

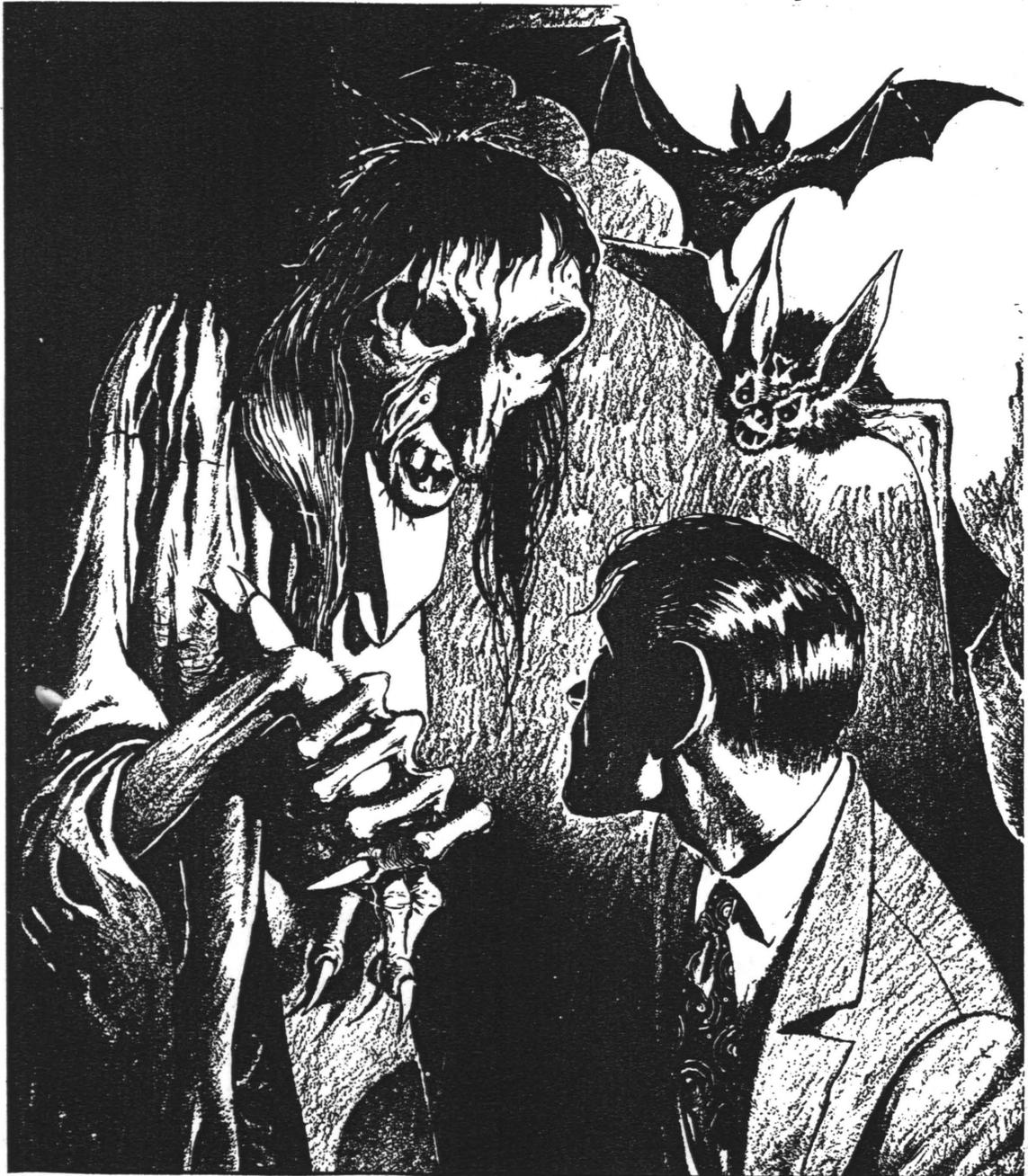


DEAD OF NIGHT MAGAZINE



Issue 20 March/April 2001 Price £2

GLIMPSES OF THE WORLD UNSEEN
Ghosts And Devils Over Merseyside



***Merseyside's Premier Publication Dealing
With ALL Paranormal Phenomena!!!***

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DEAD OF NIGHT MAGAZINE (Editor Lee Walker)

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Kolchak's Kabinet Of Kuriosities



The Thunder Of Invisible Gunfire

A man by the name of Willie Gordon, who hails from Inverurie, Speyside, Scotland, grew up on an isolated farm in the middle of the proverbial nowhere.

One morning, at the height of the Second World War, and following an extremely heavy snowstorm the night before, Willie, then aged 15, was delighted to find that the blizzard had been sufficient to block all the roads leading to and from his local school. Anxious to make the very most of the free time, Willie decided to go exploring through the deep, crisp white that carpeted the land.

Suddenly, on the very stroke of noon, the blade-sharp air was shattered by a distant salvo of gunfire. Willie, more than a little shocked, stopped dead in his tracks, with the hairs on the back of his neck standing on end.

At the time, Willie was involved with Army cadet training, and he instantly knew he'd heard the unmistakable chatter of machine gun fire.

But why on earth were the shots ringing out at midday and where were they coming from?

Willie stood stock still for a couple of minutes, awaiting the sound of further gunfire, but it never came. After a while, he lost interest and headed for home thinking little more about it.

The next day, the big freeze continued, and whilst he was out walking in the snow, once more, he again heard several short bursts of gunfire echoing through the surrounding mountains.

Checking his watch, he saw that again it was exactly midday.

The very same thing happened the following day, and the day after that...

On the fifth day, however, the Winter silence remained unbroken. And the mysterious gunfire has never again reverberated across the countryside at any hour of the day.

The memory of the five-day phenomenon has remained with Willie ever since, and he's often been plagued with the fear that maybe they were distress signals from a stricken airman who had crashed somewhere in the Cairngorms and was using his limited reserve of ammunition to try and attract assistance.

Local historians have cast doubt on this however, and have pointed out that the area was used as a training area for troops during World War Two, so the sound of gunfire wouldn't have been that uncommon.

That, however, doesn't explain why the gunfire rang out so regularly at 12 noon for four consecutive days, and then stopped for no apparent reason.

14TH January, 2001 'SCOTTISH SUNDAY POST'

STREET SPIRIT HAUNTS YORKE

The lead singer of another of this writer's favourite bands, *RADIOHEAD*, has gone on (ahem) record as stating that he has been living in a haunted house.

Thom Yorke, believes that the house in Oxford, which he purchased prior to recording the largely devoid of tunes, '*KID A*', used have its own resident spirit.

'You just knew it was there,' Thom told reporters. 'You didn't say it out loud. You just knew.'

Perhaps it was inevitable that the blame for the prog rock influences evident on '*KID A*,' should be levelled directly against the otherworldly presence.

In fact, one of the 'songs' on the album; '*MORNING BELL*,' is apparently about living with a discarnate entity. The spirit was blamed for the loss of an entire Minidisc's worth of demos when the house was struck by a bolt of lightning. Certainly, Thom seems to have little difficulty in accepting that paranormal activity was the root cause of this incident.

'That was the general vibe of the house at the time, so I didn't think anything of it. Six months later, I was in a plane travelling back from Japan and I didn't sleep at all. I hadn't slept for ages and ages. Suddenly I was lying there, and I'd forgotten all the stuff from the Minidisc, and 'MORNING BELL' came back to me, exactly as I had written it.'

Perhaps strangely, Thom seems to regret having inadvertently 'exorcised' the phantom.

'He was trapped in the plaster. And we got rid of the plaster. I really didn't want to do it.'

December, 2000 Oxford, England 'Q MAGAZINE'

Psychic Didn't See It Coming!!!

In Austin, Texas, a self-professed clairvoyant by the name of Paula Hoseford, claimed she lost her 'psychic gift' when she was unexpectedly whacked on the head by a plank of wood. Paula asserted that she used to have precognitive faculties until she suffered the accident at a DIY store.

She attempted to sue the shop for massive damages over her loss of psychic abilities, but bosses were successful in their assertions that she should have been able to foresee something as significant as a plank falling on her head. If she was any good, that is.

The judge concurred and duly dismissed the case.
14th January, 2001 Austin, Texas SUNDAY PEOPLE'

Don't Try This At Home

Turkey's state broadcasting board have ordered the TV station ATV off the air for a whole 24 hours for having the temerity to continue to broadcast the Pokemon cartoon series.

Perhaps we shouldn't be too quick to smirk at these tough censorship laws in this case however, seeing as how the clamp down *did* follow two separate incidents involving Turkish children, both of whom were injured after leaping off balconies in a bid to imitate the Pokemon characters.

7th December, 2000 Turkey 'THE DAILY TELEGRAPH'

THE WALKING DEAD

In Almaty, Kazakhstan, a man who managed to apparently electrocute himself whilst attempting to steal power cables, was buried with due ceremonial honours, last December.

He was wrapped in a traditional cloth shroud and interred in a shallow grave as is the Muslim custom. Two days after the funeral, this same man rose from the supposedly final resting place, and walked calmly into his village, sending the villagers into a state of abject shock.

7th December, 2000 Almaty, Eastern Kazakhstan 'THE DAILY TELEGRAPH'

Final Destination II

Proof that the Grim Reaper can sometimes display a really sardonic sense of humour can be provided (should you require it – and honestly, Constant Readers, do you *need* confirmation?) in spades by the following examples of decidedly unusual demises...

First up we have the case of Garry (his surname is not recorded in the clipping we came across), decided it might be a great idea to demonstrate to a group of students just how tough the glass in his office windows were by lunging at them at full tilt. Unfortunately for our hapless solicitor, he crashed straight through the panes and went hurtling down 24 floors to his death.

The incident, which took place at the Toronto Dominion Bank Tower in Canada, was given an even more ironic slant by the statement issued by the partners of the firm for whom Garry worked: They actually described their deceased employee as being one their very *bri*ghtest colleagues.

Yeah, right.

*** Next up, we have the case of two friends out enjoying a spot of fishing on a lake in Illinois, USA, back in 1998.

As they had been entirely unsuccessful in their efforts to actually land any fish, one of the two companions, a fella named Daniel, decided that it

might be a good idea to dynamite the water in their vicinity in order to stun any passing fish.

As Daniel chucked the stick of dynamite into the lake, however, a freak gust of wind blew their boat directly over the spot where it had descended into the murky depths and the boat was blown to the four winds. Somehow, the unnamed friend survived the blast, but Daniel sadly drowned.



*** A year or so later, in the state of Maine, a man known only as James, chose to move town to be closer to a girl he had met through the Internet, named Leigh.

Leigh, understandably less than enthusiastic about James' obsessive behaviour, refused to see him when he turned up on her doorstep. Hurt by this rejection, he hit upon the wheeze that acting like a *Biiigg* M.A.N might help win her affections.

So he returned armed with a chainsaw and after getting it up and running, started to swing it wildly round and round his head, in the manner of Leatherface at the climax of 'THE TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE.' Unfortunately, James lost his grip for a nanosecond and that was all it took for him to decapitate himself, thereby spurting geysers of blood all over Leigh's summer-lush front lawn.

*** That same year, a soldier in Alabama, USA, who was deadly set on winning a spitting contest, backed up and ran toward the window in a bid to give his phlegm that extra vital momentum.

All he succeeded in doing however, was to fly right over the waist-high guard rail and plunge three storeys onto the unforgiving concrete below.

*** In Washington D.C., back in April, 1999, two paramedics, Carol and Mark, were found dead in their home by Mark's 14-year-old son.

They were wearing breathing masks attached to an empty tank of nitrous oxide, otherwise known as laughing gas. Despite their considerable medical training, the couple had, for some reason failed to mix the gas, poisonous in its pure form, with air.

*** Moving on to the May of last year, a plane that had just taken off from a Phillipine airport, Augusto, a wannabe hijacker, put on a ski mask and a pair of goggles before pulling out a gun. He then robbed the assembled passengers of £25,000, then

Ordered the pilot to drop his altitude to 6,500 feet. He then strapped a home-made parachute to his back and ordered a flight attendant to open the door. He then leapt from the plane but was blown back on board by a sudden gust of wind. The attendant, rather obligingly, helped him out of the aircraft, the very second Augusto decided to pull the pin on the hand grenade. Unfortunately for Augusto, he threw the pin into the cabin and fell towards the earth still clutching the business end of the deadly device.

*** An elderly couple in the United States, were killed after their 18-stone ram elected to attack them.

Carl and Mary Beaver were butted to death by the animal as they were busy feeding and watering their flock in a field outside their North Carolina hometown of China Grove.

Mrs Beaver, aged 80, who suffered a broken leg and head injuries died at the scene. Her 84-year-old husband died in hospital.

Investigators and relatives said that the ram, acquired only a few days earlier, may have been trying to protect ewes during mating season.

'All indications pointed to the ram,' a police spokesman told reporters. 'He had blood on his head as well as his back.'

At the time of going to press, the relatives had not decided what fate should befall the ram.

22nd November 2000/ 8th December, 2000 Various locations 'LIVERPOOL ECHO'/'DAILY MANC'

*** Airport customs officials seized 2,000 Buddhist swastikas under the understandably mistaken impression that they were neo-Nazi propaganda.

The swastikas, which an artist had used in the making of miniature windmills, were actually destined for an exhibition on the constantly changing meaning of various religious symbols.

29th August, 2000 India 'DAILY EXPRESS'

*** Rodriguez Valez was so angry with his overweight wife that he tried to shove her down a manhole at the height of an argument.

Not surprisingly, she got stuck.

Valez was arrested in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, for attempted murder, but was heard to complain: 'She nags me night and day. I thought the best place for her was down the sewer with all the other rats.'

So, that's fair enough, then.

7th January, 2001 Rio de Janeiro, Brazil 'NEWS OF THE WORLD'

*** Golfer Martin Franklin scored a hole-in-one, last November, although he would be the first to admit that he had more than a little assistance from a jeezly ol' crow.

The bird swooped and grabbed the ball in its beak after it landed a mere 5 feet from the flag of the second hole.

Mr Franklin, 43, and three other players who were witness to the incident, watched in amazement as the crow calmly walked across the green and placed the ball in the hole.

Unfortunately, the hole-in-one could not be officially claimed because the rules outlaw balls being moved by any 'outside agency.'

Accordingly, the ball was put back on the spot where it landed and Mr Franklin's partner had to take the putt.

Mr Franklin, playing at Clacton Golf Club in Essex, was quoted as saying, perhaps a trifle unnecessarily, 'The chances of it happening must be millions to one.'

Other golfers had previously complained about a crow going around the course picking up golfballs. One unlucky player even saw the crow drop his ball in the water at the, spookily enough, 13th hole!!!

16th November, 2000 Clacton Golf Club, Essex. 'LIVERPOOL DAILY POST'

***A woman hired as Father Christmas was planning on suing her employees for sexual discrimination after being given the boot because her decidedly high-pitched 'Ho, ho, ho,' only served to confuse children.

Donna Underwood, 50, got the job at a shopping mall near her Virginia home and started handing out presents to children.

After a few hours, shoppers began issuing complaints that Father Christmas had a squeaky voice and that their children were more than a little bemused by this.

'My kids kept saying, "He's a woman, he's a woman," Judy Viera. 'I'm all for equal rights, but Father Christmas has to be a man. She didn't sound right.'

The management of the mall fired Mrs Underwood and replaced her with a man.

Mrs Underwood claimed that her red suit and white wig and beard made her the spitting image of Father Christmas. She was very upset and angry at being fired.

She was offered alternative employment as one of Santa's elves, but resigned after a day. 'It was just not the same,' she said.

12th December, 2000 Los Angeles, USA 'DAILY TELEGRAPH'

*** A dentist by the name of Alberto Rulli, aged 53, elected to stab to death his neighbour Antonio Mele, 54, simply because his dog wouldn't stop barking all night long and Rulli couldn't get any sleep.

He was jailed for a total of eight years for carrying out the murder.

25th February, 2001 Rome, Italy 'NEWS OF THE WORLD'

*** Meanwhile, in Monchengladbach, Germany, a man who was jilted by a girl suddenly changed his mind about killing himself and duly turned off the gas taps.

Unfortunately however, he then had the stupidity to light up a cigarette, causing an explosion that blew the roof off his block of flats.

Luckily, no one was injured.

11th December, 2000 Monchengladbach, Germany 'ASSOCIATED PRESS'

*** In a real-life Hannibal Lecter-type case, Gilberto Menezes aged 40, was jailed for killing his wife's lover in a fit of anger, and then serving up bits of his body to diners at his restaurant in Campinas, Brazil.

27th July, 2000 Campinas, Brazil 'NEWS OF THE WORLD'

*** A decidedly less-than wonderful mother by the name of Gerda Schimmel, 33, confessed to setting alight a total of 14 different properties in Hamburg, Germany, simply so that she could watch the 'sexy'

firemen who arrived on the scene to extinguish the fires.

Four people, including two firemen, died in one of the blazes and mother-of-two Schimmel was subsequently charged with manslaughter.

1st October, 2000 Hamburg, Germany 'SUNDAY PEOPLE'

*** A thief who leapt from an upstairs window in a bid to escape justice whilst carrying out a burglary landed on top of a woman by the name of Anne FELL.

Anne, who works as a wages clerk and is aged 60, was quite literally stunned when the would-be burglar flattened her as she returned to her home in Crawley, West Sussex.

Her husband Derek, 61, tried to grab the 6ft tall villain but he managed to struggle free and escaped with his £1,000 haul of jewellery.

25th October, 2000 Crawley, Essex 'DAILY SLUR'

*** A Kung Fu teacher in China, was facing execution at the time of going to press, for beating to death a 14-year-old pupil he felt had shown him disrespect.

5th December, 2000 China 'DAILY MANC'

*** A man broke into a flat in Gloucester and fell asleep in the victim's bed.

He did not actually steal anything and left wrapped in a duvet when the owner returned.

23rd January, 2001 'LIVERPOOL ECHO'

*** Escape artist Kurt Fiel had to ask police for help after he managed to lock himself out of his car. And get this, he was en route to a convention for escapologists.

PHANTOMS STALK THE LANES OF NESTON

The following account was submitted by a former work colleague, late last year, and it is her request that we decline to use her surname. Your wish is our command, Emma, so without further ado let's get around to relating her tale...

At approximately 2:45am, one Saturday, last Autumn, my boyfriend and I were walking along Church Lane in Neston.

As we emerged the other side of an old tunnel that bisects the road, I suddenly saw something moving from out of the corner of my eye. When I stopped to look closer, I could see that there appeared to be an old lady bending down in her front garden, as though she were trying to close her front gate. For some reason, I was frightened by the sight of her, even though she didn't appear to be threatening in any way. I screamed out loud, and my boyfriend looked across towards where I was pointing and also saw the 'woman.'

He too, was badly scared by the sight of the figure, and apparently in response to my screaming, the 'woman' suddenly stood up and looked directly at us.

We were able to discern that she was wearing a 'Victorian style' white nightgown with a white hat. She had long, grey wavy hair poking out from

beneath her headgear and I would estimate her age to be somewhere around 80.

Still frightened, we began to walk very quickly away from the scene, and when we dared risk a glance back, we saw that she had disappeared and that the garden gate was still wide open.

I have no doubts that the 'woman' was a ghost. I can't believe a lady of that advanced age, on a fairly chilly night, and dressed in such decidedly old-fashioned clothes, would be attempting to fix her gates at that ungodly hour.

As we hurried past her, it seemed that she did in fact say something, but we could not quite make out what it was. My boyfriend later claimed that all he could manage to catch were the words; '*I used to do this when...*'

It has always been known, locally, that the road where we saw the 'ghost,' Church Lane, is haunted. According to local tradition, the apparition is the spirit of a woman christened with the nickname '*The Red Lady.*' I thought that it was nothing more than folklore centred upon the fact that the lane is dark, winding and undeniably spooky. But after seeing the phantom for myself, along with my boyfriend, I can state categorically that there is definitely something to the stories.

The house where we saw the 'woman' is not particularly old, but the area itself has long been the site of habitation.

The entire area is renowned for being haunted by various Phantoms, and will be glad to provide your readers with further details in due course.

