I'm sure the continuing (albeit rapidly dwindling) popularity of TV sci-fi series like *'THE X FILES,'* and *'ROSWELL HIGH,'* and movies such as *'INDEPENDENCE DAY'* and *'MEN IN BLACK'* have had much more of a profound effect upon the nation's youth and their cultural belief system. You know, I can almost imagine the various people who were consulted in the preparation of this poll shouting at the canvassers with a fervour that would shame an Islamic Fundamentalist; (and paraphrasing that Ed Meir UFO poster in Mulder's basement/office): *'Of course I believe in aliens. Why? It's this simple. Because "I WANT TO BELIEVE!!!!"*

And all of this is without making reference to that overly familiar bug-eyed Gray glaring on the front of everything from crisp packets to garish T-Shirts. From DJ decks to keyrings, lamp shades and custom made bedspreads. To say nothing

of the glut of magazines, books, videos and Internet Sites, all actively engaged in propagating the cultivation of a 21st Century mythos.

But hey, I digress. Let's get back to the survey.

25 per cent of those asked were convinced beyond doubting concerning the existence of apparitions and 45 per cent though it was at least more than possible, while 22 per cent firmly believed in both aliens and UFOs, and 39 per cent though that there must be at something to them.

Astronomer Jacqueline Mitton of the Royal Astronomical Society, had this to say regarding the results of the poll; *'There probably, is, was, or will be life somewhere else in the universe. But it could be so scattered in time and space that we won't ever intersect with it. We could have already been visited by alien intelligence. We just don't have any evidence.'*

18th December, 1999 Britain, General 'DAILY EXPRESS.'

*** The next luminary, of sorts, to step forward and openly state their belief in ET, was the Science Editor of the 'THE SUNDAY EXPRESS,' Michael Hanlon, who hedged his bets slightly, by declaring that he was sure that by the dawn of the year 3000, *'humankind will discover that it is not alone in the universe.'*

He bases his convictions on the fact that whereas once, scientists were certain that life required a warm, temperate climate in which to evolve, recent discoveries here on Earth, have all but shattered that premise. Creatures have been found in the most hostile places imaginable ie; around undersea volcanoes three miles down on the Pacific floor, in 140 degree sulphurous springs and even lurking in rocks a mile below the seabed.

Biologists have readily conceded that microbial life could, and perhaps still does, somewhere on (or maybe below) the surface of Mars.

This enticing possibility has inspired a team of scientists, led by Britain's very own Professor Colin Pillinger, of the Open University, to set about dreaming up schemes and designs aimed at searching the Red Planet for any trace, no matter how remote, for life.

Life could well exist elsewhere, too, of course. One of the most promising locations is Europa, a moon of Jupiter, that seems to have a giant ocean covered with ice. In the ebon waters of this comparatively tiny world, warmed by a range of undersea volcanoes, weird and wonderful sea beasts of the sort invoked by the late, great H.P. Lovecraft, could well be awaiting discovery by NASA robot submarines in the future.

And the learned Mr Hanlon has this to say to any of the Doubting Thomas's out there, who still need a tad more convincing;

'It may be difficult to get life started.. You need water - a rare commodity in the cosmos - a climate that is not too hot or too cold, and a nice thick atmosphere to shield you from radiation. You also need a sun that will live long enough to give evolution a chance. Our star is built to last - 4.5 billion years old already, the same again before (hopefully) it finally dies. Many suns live only a million years or so - far too short to get life going. Then you need a stable planet, with not too many volcanoes and a big moon to Hoover up most of the asteroids that may come your way. And then, the mysterious process that leads to life being cooked up from a primordial soup of chemicals has to happen. It sounds quite reasonable to suppose that life on Earth was a one-off.'

'But sceptics ignore just how big the universe is. The same astronomical numbers that make life improbable on any one world, make it very probable on many many worlds. In our Galaxy alone, there may be 200 billion stars. There are about the same number of galaxies. This means that there

are about as many stars as there are grains of sand on all the beaches in the world.

But life as we know it can't live on stars, it needs planets. Again, very recent discoveries have slashed the odds on a universe teeming with life. Ten years ago the only star that we knew for sure had planets was our own. In the past three years that total has gone from one to about 30, as better telescopes spot planets around other stars.

'Finding alien bugs would be the news of the century; finding intelligent life the biggest in history. But paradoxically, we may discover alien civilisations before we find Martian microbes. The reason is not UFOs. There is a much easier way of getting in touch - radio. Radio waves travel at the speed of light, so our nearest galactic neighbours are only a few years away.'

Mr Hanlon goes on to state that he is certain it is only a matter of time before SETI track a verifiable alien message. He even quotes Seth Shostak, a senior SETI astronomer, who explains that the reason for this high degree of optimism is down to the computers which analyse signals from the SETI telescopes. Computer power doubles approximately every 18 months.

'The efficiency of our search goes up a factor of 100 every ten years. If astronomy, every time you improve something by a factor of 100, you find something.'

By definition then, it should be around about 2010 that SETI may stumble upon the signal that changes the course of history forever. Obviously, there exists the risk that we may have already received such an extraterrestrial message, but have simply not been able to recognise it as such. Most scientists however, believe that an alien message would be unambiguous.

Intelligent aliens, they reason, must be composed of the same DNA as ourselves (even stars 10 billion light years away are made of hydrogen and helium) and use roughly the same laws of physics.

Mr Hanlon does include a caveat, right at the end however, when he says; *'If no signal is received by say, 2050, I may have to rethink. But Doctor Shostak remains confident that this won't happen.'*

"Being alone is the past option on my list, he says "If this is the only grain of sand where anything interesting is going on, that would be quite incredible."

16th January, 2000 General 'THE SUNDAY EXPRESS'

*** And just a week or so later, the Astronomer Royal, Mr Martin Rees proclaimed *his* belief in the possibility that aliens exist....

As part of his Saturday Essay, published in 'THE DAILY MAIL,' he makes mention of the fact that as long ago as 1900, a French Foundation offered the Guzman Prize of 100,000 francs for the first contact with an extraterrestrial species. This prize excluded Martians, as it was thought, at the time, that the reality of the inhabitants of Mars was all but accepted fact.

'We're less optimistic about there being life on Mars that our forebears were, Mr Rees informs us, somewhat unnecessarily. 'Even if there is life there, it would be nothing more than microscopic "bugs" of the kind that existed on Earth early in its history. There is certainly nothing like the "Martians" of popular science fiction.' (a certain Colin Wilson and his like-minded chums would beg to differ, though. Read on, to see what I mean, Dear Reader).

Sir Rees does stick his neck out and attempt to hazard a guess as to what any potential alien race might look like; *'It would depend on the habitat that their "home planet" offered, of course. They could be ballon-like creatures floating in dense atmospheres; they could be the size of insects, on a big planet where gravity pulled strongly.'*

'Or they may be freely floating in space. They could even, as some science fiction reminds us, be super-intelligent computers, created by a race of alien beings that had already died out.

But even if intelligent aliens existed, they may not be transmitting any signals; and their brains and senses may be so different from ours that we wouldn't recognise them.

'There may be a lot more life out there than we could ever detect - absence of evidence would not be evidence of absence.'

22nd January, 2000 General 'DAILY MAIL'

ANOTHER DOOMED MISSION TO MARS

*** And so, as all eyes of late it seems, turn to gaze at Mars, we have first to consider the case of the missing probe, the Mars Polar Lander....

The £100 million spacecraft vanished on December 3rd, 1999, and NASA, desperately disappointed at losing such an expensive, not to say scientifically priceless piece of equipment, blamed, naturally enough, unforeseen technical problems with a malfunctioning radio aerial, and abandoned all hope of further contact.

As mentioned earlier however, the well-known Occult researcher and author, Colin Wilson, was not so willing to dismiss the craft's disappearance in such mundane, prosaic terms.

He has a far more exotic, and quite literally outlandish explanation as to its demise....He thinks it was sabotaged by a race whose name was all but redundant, 'practically worn out before anything turned up to claim it...' The Martians.



'I am sure there are living beings on Mars, Colin has gone on record as stating. 'They just don't want us there. So quite understandably, they have seen off our probe'

'Before you dismiss all this as a joke, just have a look at the evidence - and formidable evidence it is.

'Mars is not a dead planet. In 1976, a Viking lander tested the soil there. NASA announced that the results showed Mars is barren. But when the soil was treated with organic nutrient, oxygen was released.

'Other tests revealed that the soil showed signs of photosynthesis and chemosynthesis, both of which are life-giving chemical reactions.

'This is not obscure research either: all of it can be found in the Encyclopaedia Britannica.

'Professor Colin Pillinger, of the Open University, (we referred to him earlier, you will recall) says: "I

passionately believe that conditions on Mars were once conducive to life."

In which case, there would still be signs of life in the Martian soil - as in fact, Britannica admits there is.

'My belief in life on Mars has been further strengthened by the ideas of Gordon Vincent, a Massachusetts mathematician. He is convinced that the small moons that orbit Mars are in fact artificial satellites, put into place by beings far more intelligent than man.

'He says that many thousands of years ago, Mars was plunged into its own Ice Age, probably due to the impact of an asteroid 11 miles across. At that time, there was plenty of water on Mars. NASA photographs show a great number of river beds.

'Then Mars began to lose its atmosphere and became steadily colder until it turned into the bitterly inhospitable environment it is today - always below zero and sometimes as low as minus 137c. The Martians, whose resembled human beings, but were much taller, because of the lighter gravity, began to move underground.

'A quarter of a mile below the surface, Mars could be as pleasantly warm as Britain in midsummer (oh dear, Collin. I think I'm beginning to detect the first flaw in your reasoning...When was the last time we had anything approaching a pleasantly warm summer in this country?)

'If the temperature on Earth dropped, slowly and gradually, to 50 below zero, most of the Earth's inhabitants, too, could live comfortably underground.

'Indeed, there is evidence that this happened on Earth. Near the town of Derinkuyu, in Turkey, a vast underground city was discovered in 1963. Probably made during the last Ice Age, it covers two-and-a-half square miles, and once held 10,000 people.

'They came to the surface when the weather was warm enough, to tend their crops and herds.

'There are other suggestions to support intelligent life on Mars. A book co-authored by the late Professor Carl Sagan, suggests that the Martians made their own satellites to orbit their planet.

"The idea that the moons of Mars are artificial may seem fantastic at first glance," remarks his co-author, the Russian radio-astronomer, Josef Shklovskii, in 'INTELLIGENT LIFE IN THE UNIVERSE.'

"In my opinion, however, merits serious consideration. A technical civilisation substantially in advance of our own would certainly be capable of constructing and launching a massive satellite."

'Commenting on this, Sagan himself stated, "Conceivably, the capture and hollowing of a small asteroid may be technically more feasible than the construction in orbit of an artificial satellite."

'Ten years later, in May, 1976, NASA placed an unmanned craft in orbit around Mars. A few weeks after that, a NASA researcher named Toby Owen was staring at pictures taken over the Plains of Cydonia when he found what looked like two eyes looking back at him.

I don't propose to continue with these references to the so-called Face On Mars, or the supposed giant pyramid and Martian City...I don't know, maybe it's yet another NASA-led conspiracy, but I was pretty convinced by the most recent (1998) photographs sent back from that now infamous region of the Red Planet, which clearly show...er, not an awful lot...Certainly, not even by the most desperate stretch of a more than willing imagination, can there be said to be any trace of a face, or any other artificial edifice. Of course, The Lone Gunmen would say, perhaps not all that unreasonably, that NASA more than possess the technology to re-touch the pictures. but....

The redoubtable Mr Wilson believes that it is more than a coincidence that the '98 pictures were released just before

the publication of Graham Hancock's and Robert Bauval's *'THE FACE ON MARS'*.

'These photographs, of course, showed no sign of the giant pyramid or the City, which surely would have shown up (yeah, if they were there, Colin. If they were there).

'Oddly, Carl Sagan, who had previously declared that the Martian moons might be asteroids manoeuvred into place, now became a sceptic and wrote an article debunking the face (erm, oddly?).'

'According to Gordon Vincent (any relation to David Vincent, we wonder...Hero and alien hunter of the classic 60's TV series 'THE INVADERS'), these intelligent beings - remember that they would be taller than humans - have already visited Earth many times, and are probably the origin of the statement in GENESIS: "There were giants in the earth in those days."

'They helped our ancestors build the earliest civilisations and were regarded as gods.

'But they decided to leave us alone - and for a very simple reason: they knew that when a more advanced civilisation comes into contact with a less advanced civilisation, the results are always disastrous.

'No matter how well-meaning, "visitors" destroy the individuality of less sophisticated people, as we Westerners have destroyed the individuality of every native population that we have encountered.

'That, Gordon Vincent has convinced me, is why the Martians have no intention of coming into close contact with modern humans. They are more intelligent than us and understand that contact could be devastating not only for humans but also for them.

'But just why are those who run NASA so reluctant to admit to intelligent life on Mars? Because they are frightened? Or because they know that an admission that Martians exist would be so disruptive to the Mars programme which keeps them all in work that it could actually bring it to a grinding halt?'

'Whatever the reason, the more probes we send, the more the Martians will sabotage them, so they are lost from our communications.

'Which is why nine months ago, when I heard the Mars probe had been launched on a 416-million-mile journey to Mars, I told my wife with complete confidence; "That's the last we'll hear of it."

9th December, 1999 'DAILY MAIL'

*** Interestingly enough, on the very same day that the above article was published, our local rag carried the news that the missing Mars Polar Lander could have crash landed in a reservoir north of Sydney, Australia.

What is for sure is that reports from local residents filtered through to officials searching for the craft maintaining that a huge object fell from the sky, gouging a 50ft by 20ft wide path through bullrushes near a concrete dam.

In the aftermath of the fall-of-whatever-it-was, the water supply to the town of Guyra was shut down for a time and police set up barricades to keep away crowds of onlookers. A few days later, however, the official view was that the mystery object was nothing other than a small meteorite the size of a golf ball. Quite how that explanation equates with the witness accounts describing a huge 'something' smashing into the water is beyond me, but there you have it...

9th December, 2000 Guyra, Australia 'THE LIVERPOOL ECHO'

*** The following month brought news that NASA scientists were still attempting to send commands to the Lander (assuming it's still stranded on Mars - see above) to get in touch with the Earth.

A signal had apparently been detected from the surface of the Red Planet, and, it was thought, by some, that the stricken probe had sent it Earthwards.

NASA stated that the weak signal received at California's Stanford University was definitely artificial, but could have originated from several sources, including the Earth.

27th January, 2000 Stanford University, California, USA
'THE TIMES'

*** A real case of life imitating Science Fiction occurred earlier this year, when Kim Stanley Robinson's 'MARS' trilogy inspired the first official Martian flag.

'I was really pleased to hear the news,' the author told reporters. His scientifically meticulous books, 'RED MARS,' 'GREEN MARS' and 'BLUE MARS,' have been held in high esteem by the 'experts' as an accurate description of how mankind may eventually colonise and terraform the Red Planet.

Now, his works have been rewarded by the honour of having the titular colours chosen by the Mars Society as their banner. The flag is due to fly over the Mars Arctic Research Station, to be built in cooperation with NASA to investigate how early settlers could survive. The station will be constructed on the Arctic Devon Island where the cold, dry, conditions are similar to those on Mars, and will include a two-storey habitation module, a version of which may one day travel the gulf between the two planets.

The flag was also taken aboard the shuttle Discovery on its successful Christmas '99 mission to repair the Hubble Telescope by astronaut John Mace Grunsfeld.

'I had heard nothing about the flag until I saw the Internet press release,' a delighted Mr Robinson was moved to comment. *'I'd like to thank the Mars Society for what strikes me as a lovely idea.'*

The flag, a tricolour, was chosen to represent the transformation of Mars, whilst symbolising unity in diversity. It also represents the light of reason through the use of the three primary colours of the spectrum. The tricolour is traditionally associated with the republican values of liberty, equality and justice.

January, 2000 SFXMAGAZINE

*** And finally, we come to consider perhaps the most important news item of all concerning Mars...The discovery that there may well still be water just below the surface of the planet.

Steep sided gullies, a series of sinuous channels and fans of debris have been detected strongly suggesting the presence of water and providing hope for would-be colonists and present-day Martians.

The features revealed by the Mars Global Surveyor are the smallest ever seen from Martian orbit and indicates that pent-up groundwater may even today burst forth in short-lived torrents to carve gullies, trenches and fanlike deltas.

NASA were quick to hail the news as a *'landmark discovery in the history of Mars exploration.'*

The presence of springs on what was thought to be a cold desert world could be vital for future expeditions which could use the water for everything from basic survival to fuel cell energy and rocket propellant.

The discovery also gives impetus to the search for alien life. If life exists on Mars, it is likely to be in or near a water source.

The landforms, which bear a remarkable resemblance to water-carved gullies here on Earth, appear to be recent. The formations are unblemished by impact craters, freeze cracks or windblown deposits.

'These gullies could be in the order of a million years old, or they could have formed yesterday,' says Michael Malin and Kenneth Edgett of Malin Space Science Systems in San Diego, California.

'Indeed, I am puzzled as to why we haven't found degraded and cratered examples'

Only about 150 images of the more than 25,000 high resolution views collected by the Mars Orbiter Camera on board the Mars Global Surveyor show signs of water. Appearing on the interior cliff walls of impact craters, pits and two major valley systems, these distinctive formations start high on slopes as triangle-shaped alcoves, created by the undermining and collapse of the cliff below a rock layer from which a liquid appears to have been seeping.

V-shaped channels emerge from the apex of these alcoves and run downslope, splaying out in an apron of rock debris or a tangle of smaller channels.

Various details - their origin in distinct layers, their banked, winding and often branching channel paths, and their final fans of debris embroidered with finer channels - are all characteristic of gully formations on Earth.

After testing the possibility that dry flows, such as landslides or avalanches were responsible, the team concludes that the gullies may have been shaped by the same water-driven processes that create gullies on Earth.

'There's still a chance that they were formed some other way,' Dr Malin cautions. *'But there remains a high probability that they were formed by water.'*

The researchers calculate that at least 2,500 cubic metres of water were necessary in some cases to transport the amount of material seen in the debris fans.

However, the discovery of water poses a puzzle; How could large amounts of water accumulate to create these gullies when any water on the Martian surface would evaporate quickly in a boiling froth?

The authors suggest the water exists in a porous layer a few hundred metres below the surface, kept liquid by the pressure exerted by overlying rock. Water seeps through the porous layer until it is exposed at the surface inside a crater or other depression, to freeze into a small ice 'dam' at the surface. Groundwater continues to percolate through the rock and build up pressure behind this ice dam, creating a reservoir that eventually bursts through and runs downslope.

If this is the correct scenario, the researchers suggest the formation of the gullies may be linked to their location. More than 90 per cent occur in the Red Planet's southern hemisphere, almost all on the pole side of 30 degrees latitude.

'They occur where you would not expect them - in some of the coldest places on the planet,' says Dr Malin. *'The lower temperatures here may slow down the evaporation and help to form the ice barriers.'*

At several sites, the gullies group together and form clusters, which may point to a more defined Martian groundwater system, similar to natural rock-bound aquifers on Earth.

'This is part of the puzzle that we've been putting together in the last two years of a new Mars. The possibility of liquid water, accessible over a substantially larger part of the planet than we thought, is quite exciting.'

'For two decades, scientists have debated whether liquid water might have existed on the surface of Mars, just a few billion years ago.'

'The presence of liquid water on Mars has profound implications for the question of life, not only in the past, but perhaps even today. If life were to develop there, and if it survives to the present time, then these landforms would be great places to look.'

And the first opportunity to investigate whether water remains today could well be provided by Britain's Beagle 2 Mars Lander, scheduled for launch aboard the European Space Agency's Mars Express Mission in 2003.

With NASA's Mars programme currently in disarray, the Beagle 2 is the only spacecraft scheduled to land on Mars

capable of confirming the find. However, it might have problems, (quite aside from ambush by Martians) given the high latitudes and perishing cold.

We await the results though, with great interest.

28th June, 2000 'DAILY TELEGRAPH'

The Bugs From Outer Space

A special Government task force has apparently been formed to combat bacteria carried by comets from distant solar systems that might pose a threat to mankind in the future.

The less-than-reliable Sunday press ran the story early in the new year, and the articles claimed that the Government's 'space minister' Lord Sainsbury (who, you'll recall we encountered earlier this issue, in connection with the setting up of an ELE comet watch, was attempting to dream up ways of preventing the aforementioned bugs reaching the Earth.

The Liberal Democrat spokesman chipped in (for what it was worth) by saying *'You won't find little green men on a comet but you might find little green germs which could destroy life as we know it.'*

9th January, 2000 General 'SUNDAY PEOPLE'

Ain't Nothing But A Sham - ET Material Turns Out To Have Down To Earth Explanation

A piece of material, which drew Ufologists from all over the world to North Berwick Law, in Scotland, turned out to be nothing other than, surprise surprise, shammy leather.

An American businessman had discovered the material at the exact same spot where he claimed to have seen unidentified lights on a hill whilst out for a walk with his wife, four months previously, in September, 1999.

The thin substance, tan-coloured and about 9 inches square, was taken to Heriot-Watt University for analysis.

A group of Japanese golfers on holiday in Gullane also claim to have seen the same, or a similar UFO on Berwick Law. On the strength of these sightings, a film crew hired by a Japanese company, was set to visit the area of East Lothian in the Spring of this year.

Cameras were due to be set up on the roof of the Templar Lodge Hotel in Gullane and trained for six months on the skies above Berwick Law and Traprain Law in the hope of capturing UFO evidence on film.

However, here comes Joyce Cook, manager of Heriot-Watt's textile treating department to rain on the parade and state that; *'I don't think the cloth is alien at all, I believe there is a rational explanation for the fabric.'*

'After investigation, in my opinion it is most likely to be a piece of old, degraded chamois leather that has perhaps been in the sea for a long time before being washed up on the shore.'

'One of the things we were testing for was whether the material was man-made or more natural and it was quite easy to establish that it wasn't synthetic. It was very fragile, tears easily and leaves a fine powder.'

Richard Taylor of the Templar Lodge Hotel however, stated that he didn't think that Pharo, the documentary company organising the filming, would be deterred by the chamois theory.

'We're still working on the fact that it has not been identified as a textile. It's only Joyce Cook's personal opinion that it is a piece of old chamois leather, but as she pointed out, if it is leather there will be DNA content so that will be our next step.'

'The sightings still remain, as does the artificial found on Traprain Law in 1994. The metal was tested by the National Museum of Scotland, who concluded that it was of no-known material

'And we've had recent sightings by people standing in the Hogmanay crowd at Edinburgh, who say they saw UFOs in the sky a few minutes after the fireworks.'

Colin McGuire from Edinburgh, confirmed that he and two friends as well as others in the crowd had seen several triangular-shaped objects flying over Calton Hill.

16th January, 2000 Berwick Law, East Lothian, Scotland SCOTTISH SUNDAY POST

Erich Von Daniken Sets Up UFO Theme Park

The much-reviled, in serious Ufological circles, author, Erich Von ('The Ancient Astronauts are responsible for everything') Daniken, has hit upon another brainwave, doubtless motivated by a desire to make yet more money out of the eternally gullible.

Mad Erich has, it seems, been granted permission to build a spaceship-like dome outside the Swiss Alpine resort of Interlaken.

It is due to open in 2002, and it is planned that visitors will explore unexplained phenomena in a virtual world of three-dimensional computer-generated exhibits created by Hollywood special effects experts.

Von Daniken, 64, told reporters, *'We don't plan to provide answers but we hope everyone will leave the park with reawakened curiosity.'*

Visitors will be able to take simulated flights over the Nazca Lines on the plains of Peru (said Lines being Extraterrestrial in origin, according to Von Daniken, of course), whilst another exhibit will illustrate how the Egyptian pyramid in Giza was built in line with the four points of the compass and at an equal distance from the equator and the North Pole, more than 4,000 years ago.

29th February, 2000 Interlaken, Switzerland 'DAILY EXPRESS.'

Sweden's USO's

'Identified' As Herrings

One of the most perplexing mysteries of recent times, the reports of Unidentified Submarine Objects that caused the Swedish armed forces to go full alert at the height of the Cold War, has apparently been explained away as being due to nothing more exotic than a shoal of herring.

The Supreme Commander of the Swedish armed forces, Owe Wiktorin, who has proposed this prosaic answer to the enigma, do so despite the fact that a Soviet submarine ran aground off Sweden in 1981. The strange noises, and unexplained sightings of USOs/Lake Monsters/whatever that have been made since then, they maintain were caused by shoals of fish.

The sound emitted by herring are similar to those of a submarine propeller, Wiktorin told the Defence Minister, Bjorn Von Sydow.

Five years earlier, escaped minx were identified as emitting sounds like submarines. *'First it was U-boats, then it was minx, now it's worse...Herring'* the daily *'AFTON BLADET'* complained.