Liverpool To Protect The Planet Earth

Sci-fi author Arthur C. Clarke gave his endorsement, last September, to Liverpool's bid to build an early warning system against asteroids threatening the Earth.

In an open letter to Liverpool, Sir Arthur has pledged his support for the city to play a leading role in tracking rogue asteroids and comets on a potential collision course with the Earth.

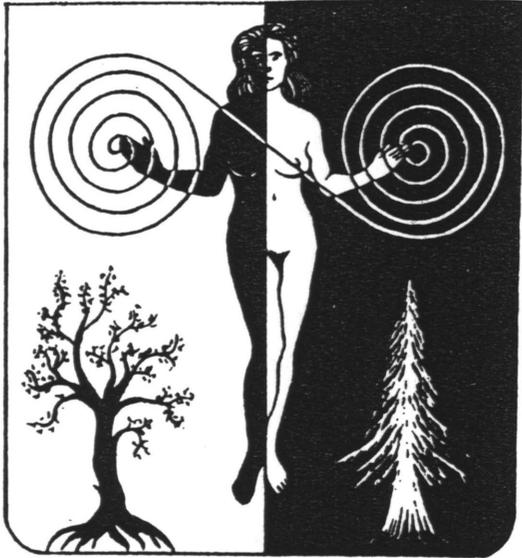
He writes; '*The UK has a proud tradition of building fine scientific instruments, especially astronomical telescopes, and Liverpool has become a distinguished centre for this high technology industry.*

'I think that it would be fitting if the engineers and craftsmen of Merseyside built the premier Spaceguard telescope, for the benefit of the whole country. Such an undertaking will be a significant technical challenge but the result will contribute substantially to the protection of our only home – the Earth. I believe that Liverpool is a fitting place for the telescope to be built because of its reputation as a centre of excellence for interplanetary studies.

'It was also in Liverpool that Phillip Cleator founded the British Interplanetary Society in 1933, and one of the Society's earliest supporters was John Moores.'

26th September, 2000 Liverpool 'LIVERPOOL DAILY POST'

BY THE RED- GOLD GLOW OF OCTOBER



It was during the autumn of my final year at Church Drive Primary School when, seated behind the graffiti-splattered desk top in Mrs Williams' math class, that I first became acquainted with Forrest J.Ackerman's 'FAMOUS MONSTERS OF FILMLAND' magazine.

I remember it had been one of those eye-wateringly bright, windless afternoons; the sort that leave you feeling strangely restless, desperate for adventure, and escape from routine.

Trapped within the stuffy confines of the classroom, however, the hours had dragged interminably, and the ringing of the Hometown Bell had seemed about a billion light years distant. As I recall, we pupils were supposed to be studying the myriad joys of Long Division and the 12x table, but looking around, most of my fellow classmates had been either staring blankly into space or else were busy passing secret messages to one another concerning the latest, hottest topical issue: The size of Jackie Goodchild's rapidly expanding "gazangas" were making the major headlines back then, if my memory serves me correctly...

And whilst I certainly wasn't averse to casting sneaky, sidelong glances at Jackie's (ahem) 'dirty pillows', I was equally concerned with trying to ensure that old eagle-eyed Mrs Williams didn't catch on to the fact that I'd

hidden the monster mag I'd swapped with Mikey Cartwright for a 'Wagonwheel' and a half-melted 'Curly Wurly,' beneath a pile of tatty, dog-eared text books. Every time she turned her back to write another sum up on the blackboard, I would hastily read as much as I could without arousing her suspicion.

'FAMOUS MONSTERS,' now sadly defunct, (although it did make something of a comeback in the mid-90's. I picked up a couple of back issues from Liverpool's 'FORBIDDEN PLANET' store, a few years back), was one of those rare publications that managed to fire the golden glow of imagination and fill the reader with a sense of wide-eyed wonder.

Its pages were jam-packed with fascinating, little-known facts, crystal-clear stills and movie poster reproductions, all of which were thrown together in an incredible, semi-organised mish-mash, not a little unlike, in its potpourri of contents at least, the humble publication you hold in your hands right now, Dear Constant Reader.

Everything was included in the mix: Interviews with the stars of the Golden Age Of Horror; Karloff, Lugosi, Chaney and Rains. Price, Cushing, Lorre and Lee. There were in-depth features on a vast array of films. From the well-established classics like 'KING KONG', 'DRACULA,' 'THE WOLFMAN,' and 'FRANKENSTEIN,' to more obscure horrors such as 'THE MOLE PEOPLE,' 'THE TROLLENBERG TERROR,' 'IT CONQUERED THE WORLD,' and 'FIEND WITHOUT A FACE.'

Previews of forthcoming releases, filmbooks, storyboard artwork, all of this, and a whole pile more assaulted my sense like a succession of video tape images with the cassette stuck on permanent fast forward mode.

A slightly more than passing interest became full-blown obsession in the space of that single October afternoon, and that craving for adventure I spoke of earlier, was all but satiated. Suddenly, horror films were right up there with footy, music and girls (although not necessarily in that order) at the top end of my personal Hit Parade.

But oh, like the respectable Doctor Jekyll after downing one of those bubbling, smoking green-coloured potions, I soon discovered that there were to be some intriguing, not to say startling side effects to be endured. You wanna hear about them? Well, okay, but without wishing to come on like a latter-day Edward Van Sloan, stepping out from behind a set of velvet curtains to announce;

'Mr Walker feels it would be a little unkind to present these examples without just a word of friendly warning...'

I feel duty-bound to caution you, Dear Reader, that, having perused this tale, you may find yourself agreeing wholeheartedly with my former headmaster, the normally kind-hearted, unflappable Mr Woodside, in calling for the Men In The White Coats to lock me in a padded cell with a packet of crayons and an easy-to-read instruction book on Do-It-Yourself basket weaving...

One

The Church Drive School Sports Day was held exceptionally late that year.

The summer of '75 had been wet, windy, and downright miserable (*Some things never change. Crappy British summers are one of 'em – Sun-Starved Ed*).

I remember it seemed that I spent the entire six weeks' vacation gazing forlornly out of the window as torrents of rainwater went babbling along the gutters of Bolton Road East, and the net result of this deluge was that just about every field in the county was saturated to the point where they resembled the muddy hell of the Somme, back in 1916...

The Port Sunlight Village Fete was postponed a grand total of nine times before the organisers finally admitted defeat and called it off altogether. Pre-season football training had to take place at The Oval's indoor five-a-side pitch. Even the New Ferry Fair had to be cancelled in the interests of public safety.

The rain didn't let up until September came rolling around, but even then, it took several more weeks for the fields to drain sufficiently enough for the School Board to even consider the possibility of breaking with tradition and holding the Sports Day in early autumn. For the best part of a fortnight, the rumour mill went into overdrive, as both teachers and pupils alike debated the prospects of The Games being given the go-ahead.

As it turned out, the Board gave the events the thumbs up just three days prior to my inaugural encounter with '*FAMOUS MONSTERS*,' and they were finally fixed for the second Friday in October, the eve of the half-term break.

That dog-blamed Weather permitting, of course.

I guess most people were thrilled by this decision. Certainly, there was an almost Christmas-like atmosphere pervasive throughout the whole school that seemed to increase as The Games grew nearer.

And by the time of Mrs Williams' fateful Math lesson, it had damn-near reached fever-pitch.

Okay, I suppose at this point, it might be advisable for me to tell you just a few things

about the high-esteem afforded our School Sports Day.

Well, I'm sure you already know that it wasn't ever gonna rival the Olympics or the Commonwealth Games in terms of national importance or prestige.

Jesus H.Christ on a chariot-driven side-car, it wasn't even on a par with The Invalid Grandmother's Stanna Chair Life Finals.

It merely consisted of a series of events, most of which involved running with some sort of handicap, with (allegedly) 'hilarious' results i.e; The Egg And Spoon Race. The Sack Race. The Three-Legged Race. And The, er, Running Quite Normally With No Hindrance Whatsoever Race, to name but a few.

Pool Bank, the largest field in Port Sunlight Village, was the favourite venue for this feast of 'athletic prowess.' The lanes of the racetrack would be marked out with white paint. There'd be a small marquee selling various refreshments, tea, orange juice and the like, and a 'Winner's Podium,' in reality, three wooden boxes covered with a tattered Union Jack.

The assembled crowds, mostly made up of parents, would be herded behind a rope barrier. From this vantage point, they'd lustily cheer on their 'little darlings' (whilst screaming horrendous foul-mouthed abuse at their kid's rivals), as some luckless soul who'd been 'volunteered' for the job of selling the photocopied entertainment programmes would move amongst them rattling a pink, plastic bucket.

The proceeds of this collection went either to the Church Restoration Fund or the Teachers Annual Christmas Piss Up, depending on your level of cynicism.

Despite all this, though, or perhaps in some crazy way because of it, I was still looking forward to taking part in the event for which my best mate, Stevie Gee and I, had been selected: The Wheelbarrow Race.

Or at least, I was, until two things happened in pretty quick succession.

The night before The Games, my mum and dad, who were always very liberal-minded where Horror Films were concerned, allowed me to stay up to see the Hammer classic, '*CURSE OF THE WEREWOLF*,' starring the late, great Oliver Reed.

To say this movie had a profound effect upon me would be like saying John Lennon had just a *teensy weensy* influence on the songwriting of Noel Gallagher.

I was transfixed from start to finish. The scene where the Werewolf breaks out of its cell by tearing the door from its hinges and smashing it over the jailer's head, and its subsequent

dash across the village rooftops, raging at the assembled mob below, haunted my dreams later that night. Don't get me wrong. The movie didn't scare me much. On the contrary, I found myself rooting for the Werewolf, not least because, here was a humble man, working in a bakery, a slave to the constraints of 'civilised society,' who defies the system by transforming himself, albeit involuntarily) into a wild animal.

And, having slipped the bonds of servility, this tragic/heroic figure is able to give free rein to the pent-up frustrations, the white-hot anger that burns within those of us doomed to eke out an existence on the very edge of the breadline.

I remember thinking how very wonderful it must be to be able to rebel against our so-called 'betters,' to stick two fingers up at authority figures, to embark upon a rampage along the corridors of power, ripping to shreds the dusty piles of rules and regulations made by fat old men keen to ensure we are kept in our place...

And as I lay awake on the wrong side of midnight, with the only sounds the ticking of my *Mickey Mouse* alarm clock, and the gentle snoring of my brother from the bed across the room, I found myself more than just pondering what it must be like to be afflicted with lycanthropy, but actually trying to dream up ways that I could become a real living, breathing Werewolf.

And before anyone starts, can I just say in my defence: Hey, I was only ten, going on eleven years *old* at the time!!!

I knew from some of the books I'd read, and films I'd seen, that there were certain paths you could tread in order to achieve this lycanthropic aim.

But some had the '*Sorry, Road Closed*' signs posted at their head, right from the start.

For a kick-off, my birthday is in late February, so that completely ruled out any font-boiling 'affront to God,' type scenario, or the ensuing Wolfman curse that comes with being born on Christmas Day.

I could similarly dismiss the likelihood of my being bitten by another Werewolf. I mean, I couldn't claim to know anyone who might perhaps undergo a lupine transformation each and every Full Moon (although I'd always had my suspicions regarding Mr Smith, our remarkably hairy Science & Technology teacher).

And the thought of hanging around some mist-shrouded moor or sitting upon a fallen bough deep in the midnight woods, waiting for one to show up, held no appeal whatsoever.

Worse, despite poring over a selection of my dad's plant life of Britain books, I'd failed to track down the likely location of any flowering Wolfsbane.

That left only two other, slightly less remote possibilities...The seeking out of a Witch with a good working knowledge of Black Magic,(even if she professed to only ever dabbling in White). For a price, she might be persuaded to cast a spell that would bring about the fulfilment of my dark desires..

Or, alternatively, I could simply don a fur cloak, a parade around on all fours, and sample the blood of a freshly-killed animal – a squirrel, say, or a rabbit – and courtesy of the sort of sympathetic magic I'd read about in Sabine Baring-Gould's '*BOOK OF WEREWOLVES*,' quite literally *will* the transformation to take place.

Oh, the agony of choice.



I finally drifted off to sleep that night, dreaming of torch-bearing gangs, the terrified shriek of captured prey, and of a little boy, straining at the bars that line his window, eyes bulging, teeth bared in feral fury as he snarls at a blood-red Full Moon....

2

Friday dawned clear and bright, instantly dispelling any remaining fears that The Games would have to be cancelled yet again.

Most everybody walked to school with a spring in their step that morning, even though the Sports Day didn't officially start until 1pm, and lessons were to carry on as normal right up until dinnertime.

I think, although I can't be sure, that we had English Class first thing. All I can recall for certain is that there was an air of barely suppressed excitement and much wistful glancing at the clock on the far wall.

I was excited, too, but for a far different reason. It was during the fifteen-minute break that the second thing that I referred to earlier, took place.

It began with me announcing to a bunch of my best friends: Mikey Cartwright, Ian Crossley, Philly Bennett and Stevie Gee, that I wouldn't be taking an active part in the Wheelbarrow Race, or in any other race for that matter, because I wanted to openly 'rebel against the system like Oliver Reed in that brilliant Werewolf film, last night'

They didn't believe me, of course.

Why would they?

It was school policy that absolutely everybody had to take place in The Games. It was compulsory. No arguments. No dissent. You did as you were told and ran, skipped or hopped, or you sold programmes or helped out with the chairs for the spectators who wanted to sit. You took part or you faced incurring the wrath of Mr 'Slappy' Parris; the Deputy Head and the most feared teacher at Church Drive.

Oh, he might not have looked particularly menacing, at first glance. In fact, you could quite easily be forgiven, for thinking he was one of those kind-hearted grandfatherly types, what with his bushy grey hair, tweed suit and National Health glasses. Not to mention the clay pipe that forever dangled from the corner of his mouth, its pleasingly woody fragrance hanging about him in a billowing cloud.

But if ever there was a shining example of that hoary old cliché; '*appearances can be deceptive*,' then boy, this was it!!!

As quick to anger as an especially irate buffalo afflicted with a chronic case of piles. Sterner than Anne: '*You ARE The Weakest Link*' Robinson when faced with a dullard contestant. More mean-spirited than a combination of Ebenezer Scrooge, Alex Ferguson and that Puritan-type couple from Royston Vasey, who have a bathroom into which they don't pass solids, and who firmly lock their doors to anyone at precisely 8:15pm (after checking the exact time with the Speaking Clock, of course)

I guess the best thing that could be said about Mr Parris is that he was most certainly not at all sexist...He inspired the same level of

bowel-loosening fear in *everyone*, both boys and girls alike, and if that refusal to differentiate meant that he was universally hated, well that was just fine and dandy with our Deputy Head.

The tales of those who had foolishly crossed him in some way were (and very likely still are) legendary. I don't propose to relate a whole pile of instances here, but I guess I'll just tell you that he'd been christened with the nickname 'Slappy,' for good reason. He kept an old battered training shoe, size nine or so, in the locked drawer of his desk, its tread long since worn smooth by the frequent visits it had paid to the smarting backsides of those who had somehow transgressed the Law According To Mr "Slappy"-By-God-Parris....

In my mind's eye, I had often imagined a whole series of tenets each engraved upon a tablet of stone, hewn from the very face of Mount Sinai. These Commandments would be stacked neatly at the very back of the store cupboard in Mr Harris's classroom and would include anything and everything from; Thou shalt never deface the cover of one's precious exercise book, and Thou shalt refrain from walking faster than a snail with a buggered hamstring along the corridors, to Thou shalt never raise one's voice above the merest fragment of a whisper when class is in session, and Thou shalt never utter words of damned cheek and impertinence when ordered to play rugby in ones underpants in the ball-chilling depths of mid-winter, just because ones forgot ones sports shorts...

Back in those dark days of cruel, sadistic torture, oops, sorry, I do of course mean life-shaping, discipline-instilling corporal punishment, the infliction of physical pain upon the pupils of Church Drive was regarded as being something of an 'occupational hazard.' You never actually got *used* to it, you understand, but you did sort of expect to spend at least two or three school nights a month watching '*DR WHO*' or '*THE GOODIES*,' soothing your butt cheeks on a chair piled high with the very comfiest of your mum's cushions.

No wonder then that even the cheekiest of the school hard-knocks strove to keep a low profile when in his presence.

And yet here was I, confidently assuring my friends that I was fully intending to seek a confrontation with 'Slappy,' by virtue of refusing point blank to participate in one of the most important dates in the school calendar.

Little wonder then that everyone I revealed my plan to regarded me with a mixture of outright scepticism and dark foreboding. Mikey Cartwright had likely voiced the general

consensus of opinion when he'd exclaimed, 'God, Slappy's gonna end up shooting yer with that bleedin startin' pistol of his!'

The words had hung in the still October air, and I remember my circle of friends suddenly bowed their heads sorrowfully, as though they were standing at the graveside of an old and trusted companion...Which doubtless, in their mind's eye, they kind of were.

I'd be lying if I said I wasn't scared at this point. The truth was, my insides had been crawling with insects too squirmy to be butterflies. Nevertheless, I was determined to prove to them that I was not going to back down, that I had succeeded in adopting at least, the bestial, untamed *attitude* of a modern-day Werewolf, but how to go about it?

The answer presented itself just as the chimes of the school bell signalled the end of first break. We began shuffling unenthusiastically towards the slope that led up to the row of classrooms, and it was as we were passing the grassy bank that formed three sides of the sunken playground, that I noticed there was a dead pigeon lying amidst a pile of soggy autumn leaves.

Acting on some crazy impulse, I suddenly turned and raced back down the slope and scrambled up the bank, the smell of wet earth and mouldy leaves filling my nostrils. I only paused to glance over my shoulder when I'd reached the pigeon's carcass, and smiled to myself at the sight of the shocked faces of my friends, who'd stood frozen, their mouths open in a series of comical O's.

I bent down to study the dead bird and could see straight away that it had met its end fairly recently. It was stone cold, but it didn't smell *too* bad, and judging from the fact that there was a great gaping hole in its side, through which I glimpsed glistening red innards and tiny slivers of bone, it was clear the pigeon had met its end at the hands, or rather claws, of a predator, most likely a cat.

To this day, I have no firm idea of the motivation behind what I did next. The only 'explanation' of sorts that I've been able to come up with is that I was 'inspired' by the vague recollection of a publicity still from '*CURSE OF THE WEREWOLF*.' It featured the lycanthrope as a less-than-innocent child, a dead squirrel in his hands, blood smeared on his pointed, too-sharp teeth...

Did I, by some perverse sense of logic, imagine that I could transform myself into a Werewolf simply by cowering down on a half-eaten pigeon....Er, yes, thinking about it now, that's quite likely, actually.

And so, as loony-toons as it may sound, and with roughly half of my class now stood

watching from the top of the slope, I picked up the weightless bundle of feathers, raised them to my mouth, and with only a moments hesitation, bit deep into the already gaping wound.

How I kept from puking straight away will always remain a mystery to me. Even though this incident took place twenty-odd years ago, (two whole decades before I became a pretty strict vegetarian), I can still remember the awful taste of those slimy, jelly-cold pigeon guts on my tongue. How they crunched between my teeth as I chewed. How they slithered down my throat in one big lump, like a nest of tangled worms....

I only took the one bite before raising the carcass above my head in a gesture of triumph and offering up what I hoped would pass for a dead-bird's-bowels-simply-melt-in-my-mouth grin.

The expressions of surprise on the watching crowd, had instantly turned to uniform disgust, and the air was rent with a chorus of '*Oh, eeeeeuuuugh's*' that were only silenced when Mrs Pierce, the English Language teacher, appeared at the school entrance and ordered everyone to return to their lessons immediately.

'And will Lee Walker, kindly put that pigeon down, get off the bank, and go and wash his hands thoroughly, before he dares sets foot in *my* class!!!' she shouted, in a voice that begged no argument.

I made a great show of reluctantly placing the bird back amongst its makeshift grave of fallen sycamore leaves, although in truth, I don't think I've ever been more relieved to see an authority figure arrive to take charge of a situation. As my fellow pupils began to drift away, some of them shaking their heads in disbelief, others, making loud barfing noises, only a few of which actually sounded forced, I made my way down the bank, and sauntered across to the toilets, whistling unconcernedly. I'm not at all sure quite how I made it to the safety of the loo without puking en route, but I'd barely locked the cubicle door behind me before I heaved into the lavatory bowl, the flood of steaming bile gushing with such force, I'd thought my throat would burst.