Tests by navy investigators during 1999 established the similarity between the sounds, concluding that; *'neither in future nor in the past can this sound be taken as proof of enemy trespass.'*

At the height of the Cold War, neutral Sweden was inclined to believe reports of alleged Soviet activity off its coastline. Those beliefs were driven by a mixture of

defence, activism and nationalism, *'THE EXPRESSEN'* was moved to comment.

'But now that the threat is over, the solution was a "line, a few hooks and a lead weight.'

7th March, 2000 Sweden 'THE DAILY TELEGRAPH.'

Encounter Above The Mojave Desert

David Hastings, who hails from England, was flying his Cessna plane over America's Mojave Desert he almost collided with a UFO.

According to his account, David managed to snap two photographs of the mysterious object as he and an ex-military pilot dived frantically to avoid the oval-shaped craft.

Disappointingly, the first snap revealed no more than an empty sky, but the second showed an enormous object with black rings around its top and bottom passing just a few feet away from the plane's wing. David handed the pictures to the United States Navy, who, if the reports are to be believed, admitted that they were completely baffled as to what the photograph shows.

The incident was published in *'PILOT'* magazine, and David told their writers; *'As we neared the Mojave Desert under radar control, it happened. We both suddenly realised that we had fast traffic in our 12 o'clock.*

'We pushed the control panel and ducked. A shadow passed over us but there was absolutely no sound. We slowly raised our heads and asked "What the heck?"

'We called the radar control tower to check if they had another aircraft and the answer was no. We took the film to a one-hour photo shop and there it was.

'One a shot had nothing, but the second had a blurred image of the UFO.'

7th June, 2000 Mojave Desert, USA 'DAILY SLUR'

Alien Animals II

MORE REPORTS OF BIG CATS STALKING THE BRITISH COUNTRYSIDE

As the Winter-that-never-was almost imperceptibly gave way to early Spring, certain newspapers were citing what they termed as *'dramatic new evidence'* regarding the existence of Alien Big Cats across the length and breadth of Britain.

This evidence was convincing enough to raise fears amongst certain teams of 'experts' that the Big Cats are breeding, increasing fears that they could pose a serious threat to wildlife, livestock, and even, ultimately, human life.

According to one article I came across, pumas and leopards have been spotted roaming about the countryside with their young, prompting zoologist Quentin Rose to warn that unless something radical is done there will be a population explosion of the Big Cats within 20 years.

More than 100 Big Cats are thought to be loose around the UK and the numbers look set to rise dramatically due to perfect breeding conditions.

Rose, who has tracked Big Cats with Red Indians in Canada, has been investigating sightings in Britain for the past eight years. He has identified 28 areas where leopards have been sighted regularly, and 32 areas for puma.

'I would estimate that there are around 100 cats loose in the British countryside and in some of those areas I know there is more than one Big Cat because they have been breeding,' he was quoted as saying.

'People have spotted females with cubs and there have been several sightings of two adults together. These cats are solitary animals and only come together to breed.'

'Conditions for the Big Cats in the UK are perfect, since they have no predators, have plenty of cover and food and find the weather to their liking, (I'm glad someone does -Well and truly peed off with the British Summer Ed)
'Most of the cats were kept as exotic pets in the 1970's and released into the wild when the Dangerous Wild Animals Act of 1976 made it illegal to keep them without a licence.

'Pairs of black leopard and their cubs have been spotted in Worcestershire and Herefordshire and puma pairs sighted in central Wales.

'Another indicator that the cats are breeding is that most of those released after the 1976 Act would now be dead. The cats only have a life expectancy of around 20 years, so their continued presence shows they are breeding.

'In the first 20 years after the cats were released, the number of animals increased very, very slowly. But, as with other animals, like rabbits or mice, when there are optimum conditions in the following 20 years there is always a population explosion.

'The main concern about the growth of the cats is the threat to wildlife. The cats feed on foxes, badgers, rabbits and deer. In their countries of origin, as the number of cats increased, so the number of prey would decrease and some of the predators would starve.

'In the UK, this problem is unlikely to arise, since there is a huge number of sheep ready for the taking.

'There is a possible threat to humans too. Although I would like to stress that the cats usually leave humans alone unless they are cornered or surprised, I would point out that there have been eight close, aggressive encounters in recent years.

'And people may be unaware of the cats as they disguise themselves well. Large animals can be released into an area and local people remain unaware of them. The cats don't leave many footprints as they don't like treading in mud and they bury their droppings.

'If they attack sheep they just leave the bones and wool, rarely abandoning a kill. Also the cats enjoy large territories. The females may wander 250 miles and the males up to 600 or 700 miles.

'If nothing is done soon, numbers will explode. We need properly funded scientific research to check on sightings and to determine the numbers and whereabouts of the animals.

'Once the Government has this information they can work out how to capture and trap the cats. If we refuse to act, predatory pressure on UK wildlife will become intolerable.

'If it is left, the Government will be facing a situation like that with the coypu, a small rodent in East Anglia in the 1960's. The longer this situation is left, the more it will eventually cost the Government.

'If the cats weren't breeding however, I would say just leave them alone.'

28th February, 2000 Britain General 'DAILY EXPRESS'

*** And, as if to add weight to Mr Rose's assertions, reports filtered down the wires from Rudyard, Staffordshire, that a set of unidentified paw prints had been found around a farm run by Howard and Marie Dale. They awoke one morning to find the prints which they both firmly believe belong to a large, black cat-like creature they have both seen prowling in the fields surrounding their farm.

25th March, 2000 Rudyard, Staffordshire 'DAILY MAIL'

*** Four months later, a mysterious black beast was being linked with a series of attacks on sheep in remote moorland. The remains of lambs and half-eaten rabbits have been found around the village of Denby Dale, near Huddersfield, West Yorkshire.

Farmer Richard Wood told reporters that there were large claw-marks on one dead lamb

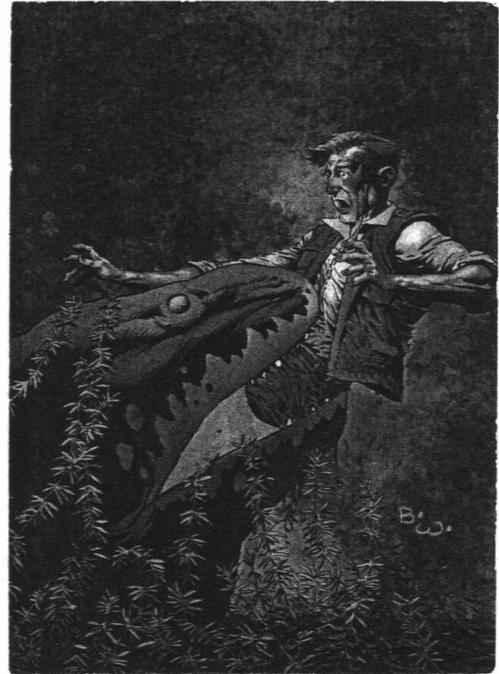
Not only that, but local postmaster John Radley claimed that he had spotted a jet-black creature as he walked his dogs. *'My two dogs didn't dare run after it, John was quoted as saying. 'They just took off the other way.'*

The villagers think that the cat may well be a lynx which has escaped from the nearby nature park.

Police wildlife officer PC Steve Downing urged the public not to panic. *'I don't want to turn it into a big game hunt,'* he announced.

2nd July, 2000 Denby Dale, West Yorkshire 'SUNDAY PEOPLE.'

Robofish, Spitting Cobras And Monster Pikes



We start off at a lake in Romsey, Hampshire, where a bunch of anglers looked on with horror as a huge pike killed a full-grown swan.

The fishermen saw the bird submerge its head under the waters surface to feed and then suddenly, without warning, it was forcibly dragged right across the lake.

The 4ft long pike sunk its teeth into the swan's neck and held it until it drowned. In then towed the unfortunate bird to a quite corner were it set about tucking into its carcass.

25th April, 2000 Romsey, Hampshire 'DAILYMANC.'

*** A species of cobra that can spit venom at its enemies has been identified for the first time by Bangor University lecturer, Doctor Wolfgang Wuster.

The 'Burmese Spitting Cobra' is found around Mandalay.
30th June, 2000 Mandalay 'THE GUARDIAN'

*** A newly created part-fish, part-machine has become one of the world's most advanced cyborgs.

The creature has a mechanical body fitted with wheels, motors, circuit boards and light sensors but is controlled by the brain of a sea lamprey.

Although the robot contains only a few nerve cells from the eel-like fish, it has learned to follow or avoid lights. Robotic experts are convinced that it marks an important step towards a new type of biological robot.

The research could pave the way for artificial; limbs or other body parts connected to the user's brain.

The fish-robot is the creation of a team led by Dr Fernando Mussa-Ivaldi, from Northwestern University in Chicago.

They removed the brain stem and part of the spinal cord from a primitive saltwater fish under general anaesthetic and kept it alive in a cold, salty condition.

The team then isolated a group of large nerve cells called Muller cells. These help lampreys to orientate themselves in water. Electrons attached to the neurons allowed them to be stimulated with frequencies they would normally receive in the fish's body.

When lights were flashed at the robot, the lamprey brain cells learned how to control the motors. The cyborg was able to follow and dodge a moving light source and move in a circle.

Researchers were confident that there would be medical benefits. *'We will be able to build better prosthetic limbs for disabled people,'* Doctor Mussa-Ivaldi told reporters from *'NEW SCIENTIST'* magazine.

Until now, the fish's biggest claim to fame was Henry I who was apparently killed by an overabundance of lampreys back in 1135.

8th June, 2000 *General 'NEW SCIENTIST'*

Documents Of The (Almost) Dead

Near-Death Experiences, or NDE's, were back in the news again as sodden June squelched into chilly, windswept July, this year.

And whether you dismiss such things as being nothing more than illusions created by a brain subjected to the ultimate in sensory deprivation or a genuine glimpse of the Other Side, of you can't deny that the more powerful cases make for fascinating (and hope-inducing) reading.



Fittingly, the compiler of most of the articles I've come across is Dr Peter Fenwick, author of one of the definitive books on the subject; *'THE TRUTH IS IN THE LIGHT.'*

A fellow of the Royal College of Psychiatrists and a consultant at The Maudsley, in South London, the good Doctor was interested, but initially sceptical, about the phenomenon, and was all but convinced that the accounts that he had come across were merely the results of psychological stress suffered by a victim at the point of death.

It wasn't until 1983, when he met a patient named Peter Thompson, a 49-year-old man affected by stress, that he had cause to begin to think otherwise.

'A salesman, he had lived a normal life and could not cope with the fact that since his Near Death Experience he was

suffering acute anxiety and was unable to work. He was embarrassed by what had happened and thought that he was going mad.

'His problems stemmed from an event that happened six months previously, when he visited a London hospital for treatment heart problems.

'As a diagnostic device, he had a cardiac catheter inserted. It is usually a relatively straightforward procedure, but the post-graduate student who operated on him forgot the local anaesthetic. Peter remembered looking up at him as he made the incision and being hit by an extraordinary wave of pain.

'Then he passed out.

'He found himself floating on the ceiling of the theatre, looking down on the chaos surrounding his body. The end of the catheter, wrongly inserted, had stimulated the heart and the shock had caused it to stop beating. Then there was nothing....No pain at all.

'He was floating down a dark tunnel being pulled towards a light. He experienced an intense feeling of peace and, as he approached the bright light, was overwhelmed with feelings of bliss and love.

'There, in the light waiting for him, was his dead mother who told him that he had to go back. Suddenly, he was pulled back into his body.

'For six months afterwards he had been very distressed, unable to explain to anyone what had happened. The hospital refused to admit malpractice and he was left with a profound fear of hospitals.

'He was referred to me because he had developed a neurosis - every time he attended hospital he broke out in an excessive sweat.

'I treated him with anti-anxiety exercises and a desensitisation programme gradually persuading him to venture into a hospital environment. Over the next two years, he got better. He was particularly helped by the fact that I took his story seriously.

The classic Near Death Experience appears to leave a lasting impression upon those who claim to have come back from the brink of death.

Many profess openly that their whole world-view has changed radically for the better and that death no longer holds any fears for them. For those who were already religious, the experience confirms that their faith was not ill-founded, whilst for the agnostic or downright atheistic, the trauma of the 'event' is often enough to inspire belief in an afterlife.

One such person is Tracey Thornton, a pretty 23-year-old from Dunfermline, Scotland, who underwent what she describes a horrifying experience when she was 16.

She is still disabled from the car accident that led to her brush with death.

This is her story....

'When I was 16, I was travelling home with a friend in his car going out for a pizza. It was January, 1994, and a very dark and rainy night. Ahead of us a taxi pulled over to drop someone off. Cars braked to avoid the taxi and my friend was so close to ramming the car ahead that he pulled out into the oncoming lane to avoid it. Unfortunately, a car was approaching and we had a head-on collision. I was left with a fractured skull, damage to my front right-hand lobe of my brain, a shattered left heel and ankle, a broken right ankle, a shattered left elbow and broken left collarbone (Jeezly Crow, apart from that she was just as right as rain - Exasperated Ed).

'It took two hours for the firemen to free me from the wreckage.

She remained blissfully unaware of any of this however, as she had slipped into a deep coma which lasted for a month. And it was Tracy was finally emerging from this unnatural sleep, that she underwent her NDE.

'My mother tells me that I awoke screaming 2Don't let them make me into a baby.' To this day, I think that what happened to me was real, even though I am now a psychology student and know that the brain can play all sorts of strangetricks.

'I found myself in a very dark place, in space, I was standing as though on a planet wheeling through the universe. I was very scared when, suddenly, I saw a light above me. At first the light calmed me and made me feel strangely relaxed and peaceful.

'But then, from the light came hundreds of small faces without proper features, almost like foetuses which had not been fully formed. They were chanting "Decapitate, decapitate, decapitate!!!

'Among them they had a baby. I knew that they wanted to cut off my head and replace it with the baby's head. I felt incredibly drawn to the light, where I knew that the creatures would use my body as a way of giving the baby life - way of reincarnation.

'But the terrifying prospect was that it would mean that it was my time to die. My body was just a vehicle, and soon the baby would be brought to life through my death.

'I was horrified. The creatures tried to pull me towards them, all the while still chanting. I did my best to fight them off, even though part of me was beginning to think that perhaps this was what was meant to happen, that my life was over and that it was the baby's turn to live.

'I came round shouting, but I was only conscious for a short time. For the next few weeks I drifted in and out of consciousness.'

Tracy eventually made a good, if not totally full, recovery, and she now states that she has absolutely no fear of shaking off this mortal coil...Not even if she once more finds herself at the mercy of the chanting, head-cutting foetuses

'When my great-grandmother died in December 1998, aged 95, I was able to see her when she was in her coffin and kiss her goodbye without feeling sad, even though we had been very close.

'I believe in reincarnation and know that even though our bodies do not last forever, our spirit certainly does.

*** The next case concerns a much older woman by the name of Gillian Mackenzie, who hails from Eastbourne, East Sussex. Aged 66, her NDE occurred 21 years ago, back in 1979, during an emergency Caesarean for the birth of her first child, James.

At the time of the birth complications, Gillian had just returned from Sri Lanka, where she'd been living with her husband, Hamish.

'I had been on the verge of going into labour for three days and was in Battle Hospital, Reading. I was in tremendous pain and very worried.

'I was hooked up to a heartbeat monitor and could hear the baby's heart starting and stopping in dire stress. In a panic, the doctors put me on a drip to induce the birth but, as soon as this was done, I was in more agony.

'The doctor told the nurse to turn down the drip containing the induction fluid but the nurse accidentally turned it up instead. I saw the doctor tear around the bed to to turn it off and then rush out to get the consultant.

'They came back in and I could see from their faces that something was wrong. The next thing I knew I was minutes away from having an emergency Caesarean.

'It was total panic and I remember being wheeled down to the operating theatre, with a tube still down my throat. Then I blacked out, and I recall thinking, "Oh my God, I'm dead."

'Then I became aware of a small pin-prick of light to the right and very high up. I had no option but to move towards

it as if I was flying. Around me were the walls of a tunnel and soon I emerged into the light.

'All the anger left me and I had the most wonderful feeling. All the pain was gone and I was elated. There are no words to describe how I felt, but even though I am not at all religious, I had a feeling that God was there. I was surprised. "Good heavens, " Surely I can't come before God?"

'A voice spoke to me, a very nice voice and one I had never heard before. It said: "Gill, do you know who I am?"

I answered; "Yes, but I just can't say it."

The voice chuckled and I thought to myself, "It is God...And He's got a sense of humour."

And then that voice said; "Here's someone you know."

'It was my grandfather, with whom I had been very close because I had lived with my grandparents during the war.

"Oh, Grandpa," I said "I can't stay here. I've got to go back."

"Why?" he asked.

'I explained that I had just had a son named James - and I don't know how I could know this, but I did. I said I couldn't possibly leave him. That Hamish couldn't cope. As a final reason, I said that I'd left a pile of shirts to be ironed and knew that Hamish, who was very used to servants, having lived for so long in Ceylon, couldn't possibly iron them.

"That doesn't matter a damn," he said, and I was shocked that he used that word in the presence of God. He said that I had be better come up with a better case than a pile of ironing.

'Then I had very strong memories of my life flash before me. I remembered being ten months old and sitting on a rug in my grandmother's garden, looking at the beautiful pink edge of a daisy with intense pleasure. I could remember seeing a field filled with buttercups with my grandfather when I was six or seven and asking him "Is this Heaven?"

'I had many other memories, mostly of beauty in nature - walks, sunsets, a horse chestnut leaf. The oddest thing is that I saw it all in such detail, because I am actually shortsighted.

'I said to my grandfather: "I've got to do something with these experiences. I've got to use this to help other people."

'With that, I was suddenly aware of being back in the operating theatre, hovering near the ceiling, looking down at my body. I saw people around the bed, sewing me up.

'I was very anxious that Hamish should know that I was back and I was going to be alright, so I went to look for him. I saw him sitting outside the theatre, looking very strained and worried. The consultant came out and spoke to him, saying that the baby was fine but that there was some concern about me.

'Hamish then went down the corridor and round the corner to the telephone, from where he called my mother, and I floated after him. I could hear both of their voices.

'Hamish explained the situation and my mother said: "When you see her, keep talking to her, and in the meantime all we can do is pray."

'I was then back in the ward, on the ceiling. My grandfather was with me and, for some reason I was talking on the telephone to him. I knew that if I pressed button A I could say hello to Hamish, and if I pressed button B I'd get my money back.

'I pressed button A, and there I was opening my eyes back in my body. I was gibbering on about having seen my grandfather, but nobody paid any attention to me. I later asked the surgeon if anything untoward had happened, but he said it had been perfectly fine.

'I also asked my GP, who looked at me as though I was completely nuts and said:

'Well, we were a bit worried about you.'

'I can be persuaded that most of what I experienced can be put down to brain function and chemistry. But it has left me with the abiding conviction that there is another dimension. My mother died recently and I feel her presence still today.'

'I told my husband what had happened, and years later, in 1986, he developed cancer. My experience helped him face it without fear.'

'And on a practical level, as soon as baby James and I were well enough to leave the hospital, the first thing I did was to teach Hamish how to iron his own shirts.'

*** And now, consider if you will, the case of Mr Robert Bloynan, aged 43, and who lives in Witch-haunted Clitheroe in Lancashire...

He claims to have made a personal visit to both Heaven and Hell.

'At the age of 37, I was living with a girlfriend, but we were going through a difficult break-up. I had been healthy all my life, indeed in my 20's I had played an active part in the Territorial Army's Parachute Regiment.'

Robert then began to suffer, what he at first took to be epileptic fits which grew progressively worse, until in 1994, he suffered a fit of such epic proportions that he decided to go for a brain scan at St. Thomas's Hospital in London.

The doctors delivered only bad news, for Robert. It was likely that he had a brain tumour.

It whilst he was awaiting surgery that he underwent his remarkable 'experience.' He had six fits in one day and was rushed to hospital where he remained in a coma for two-and-a-half days.

When he finally regained consciousness, he gradually came to recall that he had been through 'something extraordinary.'

'I had been in another world, where I had been riding on a horse alongside a hedge in a field of ripe corn. The countryside was stunningly beautiful, the colours were vivid and all communication was telepathic, so I could tell the horse exactly what to do.'

'It was a completely Heavenly world, where there was no compulsion. The corn grew because it wanted to, the horse carried me because it wanted to.'

'I knew I had been to Heaven and felt that I had been to a place where I truly belonged. It was like coming up for air after being under water for too long.'

'There, I met my maternal grandmother, who had died when I was three. She told me the secrets of the universe, and also told me that date when I would die.'

'Sadly, when I came back to my body, I could not remember the details of the discussion.'

'For the following week, I drifted in and out of consciousness in the hospital ward. Then I had a second, much more disturbing experience. I visited a place I am convinced was Hell.'

'I found myself in a barren land where there was no sun, moon or stars, but I could see but I could see for about 200 yards because the ground itself was slightly luminous. There I met a relative of mine, who is dead. I never liked him - he was a sadistic man who took calculated delight in inflicting corporal punishment. He didn't recognise me.'

'He was sitting on a rock surrounded by a pool of his own mallece, like a bad smell, and I knew I had been sent to help him escape.'

'I knew I had to make a cart to rescue him. The only materials available were a tree trunk for wheels and two planks of wood. It was an impossible task without his involvement but he refused to get involved. I realised he was beyond help, so I left.'

'Later, when I had woken up and was lying in my hospital bed, I felt myself leave my body and float up to the ceiling. I

could see everything in the room and felt as free as if I had taken off a heavy overcoat and backpack.'

'It was a great release and I felt wonderful, but after a couple of seconds another epileptic fit started and I slammed back into my body.'

'Three or four days later I had major brain surgery and a malignant brain tumour was removed. Since then I have made a good recovery, although I am still epileptic.'

*** And finally, we come to the last of this assorted batch of NDE's and the case of Lynne Hardman.

A wedding dress designer aged 56, she lives with her husband in Whitehaven, Cumbria. She underwent an NDE when she was giving birth to her daughter Nina, who tragically, would suffer death by drowning when she was only 12 years old.

Lynne experienced major complications with her pregnancy, weighing a mere seven stone when she finally came to give birth.

Because she was so unwell towards the end of her pregnancy, Lynne's baby stopped growing. She was deprived of the nourishment she needed and so the doctors elected to induce the birth.

For two days she was placed on a drip, and nothing happened. On the third day however, when the doctor placed inserted the drip, all Lynne can remember was floating above the bed looking down on her unconscious body.

'I watched the doctor put the drip into my hand and saw blood spurt out. They rushed to bring me an oxygen mask to get me breathing again.'

'I was surrounded by a beautiful orange-red glow and felt lovely and warm. The light was wonderful and welcoming and drew me towards its source. As I got closer it got bigger and bigger. It did not last for long, but it was a wonderful experience, very peaceful and moving.'

'Then I looked down at my body, and Derek sitting beside me. Suddenly, I was back in my body again and it was all over. The next thing I remember is coming to after my emergency Caesarean to see my daughter, Nina, beside me.'

'Through all Nina's short life, I loved her dearly, but she never really felt as though she was mine. She seemed only to be loaned to me.'

'Nina and her father were incredibly close. In all the pictures we have of her, they're cuddled up close or with their heads together. I don't think he's ever got over her death when she was 12.'

'She loved animals and the house was full of injured birds she had rescued, hamsters, gerbils, a tortoise, canaries and the dog. She wanted to be a vet and I'm sure she would have made it, she was so determined.'

'One hot Summer's day in 1982, I took Nina and a schoolfriend to swim in a big pool near our home. It is quite a big pool and I'd learned to swim in it as a child.'

'I was on the riverbank while the two girls splashed around happily.'

'The pool had in it what we call a fish gap - a break like a weir for the salmon to jump up when they are coming upriver to spawn. The current near the gap is very strong but we all knew that if you got caught up in it all you had to do was remember to hold your breath and not to panic.'

'You'd soon pop up on the other side.'

'Nina was paddling around close to the gap, and the next thing I knew she'd disappeared. I waited for her to pop up, then ran to the other side but she never came out.'

'From then on, I can remember nothing, it's all a blank. Help came and everything possible was done but a log had got jammed in the fish gap and my Nina had been trapped under the water and drowned.'

'You never really get over losing your child. You just get used to it. Today, I feel that my Near-Death Experience and

Nina's drowning were all part of the same event. They seem part of the same whole to me.

'I think I was sent that experience to show me what it is like to die and it comforts me. I feel sure that Nina's death would have been peaceful and lovely.

'I'm not religious. I don't even follow my horoscope. Nor do I believe in life after death. I simply think my Near-Death Experience was sent to me to teach me not to fear dying. And it is certainly nothing to be afraid of.

'Although I don't believe in reincarnation, I do think there are some strange coincidences in this life. When my youngest sister was pregnant 11 years ago she rang me in a terrible state because she feared her baby would be born on July 20th, the day of Nina's death, and was worried that I would be upset.

'Sure enough, her little girl did come then, but I was happy, not sad. To have her birthday that day makes it more bearable for the family. Her daughter is named Charlotte Nina, and she and I are very close. We hug each other all the time and she is a fixture at our house.

'It wasn't until many years after Nina's death that I heard a programme on the radio and discovered that I am not alone in having a Near-Death Experience. Until then, the only person I had told was Derek. I had been afraid to mention it for fear people would think that I was mad.

'I don't even know for sure whether Derek believes in my story, he's very guarded about it. But I'd like to think that it comforts him as it does me.'

8-10th July, 2000 General 'DAILY MAIL'

Shirley MacLaine: Charlemagne's Lover

And speaking, as we were, of reincarnation, here comes striking confirmation, if it were truly needed, of the Ms MacLaine's, shall we say, eccentricity.

In the pages of her latest book, 'CAMINO,' the actress speaks of how she was a lover of the Emperor Charlemagne in a past life, and of his reincarnation in this present one.

The book is apparently based on a walk she once took along the 500-mile pilgrimage route to Santiago de Compostella in Spain. She writes that she was guided by visions and characters from ancient civilisations who very kindly elected to reveal her past lives.

'I was a Moorish girl who was tending to the sick,' she relates. 'As time progressed, I went deeper....and further back in time.'

Meanwhile, back in this life (confused? Welcome to the club). Miss MacLaine claims to have had an affair with Olof Palme, the assassinated Swedish prime minister.

So far, so acceptable, but she then goes on to state that she openly believes Palme was a reincarnation of Charlemagne, who died in AD 814 after conquering much of western Europe.

And if all that wasn't enough, our heroine also adds that she has had visions of androgynous people giving birth to androgynous children and that she herself was androgynous.

Miss MacLaine, now aged 66, has always displayed an unorthodox approach to life, even by Hollywood standards. In her previous eight books, she has waded ever deeper into the realms of the mystical, claiming in one that extraterrestrials had landed on the front porch of her beach home in Malibu.

She asserts that her friends warned her against writing about her karmic destinies and her contact with aliens, but has refused to be silenced.

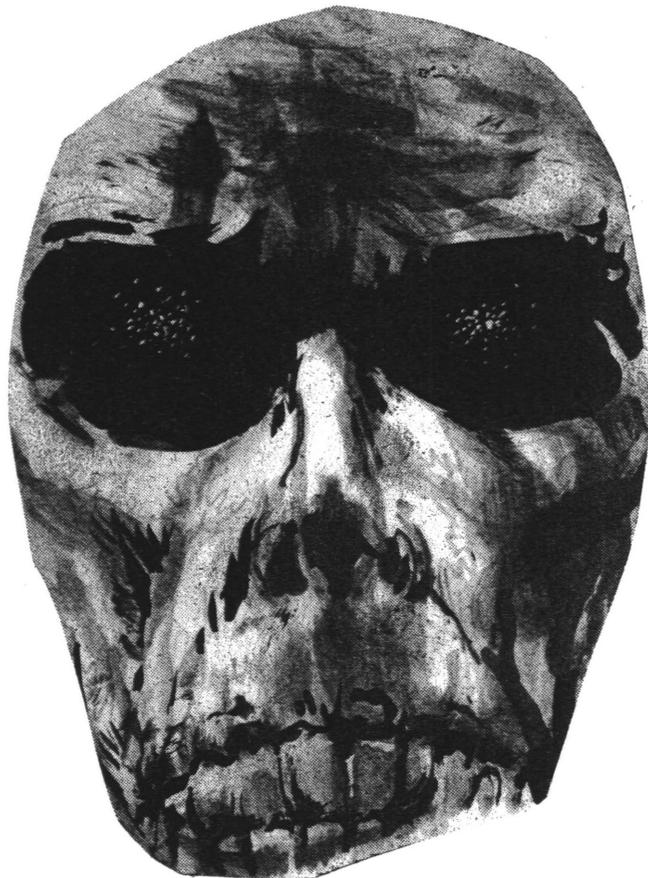
'I'm old enough to have the right to be innovative and get a big kick out of the people who think I'm a nutcase,' she defiantly told reporters.

18th May, 2000 USA 'DAILY TELEGRAPH'

HE'LL COME KNOCKING AT YOUR DOOR

Here's something that had me sleeping with the lights on for a good week or so, after I'd read it.

It might not seem to amount to much to you, Dear Reader, but this is the type of stuff that gives your humble Editor nightmares....



A few years ago, a man named J.P. Bellhouse decided to hire a horror video from the local store, for him and his girlfriend to watch one evening.

He selected Clive Barker's urban-legend-come-to-life chiller, 'CANDYMAN,' (not one of the classics perhaps, but a fairly good choice, I'm sure you'll agree. I mean, he could have picked 'THE KILLER TONGUE,' or some such happy crappy, right?).

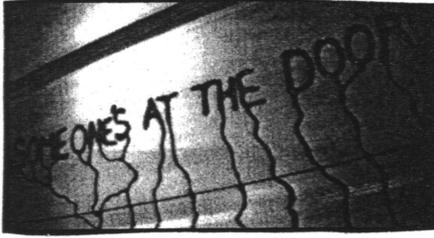
If you haven't seen the movie, well, basically the story centres around the vengeful ghost of a huge black slave with a sweet tooth, a penchant for inhaling and breathing out honeybees and a bloodied hook for a hand.

'CANDYMAN' is rumoured to haunt the crumbling tenement blocks of some American ghetto.

To summon him, you didn't have to resort to some arcane ritual, complete with all those impossible to get (legally) implements and long-lost grimoires....All that would be required would be a darkened room, a common, everyday mirror and a person crazy enough to want to stare into the blackness beyond their own reflection while slowly intoning the name 'Candyman' five times.

After they'd watched the film, in true horror movie fashion, Mr Bellhouse's girlfriend decided to chant 'Candyman's' name five times into the nearest available mirror, 'just to see what would happen.'

Well, nothing did happen.
Not that night, anyway.



The following morning, however, there was a sudden series of almighty bangs on the hall window. Mr Bellhouse rushed to open the door and was confronted by a terrified man who was screaming to be admitted into the house as the Devil Himself was after him. Trying desperately to reason with the raving lunatic, Mr Bellhouse (God, if you swapped that letter B for an H, we'd surely be in major Cosmic Joke Territory) managed to keep the man at the threshold until the police arrived. It took a total of six police officers to restrain and arrest him.

Later that same week, J.P. received a telephone call from the shop where his girlfriend worked informing him that there had been an armed robbery. The staff, including his beloved, had been held at knifepoint while the robbers set about raiding the safe.

Not long after this, a friend emerged from the couples toilet shouting that she had just seen the lock on the inside of the door unbolt of its own accord. At 2 am, on another night, a shelf which had been up for the previous six months suddenly fell off the wall at the end of their bed.

I don't know about you, but it's the thought of that stranger screaming about the Devil that gives me a dose of the shivers...

14th June, 2000 Croydon, Surrey. 'DAILYMAIL'

House Complete With Resident Ghost Up For Grabs

Ray and Maureen Ronson were reportedly so attached to the phantom that they believe haunts their home that even though they have finally decided to up sticks and sell, they stipulated that any would-be buyer would have to sign a clause promising never to carry out an exorcism.

The ghost is thought to be an ex-docker who lived in the 120-year-old terraced cottage.

When Ray and Maureen moved in they christened the spirit Old Tom, even though, at first, the ghost seemed less than pleased with their stepping over the threshold.

Now however, whenever the spook chooses to manifest, the couple simply shout 'Be quiet, Tom,' or 'Give it a rest,' and Old Tom usually does just that.

Maureen, 39, told reporters; *'The ghost never really frightened us. Old Tom likes peace and quiet and hates loud music on the TV. To think that someone might buy our house and try to get rid of him is unthinkable.'*

The property at Barry, South Wales, is currently (at the time of going to press, anyway) on the market for £49,950.

Ray, 37, said; *'Old Tom is a part of the fixtures and fittings and must remain in his favourite haunt.'*

14th May, 2000 Barry, South Wales 'DAILYMANC'

New Hope For The Swan Who Nearly Died Of A Broken Heart

A swan by the name of Tiv almost lost her will to live after her old mate, christened, for some unknown reason, with the less than flattering moniker of Father, suddenly fell ill and died last year.

The fatality was incurred thanks to an attack by a bunch of sicko vandals who got their kicks by shooting at the pair of

defenceless swans. Tiv, although injured, pulled through, but facing up to life without her partner seemed to be more than she could bear.

Swans mate for life, and after the best part of 20 years together, Tiv had all but given up and grew gravely ill herself.

Fortunately however, the Cotswald Swan Rescue Centre, based in Cirencester, sprang into action and, I'm glad to say, made a full recovery. Not only that, but it seems Tiv has fallen for another. She has met up with a new male at the centre, who, coincidentally, was also suffering from a bout of trauma.

Paul Richardson, acting as spokesman for the team at the sanctuary, told reporters; *'Bereaved swans have died of a broken heart. But Tiv and her new partner are now looking vey well, because they have each other.'*

13th June, 2000 Cirencester 'NEWS OF THE WORLD.'

The Goat That Gave Birth To A Lamb

Sometimes, no strike that, more often than not, when I'm busy putting together this little collection of anomalies, I come across an item so plainly out of whack with what passes for accepted reality that it makes me do a double-take - the sort perfected by comedians like Abbott & Costello as they catch sight of The Mummy, The Frankenstein Monster or Mr Hyde.

My first encounter with the following newspaper snippet is certainly a case in point...

According to 'THE LIVERPOOL DAILY POST,' TV scriptwriter Carla Lane (responsible for Merseyside set sit-coms 'THE LIVER BIRDS' and 'BREAD,' amongst others) had been left speechless after discovering that a goat at her animal sanctuary had given birth to a lamb.

Miss Lane had christened the lamb Cilla, after the presenter (and 'professional Scouser') Cilla Black.

The animal welfare campaigner was quoted as saying; *'We are dumbfounded. We looked to see if there was anything about it that was a goat but it is most definitely a lamb.'*

'It has got the waggly tail, the tight curly coat, a little lamb's face, and the lamb's bleat which is different from a goat's bleat.'

'The vet came to see her and just shook his head and said; "That is a lamb." There was nothing wrong with either of them. We just wanted confirmation.'

No one seemed to have a clue as to how the cross-breeding had come about, although that didn't stop people theorising. One suggestion was that Molly the goat had been placed in a field full of rescued rams...and you can use your imagination to conclude what may have happened next: Cilla (the lamb, not the TV presenter. So far as we know, anyway) maybe the product of a mass sheep-goat gang bang.

Animal 'experts' were also amazed by the incident, saying, quite reasonably, that they had never before heard of a goat giving birth to a lamb.

One doctor, equally reasonably, you may think, declared the whole thing to be impossible, whilst David Noakes, professor of veterinary obstetrics and diseases of reproduction at London University, stated that there was no scientific evidence available that lambs and goats had been known to successfully cross-breed.

He added; *'It is well-known that, if you cross goats and sheep, you will get fertilisation and development of an embryo or a foetus but invariably the foetus does not survive. There has been some anecdotal evidence that sheep-goat hybrids have been carried to term but, as far as I know, it is only anecdotal.'*

Doctor Agnes Winter, is the aforementioned luminary who has declared the whole thing to be impossible.

She is head of the farm animals division at Liverpool University, and she has this to say on the subject; *'It is physiologically impossible for a goat to give birth to a lamb. Either a sheep has given birth and a goat has mothered it or it is a goat's kid that looks like a lamb.'* Meanwhile, David Wilson, lecturer in farm animal medicine at Edinburgh University, added his tuppence worth by stating; *'Sheep-goat matings may occur but it is usually an abortion or a failed pregnancy. Hybrid sheep-goats have been made using artificial techniques but this is not the situation they are talking about here. This is something we have never heard about. It certainly suggests they should look for other explanations.'*
6th June, 2000 Horsted Keynes, West Sussex 'LIVERPOOL DAILY POST'

Cockroaches Have Brains In Their Behinds

Doesn't science perform so many damn near-miraculous feats: the most amazing, worthwhile things...Splitting the atom, faster than sound travel, manned rockets to the moon (unless the conspiracy theorists got it right, and the whole shebang took place on some elaborate film set in New Mexico, or Nevada, or wherever), and now, wonder of wonders, scientists have discovered something that will doubtlessly greatly benefit mankind.... They have found that the common cockroach thinks with its bottom to get (if you'll pardon the pun) get *wind* of impending attacks.

Yeah, it's okay. You can have a seat if you're feeling a trifle giddy at the import of this revelation. There's still a bit more to relate, yet.

Studies of the cockroach, *Periplaneta americana*, have shown that it is able to sense minute changes in the air flowing around its body using tiny hairs on two posterior appendages called "cerci."

Signals from the hairs feed into a group of 14 nerve cells which pick out information on prevailing air movement so that the roach can make good its escape.

The finding shows just why the vacuum cleaner is the cockroaches worst nightmare.

'If a vacuum cleaner approaches from behind a cockroach, the wind goes from its head to the nozzle,' one of those estimable doctors, Hananel Davidowitz, of the NEC research institute, New Jersey, told journalists.

'It thinks the attack is from the front and it turns around and runs straight up the nozzle.'

15th June, 2000 New Jersey, USA 'NATURE MAGAZINE'

Einstein The Rat Versus The Ratcatcher

And here's a classic story, that reads like the script for a *LOONEY-TOONS*' cartoon....

Tore Fauske, a 69-year-old man from Great Witcombe, Gloucestershire, has been plagued by a common brown rat for longer than he would care to dwell on.

The rat has displayed such a level of intelligence in avoiding the many traps that have been laid for it, that Tore, at his wits end, has taken to calling the pesky rodent Einstein.

In a bid to stop the rat burrowing into his shrubbery, Mr Fauske began the doomed ritual of setting various traps. When that failed miserably, he bought a humane cage complete with one of those sliding doors that snap shut when the victim has been enticed inside. Normally, this method is pretty much foolproof, not to say infinitely less cruel than employing one of those decapitating steel traps. I know. I speak from experience. I've lost count of the

number of mice we've caught in our house by utilising just such a trap.

And so it proved in this case. Einstein failed to resist the bait of a goodly-sized chunk of 'MARS BAR,' (and hell, who can blame him? A daily bar of this chocolate helps you work and rest and play, remember?). In an act of charity which he would later come to regret, Mr Fauske released the rat in the midst of the woods a good 500 yards from his house.

Predictably, Einstein came right on back the following day, doubtless tempted by the mouth-watering prospect of more 'MARS BARS'

Kicking himself for being so lenient in his dealings with the rat, Tore set the trap again with Einstein's favourite chocolate.

This time however, the rodent had learned from his mistake and promptly burrowed under the trap to get at the bait.

On a further 13 occasions, Einstein succeeded in avoiding capture, but his luck or ingenuity, finally ran out at the end of May. This time, Tore refused to take any chances and drove him two miles to a patch of isolated woodland.

Einstein must have been one of Basil Fawley's fabled 'homing rats,' however, because incredibly, following an epic journey through woods and across fields and rivers, he came back to haunt Tore Fauske.

The perplexed (not to say grudgingly admiring) would-be ratcatcher had this to say regarding the battle between rodent and man; *'I couldn't believe it when he popped up again. I could put posion down but it doesn't seem fair.'*

'This is a battle of wits and I am not going to be outsmarted by any rodent. Next time I'll take him 20 miles away to the Forest of Dean.'

27th June, 2000 Great Witcombe, Gloucestershire 'THE DAILY TELEGRAPH.'

Symbol Of Fertility Comes Crashing Down To Earth

The stork has long been associated with fertility beliefs. Witness the age-old fairy-tale that we still relate to our children concerning the origin of babies (prior to that embarrassingly awkward revelation concerning 'the facts of life' which, if the truth be told, the child has likely picked up in the school playground several months earlier, but rather than let them off the hook, they take a perverse pleasure in seeing their parents squirm and suffer with the telling, anyway).

There is also a long-held superstition that holds that if a stork chooses to nest on the roof of a house, those within will be blessed with a new-born baby in the near future.

You can doubtless well appreciate the feelings of consternation that have pervaded the town of Guadarrama, north of Madrid, then, when you hear that a storks' nest weighing half a ton, and which had been a symbol of fertility for more than 50 years has plunged from the tower of the town's main church, killing three chicks.

Local women had come to regard the stork's continued presence as bringing luck in raising families.

31st May, 2000 Guadarrama, north of Madrid, Spain 'THE DAILY TELEGRAPH'

A Distinctly Out-Of-Place Centipede

David Keating, a worker based at Liverpool's Edge Lane Fruit Market, had a hell of a shock when he came to check a bunch of bananas as part of the stock for his boss. A potentially dealy, four-inch tropical centipede crawled out, and scuttled towards him.

Fortunately, David, 42, reacted quickly.

'I am not squeamish and I am not frightened of spiders. But the sheer size of this thing made me sit up and take notice.

'We have found all sorts of odd creatures down here, but this was so big it almost cleared the place. Someone wanted to stand on it, but I thought we should save it.

'So I picked it up on a piece of cardboard and put it in a jam jar to take it to the museum.'

'Experts' at Liverpool Museum's Natural History Centre later claimed that that the insect, which at the time of going to press, still hadn't been positively identified, had a potentially lethal venomous bite.

28th June, 2000 Edge Lane Fruit Market, Liverpool
'LIVERPOOL ECHO'

The Animals Strike Back: 2

Day Of The Locusts, Jumping Sharks, Killer Ants, Dead-Eye Dogs And Dog-Napping Owls



Like some modern-day equivalent of one of the Biblical plagues visited by a vengeful God upon the people of Egypt, a swarm of some 10 billion locusts threatened to devastate the crops of another nation, half-way across the world...Australia.

Farmers throughout New South Wales, were bracing themselves last April for the attack, which is believed to be the biggest for more than a decade.

An unusually hot and wet summer has been nominated as the prime cause of the locust population explosion, providing, as it does, ideal breeding conditions for the voracious creatures.

'This is the most serious threat of a major plague in 15 years,' state agriculture executive director Geoffrey File, told reporters at the time.

Cereal crops had already been damaged and the wine industry was also in dire danger. It is estimated the plague may have caused up to £100 million worth of damage.

Locusts, like a vacuum cleaner to a cockroach, are a farmer's worst nightmare. They can devour several tons of plants every day.

Craig Walker (no relation - Ed) senior insect keeper at London Zoo, gave this summation of the crisis facing the country: *'A swarm of 50 million locusts can eat the equivalent of a years' supply of human food in one day, so you can imagine the effect 10 billion will have. If it's in an agricultural area the swarm could literally strip the area of crops. Locusts aren't at all fussy. It it's green they'll eat it.*

'Locusts are a type of grasshopper. When food supplies are abundant they breed very quickly but eventually they run out of food for their increased population.

'This causes them to join together in bands to hunt for food. Baby locusts, called nymphs, cannot fly so unite so walk across the countryside marching and eating.

'Adults can often travel up to 600 kilometres overnight, which can lead to the sudden appearance of large numbers in areas previously unaffected.

'Big swarms can take a day to pass. They cause the sky to darken and it will seem like an eclipse. The sound of their wings can be deafening.'

28th April, 2000 Australia **'THE DAILY EXPRESS'**

*** Another instance of a European Eagle Owl menacing unwary pets (see elsewhere in this issue) occurred in the village of Stebbing, Essex, last Spring.

Nicknamed Eddie, (oh, the wit of the English knows no bounds) the bird with a 6ft wingspan, was thought, by some, to have escaped from a private collection, although typically, so far as anyone has been able to relate, no one had stepped forward to claim responsibility.

The lovelorn owl had apparently set his sights on a female of the same species called Charlie, kept in the aviary of the Spalding family who live in the middle of the village. His affections unrequited, Eddie set about feeding on ducks residing at the village pond as well as attacking pet rabbits, cats and even dogs.

He had been causing such a racket with his raucous mating calls that the inhabitants of Stebbing were unable to sleep at night.

Yvonne Spalding, whose son Robert also has two male European eagle owls in a collection of 20 eagles, told reporters; *'Eddie flies up to the cage and feeds on dead chicks that Robert puts out, but he is too crafty to be captured.*

'Robert put a cage out the other day with a chick in it, but the owl just went in, grabbed the chick, and walked out again (maybe he's been taking trap-evading lessons from our old friend Einstein The Homing Rat - see elsewhere this issue).

'I really do think Eddie has become besotted with Charlie. Some people around here are really worried about him, but now he's getting more food, I don't think he'll attack any more pets.'

This piece of good news came all but too late for one of Eddie's nearly-victims, however. Muffin, a nine-year-old mongrel, was in its owners back garden when the eagle owl attacked him from behind.

Jennifer Nichol, the dog's owner, said later, *'Muffin did not hear the owl swooping. It must have touched him, because he yelped and then started barking.'*

Next door neighbour Mavis Butson, who has a pond in her garden, added that; *'I saw the owl trying to grab hold of some ducks and my cat. It is starting to worry us, I am keeping my cat indoors.'*

19th April, 2000 Stebbing, Essex **'DAILY MAIL'**

*** Meanwhile, over in The City Of Angels, a 77-year-old woman was walking along a quiet suburban street when she paused to flick something away from her hair.

A few moments later, she was rolling on the pavement screaming in agony as a swarm of killer bees attacked her with a frightening ferocity.

Up to 20,000 bees were involved, covering her like a dark cloud, stinging her more than 500 times.

The pensioner staggered into the middle of Maryland Parkway in Las Vegas, bringing traffic to a standstill. Two people who rushed out of their homes to help the stricken lady were forced back by the bees. The first two police officers to arrive were stung and had to call the fire department for assistance.

For between seven and ten minutes police, drivers and passers-by could only watch helplessly. Fire department spokesman Tim Scymanski said; *'It was a horrible, terrifying scene. The woman was sitting on the kerb thrashing at the bees. She was sobbing with pain and the bees kept coming in.'*

'We finally had to use our hoses to drench the victim and the insects.'

Thousands of bees were washed across the pavement and two firemen were stung brushing more off the woman before they could take her to a hospital, where she was in a critical condition.

Rodney Mehring, head of BeeMaster pest control, was quoted as saying; *'She is lucky to be alive. We tracked down the hive to the hollow of an old tree and destroyed it. We estimate that it contained up to 40,000 killer bees. Given that between 50 and 60 per cent of the hive gets involved in an attack, it's likely that 20,000 tried to sting her.'*

The Nevada Division of Agriculture described the insects as *'Africanised,'* referring to the aggressive hybrid that invades the hives of domesticated bees and then produces ferocious bees that will attack at the slightest provocation.

'Simply swatting one might have triggered the mass attack, or they may have been affected by something in her handbag.'

'This state is fighting an invasion of these killer bees. They came from a Brazilian experiment in 1957, when African bees were crossbred with the European Honey Bee.'

'Several escaped, and since then an estimated 1,000 people have been killed by the bees in Brazil. By 1990, the bees were crossing into the United States, where, so far, seven people have died.'

'The sting is no different from a honey bee. It is the mass technique that can kill.'

19th April, 2000 Las Vegas, USA *'THE TIMES.'*

*** How's this for a creature attack devoid of any degree of mercy...

An Alzheimer's disease victim with the rather wonderful name of Mary L. Morales Gay, aged 87, was killed after she was bitten a total of 1,627 times by a swarm of red ants or fire ants in her bed at a nursing home.

25th May, 2000 Sarasota, Florida, USA *'DAILYMANC'*

*** Here's another tale that sounds uncannily like it has been lifted direct from a *'TOM AND JERRY'* cartoon. Carlo the cat ran clean out of lives when he elected to tease Rolf, the hunting dawg.

The hound was so wound up by the feline's antics that he pounced on his master's gun and shot the cat dead.

The incident occurred outside a beer garden in Gmund, Austria, as the local hunt returned from a day's senseless killing in the name of 'sport.'

Rolf's owner, doubtless well-pleased with his dog's shooting abilities, told reporters; *'He went mad but the cat didn't seem in the slightest bit bothered. I was putting the gun in my car boot when the dog jumped on the trigger shooting the cat dead.'*

28th April, 2000 Gmund, Austria *'DAILYEXPRESS'*

*** A shark, that may have been seeking to emulate the super-intelligent breed featured in the movie *'DEEP BLUE SEA,'* actually leapt out of its tank, and crash landed amongst a terrified crowd, including children, at the Sea Life Centre in Portsmouth.

The three-foot-long bull huss jumped out, was placed gingerly back into the tank, and then promptly leapt out again.