I was bent over like that, spewing until there was nothing left to sick up, my stomach aching like the time Mr Parris had 'accidentally' dropped a medicine ball on my belly when we were doing sit-up exercises in the school gym, for what seemed an impossible length of time. When at last I managed to stagger from the toilet, sucking furiously on a couple of aniseed-flavoured gobstoppers I'd found at the bottom of my LIVERPOOL FC satchel, I felt

so light-headed I'd seen hundreds of tiny spots, dancing like black dust motes before my eyes. No one said anything when I set foot in the classroom. Not even Mrs Pierce. She merely bore me a disdainful glance from over the top of her horn-rimmed glasses, sniffed loudly, and with a sharp nod of her head, indicated that I should sit down and get on with my work.

I was only too happy to at least pretend to comply. As I took my seat next to Ian Crossley, who didn't even look up from the essay he was preparing on the condensed version of '*MOBY DICK*,' I was filled with the sure and certain knowledge that I had succeeded in proving a point: That I would openly defy the accepted order of things. That I would openly rebel against the norm. Even if that meant the inevitable, direct confrontation with Mr Parris: '*The Demon Bottom-Slapper Of Church Drive...*'

The minute our class filed onto the sports field that chilly, sunbright afternoon, it was clear we'd have a record crowd for The Games, this year.

'Bleedin' hell, it looks like half of Merseyside's turned up,' Ian muttered under his breath, and even the normally impassive Dale Scott, (a tall, rangy lad who, during a school trip, had famously dismissed the ancient Roman remains at Chester, as being nothing more than 'a crumbling pile of owd bricks'), gave out a low whistle of admiration. Ordinarily, you could expect at best, a hundred or so supporters to be stood behind the lines of rope that bordered the racetrack, and indeed, there had been occasions when the amount of competitors far outweighed the number of spectators. On this occasion however, groups of 'fans' were standing in rows twenty or so deep, all around the track. So, even by the most conservative of estimates, there must have been somewhere in the region of 500 people present at Pool Bank, that day.

Later, teachers and pupils alike would speculate on the reasons for this uncommonly large turn-out, and most would conclude that it was due to the combination of fine weather and the fact so many other planned events had been cancelled during the summer-that-never-was.

There was perhaps one other factor, too.

Something I neglected to mention earlier: All of the competitors, myself included, were not just running for themselves, but were supposed to be representing four separate teams or houses, namely; *Eaton*, *Lever*, *Walker* and *Nairn*.

At each of the previous four Sports Days, *Eaton*, the House to which I belonged, had emerged victorious, and as never in the school's history had any team succeeded in winning The Title five years on the trot, so the level of interest in the 1975 Games was greatly increased.

For once, the assembled adults had not simply gathered to support their *own* prepubescent sons and daughters in some ultimately meaningless race. Instead, as one-time pupils of the school, they'd come to cheer or hurl insults (depending on their allegiance) at the members of the *Eaton* team, collectively itching, though they'd never admit as much to an outsider, to see if the record would remain intact or be well and truly broken.

We each had to report to the large tent that dominated the field to collect our house bibs (*Eaton's* were coloured a decidedly sickly shade of yellow) along with our timetable of events.

The Wheelbarrow Race wasn't scheduled to start until 3:30pm, so there was nothing for it but to hang around and pretend to take an interest in the Games. I went and stood with my friends near to the finishing line, and watched as *Eaton* made a more than promising start. They won the Egg & Spoon Race, The Sack Race and the er, Running Really Quite Fast Race, with ease, and came a creditable second in the Three-Legged Event. The excitement was building with each positive result for *Eaton*, and by the time The Crab Football Race was about to get underway, it was clear that only a calamitous loss of form in the last three events could conspire to rob our house of total victory.

And so it was that I found myself lustily screaming my encouragement during the races immediately prior to my planned non-appearance in that blasted Wheelbarrow competition. The thought of my being solely responsible for the team's failure to retain the Title, was not a pleasant one.

And, when our closest rivals *Lever*, almost drew level by virtue of winning the next couple of events, I have to admit I began to harbour serious misgivings concerning my refusal to take part.

Especially seeing as how, amidst the uproar that greeted the *Lever* teams most recent successes, I'd caught sight of my mum engaged in animated conversation with Stevie Gee's parents near the front of the crowd

Yeah, looking back now, I honestly think things would have turned out a whole lot differently if it hadn't have been for a chance snidey remark courtesy of Wayne Williams, the obligatory class creep.

'Well, There you go,' he grinned, the slimy grin of a politician out canvassing for votes. 'I told yer Lee was gonna bottle it when it came right down to it, didn't I?'

There was a general murmur of agreement from amongst those standing within earshot, and even Stevie Gee began to look hopeful that I'd had a change of heart as we were ushered towards the starting line by Mr Ewans, the PE teacher.

'Come along now, boys.' He ordered the competitors. 'Time to show this crowd what you can do.'

'Yeah, go for it, Lee!' Wayne 'Creepozoid' Williams sniggered, tipping me as wink as I passed him by. 'Hope scoffing that dead pigeon doesn't slow you down too much!!!'

And that was all it had taken to strengthen my weakening resolve.

My body shuddered with a spasm of near-uncontrollable anger, the world swayed slightly out of focus and from then on, an air of unreality had washed over me. Everything seemed to occur in a series of vivid dream-like sequences, the memory of which has remained imprinted on my mind ever since:

The eight competitors traipse up to the Starting Blocks, the tense expressions eerily reminiscent of the ranks of British soldiers I'd once seen in an old grainy photograph, their faces etched with grim determination as they marched towards the Front and the horror of the trenches.

When they reach their allotted 100 metre lanes, Mr Parris, imposing even in a tweed cap and skin-tight Adidas track suit, relates the rules and orders everyone to get into position. The excited babble of the crowd increases in intensity. I catch sight of my mum again who waves enthusiastically, and gives a thumbs up for good luck. I offer up a half-hearted smile in response. The respective teams adopt their 'wheelbarrow' stance, and Stevie Gee drops to the ground, the fingers of his hands splayed on the soft, green earth. He cocks one leg, like a dog about to take a pee, and glances over his shoulder to see why it is I haven't grabbed hold of the proffered 'handle.'

He opens his mouth to speak, but at that moment, Mr Parris raises his air pistol, points it skywards and shouts; 'On your marks! Get Set! 'Wait for it! Wait for it! GO!!!'

The curiously flat sounding gunshot is all but lost amidst the wild cheering of the spectators as the three other teams go hell for leather towards the Finish Line.

But I only stand there. Rooted to the spot. As stubbornly immobile as the metal climbing frame in the school playground. The race reaches its conclusion, and the winners are mobbed by delighted supporters, but after a minute or so of celebration, the cheering becomes more sporadic, then gradually fades to a stunned silence. And for a while, everything seems to stand still. No one says or does anything and I swear it's so quiet, I can hear the fallen leaves blowing along Pool Bank Road, their dry crackling, the sound of a dead and mirthless laughter.

I find myself staring into the middle distance, curiously detached from the 'The Main Event.'

A plane drones drowsily overhead. A magpie struts along the path that leads to the entrance gate. And in one of the allotments at the edge of the field, a man in a baseball cap stands lighting a bonfire, the thin wisps of woodsmoke, spiralling into a sky so cloudless, it's a convincing deception of June's soft blue.

Predictably, it's Mr Parris who shatters this caught-breath-silence. He bellows with rage as he stomps towards me.

'What the hell do you think you're playing at, boy?' he screams into my face; a hurricane wind whooshing through a half-closed window.

But incredibly, I am unfazed by his anger. Unafraid of retribution. For once, his words carry all the weight of ash-flakes, like the ones drifting across from Mr Baseball Cap's bonfire, and the teacher's expression of stunned disbelief at my refusal to begin quaking in my 'Billy No-Make' trainers, is something that will live with me if I live to be a hundred.

And when I curl my lip and actually snarl at him (a not half-bad attempt at a Lon Chaney Jr/Oliver Reed Werewolf impression), the Great And Terrible Mr Parris backs away from me. Okay, so the movement is so brief it's likely few of the onlookers present even notice, but the fact remains, I see it. And in the space of the two or three seconds it takes for the teacher to regain his composure, I see something else.

I see him as he really is.

A lonely, embittered old man in a cloth cap and a faded blue tracksuit, who has maybe another couple of years, tops, before involuntary retirement, the prospect of which fills him with the deepest, darkest dread.

I know, even as a child, I KNOW nothing that Mr Parris can do or say, now or in the future, can ever serve to terrify me the way it had during my previous three years at Church Drive. His power over me had always been inspired by the fact that he had appeared to be some sort of inhuman, indestructible monster, as all-seeing, all-knowing as The Wicked Witch Of The West or the Greek Gods in 'JASON AND THE ARGONAUTS.'

To find he was every bit as insecure, fallible and yes, downright SCARED as the rest of us, was a shock that was right up there with being told Santa Claus didn't exist and that Bill Shankly had decided to call it a day as manager of Liverpool FC. but it certainly doesn't take me long to exploit the discovery.

I snarl once more, then turn and run away from the race tracks, away from the crowds, away from Mr Parris, not because I am afraid, but because I'm filled with a wild exultation, the giddy excitement that comes from openly defying convention and the accepted order of things. I run to the outer limits of the field, leap across the entrance gate, almost sending a couple of startled programme sellers flying as I do so, and scramble up one of the ancient oak trees that line Pool Bank.

Once I've secured a decent spec, roughly three-quarters of the way from the topmost branch, I turn to look back at the scene from the sports field. Most everyone is standing around in obvious confusion, including Mr Parris. But several people,

my schoolmates among them, begin walking over towards me, some of them laughing, others including Stevie Gee, more than a little angry, (it turned out that 'EATON' had managed to retain the trophy, but only because the result of The Wheelbarrow Race, won by 'LEVER,' was declared to be invalid, due entirely to my shenanigans).

Some of my friends try to encourage me to climb down and 'face the music,' but I refuse to budge, even when my mum comes across and tries to order me out of the tree to no avail. 'Right, just wait till you get home!!!' she warns as she trudges off with a couple of other, equally disapproving mothers.

And I stay put, snarling and growling at a school prefect who attempts to climb the tree so that he backs off, shaking his head and muttering, 'Oh, friggin' hell, leave him up there. He's off his bleedin' trolley!!!'

Neither Mr Parris nor any of the other teachers comes near, but a bunch of giggling girls saunter by, Jackie Morley, she of the Incredibly Expanding Gazangas fame, amongst them. She stares up at me, her eyes filled with a sense of pre-teenage wonder at my 'heroics.' And when she suddenly cracks a smile for my benefit, it's like seeing the sunrise after a cold, dark stormy night.

The brilliance of it warms me, long after the crowds have drifted away, and the chill of early twilight finds me alone, teetering on the brink of a perverse sort of 'greatness.'

Oh, I'm more than aware, that just up the road a-ways, lies the path to Inevitable Punishment, and that when I reach that destination, I'll likely be chewed up and spat out like a stick of gum that's lost it's flavour.

But for the briefest of moments, I know something of how it must feel to be a true Anti-Hero: Robin Hood. Zorro. Count Dracula. The Incredible Hulk. The Frankenstein Monster. THE WEREWOLF.

And I find that I don't regret a single action, even at the dog-end of this seemingly endless day.

By the time I finally climb down from my perch, and begin the long walk home, the sun has already slipped around the tops of the trees, scattering claw-like shadows across the pavement.

And it seems the whole world is bathed in the red-gold glow of October.

Lee Walker

New Jerry, Merseyside

February, 2001

STOP PRESS!!!

The Pre-Jurassic Stick Insect

A giant stick insect that evolved before the days of the Dinosaurs and was thought to have been extinct for the past 80 years has been found off Australia.

Scientists have gone on record as stating that the six-inch *Dryocelus Australis* closely resembles a walking sausage, and is the rarest species of stick insect in the world. Living proof, if it were required, that there still remain creatures on this planet that are either assumed to be extinct or are said never to have existed at all. 13th February, 2001 Australia 'LIVERPOOL ECHO'

More Weird Human Behaviour And Cosmic Jokes

A priest named Manuel Hidalgo, spent a total of three hours attempting to convince a man not to commit suicide by leaping from the ledge of an apartment in Ecuador.

He was getting on pretty well and would likely have been successful in his efforts if he hadn't have slipped himself, and fallen seven storeys to his death.

2nd December, 2000 Ecuador, South America 'NEWS OF THE WORLD'

*** Jimmy Zambo, the former Hungarian rock star, dubbed 'The King,' in his native country (ooh, how original!) managed to shoot himself dead after taking a series of pot shots at a rooster that had the temerity to disturb his sleep.

Jimmy, 42, fired the pistol at his head to prove to his wife that thought he had no more bullets.

Thousands of heartbroken fans gathered for his funeral in Budapest.

14th January, 2001 Budapest, Hungary 'NEWS OF THE WORLD'

*** In Maiduguri, northern Nigeria, thousands of rampaging Muslims torched scores of hotels and bars in a totally over-the-top reaction to the recent (admittedly impressive) lunar eclipse.

The religious fanatics blamed the astronomical phenomenon on the sins of the 'ungodly', although quite what the problem was with such a beautiful sight in the night sky, is beyond this writer.

Paramilitary police fought gangs of Muslim youths in the streets of the largely Islamic city for several hours.

Local residents reported that at least 40 hotels or drinking places were set alight.

'The immoral acts committed in these places are responsible for this eclipse,' police quoted a youth leader as saying.

10th January, 2001 Maiduguri, Northern Nigeria 'ASSOCIATED PRESS'

*** Meanwhile, in Romania, Ioan Mihaica, aged 32, was arrested at his local pub after he decapitated his mother Jenica's head from its shoulders and stuck it in a stewing pot.

And the reason for this less than sociable behaviour?

She had the bare-faced cheek to snatch away his glass of brandy after nagging him to cease his incessant drinking.

17th November, 2000 Romania 'THE DAILY MANC'

*** A three-year-old by the name of Mohammad Asadi sadly passed away as the result of a heart attack brought on by the incessant wailing of his relatives at his grandfather's funeral.

9th January, 2001 Teheran, Iran 'ASSOCIATED PRESS'

NEXT ISSUE OF DEAD OF NIGHT On Sale April 2001

THE TERROR OF THE HANGING DOLL

The following account was first featured in the very excellent paranormal publication; 'THE ANOMALIST.' A Mr T. Peter Park penned the piece. I hope he'll forgive me, in the interests of mutual futherance, for borrowing heavily from his authorship. If not, then cripes, I guess I'll have to pack up and head for the nearest available hills. I certainly couldn't afford a lawsuit. Here's counting on you, T.Peter....



About ten years or so ago, a good friend of Mr Park's, who hailed from Norfolk, Virginia, USA, claimed his home was haunted by an "evil presence."

Whilst paying a visit to that exact same house, in 1990, Mr Park witnessed this 'presence' at first hand. His friend, who has, it seems requested anonymity, had lived at the address for over 15 years, although at the time of this account they had just sold it.

The whole thing began when the witness was engaged in clearing out the attic of his former home that had been built in 1899. He came across a hole in the floorboards that appeared for all the world as though it had been burned around the edges. It had obviously been chipped (as opposed to being cut neatly with a saw, say) perhaps with a chisel or a knife. He had recently hired a couple of cleaners to assist him in knocking the house into shape, and the two women who he had employed, were plainly itching to find out what, if anything, was in the hole and elected to seek to explore it with their bare hands as well as with long poles with hooks attached to them.

Approximately four feet to one side of the opening, they came across an object all but hidden under the floorboards....

Feverish with excitement, they dragged out what proved to be a very old doll wearing a filthy, rotting 19th century dress and apron. The doll was a representation of an African-American girl. The writer's friend was struck by how creepy the thing looked, although none of those present were able to put their finger on precisely what it was about the doll that was unsettling...

It was an indefinable something.

And I think I know how they must have felt.

Dolls are right up there at the top of the Scary Charts along with those other supposedly innocent, meant-to-be-funny things like mime artists and circus clowns.

At least in this writer's opinion.

There's an old curiosity shop opposite Bebington Station, on the very edge of New Ferry, that specialises in Victorian era bric-a-brac, most dominant amongst them are a vast display of china dolls, all rogue cheeks, and painted lips, and blank, staring eyes...Dead eyes that nonetheless seem to gaze out at you from the other side of the grimy glass, with a dull, stupid malevolence. I used to be plagued by a terrible recurring dream, not so long back.

It would start with me being awoken in the middle of the night by the sound of something scratching at my window. I'd raise my head from the pillow and immediately wish I hadn't. From the darkness, staring in at me, is an army of moon-white porcelain faces, too-red lips parted in a grin, eyes rolling in their sockets, the source of the scratching; the scalpel blades they clutch in waxy hands....

But to get back to Mr Park's account.

As the party stood around looking at the doll, one of the girls decided, foolishly, to initiate a game of tossing the doll to one another. The other girl succeeded in catching it, but immediately afterwards screamed in pain and threw it to the floor. She claimed that she had felt something akin to an electric shock when she touched the doll.

Mr Park's friend, somewhat sceptically, picked it up and placed it on an old chest in an upright sitting position. Despite his refusal to believe that it could possibly physically harm anyone, the mere sight of it chilled him to the bone, and he really didn't like the feel of it in his hands, either.

The two girls walked back down the attic steps, whilst his friend closed and locked up the house. The girls headed off home whilst Mr Park's friend returned to his new home. The doll was left alone in that otherwise empty house all night.

Early the next morning, at about 8am, the witness met up with the cleaning girls and they all went up to the attic together. All three of them were shocked to discover that the doll had been hung up by its neck so that it swung from the rafters. No one had been in the house all night., and even if someone had broken in, why would any burglar pass on the opportunity to steal any items whatsoever, but take the time and trouble to hang a mere doll, no matter how creepy-looking it may be?

When the witness used to live in the house with his wife, they learned from a very elderly neighbour of a tragedy that had happened there. When she was very young., the neighbour had taken piano lessons at the house, and she found out that the then occupants had given birth to a retarded daughter (sometime between 1910-1920). The heartless couple had locked their little girl away in the attic like a dirty secret and overcome with shame, the little girl had hung herself from the very same rafters as that African-American doll.

Mr Park's friends had an associate who claimed to be psychic, and he apparently warned them many times that there was an entity in the house, "something very sorrowful and unfulfilled," and that he could feel its presence throughout the building, though it was at its strongest in the attic.

After finding the doll hanging that morning, it was taken to another local psychic, a female on this occasion, and when she took it out of the bag it had been transported in, she promptly screamed and threw it to the floor. She said that she wanted nothing to do with it, that it was Evil beyond belief, and that she felt, when she laid her hands on it, as though she were being suffocated. There was also an intense pain in her neck, as though she were being choked or hanged. She told Mr Park's friend to get rid of the doll, to burn it even, as quickly as possible. She believed that there was an incredibly unhappy spirit desperate for release contained within, and that this was the only way to set it free.

A second opinion was sought from another psychic. This one was less fearful but she too confirmed that there was a "strong entity" associated with the doll.

He offered to take the doll and place it in his collection of other strange objects upon which he would perform psychometry.

About a month or so down the line, this second foolishly brave psychic was found dead in his apartment from an apparent heart attack. A neighbour who discovered his body said that the psychic had died clutching the doll to his chest.

Mr Park's friend has a theory that the story behind the Evil doll has its origins in the supposition that the former master of his old house had impregnated a young live-in Black girl. She later died in childbirth, but though the baby girl survived, the issue from such a union proved to be so embarrassing to the family, that she was locked away, out of sight in the attic. Several years later, bored to distraction one day, the young girl hid her only companion, a doll, in a hole she had chiselled in the attic floorboards. And then, having weighed up her options, decided she had none...Not in *this* world, at least.

She hung herself, just like the first of the psychics had stated.

Somehow, her vengeful spirit attached itself to that damned doll, and haunted the place from that day on. The removal of the doll exorcised the house, but the entity itself could not be so easily laid to rest, and the doll/spirit brought bad luck to everyone who had the misfortune to touch it.