Karen Bulbeck, of Emsworth, Hampshire, was watching the show with her daughters, and later described what happened. *'People screamed and got out of the way. My daughters were very scared.'*

Peter Jones, a spokesman from the Centre, added; *'The keepers were trying to get across that most sharks are not dangerous. The crowd must have got a shock but the bull huss is completely harmless.'*

28th April, 2000 Sea Life Centre, Portsmouth *'DAILY TELEGRAPH'*

Tales From The Dark Side of The Earth

Every so often, usually on a slow news day, perhaps at the height of the so-called 'Summer Silly Season, a feature will crop up in the media purporting to provide the definitive proof of the reality of some form of unexplained phenomena or other. Usually, it's either those ever reliable stalwarts; Corn Circles, UFOs or The Loch Ness Monster. This year, however, the paranormal trend appears to be very much rooted in the permanently twilight realms of ghostly lore and Demonology.

Witness the following....



In early June this year, whilst most of the country's attention was firmly fixed upon events taking place in Holland and Belgium, The Reverend Tom Willis came forward to announce that he has worked as an 'official minister of deliverance,' an Exorcist, in simple English, for the past 40 years.

It seems that the battle against the myriad legions of Hell, on a literal, as opposed to purely symbolic basis, is not solely being fought by the 'superstition riddled' Catholic Church, as is popularly supposed.

Armed with the traditional vials of Holy Water and the power of prayer, the good Reverend, who hails from the York diocese, and is of the Protestant faith, declared he has been on a mission to 'combat paranormal manifestations of evil.'

His timing was immaculate. On June 9th, the Church of England publicly stated that it accepted the reality of the existence of ghosts and demons in the shape of a report led by a senior bishop and endorsed by the Archbishop of Canterbury himself, Dr George Carey.

The report stated that; 'Evil oppression or possession cannot always be explained away in medical or psychological terms.'

The Rev Willis was formerly the Archbishop of York's adviser on occult matters, and declared himself to be well pleased with the Church's decision to announce its belief in the paranormal. As an institution they had previously been somewhat reluctant to even openly discuss such a sensitive topic.

'It's good that the Church is more open about these issues because they are happening,' Mr Willis was quoted as saying. 'I have been entirely convinced of the existence of the supernatural for so long now that my work often seems almost prosaic'

'It's fulfilling however because you are bringing peace to a very disturbed situation. I get about one haunting reported every week and I also counsel people who have been dabbling in the occult, but actual possession is a rare thing. I've only seen in for real three or four times - more usually, it's simply mental illness and you have to have dabbled strongly. You don't get possessed simply walking to the supermarket.'

Mr Willis, now aged 69, retired as vicar of Trinity Church in Bridlington and St John's in nearby Sewerby, East Yorkshire, in 1996. But he decided to continue his career as a consultant 'Exorcist' to the Church, just the same.

Referrals have come from social workers, the police and the Samaritans. His training courses for clergy are as remarkable as they are unorthodox. For example, in February, 1995, the agenda detailed; 'Morning Eucharist, Physical Hauntings, Poltergeists, Evensong, Dinner.'

Whether it was purely down to Mr Willis's efforts or merely coincidence, York diocese was one of the first in Britain to 'get organised' in matters of the paranormal.

In the hundreds of years that preceded the repeal of the Witchcraft Act of 1951, there has been a huge surge of interest in the occult. As the British Isles were gripped with all manner of experimentation with oulja boards, tarot cards and seances, the Church felt compelled to intervene.

'The late Archbishop decided that we had to create a procedure to deal with these issues.'

'There are now nine Church of England Ministers Of Deliverance in this area alone.'

'When approached for help from people claiming episodes of occult disturbance, the diocese has a three-stage plan. We check the accuracy of the claim, make a diagnosis, then apply some appropriate healing. Making a diagnosis is fairly straightforward. Most of the stuff is very familiar. I use this to separate the fantasists and the mentally ill and work with the medical profession in order to achieve this. You have to ask, is this person flipping out or saying something genuine?'

'When a diagnosis is due, paranormal activity falls into one of five interrelated categories. Firstly, there are two or three dimensional apparitions. Then there are physical hauntings; the movement of furniture or objects, doors opening, rooms going cold, peculiar smells. Poltergeists are another problem.'

'Then there are Evil presences when people claim a particular room or person or object has Evil within them - this is usually when someone has actively been worshipping

Evil. Finally, there is the fallout of people dabbling in the occult.'

'Action is usually taken using Holy Water and the power of prayer. "The peace of God will return to this place."



'One of the most extraordinary cases involved a trawler that had docked in Bridlington harbour. The steering engine and radar were malfunctioning and the crew had seen an apparition of a man who wasn't one of the crew. The crew wouldn't work and were demanding that the trawler be exorcised.'

'I managed to track down a previous skipper who told me that his time on the boat had been the worst eighteen months of his life. His crew had experienced cold spots and heard people who weren't there climbing into bunks. Research revealed that a man had been washed overboard in Ireland years before. His body had never been found. I prayed for the repose of his soul and blessed the boat. They went back out to sea and had the best catch of their season.'

'I rarely see ghosts and do not claim to be psychic. But once, sitting with a mother and son who were having problems with a Poltergeist a massive bolt of electricity went through me. My head whiplashed and my hands and legs locked together. As I crumpled I saw the mother and son do the same.'

'Occasionally, I'll get a zig-zaggy feeling, as though some instinct inside me as if saying that there is something out there.'

'The strongest experience of what I call the zig-zags came when I was conducting a communion service. I felt love, euphoria, holiness and beauty shimmering all around me. I said aloud; "I don't know who or what you are, but we are one in Christ, peace be with you."

'It shimmered to a climax before leaving.'

'I am uncertain as to its identity, but I am open to the suggestion that it was an Angel.'

'Paranormal activity doesn't scare me because faith is my shield, my fear is only myself.

'Humility is vital. It's not me that's dealing with it, I'm just bringing the channel of God's power. But if I wasn't prayerful and just rushed in where Angels fear to tread I would find problems. The one time I forgot this I had helped three women who had seen distressing visions of a mutilated doll. When I got home my wife told me that she had had a nightmare where she'd smashed a disfigured doll. She had immediately blessed the children, and I now regularly say prayers of protection for my family.

'There is certainly Evil around.'

10th June, 2000 General 'DAILY EXPRESS.'

Exorcisms Are Becoming More Popular

And hot on the heels of the previous snippet, comes news of a spate of unauthorised Exorcisms that are apparently becoming increasingly widespread in the aforementioned Church of England.

According to a statement by the Synod, it has affirmed the healing ministry as an *'essential part of the Church's ministry and mission,'* and confirmed guidelines that Exorcisms should be authorised by a bishop.

The Bishop of Chelmsford, the Rt Reverend John Perry, who headed a working group that produced a report on healing, said that the ministry of *"deliverance from evil" should be kept before us as we explore the ministry of healing.'*

10th July, 2000 General 'THE DAILY TELEGRAPH.'

*** Meanwhile, in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, a paedophile resident of that country, convicted of raping children, together with a Sudanese man found guilty of sorcery, were beheaded in the nation's capital.

1st March, 2000 Riyadh, Saudi Arabia ASSOCIATED PRESS

The Witches Of Eastwick

And here's yet another case of life imitating art, ladies and gentlemen...

In amongst the tiny population of 150 souls living in the sleepy, idyllic English village of Eastwick, there just happens to be, (in common with hit movie) the archetypal three Witches.

These otherwise typical country housewives, Brenda Gallantree, Sharon Hillman and Joanne Farr, openly admit that they are not the most powerful of sorceresses. *'The only spells we ever cast are on our husbands,'* Brenda has gone on record as saying. *'But we are all very interested in the subject.'*

Eastwick too it seems, can hardly lay any claims to being the centre of the Wicca universe, in the same way as say, Lancaster, Glastonbury or Pendle. It's apparently so miniscule, you could be forgiven for driving right on past it without even being aware of its existence. Should you stumble upon the tiny collection of cottages however, and head for the local pub, you are sure to be regaled with tales of how yonder graveyard, filled with centuries-old tombstones, is rumoured to be haunted by strange unearthly cries after midnight. At present there is no vicar and St Botolph's Church stands locked, silent and empty.

That there is a real-life Eastwick will doubtless come as something of a surprise to John Updike, the American writer whose original 1984 novel *'THE WITCHES OF EASTWICK'* was turned into the hugely successful film of the same name.

Quite why the author chose to call his fictional village Eastwick, aside from the fact that it's a strangely evocative name, is something of a mystery.

It is suspected however, that he scanned the gazetteer and spotted the village quite by chance. He lives in Beverly, a northern Boston suburb close to Salem, the site of the infamous Witch trials of the 17th century.



According to the author of the article, I came across has pointed out that the area around Eastwick is riddled with superstition and legends of Witchcraft. Records show that between the 15th and 18th centuries, many women were executed in the area after being found guilty of practising Witchcraft.

Jane Wenham, the last woman to be tried and sentenced to death in Britain, for dabbling in the Black Arts was reprieved and lived out the rest of her days, lived near Eastwick. Originally from Walkerne in Hertfordshire, had fallen foul in 1712, of a young girl named Ann Thorn. She was accused of being able to fly over a gate. Charges were later brought and she had to appear at the local assizes before Mr Justice Powell.

He proved to be, given the comparative ignorance of the times, a remarkably enlightened judge who clearly did not believe in the reality of Witchcraft and saw the charges for what they in fact were... Personal grudges.

But every witness who came up was a vicar and they gave evidence against Jane, claiming that she had even been seen to fly. This further irritated Mr Justice Powell who said that as far as he knew there was no law preventing anyone from flying.

Despite the Judge's favourable summing up however, the jury found Jane guilty and she was duly sentenced to hang. The case caused something of a furore. There was no national press at the time, but there were many pamphlets published on the trial, all of them in Jane's favour.

Mr Justice Powell used his not inconsiderable influence to try to prevent the hanging. He was very well connected and managed to make a personal plea to Queen Anne herself on Jane's behalf. The fact that he was extremely eloquent

ensured that the Queen took it upon herself to personally intervene and pardon Jane.

And after the trial, Jane Wenham was 'befriended' by a gentleman from Eastwick who gave her a small pension and a cottage in the area. She became very popular and lived in Eastwick until her death in 1730.

To return to the present day, the three would-be Witches of Eastwick have taken to dressing all in black and to take turns carrying a traditional broomstick.

'It is rather spooky, claims Sharon, 'but at one point we all had black cats, like real Witches. What are they called? Familiar. My black cat died and so we got a ginger one and I couldn't very well spray it black.'

1st July, 2000 Eastwick, England 'SUNDAY EXPRESS'

Show Horse Sacrificed In Black Magic Ritual

A year-old gelding was found near Weston-Super-Mare, in Somerset, was stabbed in the neck and stomach, and had one of its ears hacked off.



The sick individuals who carried out this awful attack were suspected by some of being Satanists involved in some kind of Black Magic sacrifice.

A so-called 'Pagan expert' Kevin Carolyn, told reporters; *'The timing of this with the Full Moon would suggest it was an occult killing.'*

'Some idiots believe it is a potent time to draw energy from animals so I'd put this down to Black Magic - a sacrificial ritual.'

21st July, 2000 Weston-Super-Mare, Somerset 'DAILY SLUR'

Evidence In Court From A Demon

A woman was jailed for four months in the United Arab Emirates for casting a spell on her husband and his sister, who became possessed by a Demon.

The woman, who wasn't named in the article I came across, told an Islamic court that she had been forced to turn to a sorcerer to help save her marriage, and that he had duly prescribed a potion to administer to the victims.

A committee of religious scholars appointed by the court claimed that they had contacted the Demon, who had confirmed that the wife had cast the spell.

4th April, 2000 Dubai, United Arab Emirates ASSOCIATED PRESS

The University Of Witches

Shock news from the ever-reliable pages of the Sunday press...

Apparently, students at St Andrew's University, in Scotland, where incidentally, Prince William is considering studying, is attempting to recruit up to 400 Witches.

The move for a 'Pagan Coven,' is said to have caused something of a storm at the University, and especially moved to comment was Catholic spokesman Monsignor Tom Connelly; *'This is the occult,'* he raged.

As for the University itself, well, one of their spokesmen stated; *'There is no institutional link between us and students' associations.'*

1st July, 2000 St Andrews University, Scotland 'NEWS OF THE WORLD'

The Deadly Charm

A childless Egyptian woman who sought the assistance of a snake charmer was killed when a fertility ritual went horribly wrong.

Nureddin Asim, 29, told Sadiya Zaki Suleiman, 37, who had been married for eleven years, that wrapping his snake around her neck would help her to become pregnant. Unfortunately, all it did was bite her ear and deliver a fatal blow.

17th April, 2000 Southern Egypt 'ASSOCIATED PRESS'

The Blood-Drinking Witch Of Nottingham

A security guard, who was also a male witch in his spare time, slashed his girlfriend's arm with a knife as they lay in bed so that he could feast on her blood.

John Munks, 28, told the terrified girl that he needed the blood for use in Witchcraft spells. He first cut himself and made her drink his blood, then cut her arm.

'She suffered intense pain,' Nottingham Crown Court was told, and she needed six stitches.

Munks, of Clipstone, Notts, admitted a charge of Section 20 Wounding and was jailed for 15 months.

24th May, 2000 Clipstone, Nottinghamshire 'DAILY SLUR'

THE HAUNTED BATHROOM

The curiously-named Geraint Benny, a 27-year-old man from Aberdare, Mid-Glamorgan, claims that his toilet has been invaded by the spirit of a sex-craved female.

Every time he goes to er, make an express delivery, the invisible entity creeps up and jabs him in the back.

'It's driving me round the U-bend,' wannabe comedian Geraint told reporters.

'I've even started wearing swimming trunks to cover my modesty in the bath after she started stroking my arm.'

'I know it's a female ghost because I can clearly smell a woman's scent, but I have no idea what she wants.'

'I am forced now to go round to a friend's house whenever I want to pee.'

'It's come to something when you daren't use the toilet in your own home.'

14th May, 2000 *Aberdare, Mid-Glamorgan, Wales*
'SUNDAY PEOPLE'

The Phantom Hound Of Wavertree & The Southport Poltergeist

Born and raised in Wavertree, Liverpool's very own psychic/ghosthunter, Billy Roberts claims to have personally witnessed several local apparitions firsthand. At the forefront of his earliest childhood memories in fact, are couple of sightings of the Phantom Black Labrador of Wavertree.

Billy told reporters from the local press; *'I was brought up in the area and both my mother and myself became quite used to seeing this black Labrador dog on Earle Road, outside Les Bissen's sweet shop.'*

'In my experience, a lot of so-called ghosts can appear as solid entities, and this dog was one.'

'It was so solid there was no way of telling that it wasn't the shop's pet dog, sitting large as life on the pavement... Until it suddenly vanished!'

'Loads of people used to see the ghost dog and talk about it, and I understand that it's still seen today, even though the shop has been demolished. The word is that the real dog was killed on that site during the Second World War, and because it met a violent death its spirit was unable to rest.'

'Not that this spectre is the only ghost to haunt the streets of Wavertree.'

'St Hugh's Church on Lawrence Road is apparently home to a ghostly priest who is seen entering or leaving the main door, only to disappear into thin air. I have seen him on numerous occasions. He's a short man who seems to look at you and smile, or sometimes even speak, before disappearing.'

Perhaps the most disturbing of Billy's encounters with the paranormal however, is that which occurred at the Old Palace Hotel in Southport. The place had a history of being dogged with ill fortune and was rumoured to be the site of Poltergeist activity.

Bill takes up the story; *'Apparently, the hotel was built back to front, and when the architect realised this he committed suicide by throwing himself down the lift-shaft.'*

'There were several further suicides at the hotel, on Knowley Road, and the lift was always stopping and starting for no apparent reason.'

'Eventually, it got to the point where no-one would stay at the hotel, so it was demolished.'

'However the houses which were built on the site were also affected. I was called in to investigate one of these houses which looked like an absolute bomb-site because the presence had caused so much destruction.'

'While I was there I was physically lifted three or four inches off the floor and pressed against a wall, which was so alarming it made me violently sick.'

'Needless to say, the owner had real problems trying to sell the property and I believe it went for a song and was later demolished.'

'I have done extensive research into the subject of ghosts and the theory behind their existence. Whilst I am sure that at least some apparitions are probably spirits that have not been able to pass over to the "Other Side," I tend to incline towards another theory for the majority of ghostly sightings. I believe that there is a substance in the atmosphere which acts almost like a photographic chemical and captures every single emotional event.'

'Sometimes something triggers these events to be replayed and we experience this as a haunting.'

'So if anyone loses their life in violent or sudden circumstances, for example, there is a powerful release of energy and a psychic "photograph" can be generated every so often.'

1st May, 2000 *Liverpool* **'LIVERPOOL ECHO'**

'Ghosts Just A Trick Of The Mind'

Someone who would most definitely beg to differ with the aforementioned Billy Roberts' thesis regarding ghosts however, is Peter Brugger, of the University Hospital, Zurich, Switzerland.

According to that learned gentleman, not only phantoms, but that other perennial mystery the Out Of Body Experience, can be satisfactorily explained by a form of brain damage.

The cause of these 'visions,' as Mr Brugger refers to them, is a malfunction of that part of the brain responsible for your perception of the body and surrounding space.

This brain damage theory is only the latest in a string of attempted scientific explanations for supernatural phenomena.

Other proposed theories include the effects of alcohol and drugs (no surprise there then), and forms of mental illness.

27th June, 2000 *General* **'NEWSCIENTIST'**

Another Fabulous Cabinet Of Curiosities



UFOs Are In Da House

Not long after the 21st anniversary of the Earl of Clancarty's address to the Upper House on UFOs, author Tim Coates has written a book on the subject, called, appropriately enough, *'UFOs In the House Of Lords.'*

It was on the evening of January 18th, 1979, smack in the middle of the so-called 'Winter of Discontent,' that the eighth Earl Of Clancarty stunned the usually all-but comatose assembled Lords by launching into a heartfelt speech concerning othewordly matters. He began by stating; *'It is with much pleasure that I introduce this debate about unidentified flying objects - known more briefly as UFOs and sometimes as flying saucers.'*

Although two whole decades have passed since this historic (from a ufological viewpoint, at least) address, and I was still at school at the time, I can recall quite clearly feeling somewhat vindicated in my belief that there was more to UFOs than just mere hoaxes and honest misperceptions of the perfectly explainable. After all, if the House of Lords were prepared to openly discuss the subject, there must be something to it.

I recall the media reacted with typical disdain.

These were cynical times. And with good reason. It was a winter of frequent snows and cruel frosts (hey, remember them, anybody?) The Government was in disarray, the country had virtually ground to a standstill, electrical blackouts and industrial strikes were the order of the day. People were more concerned with the state of the nation, stocking up on candles and bags of coal to seek diversion in more exotic matters.

Now however, thanks to a new series of books featuring the all-but forgotten nuggets hidden amongst government papers held by Her Majesty's Stationery Office, Clancarty's (whose name was actually Brinsley Le Poer Trench) ground-breaking speech can be revealed once more in all its glory.

His message was as radical as it was stark and simple: UFOs were a fact of life and governments worldwide were guilty of being involved in a cover-up of the truth.

'Just suppose,' he invited their fat and old Lordships, 'the "ufonauts" decided to make mass landings tomorrow in this country. There could well be panic here because our people have not been prepared.'

He then proceeded to present a concise history of the subject from sightings dating back to 1500 BC right up to the present day.

The time had seemed ripe for the Earl to seek to initiate the debate. Just a few weeks earlier three ducks, a goose a swan and two baby wallabies were found dead in mysterious circumstances at Newquay Zoo in Cornwall, and on January 3rd, it had been reported that their bodies revealed significant traces of radiation. Inevitably, this incident was tied in with a number of UFO sightings that had been reported in the area around about the same time.

And of course, on New Year's Eve, in the skies above Christchurch, New Zealand, Quentin Fogarty and a team of journalists had succeeded in capturing a UFO on film from their chartered airplane. The shaky, but fairly convincing footage had made headline news and was screened on BBC 1 as the lead story.

Clancarty, who died in 1995, felt that it was high time that an inter-governmental study of UFOs be instigated. As editor of the highly-respected 'FLYING SAUCER REVIEW,' he was regarded as being one of Britain's foremost ufologists. He believed that we owe our human condition to the intervention of Aliens from several galaxies (this accounted for our various skin colours), and that these benevolent races first visited the Earth 65,000 years ago. He was also of the opinion that at least one of those races still remained in vast underground bases. Asked what had happened to all these various Aliens, he once replied famously; 'Well, you do see a lot of strange people around, don't you?'

At the height of the debate, Clancarty was supported by another Earl, the Earl of Kimberley, a former Liberal spokesman on aerospace.

He was keen to add his voice to the discussion;

'I think the general public should be encouraged to come forward with evidence. Many do not for fear of being ridiculed. Let them be open. Let them be honest. Let them badger their Member of Parliament and the Government to be open with them and to cease what I am convinced is a cover up here. The people of Britain have a right to know all of the Governments, not only of this country but others throughout the world, know about UFOs.'

Equally supportive was Lord Rankellour, who was keen to stress that each year there were many sightings of UFOs, and that in most cases, the reaction of the witness (or witnesses) was one of extreme concern. And yet, such accounts were treated with at best disdain, and at worst, open ridicule, by those in positions of authority.

Returning to Mr Le Poer Trench, he was careful to refer to only the more reliable UFO sightings, such as the Iranian Incident that took place above Teheran in 1976.

The aerial dog-fight said to have taken place between a scrambled Phantom and a large glowing object, was as well-documented a case as any in recent times.

The time had come, the Earl believed, for the British Minister of Defence to make a public broadcast about UFOs.

'That would go a long way to discredit the view held by a lot of people in this country that there is a cover up here, and that in some way we are playing along with the United States over this.'

Such views were anathema to the majority of the House, of course. One of its members, Lord Trefgarne, a qualified pilot, who had never seen a UFO in 2,500 flying hours, was moved to comment, in doubtless patronising tones; 'Since time immemorial, man has ascribed those phenomena that he could not explain to some supernatural or extraterrestrial agents. Today, no one takes Witchcraft seriously (oh yeah, tell that to the assorted characters in this issues Witchcraft sections - Ed) and there are no Faeries at the bottom of my garden.'

As for Earl Clancarty, Brinsley Le Poer Trench, call him what you will, as far as is known, he never actually saw a UFO. He did once see an 'eerie white light' traversing the night sky over his flat in South Kensington, but this lack of first-hand evidence didn't once deter him from his belief that the phenomenon was real.

At the absolute minimum, his fellow peers (those of them still alive) should remain eternally grateful to the Earl for helping, if only for the briefest of moments, to 'take one's mind off the frightful everyday events of the Winter of Discontent.'

3rd June, 2000 House Of Lords, London 'DAILY EXPRESS'

The 'Nordics' Invade Huyton

The following account concerns an incident which was said to have occurred back in 1980. The reason for its inclusion here is simple. Up until Christmas 1998, I was involved in a local radio programme ('Billy & Wally's Breakfast show' broadcast on Radio City's 'Magic' station), and in response to a request for listener's personal paranormal experiences, I received a deluge of mail through my letterbox.

I filed most of them away for possible inclusion in this humble publication, and they remain there to this day, awaiting my attention.

However, one of the most interesting letters, and one which I intended to give priority to went AWOL, and it was only when I was putting the final touches to the issue you currently hold in your hands, that I came across it, crumpled and dog-eared, but fortunately still legible, in the middle of John Keel's paperback edition of 'UFOS: OPERATION TROJAN HORSE.'

I include it here (having decided, in deference to the writer to omit his real name) for your delectation....

'I have never told any strangers about the following as I was afraid they'd laugh. I've never even written about it before now, and have only ever told a few close friends.'

'I have no reason to make things up. I'm just an ordinary working person. But, after 18 years or so, I've decided to get it off my chest. The exact dates may be slightly out, but I'm sure it's not by much. I suppose you can always check up on them.'

'Anyway, here's my experience.'

'It was around about the August of 1980. around 9pm. Myself, my girlfriend at the times father "Ken," her sister's boyfriend "Derek," and "Ken's" youngest son "Stephen,"

who was aged about 10, were all off to shoot some rabbits, or rats at a spot we had been quite a few times before.

It was just before the M57/Switch Island/M58 interchange was finished. To get there we had to park the car by Old Roan Station, and walk across the motorway bridge, down the railway embankment to a field. On the other side was a construction site.

'We reached a bend at a small stream that runs through the area.

'We'd only been there a few minutes when, in the distance we saw two figures. They were sort of "misty-looking, greyish," and were standing about 400 yards away.

'I always remember that in between us and the figures was a person taking a dog for a walk. It was a large sheep dog, like the one in the 'Dubax' advert. Then that person disappeared behind some trees. As "Ken" had a shotgun with him he said that he'd better hide it in case it was a couple of farmers or someone in authority.

'We hid ourselves too!!!

'Suddenly, without warning, the two figures appeared no more than 50-70 yards away from us, right next to a small tunnel that the stream ran through. That was when we began to get scared.

'There was no earthly way that these two "people" could have covered that distance in what amounted to no more than 15 seconds.

'We were amazed.

'What was even more amazing was the fact that they were both completely identical. They were tall, dressed in a grey/silver boiler-type suit with a belt tied around. They both had very blonde shoulder-length hair. It was immaculate, like they'd both just come out of the local hairdresser's.

From my viewpoint, I was only able to see the back of the two figures, but I was nonetheless struck with the overriding impression that they were 'Nordic' in appearance.

"Derek," who had crept a bit closer to the figures than us, came running back towards where we were hiding. I will never forget the expression on his face. He said that they both had long finger nails and silver boots, like something out of "STAR TREK."

'I cannot claim to have seen these details myself, but I have no reason to disbelieve him. He looked to be genuinely scared.

'We watched as the two figures then went under the tunnel to the construction site. On impulse, and after a good few minutes had passed, we decided to follow them.

'We simply had to know who or what they were.

'When we got to the other side of the tunnel, we hid behind some port-a-cabins belonging to the workmen.

'The figures were there looking and pointing at the machinery, the diggers and tractors. We watched them for about 15 minutes.

'They then went behind a mound of earth and we lost sight of them.

'That was that.

'It was quite dark by then, and so we decided to set off for home.

'And that's when things got decidedly strange again. Just as we reached the bottom of the embankment two lights appeared some way off. They weren't especially bright, and I thought at first that they were the lights of some jeep-type vehicle. Thinking that the authorities really were heading in our direction, we panicked and started scrambling up the bank. "Ken" took young "Stephen" first and ran along the tracks to the motorway bridge.

'I was behind them at the top when "Derek" fell back down.

'I went back for him (very brave!). The lights were drawing closer so I just grabbed him and dragged him back up. The

lights never reached us. At the top of the bank we started running although "Derek" had hurt his foot. Turning, I saw two lights, this time on the railway line.

Oh God, it's just a train," I thought, and we ran like the wind avoiding the electrified third rail.

'We reached the other side of the tracks and safety at last.

'But a funny thing happened.

'No train ever came past us and the lights had simply disappeared!!!

'What were they?

'I can't remember if we went for a pint that night as we usually did after a hunt.

'But I do recall getting back around 10:30pm. I was really terrified and had a thumping headache.

'It took a while, but we all eventually calmed down, and recounted our encounter.

'Later, as was usual for us on a Saturday evening back then, we played cards in the kitchen. I was facing the door and the front window and I kept thinking I would look up and see that those two "people" had followed us here and would be glaring in at us...

'As a footnote to this weird experience, a few months later, there appeared a story in 'THE LIVERPOOL ECHO,' about a courting couple in the Ormskirk/Southport area, who said that they had been disturbed by someone outside their house. On looking out the window, they claimed to have seen two "people." Their descriptions of the humanoid matched ours exactly.

'And some years later, I read a book about a woman in Wales who lived near an RAF base. She claimed that she was once visited by two very good looking, Scandinavian "people" dressed in overalls.

'Again, the witness gave an identical description, although I think the RAF said nobody worked for them who answered to this description. The witness had, perhaps understandably, assumed the "people" came from the base. When I read this a shiver ran up my back!

'I can only tell you what we saw. All four of us saw the exact same thing, and I often wonder what would have happened if we had called out to the figures. Then again, maybe I should be glad that we didn't.'

The Terror Of The Daleks

As a child, I readily admit, I used to find certain episodes of 'DOCTOR WHO' incredibly scary. The Silurians. The giant maggots (from 'THE GREEN DEATH') The Sea Devils. The Autons. And yes, the Daleks, all of them had me staring in bug-eyed fascination and shivering with a delicious thrill of fear.

I guess it's fair to say that even now, as an adult, and in a considerably less innocent age, repeated viewings can still inspire at least a trace of that gut-churning dread. So it's kind of easy to sympathise with Shona McLaren, a 39-year-old mother or two who claims that she lives in mortal fear of the Daleks.

She is so terrified by them in fact, that the mere thought of them appearing on the television brings her out in a cold sweat. If she even hears the words "exterminate, exterminate, she experiences a fit of blind panic, and the (quite frankly) disturbing combination of that classic theme tune and hypnotic graphics causes her to hide behind the sofa.

Shona told reporters, somewhat sheepishly, 'I know they are fictional, but they genuinely scare me to death. I've always dreaded the thought of them coming anywhere near me. The sight of them on TV or in magazines drives me

mad, I'm a mature woman with two children that doesn't lessen my fear of them in anyway.

'Daleks make me ill. They've ruined my life.'

That might at first seem like something of a dramatic overstatement, but it appears that Shona has sought medical assistance in conquering her fears and has even asked members of the local church in Tullibody, Clackmannanshire, to pray for her. She managed to hide her phobia for years, Debelving, perhaps quite understandably, that people would find the nature of her ailment somewhat amusing.

Shona's initial encounter with the dreaded Daleks came when she was just six years of age.

Shona states: *'The first time I saw the Daleks they scared the life out of me. One of my brothers told me there was a brilliant show on called 'DOCTOR WHO' and I sat down to watch.*

'Then I saw the Daleks. The silver body, the long arms and the antennae scared me witless - I had never seen anything so creepy.'

'I didn't like it at all and broke into a cold sweat, although my mum told me it was only make-believe. I just couldn't get them out of my head.'

'Then, when I was 11, I saw a boy in a Dalek outfit at a fancy dress party and I totally flipped.'

'Four years later, the phobia was so bad I asked the local minister and elders at my church to pray for me.'

'They had prayed for all sorts of things before but never to rid someone of their fear of the Daleks.'

'We prayed for more than an hour and I hoped that I would finally be rid of the curse. But as soon as the show came on a week later, the fear was just as bad.'

'I now live in fear of the BBC repeating any of the episodes, and I avoid the satellite channel 'UK GOLD,' and am dreadfully disappointed 'DOCTOR WHO' movie.

Shona's husband, Kevin, 42, was quoted as saying: *'I thought it was a joke at first and couldn't believe someone could be scared of Daleks, but I realised that it's a very real fear.'*

'We've just learned to cope. Even our sons, Steven and John grab the TV handset if something slightly related comes on.'

Mark Kenwright, a phobia 'expert' based at London's Maudsley Hospital, had this to say; *'It may seem strange to most people that she fears something as odd as the Daleks, but the fear is real to the sufferer.'*

'It can get to the point where the fear takes over someone's life and prevents them doing things they normally would.'

'As in this case, many phobias can be traced back to childhood experiences.'

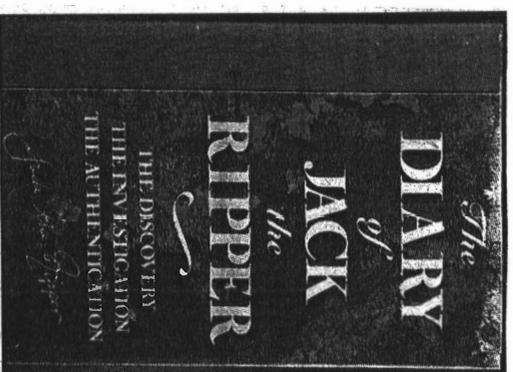
3rd July, 2000 Tullibody, Clackmannanshire, Scotland
DAILY SLUR

James Maybrick - The Cinematic Ripper

Hollywood moguls have descended upon the fair city of Liverpool intent upon filming what they hope will be a blockbuster featuring the story of James Maybrick - one of the candidates for the Terror Of Victorian London; Jack The Ripper. The publishers of *'THE DIARY OF JACK THE RIPPER'*, dismissed by sceptics, but not yet proven to be a clever fake, have confirmed that the movie will be filmed in and around the city of Liverpool. Shooting on the multi-million dollar production is due to begin next year as filmmakers are already scouting around for a worthy all-star cast to feature in the thriller.

Michael Gambon, who starred in Dennis Potter's 1988 TV mini-series, *'THE SINGING DETECTIVE'*, has been tipped for the lead role in the film.

Award-winning director, William Friedkin, who previous films include the classics *'THE EXORCIST'*, and *'THE FRENCH CONNECTION'*, and the decidedly not so brilliant *'THE GUARDIAN'*, has been tipped to direct the production for Paramount Pictures.



The movie will be based on the 1993 book which contains extracts from a journal thought to have been written by Maybrick. It is rumoured that it will be one of the biggest productions ever shot in Liverpool and is widely expected to be a box-office hit.

Locations for shooting will likely include Maybrick's former residence Battlecrease House, a rambling semi-detached mansion in leafy Riversdale Road, Alburgh, which overlooks Liverpool Cricket Club.

Maybrick died there after being subjected to a dose of arsenic poisoning in 1889, a year after the still unsolved Ripper murders of six prostitutes in Whitechapel, London. His American-born wife, Florence, was convicted of his murder at St George's Hall in July, 1889, in one of the most notorious trials of the century. After the intervention of the US Consul, her death sentence was commuted to life imprisonment.

In the alleged diary, Maybrick explains that he set off on his murder spree because of Florence's adultery with Alfred Brerley, another Liverpool cotton merchant.

Its pages contained information about the Ripper killings which were known only to Scotland Yard until well into the 1980's. The diary, quite predictably, given its contentious content provoked a high degree of controversy from some 'experts' who immediately pronounced it to be a fake, but the book, based on the extracts, narrated by Shirley Harrison, went on to sell millions of copies worldwide and has just gone into its fourth edition.

John Blake, managing director of London-based Blake Publishing, was quoted as saying: *'There has been an option on the film for some time now and it looks like it is moving along. They are going to start shooting and production next year. I know it is a major company and there is quite a lot of money involved and I can confirm that it is going ahead.'*

'We are really excited about it. This is an historic book. The most incredible book. These diaries were found and many 'experts' do seem to agree that they are genuine diaries of Jack The Ripper, but some people do dispute that.'

28th June, 2000 Liverpool 'LIVERPOOL DAILY POST'

The Spontaneously

Combusting Yucca Plant

An unwatered Yucca plant is believed to have caught fire spontaneously, damaging carpets and floorboards in a Northumberland flat.

The 4ft plant soaked up all the moisture from the peat in its pot while Carol Westgarth was away on holiday.

When she arrived home from Spain, she went to bed and was awakened by the smell of smoke.

She thought that there was an electrical fault, but when she turned off the power, she noticed that the Yucca was smouldering in her living room.

'I could see the cinders where the plant was and I phoned the fire brigade straight away,' she later told reporters.

Fire investigators believe that the parched peat began to burn by itself.

Mrs Westgarth, of Blyth, said; *'When I saw the smoke it didn't even cross my mind that it might be the plant. I couldn't believe it when the fire brigade said that it was that that caused it. There's a huge hole in the plant pot, but the Yucca is fine, really. I was absolutely terrified. All the floorboards were damaged and the carpet will cost several hundred pounds to repair.'*

Sub-officer Tony Sewell of Blyth Fire Station decided the only possible cause was the Yucca.

'There is no other explanation. There were no electrics, no heat source and no cigarettes were involved.

'I have never known anything like it. It was a very strange incident. The fire seems to have spread from the centre of the plastic pot.

'Some materials, like haystacks, are known to suffer spontaneous combustion and that's all we can think of.

'If there is a moral to this story it must be "Always water your Yuccas if they are planted in peat.'

Andrew Bailey, of the Norfolk horticultural firm Blooms of Bressingham, begged to differ however. He told reporters; *'As far as I am aware Yuccas are not renowned for spontaneously combusting. Peat though, is very flammable material and can be used as a fuel, but I have never heard of it catching fire before now*

2nd December, 1999 Blyth, Northumberland THE DAILY TELEGRAPH'

ICEFALLS ACROSS SPAIN AND ITALY

In the early months of this year, parts of central Spain and Italy were subjected to a barrage of ice bombs that fell from the heavens with no discernible cause.

Of course, the usual teams of 'experts' were wheeled on to give their views, for what they were worth. Predictably, these 'explanations' centred upon the long-held theory that human waste product from passing aircraft, that had frozen during its plummet to earth, was to blame. Conveniently, these selfsame 'experts' neglected to mention that discourteously similar ice falls have been reported throughout recorded history, and certainly long before man possessed the technology to traverse the skies.

Oh, hang on a minute, maybe a small proportion of them have just seen the flaws in their (quite literally) crap hypothesis. When in January, at least 20 melon-sized ice balls crashed into various regions of Spain, the prevailing explanation was that they may have been debris from celestial comets.

Enrique Martinez, head of one of the teams studying the phenomenon at the grandly titled Higher Council of Scientific Investigation, was quoted as saying; *'They lack the typical colouring and texture we find in aircraft waste cases.'*

One man escaped serious injury in Southern Spain when an ice ball 8 inches in diameter and weighing 9lb, smashed into his car as he was talking to a friend.

Meanwhile, over in Ancona, Italy, a workman was hit on the head by a lump of ice weighing nearly two pounds which fell from the sky. The 24-year-old man was not seriously hurt as, luckily for him he was wearing two hats.

The incident was one of four reported across the country. A ball of ice the size of a pumpkin landed in central Milan, another hit a car near Bologna, and a block weighing in at 11lb landed on a golf course near Rome.

By the penultimate day of July, however, the 'experts' had dispensed with the more outlandish comet debris theory and returned to that old familiar standby, the waste from a passing aircraft. On this occasion, a block of ice left a three foot wide hole in the roof of a house, much closer to home, in Loughton, Essex.

The one foot square block smashed into the loft of the building but luckily no one was hurt.

Is it just me, or has anyone else ever noticed that these ice balls, 'residue from Magonia,' whatever they may be, show any uncanny knack of causing damage to cars and buildings, but very seldom is anyone physically hurt. Perhaps because on the rare occasions that they do strike someone they just happen to be wearing two hats!!!

*** Oh, and maybe it's not just ice balls that are kind of choosy about what they connect with...

Back in 1996, in Minneapolis, USA, a chunk of rock smashed through Rick Wirth's windshield.

He decided to keep the rock, which turned out, four years later to be a meteorite older than the Earth itself.

Paul Weiblen, professor emeritus at the University of Minnesota's Geology and Geophysics Department, confirmed the rock's origin, the July just gone.

Weiblen has estimated that in his 35 years at the university, he has seen literally thousands of rocks brought in by people who thought that they had found meteorites. And every one of them had turned out to have a more down-to-earth explanation as to their true origin.

But when he saw the rock that had broken through the windshield of Wirth's Geo Metro, Weiblen was convinced that his luck had finally changed.

'I feel every sample someone thinks might be a meteorite is worth looking at. But when I opened this package, I knew.'

With a grey interior and ash-black exterior, the halves sported the tell-tale signs that indicated they were meteorites. Further testing confirmed it.

For Wirth, the findings are vindication of his hunch about what happened to his windshield as he was driving in rural Wisconsin (doubtless seeking to avoid an encounter with the Beast Of Bray Road - See elsewhere in this issue) on October 21st, 1996.

'When I took it to work and told the guys that I had a meteorite, they said "Yeah, right" said Wirth, a welder from Clayton, Wisconsin.

Such finds, as Jordy Verill finds to his ultimate cost in 'CREEPSHOW,' are very rare. Scientists classify meteorites that hit the Earth in two broad categories: the "finds," where the specimens' entry were not observed, and "falls," specimens' like Wirth's whose descent from the sky was either witnessed or can be documented somehow, such a hole in a roof or car windshield.

Probably as little as 1,000 or so meteorites can be classified as falls.

Wirth has been in contact with a dealer and is interested in possibly selling his meteorite. The two pieces which fit together, weight about 3 ounces. The specimen could fetch several thousand dollars.

Weiblen, however, has said that being afforded the opportunity to study it has been damn near priceless. Some scientists say meteorites, including Wirth's, were formed 4.5 billion years ago, giving scientists a chance to examine something that they believe to be older than the Planet Earth itself.

'It's like a little messenger that came in the quiet of the night,' Weiblen poetically told reporters. 'It's telling a story of what happened around the time the Sun evolved and even before the Earth was formed.'

Let's just hope for their sakes, that Wirth and Weiblen haven't managed to avoid getting any of that green, fast-growing 'nuclear shrub' on them.
25th July, 2000 Wisconsin, USA MILWAUKEE JOURNAL SENTINEL'

Weird Cat Mutilations In The USA

Displaying an eerie similarity to the attacks in London, last year, police in Merrill, Wisconsin, (a state that certainly seems to be going all out right now to secure fully-fledged Window Area status), are baffled by the mysterious deaths of four orange cats, each found strangled with twine within a mile of each other.

'We literally have nothing to go on, 'Lincoln County Sheriff Paul Proulx told reporters. 'It's really hard - we have no suspects, no complaining witnesses. It's just the officers and one citizen who found these cats lying by the road.'

A Lincoln County sheriff's deputy found the first cat last October on the shoulder of County Highway K near Merrill, 96 miles north of Green Bay.

Since January of this year, officers have found three more cats in the same area that, bizarrely, were all the exact same colour and killed in precisely the same way. Two of the cats were found within two weeks of each other.

Since no cats have actually been reported as missing, the animals' bodies were destroyed without further investigation.

Police didn't immediately connect the incidents until recently, when two officers who found the cats separately, got talking.

'The first inclination was that somebody was being cruelly dumb and had tied a cat up with some twine. And it was just this one animal, until the officers got together and said; "Wait a minute, I saw one out there, too." Proulx said,

'They apparently thought the same thing - somebody had tied their cat with a piece of twine, the cat chewed through the twine and was later hit by a car.'

But now that the police have seen a pattern exists, detectives have begun an investigation.

25th May, 2000 Merrill, Wisconsin, USA 'APB NEWS'

*** Meanwhile, in Hawthorne, California, since July 1st, someone or something disconcertingly similar is going around decapitating cats in this Los Angeles suburb.

As many as 25 cats may have met their deaths in this cruel and grisly fashion, but police had not, at the time of going to press, managed to verify this total of killings.

In each of the four so far confirmed feline deaths, the body of a cat was discovered on a lawn in the early morning. The heads of all four cats are still missing.

The most recent victim, a cat named Muffin, was found on June 30th. The others, were discovered on the mornings of July 1st, 4th, and 5th, respectively.

None of the cats were strays.
The cats appear to have been targeted randomly, according to the investigating officer, Detective Joel Romero.

'Though in the first three cases, the injuries to the cats appear to have been caused by an instrument like a scalpel (echoes of the almost medically precise cattle mutilation cases that sometimes plague America, and other parts of the world, including Britain) 'the most recent feline was killed in a less precise manner.

'It might have been an animal bite, or it might be that the same person has thought to change their pattern of killing.'

Hawthorne police have since increased their patrols in the neighbourhood where the attacks have taken place, and officers have taken to calling at residents homes to warn them of the dangers to their pets.

While about two dozen of these same residents have reported that their cats have also been killed, none of them, understandably, thought to keep the bodies, so it's not clear whether these deaths are related.

The baffled Hawthorne Police Department called in the Society For Prevention of Cruelty to Animals to look into the case.

'This is completely new to us, and we're only just learning now how to handle these kinds of cases,' Romero was quoted as saying.

21st July, 2000 Los Angeles, California, USA 'APB NEWS'

THE INVISIBLE TERROR OF INDIA

In Dunka, India, the people of the Santal Pargana region are living in constant fear of being attacked by an Invisible Assassin known as the *Murkatw*.

The entity is said to arrive in the dead of night, chop off the heads of any children and then leave the scene.

Rumours of 'his' existence have spread like the proverbial wildfire throughout the whole Santal Pargana area.

The hysteria is such that people have stampeded through the streets, running and crying as though being chased by the *Murkatw*, an occurrence that has become so commonplace as to be scarcely worthy of making the news.

This contagion of fear seems to be centered upon rural areas or on the outskirts of town. Perhaps not surprisingly, the acceptance levels of belief in the reality of this phantom attacker are higher in regions where the population is poorly educated and is largely illiterate.

This cynical view aside however, the locals remain steadfast in their convictions that the 'thing' exists. One witness, Sufal Murmu told reporters that; *'If children are not available, he can attack adults too.'*

In Dunksa, the Mochi Para, Loot Para, Jarsala, Rashpur and Rakhabsal localities are the worst affected, where people spend sleepless nights, fully alert. Even the slightest nighttime cry can start them running in blind panic. Some of the braver souls have begun patrolling the area, armed with a bow and arrow and a powerful torch, after night fall.

Predictably, whilst the 'real' *Murkatw* has yet to be apprehended, plenty of innocent people have been accosted and received a good hiding for their troubles. One close relative of a local resident, who had arrived in the area from Calcutta, suffered serious injuries whilst he was on his evening walk. He was attacked by an unruly mob, simply because he happened to be a stranger in their midst. As is often the case at the height of such levels of hysteria, the rumour-mongers have been having a field day.

Consider for example, the stories doing the rounds that two children have been killed, four have absconded, and a Maruti van filled with gun-toting militants has been seen roaming the city streets on the wrong side of midnight.

The news of *Murkatw's* escapades humming down the wires from these remote villages have further fanned those aforementioned flames we referred to earlier. As one bus driver told reporters; *'Many villagers have abandoned their homes and fled away to adjoining West Bengal. My bus piles between Dunksa and Maheshpur. Many villagers have warned me not to go into that area.'*

The district administration had to resort to a large-scale announcement in an attempt to curb the rumour. It requested that the police should be immediately informed if any person is found loitering in a suspicious manner.

One Kalish Shah, a businessman, however, provides an interesting view on the whole episode; *'This is a conspiracy by torch and battery dealers to increase their goods' sale.*

'Go to any rural area and see the brisk business they are doing amidst this rumour.'

Ironically, Dumka district is one of the few districts of India where the National Literacy Mission has claimed to have been highly successful. Interestingly, the rumour of *Murkatwa* too, has been equally successful in this 'literate' district.

Attacks by so-called 'Invisible Assassins' have been recorded throughout history and, by their very nature, are often linked to outbreaks of Poltergeist activity.

Quite often, these indiscernible entities are reported to have a penchant for throwing stones like the 'Invisible Wights' of Robert Kirk's time (17th century).

Examples of the type of thing we're talking about here, though, can best be summed up with the inclusion of the following examples; In Comeda, Portugal, in 1919, a victim by the name of Homen Christo, was slapped so violently by an unseen something that he screamed out; *'for it seemed to him that fangs hooked his flesh to tear it out.'* In fact, four red finger marks were seen on his cheek immediately afterwards.

In Nanking, China, in 1876, there was an outbreak of hysteria surrounding a rumour that 'Invisible Demons' were going around snipping off people's pigtail. This might not seem to be the most terrible of price's to pay for undergoing demonic assault, but not long after the panic spread to Shanghai, and the attacks increased in severity to the attempted crushing of victims as they lay in their beds. Amazingly, this panic lasted for three years.

Later, in 1922, this 'hair-snipping' demon phenomenon was to be repeated much closer home, in London.

Perhaps the most dramatic, not to say bloodthirsty account relates to an incident said to have occurred in Ventimiglia, northern Italy, in 1761. A group of five women were returning from collecting sticks when suddenly, and without warning, one of them dropped dead. Her companions stood aghast with fear as they perceived that the dead woman's clothes and shoes had been torn to shreds and scattered up to six feet around her. There were wounds on her head that exposed the skull; the muscles on her right side had given way revealing her intestines; her sacrum was broken and most of the internal organs were ruptured or livid; her abdominal region bore many deep and parallel incisions, and the flesh of one hip and thigh was almost carried away, exposing the pubic bones and the broken head of the femur which had been removed from its socket. The incident was reported to the French Academy of Sciences, and the *Annual Register* for that year quotes him as noting that these horrific effects took place with no obvious signs of penetration of the woman's clothes, nor was there any blood on the scene. Hell, there wasn't even the slightest trace of any of her missing flesh.

As Bob Rickard and John Mitchell report in their excellent *'PHENOMENA: A BOOK OF WONDERS'* *Thames & Hudson: 1977*; 'It was as though she had been the focal point for an instantaneous, silent and deadly explosion.'

27th July, 2000 Santhal Pargana, India 'THE TIMES OF INDIA'

Alien Animal Update: Another 'Impossible' Sheep/Goat Hybrid Baffles Science

Hot on the heels of the reports of a sheep-goat creature, alive and well and living in Horsted Keynes, West Sussex, last June (see elsewhere in this issue), comes news from Botswana, of another one of those pesky (and, if the 'experts' are to be believed, impossible) hybrids.

The animal, which is now six years old, was born naturally from the mating of a female goat and a male sheep that were sharing the same kraal.

Scientists studying the animal later found that the hybrid had 57 chromosomes, a number in between that of sheep and goats.

The ram had 54 and the dam had 60 chromosomes, the large structures in the nuclei of cells that bundle up DNA.

The intermediate number proved the animal was definitely a real hybrid and not merely a case of mistaken identity.

'In our tradition, the goat and the sheep stay together,' Kedikilwe Kedikilwe, who under lead researcher Dr Moetsapele Letshwenyo, has published a paper on the animal in the *Veterinary Record*.

'I went home one time and my mother said there was a funny creature in my kraal.'