Something decidedly *'inhuman* (in the truest sense of the word) hung that doll from the rafters to clearly signal its presence. Of that, Mr Park's friend is convinced beyond doubting.

But this isn't quite the end of this account, Dear Constant Readers.

Mr Park himself claims that he himself had a encounter with that same Evil presence, while visiting his friend's house during the Summer of 1990, just prior to him selling the property. We'll let Mr Park take up the story

'As I was going up the stairs to the second floor, helping my friend clear the house of his belongings, I suddenly had a mental image of a girl hanging by her neck in the building, for no reason that I could discern. I did not know about the story of the doll at the time, and said nothing then about the vision.

'A couple of days later, on another visit to the house, my friend told me about the doll which he and the two cleaning maids had found a couple of weeks earlier. Either I had been mentally "touched" by the spirit trapped inside the doll, or else I had somehow picked up the image from my friend's mind as we were both visiting the house where he'd found the doll.

'There truly does seem to be present in certain old, supposedly inanimate objects "a trace of some dim essence, more than form or weight, of a tenuous aether, *indeterminate*," as H.P. Lovecraft once wrote.'

October, 2000 Norfolk, Virginia, USA 'THE ANOMALIST

Prison Inmates Call For The Exorcist

It reads like the plot of some potentially straight-to-video horror movie, but prisoners at a San Jose county jail were so terrified by a series of seances with a makeshift Ouija Board, that officials felt they had little choice but to call in a priest to 'cast out Demons.'

'The prisoners *actually believed* that they were possessed by *The Devil*,' Bryan Peretti, spokesman for the Santa Clara County jail system, told reporters.

The problems began in the early Summer of this year.

29 male inmates at the main county jail in San Jose, were segregated from the rest of their fellow inmates because of their affiliation with various Latino gangs right across southern California.

The jail had no qualms about handing out such innocent-seeming board games as *'MONOPOLY'* and *'SCRABBLE,'* for the prisoner's recreation periods, but they were about to regret their generosity...

'On the back of a *'SCRABBLE'* board,' Peretti later said, 'they created the moon and the sun and the letters -all the components of a *Ouija Board*

Then, a piece of cardboard from a lunch box was made into an indicator device and the prisoners began gathering in groups after lights out, spelling out words and pointing to answers to questions.

'They said that they called the spirit of a woman who died, and they asked her how she died, and she said "I was murdered." Then they asked how were you murdered, and the indicator moved to the word "Investigate."



The prisoners, all of whom were in their twenties, were seriously 'spooked' by these events. Things got to bad, they felt they had little option but to turn to their guards for help.

'They reported that they had summoned up some spirits, but that they had called up the wrong kinds. "We are feeling possessed and scared and nervous," they said

One man seemed to talk in a weird, deep voice, while the others acted equally strangely.

'They were obviously afraid, reclusive and just plain strange

'The inmates' behaviour was even more unusual considering they were not mental patients or "first timers" unaccustomed to jail.

'The sophisticated inmates generally don't show fear. Fear is a weakness in places like this.

'The prisoners complained so much about being possessed that four were eventually removed from the dorm. A Catholic priest arrived and blessed the 29 prisoners. The priest also sprinkled Holy Water on both the inmates and their bunks.

'The jail has an obligation to take the prisoners' concerns seriously.

'It became a security problem. If someone was going to hurt themselves or attack somebody else, as this "Spirit" has apparently ordered them to do, we need to act on something like that.

'Fortunately, the priest's visit seemed to calm the situation somewhat.

'They're now doing fine, and they mentioned that they've been able to sleep through the night. They don't feel as nervous, and they've vowed never to play with the Ouija Board ever again.

The Reverend Andrew Skotnicki, a priest who counsels prisoners in Santa Clara jails, later stated that it was his belief that people may well have their own personal reasons for thinking that they are possessed.

'In normal pastoral situations, oftentimes, it's a guy who is overwhelmed emotionally and is facing guilt about things he's done, he said, before adding, 'I'm not saying Demon possession is impossible. It's part of our tradition. But the actual cases of it happening are thankfully rare.

I do not recommend the use of the Ouija Board, however.

'We understand that if there is a power of Good in this world, there is also a power of Evil. One would be most foolish to openly seek or court or invite that power into their lives.'

1st September, 2000 San Jose, California, USA 'APB NEWS'

Adrift On The Ocean Of Night The Magic Of Witchcraft Blamed On LSD Abuse

According to the makers of a Channel Four documentary, screened on August 7th, this year, the catalyst for the advent of The Great Witch Hunts; 'The Burning Times' that took medieval Europe by storm, was not sparked by anything remotely supernatural. Instead, the blame can be squarely laid upon the hallucinogenic drug that would, 300 years later, come to symbolise the cultural revolution of the late 1960's...LSD.

People suffering from a 'bad acid trip,' brought on by eating rye contaminated with the fungus from which LSD is derived, may have believed they were imbued with magical powers, including the ability to fly.

The drug itself wasn't 'discovered' until the 1950's, by Swiss chemist Albert Hoffman, who experimented with on the ergot fungus which grows on the staple grain crop rye. It was so powerful, that Hoffman fell prey to a bout of hallucinations after he absorbed a small amount of ergot through his fingertips. He later synthesised LSD from the fungus.

At the height of the 60's, the flower children, peaceniks, hippies, call them what you will, eagerly consumed the drug in the belief that it could 'expand one's perception of life, the universe and everything.'

Ergot developed on rye crops grown in warm, humid conditions. In the 1670's, a French doctor discovered ergot poisoning and noted that it could trigger vivid hallucinations. Prior to this, the cause might not have been known, but the symptoms were common.

The earliest known ergot victim is Grauballe Man, a preserved body found in a Danish bog in 1952, whose remains date back to 2100BC.

His stomach contents contained traces of ergot, and the awful nature of his death - his throat had been cut from ear to ear and his skull cracked, suggesting that he may have been killed after convulsions and hallucinations that his

primitive tribe put down to him being possessed or bewitched.

During the Middle Ages, this early form of LSD poisoning defied all normal symptoms of illness. It did not appear to be infectious and, conversely, some victims had been in isolation yet still succumbed to it.

Because no one back then understood that these terrifying symptoms were being caused by eating a poisonous fungus, other, more outlandish causes had to be found for the malady.

And Witchcraft was chief amongst them.

One of the most infamous of Witch Trials took place in Salem, Massachusetts, in 1692.

The question most frequently asked by historians, is why, after 47 years of relative sanity prevailing (there hadn't been a mass persecution since 1645) did the majority of the colony's population turn against its womenfolk?

Linnda Caporael, professor of behavioural sciences at the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in New York, believes ergot poisoning may provide the answer.

'The Salem Witch Trials took place after two young girls, Elizabeth Parris and Abigail Williams started exhibiting bizarre behaviour in January, 1692: screaming, convulsions and trance-like states.

'Then, several other villagers began behaving similarly. After Elizabeth and Abigail accused three women of bewitching them, the floodgates opened. In this fearful, Puritan society, neighbour accused neighbour. Even Rebecca Nurse, a deaf grandmother, was thrown in jail, along with Dorcas Good, a four-year-old girl, and left chained to the wall in total darkness.

'There were 200 accusations, with 19 people hanged as Witches and a further five dying in prison.

'The traditional explanation is that mass hysteria gripped the village. But after looking at all the transcripts available from the trials, I believe ergot is to blame.

'The optimum conditions for ergot growth are warm, rainy conditions in marshy ground. 1691 had a warm, wet spring and a stormy wet summer (hey, sounds familiar - Weather Conscious Ed) Rye grown then would have been eaten by the girls in early 1692.

'I also found that many symptoms described in Salem were similar to the LSD experiences I had seen amongst my peers when I was a student in San Francisco.

'Then I checked my findings against the most recent known outbreak of ergot poisoning, in the French village of Pont St Esprit, Provence - dubbed 'The Village Of Madness' - in August, 1951.

'Victims had to be tied to their beds for both their, and other's safety. Even so, a demented 11-year-old boy tried to strangle his mother. Two hundred people became ill, there were 32 cases of insanity and four deaths.'

'The doctor, Jean Vieu, managed to trace the poisoning back to a batch of bread from the baker, who had been sold contaminated rye by an unscrupulous miller. When samples were tested, it was found to contain ergot poisons.

'Because it took place in the 20th century, Witchcraft was not suspected.

'But had this taken place a few centuries earlier it very easily could have been.

Another researcher, Mary Matossian, who is based at the University of Maryland, found that a large proportion of the Witchcraft trials in Europe were concentrated in the regions where rye was usually grown as a staple.

Also, they often coincided with those warm wet springs and that encourage ergot fungus growth.

In Britain, Mary discovered that trials were rarely held outside Essex and East Anglia - two counties where rye was indeed the staple.

It was during the 1580's that rye became the staple crop in East Anglia, at the same time as Robert Throckmorton and his five daughters arrived in Warboys.

When young Jane Throckmorton began throwing fits her father initially suspected epilepsy and sought the opinion of a Doctor Barrow. The Doctor ruled out epilepsy and suggested, instead, that a spell had been cast upon her. His diagnosis gained some credence when the village misfit, Alice Samuel, came to the family manor house to work. Alice was about 60, described as having the traditionally wrinkled face of the crone/Witch, a hairy lip, protruding teeth and a squeaky voice. Not the best of combinations, I'm sure you'll agree.

When Jane first laid eyes on her, she told her father, that Alice looked every inch a Witch, and was very likely responsible for her illness.

Soon after, Jane's sisters, Mary and Elizabeth, both suffered fits. Elizabeth's condition rapidly deteriorated and one of her symptoms included hopping on one leg continually.

When the local vicar came to pray with the family, all five of the sisters went into a series of uncontrollable fits that stopped only when the prayers ceased. A family friend, Lady Cromwell, came to speak to Alice Samuel, but had a nightmare in which a cat belonging to Alice ripped off her skin.

When Lady Cromwell returned home she died suddenly. Panic filled the Throckmorton house.

The family lured Alice to the manor house and imprisoned her there. When Alice grazed her skin accidentally, drawing blood, the girls accused her of allowing Evil spirits to feed on her blood and demanded she admit that she was a Witch. Alice refused but admitted she had some 'Evil ways,' in that she had failed to attend church.

Her honesty was lost on the girls, who took this admission as a proof of her guilt and promptly told the vicar that Alice had confessed. She, her husband John, and daughter, Agnes were hauled before the Bishop of Lincoln. Told that they would go free if they confessed, they all said they were Witches and duly repented.

Of course, the Bishop reneged on his promise of freedom, and instead they were handed over to Judge Fenner at the Huntingdon Assizes, where they were sentenced to death.

A pamphlet, published at the time, described the '*most strange and admirable discoverie of the Three Witches of Warboys...for the bewitching of the five daughters of Robert Throckmorton Esq...with sundrie Diuelliſh and grieuous torments...the like hath not been heard of in this age.*'

The very next morning after the publication of this pamphlet, all three were hanged - a testament to hysteria, lies, prejudice and ignorance. And, if the modern-day scientists are correct in their theorising, you've just been reading of how three people were condemned to death for unwittingly embarking upon a bad acid trip...

1st September, 2000 General 'THE DAILY MAIL'

Witchcraft Blamed For Spells Off Work

Well, as excuses go, this certainly beats the heck out of the tired old classics; 'the bus broke down,' 'I got caught in a traffic jam' or 'My alarm clock didn't go off.'

First, a South African education official named Faith Gasa, who is responsible for 2.6 million pupils in KwaZulu-Natal, was refusing to go to his place of work, because her predecessor placed a curse upon her office.

17th October, 2000 KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa 'THE DAILY TELEGRAPH'

*** And just a month earlier, in Davanagere, India, around 60 students based at the Moraji Residential School

at Halavagalu village fell ill, and laid the blame for their malady on *Bhanamathi*, rural Witchcraft. At least according to the vice-president of the School.

Approximately 40 students were being treated at the primary health centre and the remaining were recuperating in their homes. Some of the school board claim that they found some paraphernalia associated with *Bhanamathi*, like lemons, chillies, coconuts, bangles and *kumkum* in the hostel rooms.



Interestingly enough, a few resident students said that a *sadhu*, (godman) had paid regular visits to the hostel.

There are around 245 residential students studying in Classes 5 to 9 in the school. The rumours of *Bhanamathi* have given the majority of them a case of the heebiejeebies, with the net result that some were even planning on changing schools.

However, the district health officer, Dr Prasad, was quoted as saying; '*The students are likely suffering from viral fever, and I can safely rule out any ill-effects due to Witchcraft.*'

9th September, 2000 Davanagere, India 'THE TIMES OF INDIA'

Sorcery Has Mexico In The Grip Of Fear

It seems hard to believe in this day and age, but according to reports in the press, a total of eleven people have been killed during botched exorcisms across Central Mexico.

The first tragedy struck during a ceremony involving a troubled teenager in Telta, a town located in the central state of Tlaxcala. Seven people were suffocated, including the would-be Exorcist.

Just a few days later, four more people were found dead on the floor of a Witches' chamber in Toluca Valley, not far from Mexico City.

Veronica Velazquez, 43, was convinced that a spiteful neighbour had placed a curse upon her, so to counter the spell, she sought out the town's most powerful *cavanderas* and requested a ritual cleansing. Her brother-in-law was

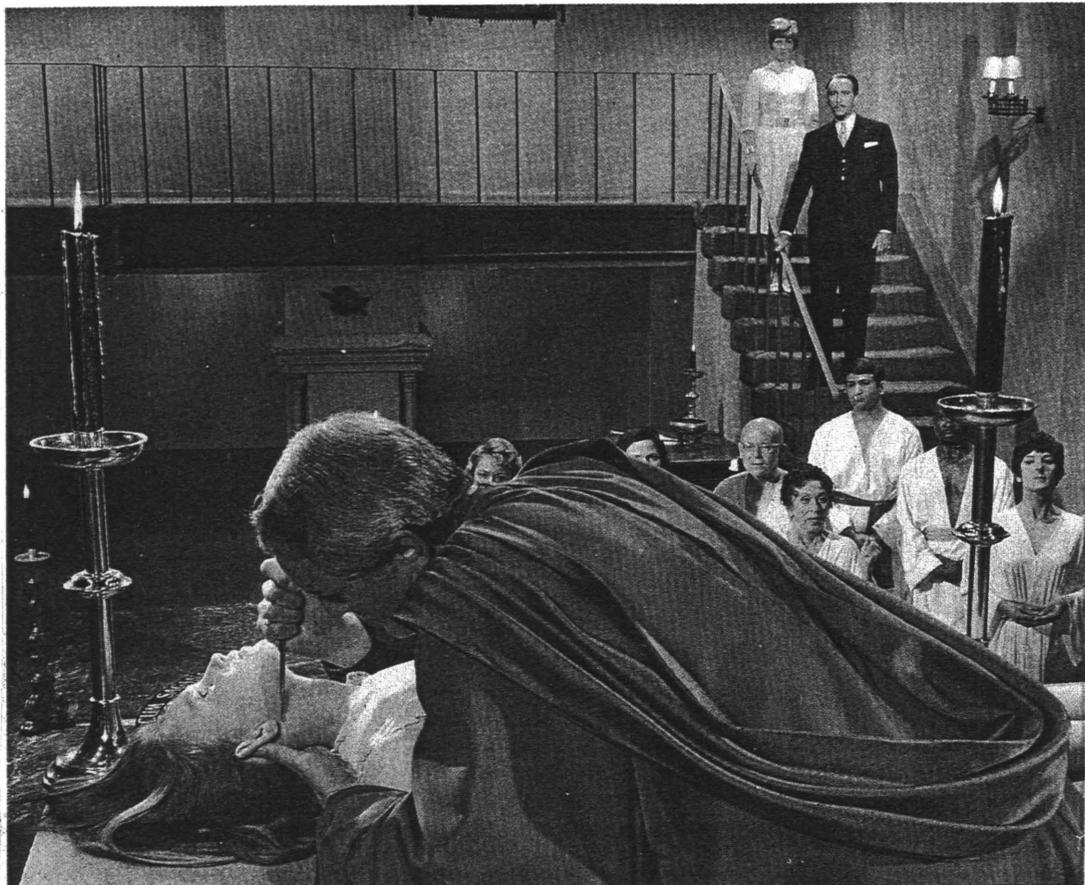
fascinated by this, and decided to pop along to see the ritual for himself. It proved to be the final session with the Gutierrez sisters of San Buenaventura.

For the sisters, Blanca and Adriana, the scented smoke from the herbs they tossed onto the glowing embers was as essential for the rites as a black fowl or Holy Water. But they apparently miscalculated how air-tight their room was on a close and thundery night, and no one survived the resultant choking fumes.

The police later attributed the deaths to carbon monoxide poisoning. In both cases the source was a charcoal brazier lit in the middle of a shuttered room.

In his grief, Veronica's widower is uncertain whether asphyxiation wasn't the doom selected by his late wife's unvanquished Demon.

Before long, it has been suggested, he is almost inevitably going to seek out the assistance of one of the thousands of shamans, seers, healers and Witches who ply their magic in market places right across Mexico. Unlike the more 'civilised' countries of the world, believers are seldom dismissed as cranks, and the supernatural is embraced by both the educated and the devout Catholic alike.



Edna Hernandez, a cyber surfer, admitted, albeit somewhat sheepishly, to reporters; *'Witches bite your flesh. Sometimes when you get up in the morning, and you look at your body, you have a mark. Sometimes that happens to me.'*

'Some of the healer's remedies have become important cultural underpinnings. Using these remedies is another way of curing yourself without having to go to the doctor. It is more common in older folks - young people tend to believe in science.'

Yeah, and a fat lot of good it does them...Just look at the benefits they reap; BSE, nuclear fallout, radiation leaks, Agent Orange, poisoned rivers and seas, holes the size of countries torn in the ozone layer, global warming, polluted stretches of coastline, islands rendered uninhabitable by Anthrax, endless unwinnable wars, fast food, mobile phones, Jerry Springer, Dale Winton, and Jane McDonald grinning with fake sincerity on the TV screen.... Who are we calling ignorant and and uncivilised, again???

Almost every market place has at least one healer. One might expect to find a contemporary version of Carlo Castaneda's wizened shaman, Don Juan, but in town markets pudgy *Mestizo* have stalls filled with such 'efficacious charms' as dirt clods taken from crossroads.

Aztec Witches were notorious in the 16th century for concocting unguents from special plants to fortify or anaesthetise their bodies in ways that confounded the Spanish Conquistadors.

Also for sale are special soaps which promise to help the user 'Dominate My Man' or 'Shut Up The Voice,' or summon up 'Seven Macho Men'. These retail for about six pesos each (about 40p), and are a direct link to the ancient Aztec ointments.

They are also easy enough to unwrap and slip into an unsuspecting victim's soap dish, but most buyers use the suds themselves. There also is an all-purpose anti-Witchcraft bar, but the most popular one promotes love.

Since shape-shifting Mexican Witches are said to be able to appear as vultures, owls, butterflies, whirlwinds, comets or incandescent red balls (a link to the 'balls of light' encountered by *'ParaScience'* during their investigations at the Ellesmere Port Boat Museum, one wonders? - see elsewhere in this issue), identifying them as Witches is more than a tad difficult. But if a market stall has a queue of preoccupied people idling in front, it could well be run by a *Curandero*.

In Catemaco, a lakeside town in Veracruz state, 13 sorcerers have christened(?) themselves with the title *'The Brotherhood'*, and even the regional tourist office extols their powers.

Dressed like Las Vegas crooners in lurid nylon and gold chains, they insist they are the guardians of secret rituals. Acolytes call them Masters, and local inn owners, reaping a bonanza of bookings with so many New Age revivalists and tourists flocking into town, have grown to respect their 'Black Magic.'

But, as we have seen, such beliefs can have tragic consequences. After 15-year-old Jose Lopez Vazquez died during his attempted exorcism, his mother is understandably inconsolable.

'The only thing we want is to clear up the death of Jose,' Augustina Vazquez told the press.

The ironic thing is, she will likely track down a Witch to help uncover the truth and find the answers she seeks.

20th August, 2000 Mexico City 'THE INDEPENDENT'

And Yet Another Black Magic Ritual Ends In Death

And so, the trail of death takes us all the way down to South America, and Vitoria da Conquista, Brazil.