'Nobody has seen anything like it here. I now take it to agricultural shows around the country and everybody is surprised.'

'The animal has half-way features. It is white, with an outer coarse coat and inner woolly coat, and its tail hangs down.'

'The hybrid grew faster than the kids and lambs born in the same month. It also had a very high libido, mounting both goats and sheep even when they were not in heat. This earned the hybrid the less-than-flattering nickname of Benny, or rapist.'

'The activity never resulted in any pregnancies which suggested the creature was infertile, but the animal had to be castrated as it was becoming a nuisance.'

'Perhaps of even wider interest though, is that the animal hardly ever gets sick. Right now, I have an outbreak of foot and rot because of the rains. But we never treated the hybrid for foot rot and yet it is fine. That is very interesting.'
3rd July, 2000 Botswana, Africa 'BBC WORLD SERVICE'

GIANT SNAKE ON THE RAMPAGE IN ARKANSAS

From Little River County, Arkansas, USA, comes reports of a giant snake feasting on the local animal population to such an extent that an animal rescue group has arrived from Pulaski County to help catch the mystery reptile, said to be over 30 feet long.

Carol and Daryl Smith, from the group, were planning, at the time of going to press, to dig the snake out of its supposed den.

'It should be interesting. It could be an anaconda or a python, or a boa constrictor,' Mrs Smith told local journalists. *'They (the local populace) thought it had been eating cats and small dogs. It's usually going to eat what's natural to it - rats and mice and other small snakes.'*

Arkansas Game and Fish Commission officials have remained sceptical about the reality of the snake. But residents of Foreman and nearby communities say something is definitely eating small animals in the area.

Some suspect a 30-foot long boa constrictor that was reportedly set free a few months earlier as being responsible.

One resident has reported that her pet goose named "Miss Daisy" died after being bitten by a snake under her right wing. Bullfrogs have vanished in a pond; fish have mysteriously disappeared from two more. Cranes and herons that once perched on the edge of Terry and Wedda Landsell's pond have since relocated. Mrs Landsell has gone on record as stating that two of her cats have gone missing, too.

'When you get asked at the Taco Bell about it, you know something is up,' Jim Williamson, editor of the weekly *'LITTLE RIVER NEWS,'* stated publicly. It was he who

sought to enlist the assistance of the Smith's in identifying the creature, and seeking its capture.

Although Game and Fish officials have suggested that what residents have been seeing is an oversized cottonmouth, Mrs Landsell is adamant that this no normal snake; *'I've seen a lot of snakes, but nothing this big. We've seen it early in the morning and late in the evening.'*

Arkansas Game and Fish Commission officials, sceptical or otherwise, have diligently searched the Landsell's property, and discovered one *'pretty big snake,'* but it was nowhere near 30ft long and it looked like a typical water snake.

Boa constrictors need water to survive, but the snakes only eat every two weeks. Many boa constrictors are kept as domestic pets.



Marty Powell, a Little River County deputy sheriff, said that he had heard that someone had released a pet boa constrictor a few months prior to the current spate of reports, but this could not be confirmed.

Mr Williamson said that the snake was the talk of the town, but few people had considered the story to mere urban folklore.

Strangely enough, this particular region of Arkansas is notorious for sightings of a Bigfoot-type creature, that reputedly haunts the Little River bottoms.

'I'd be surprised if this isn't real,' Mr Williamson maintains. *'There are small animals disappearing, so something is happening down here.'*

21st July, 2000 Foreman, Arkansas, USA 'ABC NEWS'

INVASION OF THE 'VAMPIRE' RATS

New York, 'the city that never sleeps,' has been provided with another reason for causing its inhabitants to lie awake at night, wondering what may be lurking under their beds...

The Lower East Side is being plagued by rats the size of cats, creating a very real health hazard. The infestation was sparked by the efforts of a team of construction workers who began tearing up and replacing sewage pipes directly outside the Baruch Houses at East Houston Street and the FDR Drive. *'These rats are so big the cats are terrified of them,'* resident Morris Spitzer told reporters. *'This a dangerous situation.'*

'There are plenty of rats running around the buildings in broad daylight, but the problem is even worse at night.'

'They are like Vampires - they come out in droves at night.'

Angela Laine, a 26-year-old day-care teacher, who grew up in the neighbourhood, said the City's Department of Housing Preservation wasn't doing enough to combat the menace.

'They need to take care of the problem now before somebody gets bit and dies of rabies.'

'Baseball-sized rat holes are everywhere on the grounds of the project.'

'The tracks made by the rats are clearly visible on the grass, including a well-beaten path between the piles of garbage and the base of one building.'

Residents say they are forced to stay indoors during the hot summer nights because the place is swarming with bloated rats the size of footballs.

'We have more rats here than tenants,' Myrna Rodriguez, 31, told journalists. *'The people are afraid of the rats. Nobody lets their kids play outside at night anymore.'*

Another nervous resident, Jose Alvarez, 43, stated that he gets the creeps every time he has to leave or enter the building at night.

'You come up through here at night and you could easily see 20 or 30 rats playing tag at the front of the building. It's very scary. They are taking over the whole damn neighbourhood.'

21st July, 2000 New York City, USA 'NEW YORK POST'

Tales From The Loch Side

Oh, wouldn't you just know it, Old Beard Face is at it again...As regular readers will no doubt be aware, I don't have a lot of time these days for the once-flourishing Adrian *'They're all seeing their Nessie's'* Shine. I used to admire him for his unwavering dedication and his truly Fortean open-mindedness and objectivity towards that most enduring of paranormal mysteries.

Nowadays, I'm afraid, it seems to me he's become little more than a sad, disillusioned old man, reduced to drumming up increasingly prosaic theories regarding the origins of the 'Monster' and then broadcasting them as 'Big News,' like he's scared that otherwise people will forget he's still out there 'investigating.'

And Shine's latest deduction of Holmes-ian ingenuity... 'Nessie' can be mostly explained away as being nothing more than a giant standing wave!!!

Er, excuse me, but didn't Dr Maurice Burton come up with just such an explanation for the majority of reports back in 1934? To say nothing of the host of both sceptics and believers, in the years since then. Even the likes of Steve Feltham, Tim Dinsdale (and you can include your's truly on that list, for what it's worth) have considered 'standing waves' to be right up there with those other old standby's, the floating log and the trailing boat wake as being responsible for more 'sighting's than one can care to name.

And the reason it's taken Mr Shine to do away with his previous pet theory; a rogue Beluga sturgeon, and play catch-up with the rest of us?

The discovery of giant sub-surface water movements, up to 40 metres in height. Strange, I seem to recall the 'DISCOVERY' team recording these, or else very similar underwater anomalies and making them public knowledge back in 1994.

Still, let's not deprive Adrian of the glory of his big moment, shall we. He goes on to say that the waves, caused by friction between two layers of water in the loch, cause unusual surface movements and sonar readings which have been mistaken for sightings of Nessie.

He claims he has uncovered a divide between a top layer of water, which fluctuates in temperature by ten degrees, and a colder bottom layer, which stays the same. Submerged waves go in the opposite direction to those on the upper layer.

And hey, let's give the man a little credit. He does actually state that; *'This does not explain every sighting. I personally remain agnostic about Nessie's existence, but it's right that people are given all the information to make up their own minds.'*

10th July, 2000 Loch Ness, Scotland **THE INDEPENDENT**

Dan Scott Taylor's Nessie Plan In Jeopardy

American scientist Dan Scott Taylor was, at the time of writing, desperately looking for someone to sponsor his 40-foot mini-submarine called *Nessa*, without, it appears, having had much luck.

I don't know, maybe any would-be backers have been listening to the esteemed Mr Shine, and have duly banked at the idea of throwing their cash behind a venture that will achieve little more than procuring some less-than exciting photographs of standing waves!!!

All of this is a real pity, because Mr Scott Taylor, 68, has worked for 30 years to build the £1 million, 30-tonne steel submarine.

His dream had been, and still commendably remains, to succeed in obtaining a sample of Nessie's skin in a bid to solve the mystery once and for all.

'I'm devoted to creating a machine that will bring me face to face with her,' he told reporters. *'I had planned to bring Nessa to Scotland this year, but unfortunately now I can't find a sponsor and am down to one man - me - because my team gave left.'*

Nessa is equipped with sonar equipment and powerful lights and Mr Scott Taylor, who hails from Florida, believes his 23 mph sub is the perfect vessel in which to get close to the mysterious entity which is said to inhabit the loch. He still harbours ambitions of one day bringing the craft across the Atlantic to Scotland.

'I have devoted too long on this to quit. I will return to the loch and face Nessie. It is my destiny.'

29th July, 2000 Loch Ness, Scotland **'DAILY RECORD'**

From Out Of The Age Of Legends: Bigfoot Back In The News

Our first report comes from Port Angeles on America's Pacific coast, and concerns an individual by the name of Gene Sampson.

He lives on the edge of the woods known as the Hoh Indian Rain Forest, and just recently he has come across a couple of sets of giant, unidentified footprints and has heard weird noises emanating from the forest behind his home.

'Bam, bam, bam stop, bam, bam, bam, stop, bam, bam, bam' Mr Sampson describes the sounds that have assailed his ears this Summer. His stories have resulted in the local populace on the Reservation, locking their doors and drawing down the blinds on their windows after dark.

Sampson claims to have found two sets of footprints, which he duly measured as being 14 inches wide and 17 and a half inches in length.

The Bureau of Indian Affairs elected to investigate, but remained essentially sceptical. *'I saw some big indentations that looked like footprints, but they were not that recognizable,'* claims the Bureau's Scott Small.

'There is something big going through their yards, but it's probably just a bear.'

Conversely, George Krantz, a retired Washington State University anthropology professor and author of a book called, imaginatively enough; *'BIG FOOTPRINTS,'* stated that he believes the evidence on the Hoh Reservation indicates one male and one female Sasquatch.

Richard Greenwell of the International Society of Cryptozoology, however, regards this type of evidence to be annoyingly inconclusive.

'On Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, I absolutely believe in Bigfoot, after I evaluate all the data and read all the information. On Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays, I think it's all nonsense.'

'On Sundays, I rest.'

Yeah, thanks for that, Richie.

1st July, 2000 Port Angeles, USA **'ASSOCIATED PRESS'**

*** Next up, we have the following personal account from a Dr Matthew Johnson, PhD, concerning an encounter with a Bigfoot on 7th July, 2000.

'It was just after 5pm, and I was with my wife and three children in the National Forest at the Oregon Caves. Rochelle and I had taken our kids to the park for a day out. We ate lunch at a picnic table and then took a tour of the caves. They were spectacular. If you haven't seen them before, they are a must-see experience.'

'Upon our exit of the cave, everyone usually turns to the right to go back down to the gift store and lodge. However, we are fresh from Alaska, and love to hike in the outdoors (i.e. we had just moved from Alaska to Oregon earlier this year). We decided to go left and hike up to see the Big Tree, a Douglas Fir Tree with a circumference of 40 feet that is about 800 to 1,000 years old.'

'We hiked for about two miles into the forest up the mountain. As we were hiking up the trail, we smelled a very strong, pungent odour. It was as strong as a skunk but it wasn't a skunk. We know what a skunk smells like even though it was as strong as the smell of a skunk.'

'We were standing downwind of the smell.'

'We continued to hike up the trail and the trail started to switch back to the right as we climbed the mountain. There were plenty of tall trees and brush. I heard a faint sound: "whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa!!!"'

'At first I thought it was the blood vessels pounding in my ears because it was a constant sound-rhythm, and I'm out of shape. We kept walking up the trail I heard the sound again except now it was louder. Then I thought; "This is external, not internal."'

'We all stopped and I asked, "Do you guys hear that sound?"'

'Rockelle, Levi, Hannah and Micah looked at me and nodded their heads in affirmation.'

'Don't ask me why, but we continued to walk up the mountain through the very tall trees and brush. The sound continued in cycles of five to six repetitions. Louder and louder. Now the sounds were behind us.'

'I started putting one and one together in my mind and my biological "fight or flight" responses kicked in. I stopped my family on the trail. I told them to stay quiet. I hiked up the hill to our left because I had to go poop (this happens when biological "fight or flight" response kicks in). While I was doing my duty, I was scanning the woods down the mountain on the other side of the trail my family was standing on.'

'That's when I saw it.'

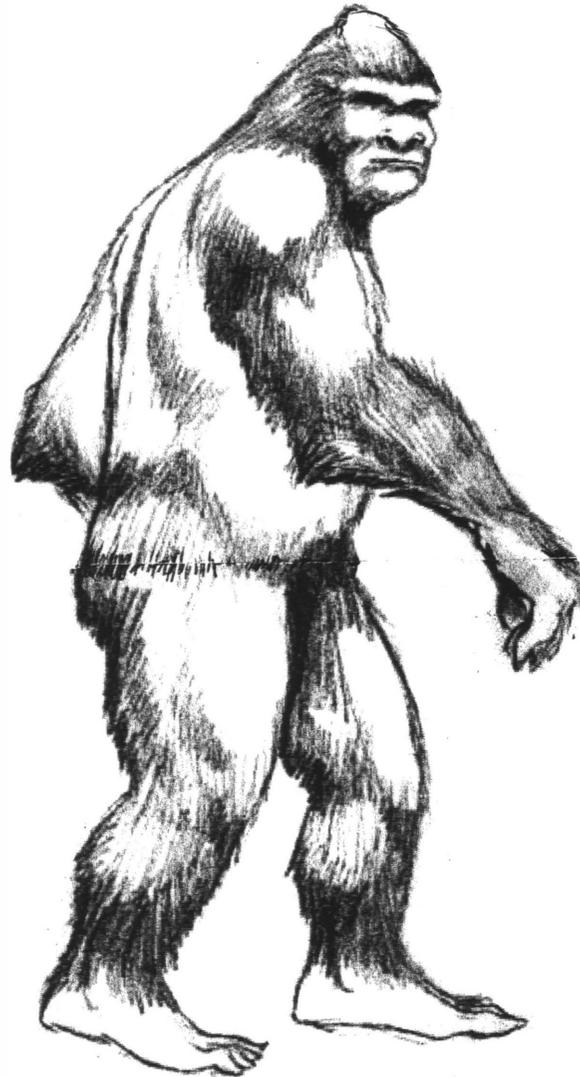
'I swear to God that I am telling the truth.'

'I saw it come out from behind one tree to the left and walk to another tree to the right. Then it looked back and was watching my family while they were standing on the trail.'

I'd hiked through the woods in Alaska numerous times and believe me, I know what a grizzly bear looks like. And I know what a black bear looks like.

I was actually chased by a grizzly bear on the Russian River in Alaska about six or seven years ago.

What I saw wasn't any kind of bear. What I saw walked upright on two legs like a human and it was much taller than any kind of bear.



What I saw was Bigfoot. I swear to God I saw it. I am not lying. I pulled up my shorts immediately, walked fast down the trail and got my family moving up the mountain. I sure as heck wasn't gonna go back down the trail where we came from and go right back to it. I didn't tell my wife or children what I saw because I didn't want them to panic.

At this point the adrenaline was rushing and I was very hypervigilant, constantly looking behind us and through the woods. The sounds stopped but I wasn't convinced we were safe.

When we got to a place where the kids could stop and sit on a fallen log to rest and drink some water, I pulled Rochelle away and told her she wasn't going to believe what I saw. Amazingly, she believed me right away. She had smelled the odour and heard the strange cries, and she knows I am not crazy. I told her to keep the kids going and that I would stay at the back to keep an eye on what was behind us. We agreed not to tell the children as we did not want to panic them.

We never heard the sounds again and I never saw anything after that. We finally made it out of the woods about an hour later. After sending the kids to the gift store, Rochelle and I sat outside and discussed the pro's and con's of

whether or not to report what had happened up in the woods.

I eventually decided that I wasn't going to keep this a secret because it was real and I know I'm sane. I remembered reading about how the Albino Gorilla was a legend in Africa, until someone finally captured one. Well, I'm here to tell you today that Bigfoot/Sasquatch is not a myth.

After we made our decision, Rochelle went into the gift shop with the kids. I walked to the Park Headquarters and reported what I saw to a Ranger. I sat in the chair stunned, and then I began to cry. All those emotions that I had been stifling due to the adrenaline began to surface now that my family and I were safe. I told the Ranger that I was not crazy. I gave her my business card. I'm a licensed psychologist in private practice. I told her that I have two master's degrees and one doctorate degree. I told her that I know what I smelled, heard and saw. In between the tears and my shaking, I told her that I saw Bigfoot. And she believed me!!!

She said that there is a lot about our world that we don't know and that we are discovering new species all the time.

I was the only one who actually saw Bigfoot because I had hiked up off the trail high enough to see it. I can't tell you what it looked like other than it was very tall, looked half-human and half-ape, walked upright and had very dark hair, coloured a mixture of very dark brown or black.

It happened so quickly, and all I could think of was to get my family the heck out of there.

I've since done some surfing on the Internet and what I saw looked a lot like the creature depicted above.

Later that same night, the Ranger called me and said that they were planning on checking out the area where we reported the smell, sounds and sighting. I am posting this on the Net because I have to tell others what we experienced. This animal is real. It does exist!

1st July, 2000 Southern Oregon, USA BIGFOOT RESEARCH ASSOCIATION

Legends Of The Werewolf

Screened August 2nd, 2000:

The History Channel

(Running Time 40 Minutes)

The programme opens with a combination of clips from the classic Universal horror movies such as 'DRACULA' (1931), 'FRANKENSTEIN' (1931), whilst the narrator proclaims, quite rightly, that mankind has always been fascinated with monsters, both real (serial killers like Jeffrey Dahmer and Peter Sutcliffe) imaginary and cinematic, like the aforementioned creations of Lugosi and Karloff, and the legendary; the Vampire, the Zombie and the Werewolf.

It is with the latter, of course, that we are concerned here. We are introduced, at the outset to Gary Brandner, author of 'THE HOWLING,' who tells us that; 'There are stories about Werewolves going right back through recorded history. And in countries as disparate as Greece, Central Europe, and Asia, the stories remain remarkably similar.'

We are transported back to the dawn of civilisation, when there was very little to separate man from beast, and to a time when belief in the ability to cross that thin dividing line, to transform oneself into an animal, was accepted as fact.

They even had a name for it: *Shapeshifting*. And here comes another author, this time Daniel Cohen; who penned the treatise; *WEREWOLVES*, 'Virtually every ancient civilised society have stories and beliefs about transformation from animal to human form, and vice versa. You go back, and even in the cave paintings, you appear to have pictures of beings that are half-human, half-stag.'

David J. Skal, author of *'SCREAMS OF REASON'*, concurs.

'In all civilisations, there has been a story of keeping certain impulses and emotions in check. And most of these are the more primitive instincts. The animal instincts. So, ever since man became civilised, the Werewolf has been lurking somewhere back there.

(As Mr Cohen gets these points across, we're treated to the sight of a quite impressive, *'HOWLING'*-esque-type creature prowling the archetypal dark woods of Faerieland and sweat-inducing nightmare)...*in the shadows...*

The Werewolf was even noted by the ancient Greek historian Herodotus. In the 5th century BC, he wrote of an entire race of *Shapeshifters* known as the *Neurians*. According to the scholar, each *Neurian* changes itself, once a year, into the form of a wolf, and he/she continues in that form for several days, after which they resume their former shape. Daniel Cohen is back to inform us that; *'You find very strong Werewolf myths among the Greeks and the Romans - I mean, you've got Roman Werewolf stories that sound like they were produced by Hollywood last week.'*

One such story came from a Roman satirist named Petronius. He was one of the first to chronicle the now-universally accepted notion that the Werewolf and the Full Moon are inextricably linked.

Petronius wrote of a man who, on a night lit by a full moon, went to visit his mistress. He asked a friend of his, a soldier, to accompany him. As they made their way through the moonlit woods, the soldier suddenly stopped, stripped off his clothes, transformed into a wolf, and ran into the tree-shrouded darkness.

(Daniel Cohen interjects at this point to state that the Full Moon really does have a connection, in folklore, with Werewolf belief because somehow the Full Moon creates madness in people: *Lunacy*, in other words).

To return to Petronius's story, when the man reached the home address of his mistress, he learned that a servant had fought off a wolf with his sword, wounding it in the neck. The following day, the man discovered the soldier in his barracks, dying of a sword wound...to his neck.

These were stories that were widely believed. If a person were wounded as a wolf, he/she would bear the same injury when they reverted back into human form.

The Roman poet Ovid, also told a bloodthirsty saga regarding Werewolves. Writing in the 1st century, he told of an ancient Greek king named *Lycan*, whose cruelty was so notorious that the King of The Gods, Jupiter, elected to pay him a visit.

Lycan, in his arrogance, refused to believe that his guest was a real, bona fide God. So, he attempted to test this by serving an extravagant feast in which he had secretly mixed up chunks of human flesh. To place a cannibal meal before a God was considered to be a *'tremendous offence'* breaking as it did, one of the most sacred taboo's of the ancient Greeks. Jupiter instantly recognised the fact that the food had been tainted, and to punish *Lycan* he turned him into a wolf. All the better so he could enjoy the taste of human flesh in a more suitable form.

From this story of King *Lycan*, we derive the modern word *Lycanthrope* - one who transforms into a wolf.

J Gordon Melton, Director of the Institute for the Study Of American Religion, is quoted as saying; *'This story has had a profound effect upon our understanding of*

Werewolves, because here, right at the very beginning, was a recognition that the whole idea of Werewolfism was related to those aspects of the human being that were opposed to civilisation and civilised society.'

By the Middle Ages, the belief in human-animal transformation was accepted right across the globe. In Lapland there were *Were-reindeer*. In South America, *Were-opossums*. And in Japan, *Were-wildcats*.

In fact, people believed that people could turn into whatever the predominant predator in that particular country, (with the notable exception of the reindeer) happened to be.



One way to become a *Were-animal* was to don the skin or pelt of said creature. The Vikings used this belief to their advantage when about to embark upon another military campaign of conquest.

They would don bear skins prior to going into battle, believing, quite rightly as it turned out, that to do so would further enhance their reputation as fearless warriors. They were called *Berserk*, a term which survives today as *'berserk'*.

Throughout the rest of Medieval Europe however, it was the wolf, the largest singularly carnivorous predator on the continent that inspired the greatest degree of fear amongst the populace.

Montague Summers, the highly-regarded (and to this reviewer's mind, at least, right up there with the Colin Wilson's, Eric Maple, Guy Underwood's and Richard Cavendish's of this world) supernatural and occult-investigator, describes what the wolf meant to Medieval Europeans;

'The distinctive features of the wolf are unbridled cruelty, bestial ferocity and ravening hunger. He has something of the Demon of Hell. He is the symbol of night and Winter. Of stress and storm. The dark and mysterious harbinger of death.'

The story of *Little Red Riding Hood*, a latter-day *Faerie Tale*, was actually (as is common with just about every similar classic children's story) a cautionary parable, warning youngsters of the dangers posed by the ravening wolf that prowled the countryside.

During the great *Witch Hunts* - the *Burning Times* - of the 16th and 17th centuries, many suspected *'Werewolves'* were tried, tortured and duly executed along with the assembled *'Witches'*, *'Warlocks'* and *'Vampires'*.

Here's J Gordon Melton, again....

'During the height of the Middle Ages, especially at the time of the Reformation, the great struggle against Witchcraft began. And right on the heels of the Witch persecution, came a fresh struggle against Werewolves.'

A brief overview of the oft-recorded sequence of events; the social, religious and political upheavals that plagued Europe and led to the *Great Witch Hunts*, is then

presented. As I propose to deal more fully with the background to this fascinating, if tragic period of history in a future issue, we'll skip this section, for now.

Werewolfism, of Lycanthropy, was considered a form of Witchcraft. Both involved a pact with the Devil Himself. Daniel Cohen states that; *'People all around at that time, were afraid that strange, magical things were happening to other people, and against them. Once a hysteria begins, it tends to spread (witness the Invisible Assailant panic in India, elsewhere in this issue - Ed). So, when a really gruesome crime was met up with, Werewolves were immediately suspected.'*



In France, the term for Werewolf was Loup Garou. In the early 1500's, Werewolves began to appear in epidemic proportions. According to legend, they could be easily identified.

Daniel Cohen; *'You've got eyebrows that meet together. Good sign of a Werewolf. Werewolves have hair growing on the palm of their hands. Of course they'd shave. But they'd have very rough palms. So rough palms were the sign of a Werewolf. Anybody in 16th century France, who lived alone, isolated from other people, who was unkempt, who behaved in a wild, strange or disagreeable manner, might easily be thought of as a Werewolf.'*

It's a shocking fact that between 1520 and 1630, more than 30,000 people in France were brought to trial accused of Lycanthropy.

A typical case was the story of a peasant named Gilles Garnier, who in 1573, at Dole, near Dijon in central France, lived like a hermit in a hut outside the city. Oh, and he was also cursed with that tell-tale Werewolf sign of a set of eyebrows that joined together across the bridge of his nose.

Villagers rescuing a girl from an attacking wolf thought that they 'recognised' Gilles in the animal. They believed that he had assumed lupine form by rubbing a magic potion into his skin. Less than week later, Gilles was captured, tortured into a confession and burned at the stake.

Accounts of decidedly cuter-looking She-Werewolves, whilst comparatively rare, were not unknown. One report, also from central France, concerns a hunter who was attacked by a wolf in 1558. At the height of the battle, the hunter managed to slice off a paw. Putting the severed limb in his pouch, he stopped off at a nearby house to tell of his adventure. But when he pulled out the paw, he discovered a slender-fingered woman's hand wearing a gold wedding ring.

Recognising the ring, the householder raced upstairs and found his wife hastily bandaging the bloody stump of an arm. Perhaps left with little choice in the matter, she confessed readily to being a Werewolf, and was later to make the all-too-predicable one-way trip to the stake for her troubles.

Next up is the case in 1589 of another poor peasant by the name of Peter Shtum. He 'confessed' after undergoing the

ordeal of the wheel, red-hot pincers and having flesh torn from his body, that he was a Werewolf. All of this was published in a 'best-selling' (for the time) publication called *'THE BROADSIDE.'*

Mr Cohen calls such works *'THE NATIONAL ENQUIRER'* of their day, and it is certainly true that Peter Shtum's fate became the most widely-known, up to that point, of Werewolf confessions.

One Werewolf trial, in 1604, made legal history. Jean Granier, a 14-year-old shepherd from the Bordeaux region of France, was a simple-minded individual given to roaming the countryside. When a female witness testified that she had seen him put on a magic pelt, and turn into a wolf, he was arrested.

At his trial, he claimed that a 'mysterious dark stranger' (a recurring image throughout legend and folklore that puts one in mind of the modern-day 'Man In Black?' -Ed) had given him the pelt, whilst he was walking through the midst of the darkwood. He admitted stalking the forest and attacking children. The courtroom erupted with laughter when Granier described his preference for young flesh, finding an old woman as tough as leather.

A lawyer argued that he was a victim of his disordered brain. Remarkably, given the superstition-riddled perception of the times, the argument of insanity prevailed. Instead of death, Granier spent the remainder of his life at a monastery prison. He died just shy of his 20th birthday.

In the years since that blessed flash of enlightenments, various scientific theories have been put forward in an attempt to explain the cause of Lycanthropy.

As early as the 2nd century AD, Roman doctors had recognised Werewolfism as a psychological disorder.

Today's psychiatrists consider a Lycanthrope to be a person who howls, craves raw meat or runs around on all fours during an attack.

J Gordon Melton now believes that we have enough cases to enable us to begin; *'to see that there are people who have this grand delusion that they can change into different animals. and that when they get into that delusion they even act out the part and do things that we think of as being associated with the animals.'*

By the mid-17th century, perceptions had changed radically. No longer were suspected Werewolves burned at the stake. Now, they were sent into monastery's.

The narrator of the programme reminds us however, that perhaps not all supposed Werewolves were merely insane. Some at least, may have been under the influence of hallucinogenic drugs.

Plants and herbs such as poppy seeds, aconite which slows down the heart, and belladonna, were readily available as cure-alls from the local Wise Woman. When rubbed into the skin, the ointment entered the bloodstream, inducing wild excitement, mental confusion and delirium.

Another possible hallucinogen occurred in rye bread, a staple of the European diet in the Middle Ages.

When winters were excessively cold, a fungus, called ergot, infected the rye. The drug could induce LSD-type hallucinations.

Reports from frightened villagers of a ragged human running through the forest fuelled fears of Werewolves, even though they were usually simply misperceived accounts of hermits attempting to eke out their lonely existence.

However, there were a few genuine instances of wild children who had been long-lost or abandoned in the forest, and had learned animalistic survival skills. Amala and Kamala were among 16 children supposedly raised, in true Romulus and Remus fashion, by wolves. They were found in India between 1843 and 1933. When the girls were removed from a wolf's lair in 1920, they walked on all fours, ate nothing but raw meat, and howled to escape captivity.

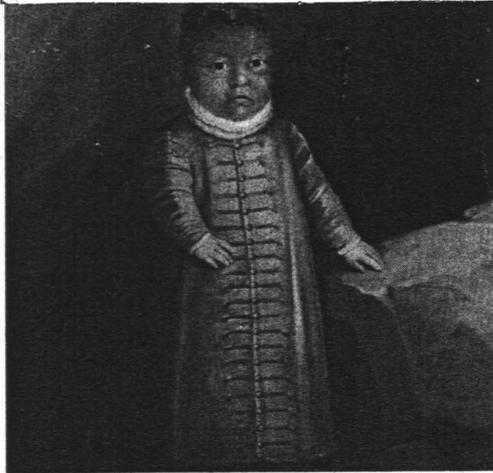
Amala died within one year at the age of about 2 and a half. Kamala died nine years later, when she was 17.

Perhaps the most famous such story is that of Victor of Avignon, whose story was told in the 1969 Francois Truffaut film; *'THE WILD CHILD.'*

In 1797, French villagers became deeply concerned about a mysterious 'Wildman' seen running through the woods. Three years later, a naked 12-year-old boy was captured. He was covered in cuts and bruises, and terrified of humans. Victor lived to the age of 40, but never learned to speak.

Another explanation for Werewolf reports could be two rare medical conditions; One, hypotrichosis (okay, that may not be the correct spelling, before all you medical buffs out there start moaning - Ed), is a genetic disorder that occurs in one in every billion births. It causes increased hair growth all over the body.

In the 16th century, this disease was observed in Peter Gonzalez and his children.



Daniel Cohen pays them their due respects; *'There are these wonderful paintings of them, these people with furry heads, looking, incidentally, very much like the Lon Chaney Jr make-up in 'THE WOLFMAN.'*

Such people could easily have been mistaken for Werewolves.

The second disease which may have helped perpetuate the myth is porphyria. It's (thankfully) an extremely rare form of a genetic blood disorder. It was first recognised in the early part of the 20th century. In some severe cases, patients are so sensitive to sunlight that prolonged exposure could result in the loss of tissue from the extremities; face and head.

Anthony F. McDonagh, a professor at the UCSF Liver Centre, tells us; *'Somebody afflicted with this might tend to come out late at night. If they had a lot of damage to their*

tissues, they would tend to hold their hands in a clawed-up position. If the tissue was lost from their lips, their teeth would be more exposed, and there would be this brownish colour which people might associate with blood. Plus there might be this extra clump of hair growth, particularly around the temples.'

Some 'experts' however, dispute the scientific attempts at explaining away the entire phenomena, thus.

The widespread belief in Werewolves in the 16th-17th centuries, they maintain, cannot simply have its basis in rare medical conditions and the use of hallucinogens.

J Gordon Melton; *'Werewolf beliefs are not just in a few places where LSD might have gotten into the food supply.*

Werewolf stories are not just limited to where there have been outbreaks or family traditions of porphyria. It's a much larger phenomenon than that.

'The Werewolf mythos has come down to us through the ages, basically, as a myth about our inner nature. The animal side of us, as we like to think of it, as opposed to the spiritual side. It has a certain amount of appeal because we are animals, after all.'

Most of what is familiar about today's perception of the tradition of Werewolves comes from a purely fictitious medium; the cinema, and in particular the 1941 Universal production of *'THE WOLFMAN.'*

We get to see part of the original trailer to the movie, and then we skip to the Russian actress Maria Ouspenskaya's warning to Lon Chaney Jr that; *'Whoever is bitten by the Werewolf and lives, becomes a Werewolf himself.'*

David J Skal has this to say regarding the movie; *'THE WOLF MAN' was the premier horror icon of the 1940's. It was the first really original monster that had come down the pike for a long time.'*

And Daniel Cohen adds his tuppence worth; *'THE WOLFMAN' is a great, great film. What the Werewolf lacks, is a great novel. And that's perhaps why the Werewolf is not quite as popular as the Vampire or the Frankenstein Monster. There are a lot of very fine Werewolf stories, but nothing to match 'DRACULA,' nothing to match 'FRANKENSTEIN.'*

Typical of the less-than-impressive literary attempts was an 1846 Victorian potboiler by G.W.M Reynolds; *'WAGNER THE WEHR-WOLF.'*

It was serialised in the 'penny dreadfuls' that would later feature such luminaries as Spring-Heeled Jack.

Nearly twenty years later, in 1865, a more scholarly work arrived. A collection of legends selected by the Reverend Sabine-Baring Gould. But the first actual novel to receive literary recognition wouldn't arrive until 1933. Guy Endore's *'WEREWOLF OF PARIS'* was based upon a real-life story concerning a French soldier who had taken it upon himself to visit the cemeteries of Paris to feed upon the recently dead bodies that were buried there. But, despite that the fact that the perpetrator of such actions had more in common with the ghoul of popular folklore, Mr Endore's story turned the creature into a Werewolf. The book proved to be so popular that it was made into a film in 1935. The location was switched to London, and the Universal film was duly called *'WEREWOLF OF LONDON.'*

Directed by Stuart Walker, and starring Henry Hull as the Lycanthrope (and co-starring Warner Orland and the ever-lovely Valerie Hobson), the movie proved to be a box-office success.

A clip is shown. Warner Orland warns the typical mad scientist (Hull) that he should; *'remember this, Doctor Glynden. The Werewolf instinctively seeks to kill the thing it loves best.'*

It was the first feature-length Werewolf film and despite its success, the movie failed to become the benchmark for Werewolf cinema.

The censors at the time, the bane of all Horror movie makers, right up to and including today, felt that the transformation of man into beast was too close a parallel to Darwin's theory of evolution.

Further censorship problems erupted when Universal attempted to produce a sequel. The clouds of war were once more gathering on the horizon and with real-life horror about to engulf Europe, it was felt that to release further scary movies at that time would be deeply inappropriate.

As David J Skal points out; *'Just before World War Two, there was an international embargo on horror movies. They stopped making them for a few years because the British Board Of Film Censors felt it that was a very demoralising form of entertainment.'*

Ironically enough however, Hitler called his fleets of U-Boats, WolfPacks, named after the way they surrounded a convoy, and picked off one ship at a time.

'Adolf Hitler was absolutely fascinated with wolf imagery.' Mr Skal relates. *'He surrounded himself with all sorts of wolf totems, and liked to name things after wolves.'*

'One of his favourite American movies was 'WALT DISNEY'S THREE LITTLE PIGS,' and he used to whistle 'WHO'S AFRAID OF THE BIG BAD WOLF?' as he went about his bunker.'



Fortunately, for the cinema-going public, the ban on horror movies didn't last long. By 1941, Lon Chaney was prowling the misty woodland stage sets at Universal studios as *'THE WOLFMAN.'*

Curiously, we get to see a couple of clips - Baron Frankenstein's castle being blown to pieces, the Wolfman jumping onto the back of a hopelessly miscast Bela Lugosi as the Frankenstein Monster - from the vastly inferior *'FRANKENSTEIN MEETS THE WOLFMAN'* (1943).

Normal service is thankfully resumed, however, and Mr Skal evaluates the main attraction thus; *'THE WOLFMAN' is about an American character who is kind of like displaced into a 1940's Europe where there is no war, but there's a Werewolf behind every tree. And what you have in the Werewolf saga is the Werewolf trying to put to sleep the beast in human nature.'*

'All of this happening against the very real backdrop of the war and it's probably not a coincidence that the Wolfman saga began right after Pearl Harbour, and wound up (with

the monster-fest that is *'HOUSE OF DRACULA'* 1945) just in time for Hiroshima.

'THE WOLFMAN' was. up to that point, the definitive Werewolf film. It established his appearance at the Full Moon and the mark of the Pentagram - a Satanic emblem that pointed to the Werewolf's next victim. It also introduced the mythology that a Werewolf can only be killed by a silver bullet.



It was also the first time that audiences had witnessed the transformation of man into wolf onscreen. The footage depicting Lon Chaney Jr's filtered change from ordinary American to the hirsute, yak-furred face that launched a thousand Aurora model kits, is duly featured.

Here's J Gordon Melton, once more; *'One of the things that both stage and screen do to complex folk mythology is, they simplify it. They put it together so that it is easily available to you. Movies have helped in the understanding of Werewolves by simplifying it and giving it some characteristics we could identify with.'*

The Wolfman's features were created by German immigrant and screenwriter, Curt Siodmak.

Gary Brandner is the first to give credit to Mr Siodmak. *'I think he is the father of all modern Werewolf myths; the Full Moon, silver bullets, the pentagram on the hand...As far as I know, Curt Siodmak invented all that.'*

And the great man himself has this to say regarding his creation; *'I invented certain things like the Pentagram, maybe it existed before, I don't know.'*

What is irrefutable, is that Curt definitely wrote the verse that has now become an accepted part of Werewolf folklore.

*'Even a man who is pure in heart
And say's his prayers at night
May become a wolf when the wolfbane blooms
And the autumn moon is bright.'*

The film was so influential on its contemporary audience that it was able to make up its own rules concerning Werewolves and get away with it to the extent that people nowadays accept the Hollywood version as gospel.

Daniel Cohen; *'Everybody now believes that the real way to become a Werewolf is that you have to be bitten by a Werewolf. That comes right out of the films. That's strictly Hollywood law. A Werewolf didn't just bite people. A*

Werewolves tore people to pieces and ate them. There wasn't gonna be enough left of the victim to become another Werewolf.'

As for the real-life wolves, conservationist groups are constantly fighting a rear guard action in their assertion that the wolf has a right to exist. Others would prefer wolves to be eradicated completely, and not just fans of West Brom and Aston Villa, either (you're fired - Unamused Ed).

Horror author S.P. Somtow believes that man has a beast inside him and that he has a secret desire to change into one and lose all civilised restraints. *'The more civilised we are, the more we need to fantasise about no longer being civilised'* Such fantasies became widespread when a selection of old Werewolf films were shown on TV in the paranoia-fuelled 1950's.

Ray Ferry, editor of my all-time favourite magazine (with the possible exceptions of 'HOUSE OF HAMMER' and the old-style FORTEAN TIMES) 'FAMOUS MONSTERS OF FILMLAND,' states that; *'it wasn't until the films were released to television and the kids started getting their hands on them, that they (the kids) adopted them. Because at 12 years old, Monsters, you latch on to that. Because they're not understood. Any more than you are. They have a tough time dealing with their environment. Just like you do. But they can fight back...'* (here we see a clip from the classic Hammer movie 'CURSE OF THE WEREWOLF' Oliver Reed tearing the prison cell door off its hinges and then smashing it over his the head of the luckless warder. Snarling at the gang of traditional fire-wielding villagers from the roofs of the surrounding houses)

'....And you fantasise through those characters'

Rather than an object of fear, the Werewolf was, by the late sixties, early seventies, becoming a popular culture icon. In 1972, Marvel Comic's creator Stan Lee, produced a series called 'WEREWOLF BY NIGHT.' In these publications, the creature was actually something of an anti-hero, as the venerable Mr Lee explains; *'They're fun to read about. Even little kids, they're always looking under the bed to make sure there isn't a monster under there. And there is something fascinating about the idea that maybe in some way, some people do change at night into something else.'*

We return to Gary Brandner's 1977 novel; 'THE HOWLING,' which was of course made into a hugely successful movie in 1981. (We'll draw a discrete veil over the gamut of pretty awful sequels, however).

'Part of the joy of being a Werewolf,' Mr Brandner maintains, *'is that you can go out and jump any lady-Werewolf you want to, and no-one's going to look funny at you...It's the freedom to be as lustful and as sexy as you want to.'*

There is even a Werewolf role-playing game available on the Internet. Called 'WEREWOLF THE APOCALYPSE,' it attracts thousands of players worldwide.

In 1997, the United States Post Office cashed in on the public's need for fictional monsters by producing five Movie Monster stamps; Lon Chaney Sr's PHANTOM OF THE OPERA Lugosi's DRACULA, both Karloff's MUMMY, and 'THE FRANKENSTEIN MONSTER, and last but not least, Lon Chaney Jr's 'THE WOLFMAN' More than 50 years on, and despite all the advances in special effects, the 1941 Wolfman is still in vogue. A fact not lost on Mr Slodmak; *To have created something that might live much longer, it only shows you shouldn't be a writer, you should be a postage stamp. Then you are immortal.'*

This quite excellent programme, which comes highly recommended for anyone even slightly interested in the subject, closes with its narrator summing things up very eloquently;

'The Werewolf has evolved throughout history. What we now accept as legend was once a very real fear. Beginning as a way to explain the inexplicable, a creature to blame for the atrocities of man, and a symbol of the sexuality and power that many humans envy but do not attain. Although the Werewolf is now a figure of entertainment, perpetuated through films and comics, it holds a prominent place in our past.

And continues to live on....'

THE BEAST OF BRAY ROAD

I first came across this potential real-life Werewolf mystery when it was featured on a recent edition of a programme on SKY's 'ANIMAL PLANET' channel.

The basic background story goes something like this...The people of Walworth County, Wisconsin, situated in the heart of the good ol' US of A's dairyland, have been beset by a series of bizarre encounters with a creature that looks to have stepped right out of a Universal horror movie.

The programme showed pictures of a typical, American backwater town. It appears to be a quiet, rural community, idyllic, one might say, save for the fact, (and to paraphrase Heather Donahue), recent history tells a different story.

A mysterious animal is said to be prowling the woodland that borders the stretch of rural highway known as Bray Road.

The initial encounters seem to date from no earlier than 1989. A woman, who chose anonymity as lives in the area, was driving home along Bray Road, one moonlit night when she saw an animal from the surreal depths of nightmare. Linda Godfrey, a local journalist, takes up the tale; *'She saw, looking through her car window, a thing, kneeling by the side of the road, which she thought was unusual. It had long shaggy fur, and what really struck her about it, as she kind of slowed down to see what it was, she didn't want to hit it, was that it was kneeling with its palms up and holding a piece of roadkill.*

'It was kind of like the way a person would hold on to something and eat it.'

Linda has since managed to have interviewed a further 20 people who claim to have witnessed the Beast firsthand.

'All of these witnesses have said that if the Beast had been standing, it would have been 6-7ft tall. They all described a very shaggy, wild-looking fur, more so than you would see on even a wolf or an average dog.'

Tod Poll, the creator of the very wonderful 'WEIRD WISCONSIN' website, has also managed to collate enough information to enable to build up a composite picture of the Alien Animal.

'It has sharp yellow eyes, finger-like digits on its hands, almost like claws, a canine stature, and a predilection for standing on its back two legs, even though it's a quadruped animal.

'The creature would also appear to have long pointed ears, and a massive, very powerful, muscular chest.'

One of the reasons that the Beast has frightened those who have encountered it (aside from the not inconsiderable fact that it closely resembles a Werewolf!!!) is that it seems to have very little fear of humans. On the contrary, when sighted, it just glares at them until they slam their foot on the brakes and drive like hell for home.

Tod Poll has attempted to provide investigators with a chronological history of the phenomenon, the full details of which can be found on his aforementioned site. Here, however are the bare bones...

On June 18th, 1991, the carcasses of several dogs were discovered in a ditch by the side of the road. Ominously

enough, they were said to have been the victims of ritual abuse (See the disturbingly similar cat mutilations, elsewhere in this issue).

By December, 1992, news of the Beast had travelled well beyond the borders of Walworth County. Reporters had descended upon the locale, and as a result, the townspeople themselves, as is so often the case, (perhaps in an attempt to cash in on the sudden media attention thrust upon an otherwise non-descript locality, perhaps in a bid to ward off the creeping fear in a manner akin to whistling past the haunted graveyard) began to treat the phenomenon with a less-than-serious-attitude.

They erected Werewolf signs, organised special Werewolf Nights and concocted drinks to match the occasion. One particular group of Werewolf enthusiasts in Grand Rapids, Michigan, decided to record a simulated Werewolf hunt, the results of which were broadcast over the air in an almost identical fashion to the infamous Orson Welles 'WAR OF THE WORLDS' programme back in 1939. They scored surprisingly similar results, too (though admittedly, on a much smaller scale. Werewolves it seems, no matter how terrifying, can't hold a candle to an all-out Martian invasion...)



By the Spring of 1992, the community of Walworth had succeeded in incorporating the Beast into their popular culture to such an extent that residents even organised fundraisers to benefit handicapped riders with slogans and puns making reference to the Beast ie; Beast Dogs and Were-B-Que sandwiches.

Party till the Beast creeps home, indeed!!!

And then, in September, 1992, when there hadn't been any reports of the Beast in a goodly while, what researcher Todd Poll refers to as The Wipe, began to raise its all-too familiar head...

'As soon as that initial media frenzy had died,' he states on his website, 'and the stories have appeared in the tabloids, in the minds of many, establishing the whole thing as no more than an elaborate joke or hoax.... then The Wipe is on.

'In Fortean circles, The Wipe is a term used to describe the typical reaction to reports of the paranormal.

**a): The initial report of the story, factual, if slightly incredulous*

**b): Increased media attention;*

**c): Increased resistance to the very idea that any paranormal phenomena exist, with the more lurid or bizarre aspects of the stories played up to rob them of their strength and legitimacy, in a sense, to show their absurdity;*

**d): Dismissal*

'The wipe is usually aided by appealing to authority, in this case, for example, the Sgt of the Walworth County Sheriff's Department. Upon proclamation that the stories are a joke, or one of mistaken identity, or too much alcohol consumption, the official verdict of 'STORY OVER' is stamped on the event. After all, the authorities are the ultimate arbiters of reality, no?

'So go ahead, unbolt your doors.'

To return to the eyewitness accounts; one unspecified Halloween night, another anonymous woman was driving along Bray Road (one would have thought that was just asking for trouble, but there you go). For a moment she lost track of how she was driving and she hit what she thought was a bump in the road. Concerned that her car might have sustained some damage, she got out to take a look, and as she did so she realised that the 'bump' was in fact the Beast standing in the middle of the road.

As she raced back to her car in a blind panic, she could hear the sound of the creature's feet slapping on the surface of the road. As she attempted to drive off, the Beast jumped on to the back of her car leaving behind a series of scratches on the trunk of her car.

All was then quiet on the Walworth Front until August, 1999. But we'll come to that in just a minute. First however, let me tell you the following amusing aside featuring one Jose L. Contreras, who was arrested on Bowers Road in an apparent burglary attempt. Nothing too funny about that, you may say, but wait till you hear what his excuse was for carrying a 9mm handgun.

Yep, that's right, he told the jury the gun was for his own protection lest he be attacked by the Bray Road Beast.

He'd even taken out an advert in the local press requesting witnesses come forward to support his contention that a highly dangerous Werewolf was prowling the area. Unfortunately for him, this line of defence proved to be of no avail, and he was duly convicted.

I know I shouldn't, but I can't help feeling just a little bit sorry for him. I mean, I work in a solicitor's myself, and I've heard some pretty ingenious excuses put forward to explain away a crime, but just imagine some scally from the South End of Liverpool getting stopped by the buses and telling them that the only reason he was 'packing a piece' was 'cos he was scared that the Toxteth Werewolf was gonna get him!!!

But to return to the sighting in late Summer, 1999

On 13th August of that year, yet another anonymous woman was driving along that infamous stretch of road with her husband when suddenly; 'Our headlights hit some shining eyes. They moved towards the undergrowth surrounding a clump of ancient trees, and I wound down the window and shone a light at it, honked the horn and pulled forward, and it started coming towards us.

'The eyes shone bright yellow and they were not round like a deer's. They were oblong. It was so strange.

'I am more than familiar with the local animals. It could not have been a wild dog or a deer. Because if you shine a light at them, a deer will freeze. A dog will run. This thing did neither. When the creature got to within 50 yards of us, we decided to leave because we thought that that was just a little too dangerous.'

Ms Godfrey, a local journalist, you'll remember, believes that, no matter how bizarre the stories doing the rounds concerning the Beast, most of the witnesses have little to gain and lots to lose, by making their accounts public. She certainly tends to believe that the the majority of them had seen something



The more popular theories as to the identity of the Beast include coyotes or hyenas (who when threatened, have been known to stand up on their two back legs so as to appear bigger than they really are) or else a hybrid of a wolf and a large dog breed like a Russian Wolfhound.

Whatever the truth may turn out to be, I am deeply indebted to Todd Poll for the following dissertation on the Beast. I haven't actually asked his permission to include it...I hope he'll understand it's merely in the interests of mutual furtherance. And if he doesn't and he decides he wants to sue me for breach of copyright, er, I've got about £3:23p in the bank, although I should point out that £2 of that is for my auntie's birthday present next month.

Well, I don't like her *that* much!

'From the very first reports, an immediate dichotomy appears. Although the Beast appears wolf-like in the early witness reports, some describe the Beast as running on four legs while others report it running on two. Some described the Beast as more dog-like, but shaggier, with wolfish overtones, broad-chested, with something odd about the arrangement of the rear legs. Other witnesses described the Beast in much the same way, except the Beast was seen running on two legs, or holding its paws/hands in human like ways, or kneeling as a human would, with its feet behind its body.'