Local police arrested Joaquim Alves and Priscila Souza Ferreria, a couple accused of killing a six-year-old boy in a Witchcraft ritual.

Officers discovered the bound body of Carlos Andre de Jesus Barros at the bottom of a well near the couple's home, 500 miles north-east of the capital Rio.

25th August 2000 Vitoria da Conquista, Brazil
'LIVERPOOL ECHO'

More Real-Life Exorcist Tales

In the last issue of 'DON,' we carried a feature on the Reverend Tom Willis, an 'official minister of deliverance' - that's an Exorcist, to you and me.

Well, hot on the heels of the revelations that even the Church of England are taking the possibility of Demonic possession seriously, (a hundred years or so after such beliefs were, it was assumed, tossed in the bin marked 'Outmoded Faith') comes news of not just one, but two more clergymen coming forward to add credence to the Reverend Willis' contentions...

First up is Reverend John Leach, who recounts how he felt compelled to act whilst giving a lecture at a church in Stoke-on-Trent.

'Suddenly, during sung worship, a middle-aged woman fell to the floor, her body jerking violently. Her face was screwed up in pain and she suffered physical manifestations. Green gunge came out of her mouth (how very Regan MacNeil/Linda Blair -Ed), her eyes rolled back and she spoke in a voice not her own.

'We took her to a side room and, for several hours, a group of us prayed peace to her. She had to be held down while we sprinkled Holy Water and anointed her with oil. Eventually, she was calmed down. She was filled with Demons and we had been able to drive some of them out.'

'Jane,' (she elected, perhaps not surprisingly, to adopt a false name) is, the good Reverend believes, living proof that people can be invaded by metaphysical entities. Certainly, 'Jane' is convinced that it was the power of God that came to her rescue on that fateful night.

The secretive Ministry of Deliverance is headed by the right Reverend Dominic Walker (no relation -Ed), Bishop of Reading. He employs a whole team of psychiatrists, psychologists and other clergymen in every English diocese, and each and every year it considers hundreds of apparent hauntings, Poltergeist infestations and claimed Demonic possessions. The Reverend Walker insists that

there is nothing at all sinister about the veil of secrecy that hangs over the organisation.

On the contrary, it is only necessary because they do not want to have to be dealing with more than their fair share of disturbed individuals who swear that they are possessed, but who are really only suffering from paranoid delusions, and the like.

Plus, of course, they don't want to be seen in a bad light. The Church is in enough trouble as it is, what with declining attendances, the rows about women priests, etc. The last thing they need right now is to be perceived as being obsessed with superstitious nonsense of the sort that's been discredited since the Middle Ages.

'We don't publicise the structure or the contacts. We don't want people ringing up who have seen "THE EXORCIST" and think they've got Demons,' Bishop Walker told reporters.

Calls to the Ministry's Helpline are such that the Bishop runs a special centre, the Christian Deliverance Study Group, to train members sent from the dioceses.

The Anglican Renewal Ministries, which performed "Janes" exorcism, take the existence of Evil very seriously indeed. The group represents the charismatic wing of the Church of England, which some Ministry of Deliverance members have accused of conducting unnecessary and unauthorised exorcisms.

'There are degrees to which people might be touched by Evil,' claims Reverend Leach, the Anglican Renewal Director. *'Possession is not a Biblical term but we do believe in Demonic influence.*

'Jane,' who has been married for forty years, and has three children, says that she had a very difficult childhood, with an abusive father who used to beat her mother and who ruled the family with an iron rod.

Soon after the birth of her first child, she began to suffer from deep depression and blackouts.

'I had a lot of trauma in my life. The violence of my childhood, a bad car crash, and the depression all lowered my resistance to Demons. Later on, I tried transcendental meditation, and that opened up the gateway to Evil Spirits.

'My behaviour became more and more bizarre, and I was often out of control with anger. Then I saw in my church magazine an article about a lady's testimony of deliverance and I began to read The New Testament, particularly where it says that Jesus healed. I went to my local parish church and I knew the Holy Spirit was there.

'On the night Mr Leach came to preach, I prayed to the Lord to free me, and called on Him to do what He had to do.

'Within a few seconds, I fell to the floor. I wasn't in control but I didn't feel frightened. John commanded the Demons to leave me and they rattled and rattled, but they have to bow on their knees to Jesus, and I felt the Demons going. It was just like being let out of prison.'

Adopting a more sceptical tone however, the Reverend Stephen Parsons, the diocesan Adviser on Spiritual Deliverance for Gloucester, was quoted as saying; *'Most of those who think they are possessed by the Devil are suffering from mental delusions and are susceptible to evangelical fear.'*

The difficulty for the Ministry of Deliverance lies of course, in attempting to determine which cases are in fact, genuine. Poltergeist activity, seems to mainly happen around young women, according to the studies of Mr Parsons.

'A clergyman rang me recently about a 12-year-old Filipino girl who was causing strange bangs and crashes in her adopted home. I think a combination of puberty and a recognition of her identity had created a kind of psychic energy.'

Mr Parsons also visited a cottage in the Cotswolds with a history of unhappy events.

'The woman who lived there was disturbed by visionary apparitions, m ghosts and weird noises. A deep, cold atmosphere filled the house, and I found that there had been two unpleasant deaths there. Also local tradition said that a gypsy encampment had been on the site. Together with the parish priest, I carried out an exorcism of the building. We held Holy Communion, sprinkled Holy Water, and said prayers in every room.'

Prebendary (no, me neither - Puzzled Ed) Robert Horsfield, Ministry of Deliverance representative for Herefordshire, pipes up to offer this explanation for the dozen or so calls he receives each year;

'Paganism was never stamped out in this part of the world and lived side by side with Christianity - that may have something to do with it.'

To return to Mr Horsfield; *'Typically, I am asked to help when there is an awareness something's not right about a house. There's a feeling of unease and oppression. The people will feel burdened and need deliverance from that.'*

'In cases of ghosts or presences, people who have lived in one place for a long time become Earth-bound and are reluctant to move on.'

Among Somerset's scattered rural communities, ghosts are almost commonplace, according to Ministry of Deliverance adviser Prebendary (there's *that* word, again) Christopher Tookey.

'I've often been to places that have ghosts. People tend not to talk about them, or deny them because they can't be explained and don't fit into their ideas. Ghosts, or the departed, aren't Evil, just misplaced and are simply waiting for the right train.'

Mr Tookey theorises that a lot of hauntings are by children who may have been treated cruelly (interesting point - see the Ellesmere Port Boat Museum piece elsewhere in this issue and note its many references to ghostly children).

'I was called to an old people's home, which originally had been an orphanage or workhouse. Residents were seeing and hearing things which had made them afraid. I held a Requiem Mass for the departed and brought peace.'

Meanwhile, in Worcester, Canon Lisle Ryder also experienced problems with a nursing home.

'This was a haunting with strange phenomena, apparitions and voices. There were stories of deaths and a general feeling of uneasiness. I blessed the rooms and said Communion.'

Canon Ryder is of the opinion that Poltergeists can be aroused by *'dabbling in the occult. I recall comforting a group of girls who had fled at dawn to the cathedral after a night playing with the Oulja board. If I can bring a bit of peace to people, that is as much as I can do.'*

And yet another clergyman, Julian Drewett, general secretary of the Churches Fellowship for Psychical and Spiritual Studies, was once called to help a child who had also used a Oulja board and apparently succeeded in making contact with a 19th century suicide victim.

'We checked the story and the link-up was genuine, so we held a version of the funeral service and prayed for the person who had passed on.'

'The unquiet dead can be disturbed by dramatic or emotional events like a battle re-enactment. The air holds a charge. Everything that happens is forever caught, is around us and can be replayed.'

'Exorcisms are very rarely used, but there is a need to deliver people from the dark forces that oppress them. People can be influenced to act in Evil ways and to take on characters not their own.'

I do believe that there are Evil Spirits.'

And as for 'Jane,' well, she now accepts that the existence of Demons is a hard fact of life.

'The Demons still try to convince me they are in me. They are everywhere. I can sense them. Hundreds and thousands of Demons all around us.'

The final word goes to Bishop Walker, however; *'Satanic possession is rare and is not something that can effect anybody. You can't catch Demons like you catch colds.'*

'And as for exorcism, if and when it is needed, a simple prayer, commanding any Devil to leave will generally suffice (which I'm sure will be of no consolation whatsoever to the overworked Father Merrin. Or Damien Karras, for that matter!!!)'

8th August, 2000 General 'DAILY EXPRESS'

The Curse Of 'THE OMEN'

Loyal readers will doubtless recall how, a few issues back, we recounted the oft-told tale of how *'THE EXORCIST'* movie (1973), was reputed to be plagued with real-life horrors in the shape of unexplained deaths to cast and crew members, studio fires and general ill fortune. The general consensus of opinion is, of course, that these stories were nothing more than a cynical, though undoubtedly hugely effective attempt by the likes of director William Friedkin, to generate more publicity for the film.

Let's face it, folks, he wouldn't be the first.



It was whilst I was putting this edition together, that I stumbled across the following article in an old back issue of *'THE DARK SIDE'* magazine. And as is so often the case, its contents seemed to me to be worthy of inclusion, no strike that, acutely relevant to this particular section of the our humble publication....

Harvey Benhard, the producer of one of the most successful horror films of the 1970's, *'THE OMEN'*, (1976), and its first sequel *'DAMIEN: OMEN II'*, (1978), claimed that during filming on both movies, *'some supernatural power was at work that did not want either of these films made.'*

Harvey begins by stating that the strange events began back in 1975, when; *'a film was suggested to me based on*

The Book Of Revelations, which prophesies the coming of the Devil's Son on Earth; The Antichrist. A screenplay was developed and sent out to the major studios, who gave the green light for the movie to start shooting in London on 12th October, 1975. But then things began to happen...

'A bomb planted by the IRA went off with a loud explosion one morning in the Hilton Hotel where the director and the producer were staying. When I was in Rome on a location survey trip, a violent storm swept the city, and at 3am, a bolt of lightning hit Hadrian's Gate, a landmark near my hotel. I thought it was the end of the world.

'Meanwhile, across the Atlantic, Gregory Peck, (who, along with Lee Remick, was the star of the film), and the screenwriter, David Seltzer, were flying towards London on separate aircraft when, an engine on Peck's plane was knocked out by lightning. Eight hours later, half-way across the ocean, Seltzer's plane was also struck by lightning. The trip proved to be so rocky that the stewardess ended up on her knees praying.

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'The strange incidents started to pile up and, despite the fact that I had never really thought much about the Antichrist figure in history or myth, I began to think of the mysterious implications of these events.

' Though a stuntman was certainly well-protected during the scene in the Italian cemetery when a pack of wild dogs attacked him, their fangs somehow tore through the covering and the man required stitches.

'Another scene was being shot at Windsor Safari Park, and at an adjoining cage a lion's paw shot through the bars and crushed the skull of an attendant.

'In an attempt to try and forget these unsavoury incidents, I went to see Shirley MacLaine (who, as we saw in the last issue of 'DON,' has recently announced she believes herself to be the reincarnation of Charlemagne's lover, from the 8th century A.D.) perform at the London Palladium, but the performance was cancelled when a terrorist's bomb was found in the basement!!!'

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'At this point I was getting nervous. Flying home over the Atlantic, the pilot came on the radio and said that something was wrong. I didn't pay that much attention, until a few minutes later he came back on and said we had to make an emergency landing at Montreal.

'Then came the most shocking event shortly after principal production had ended on the original movie... Our brilliant special effects man, John Richardson, went on to Holland to make 'A BRIDGE TOO FAR.' He was accompanied by his lovely assistant who worked on 'THE OMEN,' too. She made the "hounds of Hell" - dogs which we used for special effects in a particularly violent scene. They had been filming late and were on their way back to their hotel when the car in which they were travelling was hit by a truck. The girl was killed instantly and John was badly cut about the face and head, and knocked unconscious.

Now, here's the incredible aspect of this tragedy: When John came too and looked out the smashed window of the smashed car to find out where he was, he spotted a stone marker at the side of the road which read that he was twenty kilometres from the town of OMMEN in Holland!!!

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'All I could think of in that moment was 'THE OMEN' curse, and I said a silent prayer that we'd all get down okay. It seemed to take forever, but thanks to the pilot's skill and help from the traffic controller we landed safely.

'The movie began shooting in Chicago on 2nd October, 1977, just ten days out from being exactly two years to the day of the anniversary of the first movie. By now, I was wearing a crucifix around my neck. I bought the crucifix in Ethiopia and I haven't taken it off since.

'The first three weeks of production on the sequel were a debacle. Shooting schedules went awry. Equipment was lost or mislaid. The company came down with a galloping flu...

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freeway when I heard a noise coming from under the car. I stopped twice to see what was wrong.

'I started off again and was just about to accelerate onto the freeway when the wheel flew off the car. It careened all over the road and I struggled to control it. I thought it was going to turn over, but I managed to bring it to a halt and I sat there trembling with fright, thinking again of the curse and wondering what was going to happen next.

'The answer came in the form of the flu virus, and although no outbreak of it was reported in Chicago, eventually 40 members of the 'DAMIEN: OMEN II' crew came down with it, including co-producer Charles Orme, who claimed that he had never before been that ill in his life.

'Even the autumnal Chicago weather became deceptive. For a scene requiring good sunlight, the crew set up the cameras on a roof for a shot. But seconds before the cameras were set to roll, a dark cloud swept overhead and a storm lashed that same rooftop, ruining the shot and further delaying the production.

'Before leaving Chicago for Eagle River, Wisconsin, my camera case was stolen from my hotel, as were my wife's rings. When the company arrived in Eagle River, it was not exactly a winter wonderland. In fact, it was reasonably mild for upper Wisconsin in early winter. Every year, for 20 years, Eagle River has been frozen over by November 15th, and we had the bad luck to arrive in the mildest autumn they've ever had there. But, whether it was my cross, or the collective prayers of the company wanting to get home by Christmas, a cold front suddenly swept over the lakes and pine trees of Northern Wisconsin and lakes froze.

'The mishaps continued, however. The brakes on the catering truck failed and it slammed into the back of the honey wagon, the slang name for the portable toilet. A leonster and his wife, and a second couple were returning home from a restaurant and a deer jumped in front of their car. To avoid hitting it, the driver turned the wheel, the car skidded on the road and overturned in a ditch. Several of the passengers required hospital treatment.

'Back in Los Angeles, my newly-redecorated apartment was flooded when the bathroom pipes broke. At my local garage, the mechanic who works on my car had just received an OMEN T-shirt. The boss admired it and the mechanic gave it to him. The first time the man wore the T-shirt, his car was totalled in a wreck.

'And the curse still pursued me: while I was standing on the frozen Wisconsin lake, a hand warmer in my coat pocket burst into flames. The film was finally completed, almost exactly two years on from the original "OMEN"

'Make no mistake about it, the Antichrist is in our midst, and I pray to God that the power of good will get us through.'

Source: 'THE DARK SIDE' Magazine Issue 50 August, 1996

All The Colours Of Darkness

And in even more Exorcist news, the following came hammering down the wires from the not-so-good-ol'-US of A...

Back in 1980, a young Jesuit priest was approached with an offer he found, that in all conscience, he couldn't refuse... Would he like to sit in on a real, bona fide exorcism?

Father Dave Creamer, the director of a Jesuit faith centre at the University of Manitoba in Canada, was weak, and feeling pretty lousy stuck in a hospital at the Child Jesus Hospital in southern India, when the call came. He had

been knee-deep in the usual day to day missionary work prior to illness striking him down.

He accepted the invitation, and never regretted his decision one little bit.

'I can recall it all quite clearly, even though it is now 20 years ago,' Father Creamer told a reporter from 'FOX NEWS,' last September.

A nun at the hospital told the Father that a young Tamil woman, probably aged somewhere in her mid-twenties, had dabbled in Witchcraft, a practice that many Catholics, quite naturally believe can lead to Demonic possession. An active, charismatic group in the town had alerted the diocese's official Exorcist.

Father Creamer said the group took the situation very seriously. When the priest entered the room and saw the woman, the source of their concern was all-too obvious.

'She rolled around on the table a lot and from time to time vomited up some kind of greenish stuff,' Father Creamer recalled. 'The young girl spoke more than one language, told people in the group things that she ought not to have known.

'And when she was sprinkled with Holy Water, she reacted as if it were acid!

'The only language I could make some sort of sense out of was English. The Exorcist would speak to Demons within her and I remember her saying, over and over again: "I know Jesus."



And it seems, this case is proof that, today perhaps more than ever, the business of expelling Demons is hugely successful. Gabrielle Amorth, the chief Exorcist of the Rome archdiocese, has presided over hundreds of cases of what he believes were genuine instances of Demonic possession. And Father James LeBar, chief Exorcist of the New York archdiocese, recently told journalists that he has performed about 25-30 a year during his five years as an Exorcist. And the archdiocese of Chicago supposedly went to far as to appoint a full time Exorcist.

All of this begs the question; has there been a profound increase in the machinations of the myriad Legions of Satan to the extent that they have launched a mass (forgive the pun) raid on the souls of unwitting humans?

Gabrielle Amorth stated, with one eye on the book sales of his opus; 'AN EXORCIST TELLS HIS STORY,' certainly believes so. He says there are two main reasons for this.

'First, Western culture is slipping. The majority of people have lost their faith due to a materialistic and hedonistic

lifestyle. And secondly, when the Vatican II removed the Prayer to St Michael from the end of the Catholic Mass, it did away with an important broculation against the powers of Satan.'

Of course, there are more than one or two voices of "sanity" raised against such extreme views. Paul Kurtz, a philosophy professor at the State University of New York in Buffalo, and founder of several scholarly groups, including that would-be bane of all-things Fortean; the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal (CSICOP), believes that it's not the Devil, but rather physiological disorders - Tourette's Syndrome, childhood schizophrenia, temporal lobe syndrome or other psychological deviant behaviour - that are responsible for Demonic possession.

'Any strange behaviour on the part of unfortunate individuals who have had to submit to such rites are due to suggestion on the part of the Exorcist and the social context in which it occurs. The patient is responding and playing a role as expected,' the know-it-all 'expert' Kurtz is quoted as saying.

Equally dismissive of the reality of Demons is Daniel Barnett, who, as vice-president of the North Texas Sceptics, has studied exorcisms extensively. Not surprisingly, he too proposes a shared delusionary theory as to the origins of Demonic possession.

'Within the scope of an exorcism ritual, which is psychologically a highly demanding event for all the parties involved, it is probably easy for relatively mundane events to be misinterpreted as genuine paranormal activity,' he says.

And indeed, many fair-minded priests accept readily that this type of auto-suggestion is more than possible, and is likely the root cause in the vast majority of cases. But the redoubtable Mr Amroth, of the Rome diocese, maintains that a skilled Exorcist can tell almost immediately if the patient he is dealing with has a legitimate case of possession or not.

A new manual for Exorcists, approved last year by the Pope, John Paul II, updates the guidelines and implores priests to explore all medical or psychological explanations for the victim's behaviour before proceeding with an exorcism. And in most dioceses the majority - if not all - requests for exorcisms are denied.

'I worked for seven years as a chaplain in a psychiatric hospital and often received requests for exorcisms. All had no spiritual basis but were caused by medical conditions,' Father Aquinas T. Duffy told reporters. Aquinas hails from the Dublin, Ireland diocese. *'Does Evil exist? Yes. Can a person be possessed? Yes. But only through their own free choice and by dabbling in the occult. Hollywood films have tended to give a very false picture of reality.'*

We may well ask, then, just what is an accurate picture of reality when it comes to Demonic possession?

Amroth writes in his book that there are in fact, no hard and fast standards of behaviour for possessed souls. Some patients lie silent and perfectly still during the ritual, while others flail about wildly, speaking in strange languages, reading minds and threatening those gathered in the room with them.

'One thin, apparently weak girl had to be subdued by force by four strong men during her exorcisms,' Amroth states. *'She broke every bond, even some heavy leather straps with which they tried to tie her down.'*

'Once, when she was tied with strong ropes to an iron bed, she broke some of the iron rods and folded others at a right angle.' Those who adhere to the Catholic faith have even been provided with a 'checklist' as to what are the recognised symptoms of a genuine possession...