'As reported in 'STRANGE MAGAZINE,' Lori Endrezzi described the Beast - despite its generally wolf-like appearance - as remarkably human in its posture.

'Scarlett Sankey reports Endrezzi saying;

"The arms were really kind of strange. It was jointed like a man or woman's would be. He was holding his food with his palms upward. The forearms were kind of big, like a man who had worked out a bit. It might sound strange, but it did look like it had fingers. It looked like a hand, you know, a bare hand with claws.

"His back legs looked like they were behind him, like a person kneeling. It had kind of big calves with hair on them like the rest of the body."

Endrezzi went on to draw a picture of the Beast, looking very much like a wolf, only with fingers, and kneeling as a human would.

We've seen a similar description only once before...

In Janet and Colin Bord's 'THE BIGFOOT CASEBOOK,' the pair describe a Bigfoot sighting by legal secretary Mrs Donna Riegler on June 24th, 1980, in Union County, Ohio.

"When asked for more details of the creature's appearance, she (Riegler) demonstrated its posture: upright, with knees bent, and hands held out, palms up. She could not see any facial features. Mrs Riegler escaped as fast as she could, stopping at a stranger's house where unnerved by her experience, she broke down and sobbed." (a little like the reaction of Dr Matthew Johnson PhD, over in the National Forest Oregon, this July - See elsewhere in this issue)

To top it off, a farmer had seen this same creature one week earlier, whilst working the field on his tractor.

"It was about 7ft tall, and walked with its knees bent. Even though the farmer got to within 30 yards of it, he still could not make out any facial features. "There was nothing there," he said. The Bigfoot stopped and turned towards him, holding its hands out, palms up."

'As bizarre as a creature without a face might be, we could perhaps overlook that detail, chalking up the lack of distinguishing facial features to poor visibility or obliviousness to detail by the witnesses due to shock or fear. What interests us most is that both witnesses describe the creature as having "bent knees" with and with its "palms up."

Both the witnesses and the Bord's classify the creature as a Bigfoot.

Some researchers claim that any creature described as Bigfoot that is found outside the Pacific Northwest, falls squarely within the realm of the paranormal. Bigfoot, or Sasquatch, as it is known in California, Oregon, Washington State, and British Columbia, is a real creature, either a branch of the ape family or an early proto-or-near-human derivative, whilst all similar creature sightings from across North America are classed as some other phenomenon.

'This other phenomenon has been described as every thing from an as yet unidentified monkey-like creature to an energy field that somehow becomes 'Bigfoot' when interacting with a witness.

In this latter view, some unidentified extraordinary energy source uses the percipient's own energy or terror to conjure itself into physical manifestation.

To do this, the energy searches among the percipient's memories or store of mental references to pick out a shape that it is suitable or somehow in keeping with an easily identifiable form (rather like the 'preying upon your worst fears' shape-shifting Pennywise The Clown in Stephen King's "IT" - I've often thought that such an explanation may apply to a whole welter of paranormal phenomena. It would certainly account for sightings of lake monsters in stretches of water barely large enough to contain a shoal of fish, UFO occupants that resemble pulsating brains and living Pterodactyls flying over the Yorkshire Moors. It's even possible that this energy has an intelligence...And a not necessarily benign one, either - Ed). Alternatively, the energy may display itself amorously, and the percipient automatically makes sense out of the form by clothing it in an familiar form, again from memories or mental references. People inclined to seeing Greys, for example, will see alien Greys; people inclined to seeing Bigfoot, will see Bigfoot. If this is the case, could then the wolf-like

Beast seen near Elkhorn be akin to the Bigfoot sighted in Union County? Are the two creatures actually a manifestation of the same type of energy which is interpreted differently by witnesses?

This view is very controversial, and we take no stance on the matter. The mere fact that the two incidents are strikingly similar brought it to our attention.

Conversely, that no previous reports in Bigfoot lore have at all described Bigfoot as making this same palms up gesture could only indicate that, as Bigfoot is perceived in essentially manlike or related in man terms, such a gesture would not be out of character for such a creature, and thus not remarked upon in the literature. Witnesses would not find it particularly odd. By the same token, that many have speculated the Bray Road Beast is a Werewolf, indicating human to wolf transformation, kneeling and a palms up gesture would not be entirely out of keeping with the Beast's physiognomy.

'If nothing else, this is an interesting path for speculation.' Look out for more on the Beast Of Bray Road in the next issue of 'DEAD OF NIGHT'

Argentinian 'Werewolf' Identified?

According to Argentina folklore, the 'Lobizon' is a Werewolf-like creature that prowls the countryside in search of unsuspecting victims. Belief in this entity is so strong that many 'innocent,' decidedly un-supernatural animals have been killed in the mistaken assumption that they are the 'Lobizon.'

One of the most frequently blamed is the Aguara Guazu, a protected species that is essentially harmless. The reasons for this case of very much mistaken identity, centre upon the fact that this canid makes very little noise, has cinnamon and black streaked fur and moves in a more than unorthodox fashion as its hind legs are higher in comparison with the rest of its body.

It feeds almost exclusively on fruit, though it does also eat small rodents and birds, which it consumes whole.

Therefore, the Aguara Guazu would seem to be a likely candidate for the 'Werewolf' sightings currently plaguing the inhabitants of Concepcion del Bermejo. A selection of blood and hair samples from a supposed 'Lobizon,' recovered at the scene of a mass sighting (there were 19 witnesses at a farm belonging to the Ovejero and Gomez family's) and later at a nearby service station.

Blood samples collected from the Ovejero's floor and from the Gomez family's backyard by police officers of the Second Regional Police Unit were subsequently forwarded to the Province's Central Laboratory for urgent analysis. The 'Lobizon's' appearance has roused the interest of the Argentinian media after incident experienced by residents of Concepcion del Bermejo, some 60 kilometers west of Saenz Pena, on National Route 16.

The results were not available at the time of going to press, but we'll be bringing you an update in our next issue.

29th July, 2000 *Concepcion del Bermejo, Argentina DIARIO "NORTE" DE ARGENTINA'*

The Re-Call Of The Wild: Wolves To Make A Comeback

This news probably won't go down too well with farmers, landowners, and people of a nervous disposition, but after an absence of hundreds of years, the woodlands of Britain could once more be echoing to the that staple of a thousand horror movies; the howling of wolves.

Nadja and Mischka, the first European wolf cubs to be born in this country for more than 500 years, were, at the

time of writing, already practising their trademark calls, despite only being 12 weeks old.

Wolves were hunted to the point of extinction back in the Middle Ages by farmers who offered bounty for their mass slaughter.

In Saxon times they roamed the woods which in those days stretched right across present day Kent and Sussex, living on a diet of horses and deer until both the forests and the intended prey declined to an alarming degree.

Parts of this ancient wood, that runs between Canterbury and the north Kent coast, still exist today, and it is fitting that the twin cubs are being reared here. David Gow, established the first breeding pack of European wolves at the Wildwood Centre, in Canterbury, earlier this year after importing three adults from Werewolf-haunted Romania and the former East Germany. He was reported to be delighted with the birth of the cubs and is currently lobbying for wolves to be reinstated into the wild in a bid to protect them from extinction.

He was quoted as saying; *'These are two wonderful creatures and a great education tool to show people that they are not the dark, medieval animal which does terrible things to people, but are in reality an endangered species.'*

'I think they are wonderful animals, and they are a species which epitomises the spirit of the wild.'

Not surprisingly, Mr Gow is more than aware that he faces an uphill struggle to bring wolves back into the wild. Nevertheless, he is convinced that Britain has a moral obligation to protect its endangered species, just as tigers and lions are (supposed to be) protected overseas.

Despite their fearsome reputation, Mr Gow has this to say regarding their true nature; *'In fact, wolves are quite shy, but highly social and very intelligent.'*

'The reintroduction into the wild is a highly emotive subject, mainly due to the danger they would pose to sheep. But they do not pose any threat to humans.'

15th August, 2000 *Canterbury, England 'DAILY MAIL'*

TO CATCH A LAKE MONSTER

And so we return to the shores of Lake Seljord (see elsewhere in this issue) where another international team of 'monster-hunters' had called a press conference to unveil a giant trap designed to catch the creature known as 'Selma.'

The six-metre long tube-shaped trap, comprising a metal frame with nylon netting, was to be lowered into the lake during August.

Using live whitefish as bait, the team hope to lure the monster into the trap.

'This is the first serpent trap of its kind in the world,' Swedish team leader Jan Sundberg, told reporters. The rest of the group is made up of seven Swedes, three Norwegians, a Canadian and a Belgian.

'The trap is adapted from a fish trap for eels. If anything up to about six metres long swims in one end, the opening closes and it won't be able to get out.'

Over a two-week period, starting from 2nd August, the team planned to dangle the trap into the lake, at depths of between 30 and 100 metres near where the majority of the sightings of 'Selma' have been reported.

Two biologists of the University of Oslo will also be on standby to fly to the area by helicopter ready to take tests if the team are successful and manage to capture the monster.

Jan Sundberg was quick to allay any fears that the animal would be harmed in any way: *'We simply aim to take a DNA sample, document the serpent and then release it into the lake. We will be very careful not to hurt it.'*

'Experts' on land were also attempting to try and track any anomalous underwater phenomena with hydrophones and sonars to help fellow expedition members based on a floating platform move the trap quickly to a promising spot.

Sundberg said that the team had recorded mysterious whale-like noises during a previous visit in 1999. *'We'd be disappointed if we don't get some kind of result this time...the only evidence scientists would accept is a dead or alive specimen.'*

We await the results with interest, though with a due sense of scepticism that anything will be discovered. Not because we don't think it's possible that a monster of some description could exist in Lake Seljord, but simply because this branch of cryptozoology - in common with most other forms of Fortean phenomena - is notorious for avoiding unequivocal detection.

3rd August, 2000 Lake Seljord, Norway 'Associated Press'

NIGHTMARES AND DAYDREAMS

Classic Tales Of Weird Phenomena: 1

Pterodactyls Over Africa

In September, 1939, *'THE WEST AFRICAN REVIEW'* contained an article called *'LIVING MONSTER OR FABULOUS ANIMAL?'*

Readers will recollect that some years earlier there had been a type of Challenger expedition into Central Africa to search the Iruwul forests of the Belgian Congo for a huge mysterious, antediluvian monster.

'IS THE BRONTOSAURUS STILL ALIVE IN THE MORASSES OF THE CONGO?' were the headlines in some of the London papers. No report of the traces of any such monsters ever appeared, and I was not surprised. I had been right through the Belgian Congo in 1923, and had come into intimate contact with a number of what would be called Native Commissioners or District Officers in British territory, as well as with noted big-game hunters. None of these men, who were in positions to know before anyone else of the existence of such monsters, ever alluded to the possible existence of them. Yet stories do circulate amongst natives of animals never listed in any museum.

On the Gambia River lingers a native tradition of an enormous monster that comes out at night from the ooze and slime of the mangrove marshes and devours whatever it meets. To those who gain the confidence of the older fishermen, terrifying stories are still told of the 'Ninki Nanka,' as the reptile is locally called.

Two very serious defects are immediately apparent in such stories. Animals of the size of the Brontosaurus and of the 'Ninki Nanka' are heavy, and would leave the damp earth of the river bank or on the margin of the mangrove marshes pug marks that would persist for years. I have seen on the banks of the Rufiji River in East Africa, elephant tracks two years old. Yet the tracks of any such monster have never been reported, either by the natives or by any European hunter.

The second defect in the possibility of the existence of such creatures is that these huge animals are usually herbivorous and would inevitably invade cultivated riverine lands. Yet no reports of ravaged farms are ever received from natives. On circumstantial evidence one may rule out the existence on land of any huge monster, leaving the 'Sea Serpent' to its watery domain.

The creatures of the air are in a different category, they fly and do not necessarily leave traces behind them. It is unlikely that any direct descendants of Pteranodon - the great 18-footers of the British and Kansas chalk deposits - are alive today, but of Rhamphorynchus, with a wingspan of 25 inches, things may be different. Mr. Melland, a Native Commissioner in Northern Rhodesia, recorded a conversation he had with some local natives:

'What is the "Kongamato"?'

'A bird.'

'What kind of bird?'

'Oh! well it isn't a bird really. It is more like a lizard with membranous wings like a bat.'

Further inquiries disclosed the facts that the wing-spread was from four to seven feet across, that the general colour was red. It was believed to have no feathers but only skin on its body, and was believed to have teeth on its back.

'I sent for two books, containing pictures of Pterodactyls, and every native present immediately and unhesitatingly picked out and identified it as a "Kongamato."'

From the Gold Coast comes a similar story. The 'Susabonsam' is a mysterious flying creature, described by the natives as being about the size of a man, with thin tenebrous wings, like a bat. These two accounts favour Pteranodon rather than Rhamphorynchus. However, the obvious answer is that the natives have exaggerated the description of a very large bat.

The trouble with this explanation is that the natives have names for each kind of bat and neither of the above described creatures is regarded as a bat. Also, there are no known bats in Africa comparable in size with say, the flying-foxes of Java with wingspreads of five feet, with and to which such creatures might be confused or traceable. The largest bats of Africa are the fruit bats and their wingspan seldom exceeds three feet. Nevertheless let us see how the bats fare under native reports.

Among the Ibibio bats are associated with Witchcraft, and for any bat to fly into a house and touch a person is a sure sign that that person is thereafter bewitched and will perish by having his heart eaten at night while he sleeps, or his shadow captured and taken away.

Among the Pagans of the Nilotic Sudan, "Witchcraft is usually performed at night, and thus owls and bats are associated with it."

Among the Bongo of the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan much the same superstition lurks; "Spirits, Devils and Witches have their general appellation of "Bitaboh," wood-Goblins being specially called "Ronga." Comprehended under the same term are all the bats (especially the *Magaderma frons*, which flutters about from tree to tree in broad daylight.

In the Cameroons, the superstition of the Vampire is attached to bats. Bats, owls and bush cats are said to be Witch-shapes (among the people of Ndop); should a bat or owl come near a man's house or a bush cat defecate in his compound, the man must go at once to the diviner and discover what remedies he must take to ward off the evil. A Witch-shape is said to be capable of sucking out the life of a sleeping man or woman.

From Sierra Leone comes an account of the gruesome habits of the large fruit bat. One of the most uncanny superstitions is that of the 'Boman' in which anthropologists will recognise the Vampire of European superstition. This creature is said to suck the blood of sleeping children until they die; it can turn into a stone or a snake at will.

The 'Borman' is in reality the hammer-headed bat: (*Hypsignathus monstrosus*), the largest fruit bat found in Africa; it's dull monotonous cry at the time when fruit is ripening has struck terror into many a village, whose inhabitants will sally forth from their houses and beat tins to drive it away, cursing its father and mother and all its ancestors the while.

It is curious that in two such widely separated areas as Sierra Leone and the Cameroons, blood-sucking should be attributed to bats when no such type of bats are found in Africa.

The only place where such bats exist is in South America, and not further north than southern Mexico. These bats are quite small, and were of course not known to Europeans until long after the discovery of the Americas. They were called Vampire bats after the belief in Europe of this mysterious being; a Vampire. It however was not bat-like and could not be associated with flying monsters. At one time in Europe, the Vampire was regarded as a blood-sucking ghost, at another as a Witch, and at another as a corpse that destroyed the living by sucking their blood from them.

The idea of a Vampire in the form of a huge bat-like figure was of course, the foundation of the gruesome story of 'DRACULA'

To return the mysterious flying creatures that haunt the stories of the natives, there is among the Hausa the 'Buraka.' It was winged and had the head of a man with the legs and feet of horse. As this story is found among the Hausa, it may be an Arab version of the Grecian Centaur. Nevertheless, in these accounts of mysterious flying creatures, is one dealing with fact or fancy? Is it a case of race memory, a carry-over from the times when the human race hid from the terror that flew by day? Or is it another instance of culture-contacts?

Perhaps some racial consciousness would explain the occurrence of stories of winged creatures in so many places. The dragon is another form of the beast. Are St George and the Dragon, Andromeda and the Dragon and the Dragon of Wales but local tribal variants of the 'Kongomato' and of the 'Susabonsam'?

Or is one dealing with a case of rationalizing a culture-contact superstition common to both Africa and Europe by projecting a belief in Witchcraft, Vampires, ghosts on to the harmless little 'fly-by-nights' and then exaggerating their size?

Perhaps.

Others who read may be able to add to these stories, and I would welcome accounts of mysterious winged creatures in Africa. Yet *ex Africa aliquid semper novi*, and the suspicion lingers that perhaps there is some hidden corner of Africa where a few, shy, Pterodactyls still lurk.

Yes, there are still hidden corners of Africa. Only a few months ago I was the first Britisher to peer over the rim, at 6,000 feet, of a lovely little crater lake, scramble down its precipitous walls, and drink from its pure, pellucid waters.

M.D.W. Jeffreys, M.A. Ph.D. (1939)

Sources: Melland, A.H. 'IN WITCHBOUND AFRICA' Sellgman, C.G. & B.Z. 'THE PAGAN TRIBES OF THE NILOTIC SUDAN' p: 523 London 1932

STOP PRESS!!!

The Invisible Man Is A Foreseeable Reality

Sensational news from the science labs at the University of Texas. According to reports published in a welter of respectable journals, scientists have discovered a way to make human flesh transparent for a few moments at a time. By somehow manipulating the way light passes through tissue, the team of researchers have gone on record as stating that they can now create a temporary "window" in tissue, which allows doctors to see up to five times deeper than at present over an area of up to one or two square inches. And whilst the technique has not yet been tested

on human skin, the engineers are convinced that it could well have applications in diagnosis; helping to reveal the extent of skin cancer, for example. And even assisting in the actual treatment of the disease, by allowing a laser beam to be targeted on underlying tissue.



By injecting various substances, the team made small areas of rat and hamster skin virtually transparent for more than 20 minutes at a time.

'We could see a blood vessel which had not previously been visible,' claimed Professor Ashley Welch, the lead investigator.

Light does not normally penetrate the skin because it is scattered like a torch beam engulfed by a sea mist, or a sound-muffling pea-souper. Just as each water droplet in the fog scatters light, so small components of tissue also scatter light. To overcome this, the team used glycerol, a hygroscopic alcohol which pulls water out of tissue.

Without wishing to rain on anyone's parade however, one can't help but recall the warning words of Claude Rains, playing Jack Griffin, at the conclusion of the classic 1933 version of 'THE INVISIBLE MAN'

'I meddled in things that man must leave alone!!!'

24th August, 2000 University of Texas, USA 'THE DAILY TELEGRAPH'

RESIDUE FROM MAGONIA:

Fish, Mice And Straw Fall From The Skies

When the heavens decided, not for the first time this miserable, Summer-That-Never-Was, to open over Great Yarmouth, last August, hundreds of silver sprats came crashing down along with the sheets of endless rain.

The tiny creatures landed in a variety of locations, including gardens and atop the roofs of several houses in Alderston Road. Retired ambulance driver Fred Hodgkins, 65, witnessed the fish falling when he stepped out into the deluge to investigate what he at first thought to be showers of hail pelting his roof, so great was the storm's ferocity.

'There were a couple of claps of thunder and the sky went really dark even though it was only about 11 in the morning,' he later told reporters.

'At first I thought I must have something wrong with my eyes because the whole of my back yard seemed to be covered in little slivers of silver.'

'When I looked again, I saw scores of tiny silver fish. I got my neighbours to have a look because I knew that nobody would have believed me.'

'One of them found their garden shed was also covered in fish. It was quite extraordinary. I have never seen anything like it before in my life.'

'I live about half a mile from the sea so the fish must have been carried some distance. They were all dead, though they looked fresh as if they'd just come out of the sea - but I didn't try eating any.'

'Nobody has been able to tell me what kind of fish they are - but they look like sprats or baby whiting.'

Predictably, the teams of 'experts' were wheeled out into the media spotlight to voice their opinion that the fish must have been sucked up by a water spout, and taken high into the gathering storm clouds where they were carried for two miles before being released over Great Yarmouth.

A Meteorological Office spokesman, Andy Yeatman, was one of those who claims to profess to know the answer to a mystery that has befuddled mankind since records began; *'Mini-tornadoes build up under thunder clouds. In this case, the tornado gathered over the sea and the fish got sucked up into the clouds.'*

'They were obviously carried along in the cloud for some distance before the cloud burst and the fish fell away with the rain.'

'The most extraordinary example of this sort of phenomenon occurred during the 1976 Olympic Games when the skies started raining live maggots during a yachting event. I suppose the gentleman in Great Yarmouth had a pleasant experience in comparison with that.'

That's all very well as logical explanations go, but what I am left wondering is how come this 'tornado' (in common with countless other tornadoes across the world and throughout history) is so selective in its choice of victim...Why did it suck up only the one species of fish? Surely there were other shoals swimming in the vicinity? And what about the attendant flotsam and jetsam?

A highly discriminating meteorological phenomenon....Now there's a truly Fortean mystery.

7th August, 2000 Great Yarmouth, England 'DAILY MAIL'

*** And just a week or so later, homes and gardens on a Suffolk estate were being carpeted with falling barley straw in a shower that lasted for approximately 20 minutes.

And oh, those 'Weather Experts' (the same ones whose forecasts this Summer have been about as accurate as a Jaap Stam penalty) were out in force again, clambering over each other in their bid to rationalize the 'impossible' Once more, their theories centered upon that highly convenient 'selective tornado,' a whirling dervish that has now apparently grown tired of its all-sprat diet and has chosen instead to suck up this particular type of straw - and nothing else mind - just barley straw - and dump it unceremoniously on the Pinewood estate in Ipswich.

14th August, 2000 Ipswich, Suffolk 'THE GUARDIAN'

*** And finally, over in Palermo, Sicily, residents of the island's capital were being deluged by 'rains of big fat mice.'

Here at least however, we have an explanation for the phenomenon a great deal more acceptable than the ones put forward to account for the aforementioned falls of fish and bales of straw. In this case, the rodents, leaping from rooftop to rooftop in the run-down city centre, have become so gorged with the richness of the local pickings that they are too heavy to jump and are instead

plummeting into the streets below. They often hit unwary passers-by on the head. Embarrassingly enough for the authorities, a United Nations international conference on crime was due to be held in the city at the height of the falls of obese mice.

In frustration, the inhabitants elected to erect a series of barricades during a demonstration over the city council's failure to tackle the problem, disrupting traffic for several hours.

1st September, 2000 Palermo, Sicily 'DAILY MAIL'

HUMAN HEAD FOUND INSIDE A COD

One of the most curiously horrific stories we've come across in some time made just about every newspaper on the penultimate day of last August.

Peter Monson, a fish-factory worker, cut open a giant cod and was shocked by the sight of a human head that rolled out like it still possessed a life of its own.

The 5ft cod was being prepared for sale when, as Peter relates; *'I saw the head of a man that was pretty much intact. I just stared in horrified disbelief.'*

The big mystery of course, apart from who the head might actually belong to, is how it got there in the first place. The fish in question, a Morgan Cod that, weighs 97lb, does not have sharp teeth and usually sucks its prey. This particular specimen had been caught in a trawlers nets and kept on ice.

The police naturally took an interest in the grisly discovery, and one of the investigating officers, Detective Sergeant David Miles told reporters that they have not yet identified the head, and that the process of identification would likely take a long time.

That of course, didn't prevent the local fishermen from speculating that the head could be that of someone who fell off a ship and was attacked by a shark, just recently.

A fisherman named Michael Edwards, 39, went missing overboard from an Australian trawler off Townsville, Queensland, the previous weekend. Police in Cairns, Australia, stated that they were awaiting the results of a post-mortem examination.

30th August, 2000 Cairns, Australia 'DAILY MANC'

Struck By A Finger Of Fate

'It could be you!!!' An unnamed 38-year-old woman was rushed to hospital after, of all things, a 6ft finger fell on her.

The giant offending finger, a hanging direction sign at Zurich's central railway station, landed smack on her head and caused her bruising and a not inconsiderable degree of shock. A railway spokesman stated that it was'n't known why the finger had suddenly become detached from its rightful position among a number of others.

18th August, 2000 Zurich, Switzerland 'THE DAILY TELEGRAPH'

And Finally, More Weird Crime

A colour-blind forger was arrested after he used black ink instead of green on a series of fake dollar bills. He had forgotten to ask what colour they were before embarking upon his intended scam in Texas, USA

6th August, 2000 Texas, USA 'NEWS OF THE WORLD'

*** And finally, for this issue, a flatulent jailbreaker named Claude Conte, 21, from Lyons, France, was soon back behind bars...after he was (ahem) sniffed out by the police. The reason? His excessive wind had betrayed him and given away his whereabouts during a seach of his hideout.

31st August, 2000 Lyons, France 'DAILY SLUR'