(a): Speaking in tongues, languages the person has never before studied (including Demonic tongues).

(b): Exhibiting supernatural strength.

(c): Knowing what is, supposedly unknown to mere mortal man

(d): Strong aversions - often violent reactions - to anything considered to be sacred, particularly the prayers of exorcisms.

The hordes of assembled sceptics remain unconvinced, however.

'In the sessions I have been able to observe, whether on videotape or in person, I have yet to find any evidence of paranormal activity during a possession state or any sort of ritual for deliverance or exorcism,' Barnett was quoted as saying.

Give him his due, however. At least he remains open-minded enough to admit that he has not yet been able to completely dismiss the possibility that possession may be feasible.

'I am not saying that genuine cases of spirit possession do not exist. But all possible medical options must be exhausted before the more spectacular possibility of Demonic manifestation can seriously be considered.'

Now, if only all sceptics could be that objectively open-minded!!!

22nd September, 2000 General 'FOXNEWS'

A Modern Day 'Witch' Persecution

And staying over in America, the intolerance afforded to those perceived as 'Witches' of whatever shade, continues to grow to levels not a million miles removed from the bad old days of medieval persecution.

You want proof? Check out this story from Pittsburgh, USA...

A group of four Witches including Tannin, the Pagan name of a 31-year-old woman, told reporters that the five-pointed star or pentagram she wears on a chain, has to be concealed whenever she sets foot outside. *'There are too many Christians where I work,'* she says.

Another Witch, Eloria Lightfeather, aged 22, apparently does have the nerve to wear her pentagram in broad daylight, but was harassed three years earlier for having the temerity to don a Witch's costume at an office Halloween party!!!

'I got Witch notes,' she related. *'I got scared looks. I got confused looks. People wouldn't talk to me. I lost my job.'*

The women are, it may be said without fear of contradiction, more than a little pissed off with this current attitude displayed towards their beliefs. It may be, as Erica (Erica Leerhsen) points out in *'BLAIR WITCH 2: BOOK OF SHADOWS,'* the likes of that movie's more illustrious predecessor, has contributed towards the less-than-savoury reputation the modern-day sorceress has been saddled with.

Not surprisingly, given the general atmosphere, the women featured in the article I came across, were quick to distance themselves from any connection with Satanic cults or any form of Black Magic. They are Wiccans, worshippers of earth-magic that *'stresses many deities, karmic laws and individual spirit paths.'*

Not that this cuts any ice with the locals.

And for 17-year-old Ken Scott, the prejudice has struck home with a real vengeance.

Ken, a senior at Brownsville Area High School, was afforded the honour of being the special guest at the most recent meeting (at the time of going to press) of the Pittsburgh Pagan House Foundation. The assembled Wiccans were rallying behind Ken because he'd been the subject of Pagan discrimination.

The senior had been sent home from school for dress code violations.

He had chosen to convert his religion from Southern Baptist to Wicca, but the school administrators in the (aberrant) 'land of the free,' decided in their wisdom to prevent him wearing his pentacle, unless he hid it from view underneath his shirt. His mother, Dawn, was, she said, a witness to the imposing of this condition, despite the fact that the school, once the story was made public, denied having said any such thing.

'It's a little frustrating to see how close-minded people can be,' Ken told the assembly.



But Brownsville Area Superintendent Gerry Grant was adamant that the disciplinary action against Ken had nothing to do with his wearing a pentacle and everything to do with him donning torn pants, a chain and spikes on his bracelets. They were also less than enamored with Ken's 'CRADLE OF FILTH' T-shirt, which apparently features, horror of horrors, a picture of the band members sporting hairstyles twisted the shape of 'Satanic' horns, (my oh my, as Bill Grundy once said to 'THE SEX PISTOLS' during that infamous TV interview in December, 1976; 'God, you frighten me to death!')

'It's dress code violation,' Grant tried to assure reporters. 'It definitely was not religion. The T-shirt gave the appearance of the Devil. That is offensive to other kids.'

Erm, isn't the personification of The Devil as a horned deity essentially Christian in origin? The only kids who could therefore be even in the slightest bit offended would, by definition, be Christians, (and pretty devout ones, at that. The sort that think nothing of ramming their dogma right down the throats of the 'heathen unbelievers' at every opportunity, as well as trying to get Halloween banned each and every year, along with Horror movies, death-metal albums and er, Harry Potter novels).

If that's not religiously-motivated intolerance, I'm sure I don't know what is.

Phil Kaplan, the well-known research director of the New Jersey-based National Clearinghouse on Satanic Crime in America, was quick to add his voice to the controversy; 'Nowadays, more schools are taking a hard line and instituting dress codes. They cannot wear certain styles of T-shirts that have offensive connotations, gang, death-metal, Satan.'

'Even the plain white T-shirt has taken a hit. Earlier this month (September), Ambridge School suspended 50 students for wearing underwear as outerwear.'

Body piercings are also prohibited in some districts, including, not surprisingly, Brown(shirts)ville.

Ken Scott takes particular offence at this, as he has had his bottom lip pierced and regards it as an expression of Wicca.

'The pierce is in remembrance of all the Pagan and Wiccan pain suffering throughout all of time and that still goes on today,' says Ken, who, thoughtfully enough, had even taken to covering his piercing with a Band-Aid. 'I did research of Wiccan on-line. There is nothing that says that its followers have pierced body parts.'

The Pagan group were, at the time of going to press, planning on drafting a letter to inform the district that it is unconstitutional to forbid the pentacle, whose points correspond to air, earth, fire, water and spirit.

Ken Scott, who has recently moved to Brownsville from North Carolina, and doesn't have that many close friends, has stated that he just wants to be allowed to wear his pentacle in peace and not be seen as some sort of religio-political cause. He claims that some fellow students have actively encouraged him.

But, whatever the outcome of the dispute, the religious tensions within his own family look set to grow. His mum and dad disapprove of his association with Wicca.

'It bothers me, the prejudice,' Ken says. 'A lot of people see my pentacle and associate it with Satanic power. I don't even believe in Satan.'

'I had a Pagan calling back in January, but it took months, but it took months for me to get up the courage to wear the pentacle.'

'At first, I got into the magical aspects. Now that I have made it my religion, I don't think I would cast any spells at all.'

Some Wiccans, of course, undeniably practice Magick, but they always claim that the spells they weave are simply a channelling of energy aimed at creating a change in their lives, never as a way of harming someone.

Ken says, understandably enough, that he is nowhere near sufficiently learned to call himself a Witch, although he would very much like to one day. 'Wicca helped me to accept and love others. I once had a lot of problems with love in general.'

'My mother is still a practicing Southern Baptist. Initially, she was nervous when I started lighting candles, chanting and shunning God. But now she is fighting for me.'

His mum even goes so far as to state that though Ken is an honour student, he was a typically angry and belligerent teenager before he found Wicca.

'It's a 180-degree turn,' says Dawn, a nurse. 'He used to be very mean and rebellious. Whatever I would say, he would take the opposite. He's not mean anymore.'

Indeed, she is now so supportive, she turned up at the Pagan meeting, along with Ken's younger brother and sister, who, the Christians will doubtless be relieved to hear, were bored rigid by the proceedings.

'You are lucky to have a mother who is so supportive,' one of the Witches present at the meeting told Ken, you might think somewhat unnecessarily.

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But not everyone views Wicca as being essentially harmless, it seems.

The ever-reliable Mr Kaplan told reporters; *'Wicca has been termed Satan's little white lie. It teeter totters on the border of heavy occult involvement or someone who wants to act out. If it is left unchecked, and the school doesn't take a zero-tolerance policy, it could flourish and blossom.'*

Fortunately, the voice of reason (not to say sanity) rang out clear across the Pittsburgh air. Wendy Griffin, associate professor of women's studies at California State University in Long Beach, says that Wicca is simply misunderstood and has nothing to do with Satan; *'If you don't believe in ultimate good, you can't believe in ultimate bad.'*

27th September, 2000 Pittsburgh, USA *'THE POST-GAZETTE'*

Witch Film Sparks Anger In The Philippines

In an eerie echo of the aftermath of the release of *'THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT'*, over in the States, a movie featuring Witches, this time inhabiting the town of Iloilo, has sparked a series of angry exchanges in the halls of local government.

'There are no Witches in our town,' Governor Arthur Defensor and Mayor Rolly Distura stated as they decried the contents of the film *'SAPILINGNGASWANG.'*

'The movie is very offensive to the our townspeople and the people in the film industry should not make that type of ovie again.'

The film features a group of students (so that's a whopping big nought out of ten for originality, then) who conduct research on Witches.

Defensor had requested that local cinemas refuse to screen the movie because, in his eyes at least, *'It slandered the good name of the people of the town and that could drive away tourists, and even investors. I am very saddened with that movie.'*

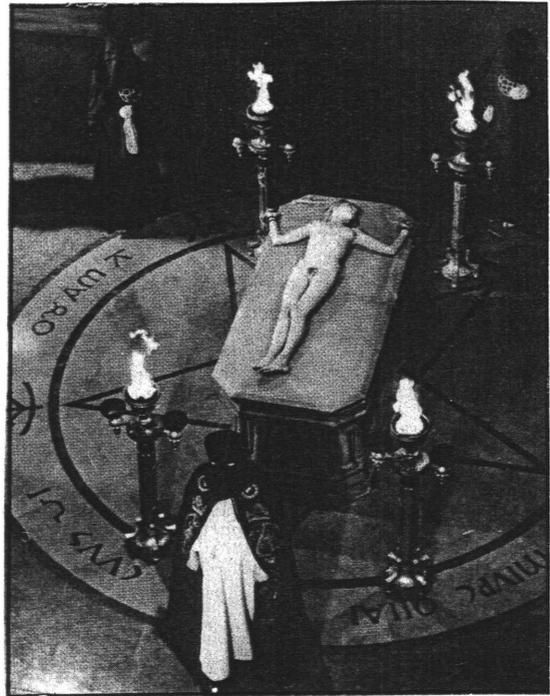
'I spent my childhood in the area that was described as being a village of Witches in the movie, and now other people might actually think that Witches really exist.'

The village of Lublub became notorious as a haven for Witches because back in the 1940's, a local legendary figure, Tenyente Gulmo once lived in the area. He

apparently made people, particularly the Japanese, believe that he was a Witch so that the Japanese soldiers wouldn't bother him. This was nothing more than an enterprising strategy aimed at protecting his wealth and properties.

Jubal Gallaga, the son of the movie's director, claimed, like so many others before him, that he couldn't get a handle on what it was about the film that polarised opinion so.

'Have they actually seen the movie? If they haven't, then they have no right to make judgement on something they know absolutely nothing about. And if they have seen it, then I wonder how well they grasped it.'



'In the film, my father created a fictional town called Panitan. I know this because I spoke with my dad about it before we began shooting. The name of Panitan was chosen because the Witches in the movie shed their skin. Panitan means "to peel" in Hiligaynon. The Witches in the movie were not portrayed as being Evil or malicious.'

'The film is more of a tragedy of errors, the horror stemming from a gross misunderstanding, a catastrophic culture shock, or more appropriately, clash, if you will.'

'The Witches just want to be left alone, it just so happens that their diet includes human flesh. We do not think a lion is Evil for preying on gazelles.'

25th September, 2000 Iloilo, The Philippines *'THE PHILIPPINE DAILY ENQUIRER'*

Weird Tales From The Heart Of Nigeria

Late last September, a story was doing the rounds across the city of Lagos that begins with the driver of a motorcycle taxi, called an Okada, who picked up a female passenger one day and handed her a helmet. This is strange enough in itself because no one in Lagos, wears a helmet while riding a motorcycle.

At the risk of sounding sexist, the woman passenger refused to wear the helmet because she was afraid to do so would mess up her hairstyle. She placed the helmet on the driver instead whereupon he promptly vanished. The motorcycle crashed a few seconds later.

Other drivers gathered around, someone recognised the driver's bike, but his body had disappeared completely.

Several people went round to his house to break the news to his family, but instead they found the missing driver stretched out on his bed, in a Zombie-like state. And from the mouth of the Zombie money came forth, more money than any of those assembled had ever seen.

The driver, with the aid of his magic helmet, had hoped to turn his passenger into just such a money-spewing Zombie. Instead, he became a victim of his own scheming and was never able to enjoy the riches he sought.

The fact that many Nigerians were quick to accept this tale at face value is perhaps, a searing indictment of the state of the nation following thirty years of military misrule and corruption. People tend to cling to any bright tale of hope in the midst of the darkest despair.

And as the ordinary person struggles to understand how it is some people at least seem to be making money in this climate of economic ruin, it is all-too easy to look to Witchcraft as being the possible explanation.

And this atmosphere of credulity is fostered further by the Nigerian newspapers who constantly run a plethora of stories involving Witchcraft and ritual killings.

In one such article, a victim was allegedly caught and castrated while still alive, then decapitated and the head and genitals used in a ritual to produce wealth.

'I don't think such stories should be sensationalized to enable people to just think, "Oh, it's Africa. It's more tribalism, it's more primitivism. It's some sort of horrible thing that goes on somewhere else,' anthropology professor Misty Bastian of Franklin & Marshall in Pennsylvania.

Dr Bastian, who has been christened with the nickname the Stephen King of African anthropology because of her interest in these sort of tales, believes they could be thought of as little more than Urban Legends. But that's not to say that they don't actually happen. *'They do. But the wide belief in such stories points to some deeper currents in society.'*

'This is about turning people into the ultimate commodity, which is the commodity that pays you back. The Zombie on the bed is the perfect image, a sort of African ATM.'

'There are no reliable statistics on these crimes. Only anecdotal reports that the lively media play up to full effect. This raises public fears about falling victim to ritual killers or other unscrupulous characters.'

'Which is why the Lagos State commissioner of police, Mike Okiro, found himself on national television giving people tips on how to avoid being kidnapped for a ritual killing.'

'Nigerian journalist Allwell Jumbo's investigation of the rituals began when he received a tip off that a young girl had been admitted to hospital with mutilated genitals.'

'She gave him enough information to be able to track down the man responsible. Mr Jumbo approached him about having a ritual performed to make him wealthy.'

'He was given a list of what to get, including female body parts. When Mr Jumbo told him that it would be hard to get them, he was asked for money instead.'

'The amount was about \$1,000.'

'By this time, Mr Jumbo had contacted the police who assigned an undercover officer to accompany him to the next meeting. Arrangements were made for the full ritual, including body parts. But when the day arrived, it was the police who showed up at the Witch doctor's home. The ritualist was convicted of a series of murders. Mr Jumbo won an award.'

Isak Niehaus of the University of Natal in Durban, South Africa, claims there is a long tradition in Africa of using body parts in wealth-creating rituals.

'There is a belief in the efficacy of human flesh to make things happen. It used to be rituals that were meant to produce rain, which would result in communal wealth. These days, the aim is for individual enrichment.'

'Body parts are believed to preserve their maximum power if severed while the victim is alive. The genitals are commonly chosen because of their creative force.'

25th September, 2000 Lagos, Nigeria **THE GLOBE AND MAIL'**

And Equally Strange Stories From Ghana

The body of a woman known only as Monica was found recently on a patch of wasteground close to her home in one of the run-down ghettos that litter the Ghanaian countryside.

She had been strangled and the bones in her wrists and legs had been broken. The 26-year-old was the 14th victim of a serial-killer who has been plaguing the women of Ghana for the past two years. Even worse, a total of 25 women have been found in and around Accra, the capital city. Nationwide, the figure is, to date at least, 31.

What has disturbed even the most hardened of police officers however, has been the signs that have labelled the killings as being ritualistic, maybe even Voodoo-inspired, in origin. When the killings began back in 1998, they were dubbed "The Vampire killings" by the media because of the curious puncture marks found on some of the bodies. Other victims were reported to have had the blood sucked from their fingertips. All the women were found in the early hours of the morning, naked from the waist down, legs splayed, and surrounded with used and unused condoms, which seemed to imply a sexual motive for the murders.

All had been strangled, and in some cases, breasts and genitals had been mutilated. Seven of the victims remain unidentified and have been buried by the police in unmarked graves.

The deceased Monica's former best friend, Abigail Dakwah, 22, told reporters; *'Monica was a lovely woman, very kind and liked a joke. Nobody knew much about her, and she didn't give a lot away about her personal life - we didn't even know her surname - but she was always cheerful. I knew she had a boyfriend. She had dreams and she was trying to save money for travel. The last time I saw her was on January 21st, last year, when she said goodbye to me outside the bar at midnight. I said, "See you tomorrow," and then we went our separate ways. At that time of night Dansoman is dark, with only the kerosene lamps of a few traders to light up the main road. I assume that Monica turned into one of the dark side streets that led to her home, about three miles away. I always told her to take a taxi, but she wanted to save money.'*

'A passer-by discovered her body on a football pitch at 5:30 the next morning, yards from her home. I couldn't believe it. I had to go to the morgue to see her so that I knew it was true. I cried for days and was very afraid. I got so depressed I had to take time off work. I'm terrified about going home at night. I always take a taxi, although you can't always trust the taxi drivers.'

The fact that the police have proved to be entirely ineffectual in attempting to catch the killer(s), has led to people deciding they were left with little option but to seek to take matters into their own hands. Last November, thousands marched through the streets of Accra, demanding action. The government was forced into offering a £7,000 reward for information leading to the arrest of the killer(s), a huge amount of money in Ghana. They even set up a special inter-agency team to help coordinate the investigation.

All to no avail.

The fear is now that those responsible will not be brought to justice unless the police have an extraordinary stroke of luck.

TV presenter Grace Omabdo regularly discusses the murders on her programmes and is concerned at what she describes as a cloak of secrecy surrounding them.

'We know some of the women were bleeding from their vaginas and that one girl was reported to have had something cut out of her while she was still alive. We are all in the dark and have to rely on rumour.'

'Are these murders ritual killings ordered by a man or people in positions of power, or is it someone who wants to punish all women because of something a woman has done to him?'

'Have autopsies been done on these women? We want to know whether any organs have been removed. If this has happened, it would indicate that the women are being killed for their organs, which are being used for Voodoo ceremonies. The ritualistic nature of the killings has made women even more fearful. While the majority of Ghanaians are practising Christians, many turn to Voodoo for healing, divination and wish-fulfilment. West Africa is rife with rumours of people in high places consulting Voodoo priests, who are said to recommend human sacrifice to protect the position of politicians and army officials.'

'There's no smoke without fire,' a market trader by the name of Fiona Pepera, told reporters. 'When our soldiers go to fight for the United Nations, some of the top-ranking officers pay Voodoo priests lots of money for protection rituals. When people get into power they are so afraid of losing it, they will do anything to hang on to it, even seek out the blood of women, and bits of their bodies for the rituals. I am a devout Christian and I go to church every Sunday, but there's no harm in going to the Voodoo priest when you are in trouble. It has helped me many times. But what these people are doing is Evil.'

The daughter of another victim, Deborah Henaku, 29, last set eyes upon her mother, Comfort, 55, when she visited her at work on 4th April, 1999. Just 24 hours later, Comfort's half-naked body was discovered, laid out like the others, on a stretch of wasteland in Dansoman, near to her home. She had been waiting for an early morning taxi to take her to the market where she sold ice water. Her husband, Maxwell, a retired teacher, had always previously walked her to the taxi rank, but unfortunately, she had sneaked out early than usual that morning, not wishing to disturb him. Not surprisingly, Maxwell has been tormented by guilt and has gone on record as stating that he will never be able to forgive himself for what happened to his wife.

It was several hours after the body had been found that the police were informed via a phone-in radio show. Tragically, Deborah also caught that broadcast, and knew straight away that the victim was her mother.

'I had an awful feeling. She was so strong and energetic, I couldn't imagine her dying like this. But it was clear she had put up a struggle because her clothes were torn.'

'This has been a terrible blow to the family. My father is no the same without her. But our pain will not stop the killings. They are going to go on for a very long time.'

Elizabeth Akapala, executive director of Advocates for Gender Equality, believes simply that the police attitude towards these cases is sexist in origin.

'Their reluctance to catch the killer is a reflection of the way women are seen as inferior beings in Africa. This year, there has been a murder nearly every month, and no one is doing anything about it. We are invisible, and the excuse they use for not investigating properly is to say that all the women killed were prostitutes. They were not - most of them were traders and businesswomen. And even if they were

prostitutes, that is no excuse. They were mothers, sisters, wives and daughters, and the human cost to their families is tragic.'

12th October, 2000 Ghana, Africa 'DAILY MANC MAGAZINE'

The Cursed Ford Capri

We've come across this type of story before, so we can't help but wonder if this is a case of coincidence, urban legend, outright invention or gross stupidity on the behalf of the person who bought the vehicle with the 'Satanic' registration plate.

Whatever, the fact that Keith Tagliaferrro's car's registration plate is ARK 666Y, has, according to our intrepid motorist, contributed to the following mishaps and run of ill fortune....

On his first ever drive, Keith was struck by a bolt of lightning...You'd have thought he might have taken the hint...But no...

The wheels caught fire not long after.

A lady friend claimed to have seen a phantom sitting in the back seat of the vehicle.

And mechanics working on the car were left shaking in fear as it suddenly and unaccountably began rocking and emitting strange noises.

Things got so bad, Keith decided to call on the presenter of 'FORTEANTV', the good ol' Reverend Lionel Fanthorpe, to see if he could 'exorcise' the car. As you may have heard in a recent TV interview, Lionel was left mystified when the container filled with Holy Water began to heat up as he sprinkled it on the bonnet.

Keith appears to have finally seen sense and is currently looking for some other mug to purchase the 1982 motor.

In an interview for the LWT series 'MOTORING MADNESS', he told the presenters; *'Anyone who comes into contact with that car has something bad happen to them.'*

'I told a woman about it and she rang the next morning to say she'd had a crash and written her own car off.'

'I once jokingly put a photo of the car in front of my son Dean's goldfish tank and told the fish; "Look, there's the haunted car."

'Next day the fish died.'

'And I've noticed dogs, who are supposed to be very aware of the spirit world, won't go near it. (I'm not surprised. They're probably worried he'll stick a photo of that blasted car to their nose and tell them they're damned to burn in Hell for all eternity....Just for a laugh, like - Ed)

'The car's definitely cursed. It's even ruining my love life. I'm single and no woman will have me while I have this car.'

Keith, 44, sells number plates, and foolishly thought he'd stumbled upon a real bargain when he bought the car, complete with its 666 plate, for a mere £150 four years earlier. (Lordy, hasn't he ever seen or read 'CHRISTINE?')

Keith, of Eastbourne, Sussex, once believed beyond doubting that he could easily sell the Capri for a nice tidy profit.

Not now though.

Not unless the ghost of Arule Cunningham puts in an appearance...

'It's only now that I remember the former owner rang me up and practically begged me to buy the car.'

'He drove 50 miles to deliver it to me and that day we had one of the worst snow storms in history.'

'He couldn't wait to get rid of it.'

'I can see why now.'

13th August, 2000 Eastbourne, Sussex 'SUNDAY PEOPLE'

Walking On The Night Side Of Nature

A brand new book by authoress Joyce Miller, covering all aspects of Scottish folklore and entitled, imaginatively enough; *MYTH AND MAGIC*, has hit the book stores recently, its contents being of especial interest to readers of our humble publication.

Joyce told a reporter from a Sunday magazine that the reasons behind her penning the tome are to help provide an answer to some of life's more intriguing everyday 'superstitions.'

'How often do you walk under a ladder? Not a lot, if you can avoid it, I'm sure. And how many of you cross your fingers for good luck, or throw spilled salt over your left shoulder? (Just to be on the safe side, of course).

'Though we rarely think about these habits or dismiss them as being "just superstitious," the beliefs from which they originally formed the core of Scottish life just a few centuries ago.

'In my book, there are a wealth of stories covering ancient Scottish rituals, festivals, songs and legends. There are also many sites to visit, with fascinating stories attached, such as the tale about the Robin Hood-type Faeries that dished out the farmer's money to his ill-treated worker

'Before studying for my Ph.D, I worked as a nurse and was interested in forms of healing that were practised before the advent of modern medicine.

'I realised that a lot of healing was about good luck. Festivals, offerings and so on were to ensure cattle were healthy and crops fruitful. Crossing your fingers was about survival - the symbolism of the Christian cross would ward off Evil and hopefully bring good fortune.

'Some beliefs were international. The idea of special water and tying cloths to wells in the hope of healing was practised across Europe and still happens in Scotland, Cyprus and Japan.

'There's been a change in attitude towards unconventional beliefs in the last century, and more people are delving into the myths that we used to live by.

'We've become more willing to understand and more open-minded. Some festivals, such as Beltane, have been reinvented because people realised how good they are for communities.

'This open-mindedness also explains the rising popularity in alternative remedies and therapies.

'Alternative remedies are like rituals in that they involve faith. The New Age belief in crystals echoes an ancient idea that some stones have particular powers. Aromatherapy is also based on rituals and use of natural resources.

'The rituals and beliefs that gave our ancestors hope and explained the way the world was began to wane as the dogma of the church and scientific discoveries spread in the 17th century, turning the world of magic and mystery upside down. I prefer to imagine that Faerie Hills are more than Pict passageways and that dropping money down a well and making a wish is a worthy investment.

7th October, 2000 Scotland 'THE SUNDAY POST MAGAZINE'

FRIDAY THE 13TH PART 13

The only Friday 13th of the Millennium year was afforded much the same level of irrational fear, anxiety and downright dread by people who, you would think, ought to know better...

As amazing as it may seem in these so-called 'rational, logical times,' places of work would doubtless be suffering

staff shortages as their employees rang in ill at the prospect of setting foot beyond the safety of their doors on this date.

Explanations as to the origin of this superstition are as numerous as the legion of shoddy sequels filmed in 'honour' of the hockey-mask wearing killer of Camp Crystal Lake.

Firstly, the number 13 itself can inspire a fear that is known by psychologists as 'triskaidekaphobia.' The term *paraskavedekatriphobia* (in its simplest terms, 'fear of Friday 13th) was later coined to identify those specifically afraid of that ominous date.

In the not-so-good-ol' US of A, there are an estimated 21 million sufferers of this malady. (But then, what do you expect of a nation that can't even count the votes of a presidential election properly?).

Sadly for the afflicted, there is always going to be at least one Friday 13th each and every year. Some years there are two, rarely three (most recently in 1998 and the next is due to occur in 2009). And if the date happens to coincide with the event of a full moon, then watch out... Tradition dictates that violent crime and mental illness will be the order of the day.

According to popular folklore, certainly in the Western world anyway, it would be extremely foolhardy to embark upon a business venture, take a trip, or get married on Friday 13th. Such enterprises can only end in financial ruin, journey's into disaster and a lifetime of heartache.

Sufferers will be somewhat relieved to know that there are remedies and charms that can be employed to ward off the Evil influence of the date... These include four-leafed clovers or wishing on a star (if you're lucky enough to be able to view a celestial body through the perennial cloud bank that's covered much of Britain since, oooh, one day in early May, last 'summer').

Alternatively, you can toss coins into a wishing well or fountain, or take to burning an old pair of socks on top of a mountain.

The superstition is supposed to have its origins in the embryonic years of Christianity. Biblical references include the 13 people present at the Last Supper and the belief that the Crucifixion took place on, of all dates, Friday 13th.

Some theologians also claim that Adam accepted *that* item of Forbidden Fruit on a Friday and that Cain killed his brother Abel on a disconcertingly similar date.

Norse mythology too, appears to have viewed the number 13 in a less than favourable light.

Loki, the God of Mischief, was once the uninvited guest at a banquet in Valhalla. The God of Light, Balhar was killed as a result of Loki's presence.

Ancient Norsemen also tied 13 knots in their hangman's noose.

A Witches Coven is supposed to consist of 13 acolytes, and 13 was regarded by the Christianised Romans to be the number of the Devil, whilst the Chinese have long interpreted 13 to be the number of obstacles placed in the way of good fortune.

But not everyone, it seems, considers 13 to be exclusively unlucky. The Mexicans, for example, believe that the number symbolises the sun and energy in general. The Jewish Cabala, too, confirms its lucky status: The Book of Moses makes reference to 13 attributes of God, and the bar mitzvah celebrates the passing from the carefree days of childhood into the (not always to great) era of adulthood, at the age of 13.

As for Friday itself, well, every Friday is considered a fortunate day across Scandinavia. The word Friday comes from the Anglo-Saxon '*Frigedæg*,' possibly a derivation of Frigg, the Norse God Of Love.

And while we're at it, Vendredi, the French for Friday, derives from Venus, the Roman Goddess of Love. Many

actors believe Friday to be an especially propitious day, often insisting that they only sign new contracts on that particular day.

Charles Dickens was said to have begun writing all his books on a Friday. Even Stock Market traders on Wall Street regard Friday 13th as a lucky day. Over the past three years it has occurred five times and each time the market has risen substantially.

Amongst the list of celebrity paraskavidetriaphobics we can include Winston Churchill and Franklin Roosevelt, who both avoided travelling on that day. Even the Royal Family has also been known to avoid the dreaded number. Princess Margaret's birth was not officially recorded immediately as the registration number was 13. The family waited three days until another baby was registered so Margaret could have the number 14.

As for the disasters associated with Friday 13th, well, in the 19th century, we have the disappearance of the Royal Navy's HMS Friday, following which Lloyd's would not insure any ship launched on Friday 13th. Even today, the US Navy will avoid launching a ship on Friday 13th. The Andes airline crash also occurred on Friday 13th, 1970, when the survivors were forced to eat the bodies of those who had perished (dramatised of course, in the extremely harrowing movie *'ALIVE'*)

Then there was the ill-fated Apollo 13 launch (also made into a highly successful film) took place, remarkably, at 13:13 hours, whereupon an explosion in the fuel cell aborted the mission on April 13th. At least that tale had a happy ending, though.

In the 1920's, 13 people sat down to dinner at the Savoy Hotel in London. The following day, their host died. Since then, whenever there are 13 people for dinner at the Savoy, the hotel provides an extra seat and places a statuette of a black cat called Kaspar on the chair.

In France, a company actually exists which will always provide a last-minute 14th guest for dinner parties cursed with the dreaded number.

Of course, many of those ubiquitous hard-nosed sceptics are predictably falling over themselves in a bid to debunk the whole superstition. The London Thirteen Club, formed in the late 19th century by journalists, regularly meets to mock superstition by spilling salt, opening umbrellas indoors and walking on cracks in the pavement.

The Friday The 13th Club, based in Philadelphia, has been meeting for 63 years and celebrates the day by breaking mirrors, walking under ladders and crossing the paths of black cats.

Greek-born Nick Matsoukas emigrated to the United States, arriving on February 13th, 1917. He was the 13th child of his family and his name consisted of 13 letters. He formed the National Committee Of Thirteen Against Superstition, Prejudice And Fear.

13th October, 2000 *General* 'DAILY EXPRESS'

The Curse Of The Black Cat

Before you read on, let me just tell you that this is not quite the type of snippet you might be expecting from the somewhat misleading heading....

Nope, the 'curse' we're referring to here, concerns a pet rescue centre that apparently cannot find homes for the supposedly ill-omened black cat.

Of a 124 felines at the Mayhew Animal Centre, in Kensal Green, North London, nearly half are black.

Animal care manager Helen Betts, is in no doubt as to why this should be; *'Black cats are difficult to re-home because people are superstitious about them. Some associate them with Witchcraft and Evil. With the approach of Halloween,*

we get comments like; "I don't want a black cat, they're unlucky."

'Some people think they're simply a boring colour and make a bee-line for the ginger and tabbies.

'Others would actually rather have a bit of a different-coloured cat than a whole black one. It has even been easier to find homes for cats with three legs!!!

And even those who do decide they want a black cat are sometimes not to be trusted. Once a woman came in asking to see a black cat. But a volunteer overheard a conversation that revealed that she was a Witch who wanted the cat for a ceremony. I'm not sure what this involved, but you can rest assured she didn't get the cat.'

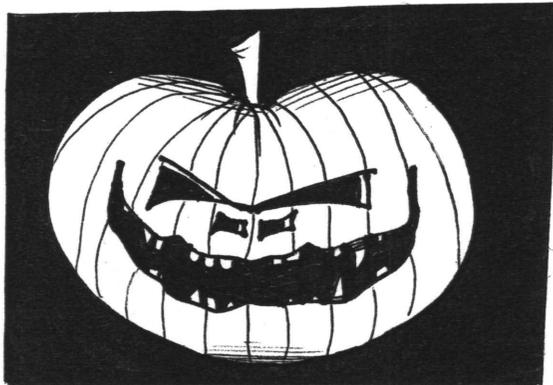
29th October, 2000 *Mayhew, Kensal Green, North London* 'NEWS OF THE WORLD.'

We're reminded of another example of paranoia concerning cats of a wholly ebon shade, which we include here from our files;

Back in April, 1995, a nomad by the name of Goma Salama, murdered three of his children because he claimed he was told to do so in a dream by a black cat. Goma, who hails from Cairo, Egypt, strangled his 13-year-old and his seven-year-old daughter and killed another son, named, spookily enough, Salem, with a spear.

His heartbroken wife later stated that Mr Salama had been suffering from hallucinations for years, and regularly abused his children.

Hell Wants To Become Halloween Town



Businessmen in the US town, christened with the less-than-delightful name of Hell, have joined forces in an attempt to utilise its moniker by making it 'the Halloween capital of the world.' (*Funny, I always thought that title had already been bestowed upon either Haddonfield, Illinois, or the domain of Jack Skellington - Ed*)

The Michigan town has already proved to be extremely popular with tourists - its post office regularly attracts unhappy taxpayers who visit especially for the 'Hell' postmark. Local businessman John Colone sought to cash in further by opening 'SCREAMS' which he describes as; *'the scariest ice cream parlour on earth.'*

The Chamber of Commerce was also entering into the (ahem) spirit of things, by allowing its offices to become 'haunted' every thirty minutes. For half an hour's duration, the buildings will be racked with 'ghostly' sounds ie; bumps, knocks and bangs, as well as 'spooky sights.'

Sounds er, terrrtying, I'm sure you'll agree...

Pam Kekes, who has lived in Hell since 1988, told reporters that she liked the ideas and welcomed the direction Mr Colone is taking the town.

'Basically, Hell has always had that concept. I think John Colone is simply trying to create much more of a family atmosphere as opposed to the way it had been previously.'

Insert your own ultra-cynical 'The American Dream Goes To Hell,' joke here, if you please....

26th September, 2000 Hell, Michigan 'THE DETROIT NEWS'

Time's Dark Laughter: The Cosmic Joker's Latest Pranks



A BATCH OF PRETTY HOPELESS CRIME

And pride of place this issue must simply go to Matthew Williams, a Doug-n-Dave wannabe from Bourton, Devizes. Mr Williams told reporters that his 'mission' was to put and end to the mystery surrounding the formation of Crop Circles, once and for all. He attempted to carry out his goal by sneaking through the wheat fields of Wiltshire in the wee hours before dawn armed with planks, bamboo sticks and a scribbled collection of geometric calculations. Together with a friend, he spent three consecutive nights creating a seven-point star shape in field of flattened grass. The intended target of this bout of hoaxing was Professor Michael Glickman, 'a world authority on Crop Circles,' who often ascribes a paranormal explanation to the formation of said Circles.

It was Matthew's intention to prove that even the more complex shapes were easily reproduced by human hands and with no assistance required from otherworldly forces. Unfortunately for Mr Williams, the only result of his efforts was a court appearance and a fine of £100 for criminal damage to the farmer's field. Matthew was the first person in Britain to be charged in connection with the making of a Crop Circle, although quite how the aforementioned Doug 'n' Dave managed to get away with it for so long (if their stories are to be believed, if course) is a mystery right up there with er, what is the 'phenomenon' behind the creation of the Circles.

Stephen Clifford, defending Matthew at Devizes Magistrates court, said; 'The crop researcher said it wasn't possible for humans to create it. My client's desire was prove Mr Glickman wrong.'

Professor Glickman elected to call the boys in blue after receiving an e-mail from Mr Williams. The hoaxer had also broadcast a picture of his work on the Internet, and Williams freely admitted what he had done and 'went into some detail about how he did it.'

Roger Jones, prosecuting, said in court; 'Mr Williams showed no malice. He thought the farm belonged to another farmer who hadn't objected to Crop Circles in the past.'

Matthew had been informed that he would not have had to go to court if he bothered to find out who owned the field first.

'We suggest that before you go running around making artificial circles you get permission from whoever owns the field,' magistrate Geoffrey Olsen told him.

Damage to the wheat, at Manor Farm, West Overton, was estimated at £200. Further damage was caused by people trampling across the field to see it.

In the wake of this case, an unrepentant Mr Williams told reporters; 'The public are being conned. The majority of Crop Circles are man-made, although I do believe some are the work of the paranormal.'

Meanwhile, Professor Glickman said that he was delighted with the result of the prosecution. He further stated that there had been 150 circles this year of which seven or eight were possibly man-made.

'Mr Williams's pattern was not up to standard anyway. These formations appear in a flash and are very intricate. Sowho's working for these hoaxers then, Michaelangelo?' 7th November, 2000 Bourton, Devizes. 'DAILYMAIL'

***A couple of luckless bank robbers were easily caught by the police when a 23-stone officer got himself stuck in the revolving door, effectively blocking their exit.

As a way of nabbing criminals, it was decidedly unorthodox, but nonetheless successful.

15th October, 2000 New York, USA 'NEWS OF THE WORLD.'

*** And in Lille, France, a woman took it upon herself to attempt to rob people utilising the services of a ferocious mouse to acquire her ill-gotten gains.

She terrorised the city's shoppers by thrusting the tiny rodent into their faces and demanding their money. One mother was so afraid at the sight of those razor-sharp teeth that she simply dropped her handbag and fled the scene.

Police finally located the mouse, called Jerome, in the woman's pocket. The 19-year-old (the woman, not the mouse, one presumes) was sentenced to 100 hours community service.

The three-inch long Jerome has been let off rather lightly and has been given a home in a local pet shop.

26th July, Lille, France 'DAILYEXPRESS.'

*** Meanwhile, over in Germany, a man armed with a pistol held up a clothes shop and demanded, of all things, a bag full of tights and knickers.

Police later said that the man, who burst into the 'Clothes Chest,' store shortly before closing time, demanded cash but was told by the owner that the till was empty.

Instead he made good his escape with underwear worth about £125.

The female owner of the shop in Brandenburg state told the robber all of that day's customers had paid by credit card.

We're reminded of that classic 'Python' sketch where John Cleese attempts to rob a store, only to discover that he is in a ladies underwear shop. After enquiring whether there is any other goods available, or any cash in easy-to-carry

bags, he finally shrugs and says with a sigh; 'Just a pair of panties then, please.'

17th October, 2000 Brandenburg Germany REUTERS

GUNNING FOR TROUBLE

A bunch of wolf-hunters accidentally shot dead their 80-year-old companion who was mimicking (hugely convincingly, one assumes) the animal's sounds.

At first, the four hunters had claimed that Nikaloas Kavalakis died after accidentally shooting himself. Police investigating the case however, later managed to secure a confession that Kavalakis was shot by Abdi Mehmetoglou, 58, after being mistaken for a wolf in the forest near Soufli, 150 miles northeast of Thessaloniki, Greece.

28th August, 2000 Thessaloniki, Greece 'LIVERPOOL ECHO';

*** And in an eerily similar case, would-be joker Pierre Berton, 41, was shot in the backside by his brother, Lucas, after he hid behind a bush and did an impression of a boar grunting in the middle of a wild pig hunt!!!

23rd July, 2000 Limoges, France 'NEWS OF THE WORLD.'

*** Two partners who were working in a record store in New Jersey, USA, were engaged in a spot of rehearsal aimed at what they should do if they were ever present when the shop was being robbed. Everything was going swimmingly until the one acting as the assistant accidentally shot dead the one who was acting out the role of the robber.

29th October, 2000 New Jersey, USA. 'NEWS OF THE WORLD.'

*** Another disastrous mix-up involving misdirected gun-play occurred in Paderborn, Germany...

A would-be robber (the real thing, this time) sauntered into a bank pointing a pistol, but panicked when he spotted a guard, and somehow wound up shooting himself in the bottom as he attempted to hide the gun in his back pocket.

The unfortunate Peter Hoefleler was rushed to hospital with a highly embarrassing buttock wound and later charged with attempted robbery.

29th October, 2000 Paderborn, Germany 'SUNDAY PEOPLE.'

When Fate Turns Its Back...

Horst Meder, 43, had most certainly successfully mapped out his 'Final Destination,' last Autumn.

Firstly, he accidentally drove into a telegraph pole before plunging down a twenty foot embankment and crashed straight through a fence in Wurzburg, Germany.

Amazingly, he stepped from the vehicle virtually unharmed and began walking along the road for assistance...Where he was promptly knocked down by a truck which struck him dead.

3rd August, 2000 Wurzburg, Germany SUNDAY MANC'

*** A pensioner by the name of Ralph Page had faithfully promised his wife that he would never pay a visit to a strip joint.

But not long after she died, the 87-year-old promptly went to just about the raunchiest club he could find in Detroit.

One of the strippers there spotted him and dragged him on stage. She then took off his shirt, smothered him in oil, whereupon he died of a heart attack.

Well, I guess there about a billion worse ways to go.

3rd September, Detroit, USA 'NEWS OF THE WORLD'

*** Virginia Simpson was taking a bath whilst listening to the oldest crooner in town, Tom Jones, singing the

(inexplicably, despite featuring the very lovely Nina Persson) hit 'BURNING DOWN THE HOUSE,' when a fire suddenly broke out in her kitchen.

3rd July, 2000 Essex, Devon 'SUNDAY PEOPLE'

*** Also experiencing synchronistic trouble with fires was one Erik Wilksted, a farmer who drove his burning lorry into the nearest town for help and started a blaze...At the fire station.

He decided to park the hay truck alongside two huge wooden doors which suddenly burst into flames at the depot in Forssa, Finland.

3rd September, Forssa, Finland 'SUNDAY MANC'

*** Nancy Burrows was so concerned for the security of her home that she hit upon the idea of planting a row of rosebushes directly in front of her lounge window after reading how they are supposed to act as an effective deterrent against would-be burglars.

Unfortunately, Nancy, 61, was left stunned when all six bushes were dug up and stolen in Biggin Hill, Kent.

3rd July, 2000 Biggin Hill, Kent 'NEWS OF THE WORLD.'

*** Dolph Mohr was a trumpet player aged 20, who died of a brain injury suffered when he was whacked on the back of his head by a bandmate's trombone slide.

Police later said that the band had been playing 'a spirited rendition' of 'WHEN THE SAINTS GO MARCHING IN' in Bochoit, Germany.

16th October, 2000 Bochoit, Germany 'DAILY SLUR'

*** Two men held up a police station in South Africa's Northern Cape Province, last September, and got away with 370,000 Rand (£37,000) which had been left there for (ahem) safekeeping.

21st September, 2000 Northern Cape Province, South Africa 'DAILY MANC'

*** Meanwhile, in Vienna, Austria, a woman was stabbed to death by her lover in their flat after she received a call on her mobile phone which her jealous partner believed was from another man.

Police have not been able to discover who it actually was who called.

17th October, 2000 Vienna, Austria 'DAILY TELEGRAPH.'

*** An unnamed woman in Romania, who lived in a school attic with her son for a total of six years, threatened to commit suicide if the council refused to rehouse them. She claimed that at least then officials would be forced to find her a plot in the cemetery.

Unfortunately for her, the council took due notice and promptly gave her a crypt in a local churchyard.

28th August, 2000 Romania 'DAILY EXPRESS'

*** Whilst he was engaged in a spot of cupboard clearing, a man in Dumfries, Scotland, came across a book he'd bought untold years ago but had somehow never got quite round to reading. And the title of the tome. Well, I guess it simply had to be 'HOW TO ORGANISE YOUR TIME.'

10th September, 2000 Dumfries, Scotland 'DAILY RECORD'

And When Fate Smiles Down

Charles Sutcliffe's heart was stopped by lightning, last September, and yet, somehow, his organ was re-started the moment he hit the ground.

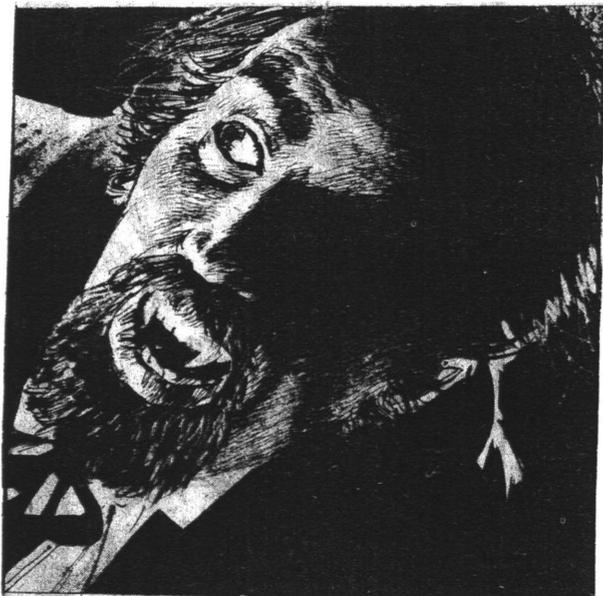
The impact left Charles with three hairline skull fractures. He later told reporters; 'I remember coming around in a pool of blood. I feel really lucky. It could have been so much worse.' Charles, 34, from Todmorden, West Yorkshire, had been on holiday with his family at Robin

Hood's Bay, North Yorkshire, when the lightning strike occurred.

4th September, 2000 North Yorkshire 'DAILYMANC.'

Weird Human Behaviour

Vampire On The Prowl In New Hampshire



The following snippet reads like a scene from the classic 1970's TV movie 'KOLCHAK: THE NIGHT STALKER,' In Manchester, New Hampshire, USA, local police charged David Osbourne, 28, with assaulting a woman, and whilst he was in their custody he claimed that he was a Vampire who simply(?) wanted to suck the woman's life blood. He further related that he'd begun following his 18-year-old intended victim while walking down a darkened street at 2am.

At one point, he ran up behind her and grabbed her breasts and buttocks. Luckily, she was eventually able to make good her escape by diving into a local store, where a clerk called the police.

When Osbourne was later arrested, he was found to be in possession of two sets of false fang teeth. He was charged with criminal trespass and sexual assault.

16th August, 2000 New Hampshire, USA 'THE BOSTON HERALD'

AN URBAN LEGEND MADE REAL

I guess it's fair to say we've all of us heard the FOAF (Friend Of A Friend) story that goes along the lines of the poodle, baby, whatever, accidentally placed inside the microwave, usually by the distracted babysitters, and cooked from the inside...Sure you have. It's right up there with alligators in the sewers, the killer with the hook for a hand and a penchant for cutting off courting couples heads, and the spider bite that results in an arachnid nest hatching inside some poor unfortunate's brain.

Well, for once, the stuff of Urban Legend has been made reality, as the following case from New Kent County, Virginia, USA, readily attests...

Elizabeth Renee Otte, aged 20, entered what is known in law as a Alford plea in court when she was found guilty of involuntary manslaughter.

Her crime, as if you hadn't guessed already, was to kill her newborn baby son by putting him in a microwave oven.

As part of the plea bargain, she was facing, at the time of going to press, a maximum of ten years in prison for the death of her five-week old son, Joseph Lewis Martinez. The agreement spared (as if she deserved it) Otte the possibility of a first-degree murder conviction, which obviously carried a life sentence.

Stephen Harris, Otte's attorney, said in court that; *'Th manslaughter charge is a compromise that says my client either accidentally killed the baby or showed negligence with a callous disregard for human life.'*

'It's a very tragic case all the way round. Her perspective is that she never intended any harm to the baby, would never do anything like this and that all of this has fallen on her because of her epilepsy. She is having a hard time dealing with the reality of it, even a year later.'

The prosecution, who had predictably maintained that Otte had intentionally killed the baby in a jealous fit, agreed that new medical evidence about Otte's epilepsy and expert opinions cast some degree of doubt about Otte's responsibility for her son's death.

Otte had previously told police that she very likely suffered from a seizure in the early hours of September 23rd, 1999, as she was feeding the infant in her Lanexa, Virginia, living room. As with all her previous seizures, she claims she doesn't remember anything afterward.

The tragedy was discovered by the baby's father, Joseph Anthony Martinez, who was only 18 at the time. He awoke about 5:30am and realised that he had not heard the child's cries in the middle of the night, as was usual. He checked the crib, found it empty and awakened a Bonnie Watson, who had moved in to care for the baby.

They began a systematic search of the house, then called both relatives and the police, who also began searching the house.

Martinez's youngest sister and Otte's best friend, Alina Martinez, finally discovered Joseph, still dressed in his white Winnie-The-Pooh pyjamas, inside the microwave at about 6am.

Gregory stated that experts had testified that it was possible that Otte had blacked out as a result of a grand mal seizure and accidentally placed the baby in the oven. He said medical evidence showed that the baby had been in the oven for at least ten minutes and died from thermal injuries associated with overheating of the blood.

Otte had told the police that she has no conscious recollection of placing the baby in the oven and her defence attorney went to great lengths to prove that Otte could enter into a trance-like state when suffering from a grand mal seizure.

'She showed the ability to perform certain complex tasks.' Gregory agreed, adding that she would have had to push at least four buttons to program the microwave oven, but nevertheless conceded that; *'Evidence and expert opinions reveal that it was possible that she could have done this without knowing.'*

26th September, 2000 New Kent County, Virginia, USA
'THE WASHINGTON POST'

Boy, Are They Strict?

In a display of outright disciplinarianism of a type that would put Anne *'you are the weakest link, goodbye,'* Robinson to shame, a woman teacher decided to mete out the following punishment to one of her pupils. Because Li Xinjiang, aged six, had the temerity to misbehave in her class, the 26-year-old teacher amputated one of the boys fingers with a pair of scissors. Doctors later managed to re-attach the digit, and the sadist, opps, sorry, teacher, was unsurprisingly suspended and is facing an assault charge.

Jeezy Crow, and I thought my former games master at Church Drive was a stickler for discipline...

29th August, 2000 Zhejiang Province, China 'SUNDAY EXPRESS'

*** Equally draconian were the measures adopted by the Mayor of Lavandou, on the French Riviera, whose cemetery has run out of space to inter fresh corpses. He has therefore issued a decree that expressly forbids anyone to die in the village, although quite how he plans to carry this out, is anyone's guess.

12th September, 2000 Lavandou, France ASSOCIATED PRESS'

The Woman Who's 'Allergic' To Black People

A doctor in Germany who elected to defend a woman's claim to be allergic to people with black-coloured skin, could well be struck off (at the time of going to press) after being found guilty of being racist and fined over £100.

The 66-year-old who hails from Berlin, was charged with racist abuse when she told a black man standing in a train; 'Get out of the way, I'm allergic to blacks.'

The 31-year-old man later complained to the police after the woman repeated the insult when he followed her along the train carriage and asked her what the problem was.

In court, the woman, named only as Karla W, was defended by a doctor from Hamburg who said she suffered psychomatic stomach ache whenever she came into contact with black people.

Now (hopefully) he can be struck off after the Hamburg Medical Council described his testimony as a scandal.

25th September, 2000 Berlin, Germany 'ASSOCIATED PRESS'

A CABINET OF CURIOSITIES

Attack Of The Killer Litter



A woman was charged after a plant pot falling from her flat in Singapore, tragically killed a child. Annie Lim, 59, was facing a maximum of two years jail if she was found guilty of causing death by a 'rash or negligent act' and could well lose her council home.

The government's Housing Development Board is currently campaigning to stop 'killer litter,' including items such as big bicycles and television sets, from being thrown from high rise buildings.

7th September, 2000 Singapore, South East Asia 'THE STRAITS TIMES'

The Toilets From Hell

There's few things in life more sickening, stomach-churning or downright appetite-destroying, than the terrible stench that can sometimes waft its way across are open-plan office at 'NICHOLAS JONES SOLICITORS,' where I work... (And yes, you know full well who the guilty parties are, fellow workers- Ed).

But I digress. Over in California, USA, more than 100 employees had to be evacuated and 24 were given hospital treatment after they were overcome by a godawful stink emanating from their firm's gent's toilets.

White-suited firemen were called out to the National Pen Corp in Rancho Bernardo, fearing a chemical spillage, while medical crews took the nauseous and vomiting victims to hospital for blood tests.

They found the problem to be linked to small blue and yellow urinal cakes - too many had been placed in the men's toilet and had reacted with the urine.

The cakes gave off overpowering fumes that spread across the building, making workers dizzy and ill.

25th September, 2000 San Diego, California, USA 'THE UNION TRIBUNE'

'Teleportation' Of Cattle In Portsmouth

Whether or not actual teleportation (to coin the venerable Mr Fort's word for the transporting by paranormal means from one place to another) was involved or not, something decidedly strange was going on in the country lanes of Fareham, near Portsmouth.

A farmer reported that a herd of Aberdeen Angus cattle had gone missing without trace, from one of his fields.

The very next day, the six cows and one bull turned up very hungry and somewhat distressed, although otherwise unharmed, as though they'd never truly been away.

7th September, 2000 Fareham, Near Portsmouth 'THE NEWS'

The Bugs And Worms That Live Forever

For the first time, scientists have succeeded in lengthening the lifespan of a creature - the first step along the road towards life eternal?

At the very least, excited reporters were making somewhat rash statements along the lines that human life may soon be extended by as much as seventy years, in the not too distant future.

And the first animal to be experimented on in a bid to prolong existence? Step (or rather writhe) forward, Adrian Shine's favourite creature; the nematode worm.

By treating them with drugs, British and American biologists have increased their lifespan by an average 50 per cent, and in some cases, doubled it from 20 to 40 days. Strains of worms genetically engineered to die early were given back normal lifespans by the treatment.

Eukarion, the American pharmaceutical company which supplied the drugs, now plans to develop them, for testing on people.

Dr Gordon Lithgow, of the University of Manchester, who leads the research, was quoted as saying; 'The experiments

*** Gregory Ames was just eight years of age when his family were holidaying in a seaside town in County Mayo, Ireland. His vacation was somewhat spoiled when he was attacked by a fish head.

The severed head leapt from a basket of fruit and bit the unwary boy on the neck. Gregory managed to fight back by giving it a *'Ninja chop to the gills, and then put him in a headlock'*

Why, or indeed how the head managed to attack him in the first place, or even what it was doing in the fruit basket are questions that have never been answered.

*** The small, remote Pacific island of Niuafu'ou or Tin Can Island, in the Tonga archipelago, has steep shores, making any landing by boat extremely difficult.

For years a native islander would swim out to meet the monthly mail ship, and bring the letters ashore in a tin can to keep them dry.

One day in 1931, however, the island 'postman' collected the mail from the ship and set out for his return swim. Unfortunately, he was eaten by a Great White shark on the way back. The shark even had the temerity to devour the mail as well. Since then the journey has been made by shark-proof canoe.

I've heard of postmen being bitten by over-zealous guard dogs, but sharks... That has to be a first.

*** Back in 1990, a dead whale was washed up on a beach in Oregon, north-west America. It was 45-feet long and weighed in at eight tons. After a while it began to smell of decomposing blubber, and the local authorities called on the State Highways Division to dispose of it.

As the Division had never before gotten rid of a whale, they decided to use dynamite believing that half a ton should suffice.

Hundreds of people gathered to watch the controlled explosion take place, laden with video cameras and picnic lunches. The authorities moved them to what they considered to be a safe distance, placed the dynamite under the whale and pressed the detonator...

The video cameras recorded what happened next. First the whale carcass disappeared in a huge blast of smoke and flame greeted by a chorus of cheers and cries of 'There she blows!'

Suddenly, the atmosphere of excitement changed dramatically as the sky darkened and huge chunks of whale blubber fell everywhere.

One piece the size of a house descended upon a car parked more than a quarter of a mile away, and completely flattened it. The owner had to put in an insurance claim, for a car crushed by a dead whale. It is not recorded how successful he was.

Vast lumps of dead whale littered the area for miles. The videos of the Great Exploding Whale Of Oregon has been posted on the Internet where it is one of the most visited sites.

*** The largest species of fish in the world is the Whale Shark (although neither whales or sharks are actually fish, whales, of course, are mammals, and sharks, unlike real fish, do not have backbones, but skeletons made of cartilage instead).

The largest whale shark on record got itself wedged in a fish-trap off Chick Island in the Gulf of Thailand in 1919.

The creature was stuck in the trap for seven days. It was so big, over 60ft long, that although the water was 30ft deep at that point, all shipping had to be suspended for the whole week until it could be removed.

Another whale shark caught in 1912 of Knights Key in Southern Florida was loaded onto a cast-iron railway flat-car, which duly collapsed under its weight.

*** A goldfish christened with the name Fatboy Slim, belonging to a family in Little Hulton, Greater Manchester,

died last September and was buried in the back garden with all due ceremony.

Five days later, a cat dug it up and brought it back into the house, where, amazingly, it was found to be still alive.

*** A pilot by the name of Ed Bishop, was flying a light Cessna float-plane in Alaska when he accidentally brushed against an eagle carrying a large fish in its claws. The eagle flew away unharmed, but dropped the fish into the engine. The plane had to make a forced landing.

*** Late last August, a 14-year-old boy was saved from death by drowning by a dolphin after he'd fallen into the Adriatic Sea.

The teenager couldn't swim, and after he fell from his father's motorboat while they were cruising in the Gulf of Manfredonia off the coast of southern Italy, he slipped straight under the water. Suddenly, he felt something below him push him back towards the surface. *'When I realised it was Filippo, I hung on,'* the unnamed boy said later, referring to the bottle-nose dolphin named by locals after first appearing in their waters two years ago.

The dolphin then towed the boy back to the boat, where he father, who also couldn't swim, gratefully hoisted him on board.

Paul Sieveking, one of the editors of the highly-respected *'FORTEAN TIMES,'* was moved to comment on this remarkable incident in his *'STRANGE BUT TRUE'* column in one of the Sunday broadsheets.

He related that dolphin rescues have long history. Herodotus told the story of Arion the harpist in Book One of his *'HISTORY.'* Arion was forced by Corinthian sailors to leap overboard en route to Taenarus, but was miraculously rescued by a dolphin who carried him, in full attire, to his intended destination.

Paul also makes reference to the case of Doris Svorinic, aged 28, who got into difficulties in April, 1997, while snorkelling with friends in the Indian Ocean off Garvies Beach, near Durban, South Africa. These waters are notorious for sharks. Doris lost one of her flippers, panicked, swallowed water, ripped off her mask because she was hyperventilating, and thought that she was about to die.

Then from out of nowhere, five dolphins suddenly lifted her up and carried her towards the safety of the shores, all the way to the breakers.

Also, in July, 1996, a group of diving trainees, sailing in the Red Sea near the Egyptian resort of Sharm el-Sheikh, saw some dolphins and promptly jumped in to join them. Martin Richardson, 29, was the last to head back to the boat, when he was attacked by a shark which took chunks out of his thigh and chest.

Unable to see even the slightest hope of salvation, he resorted to prayer and waited for death.

For some reason, unknown to him at the time, the shark failed to return and his friends managed to pull him to safety.

They explained to him that five or six dolphins had succeeded in scaring the shark off by ramming it, something they can apparently do at speeds of up to 35mph.

And there's more. Three 17-year-old boys were surfing alongside a school of about twenty dolphins on Half Tide Beach, New South Wales, in January, 1989, when Adam Maguire was knocked off his board by a shark. Some of the dolphins swam under the boys while others rammed the shark. Adam was left with deep stomach lacerations and his surf board had a foot-long bite taken out of it.

When a baby was swept away from the coastal village of Chakoria in Bangladesh during a cyclone on April 30th, 1991, which officially claimed at least 125,000 lives, he had been given up as dead. Rescuers however were astonished to find a dolphin holding the baby in its mouth keeping him

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clear of the water. The dolphin allowed the villagers to prise him from its jaws and had to be treated for leg injuries inflicted by its grip.

And it's not only dolphins that can sometimes come to the rescue of humans. Turtles also seem to be kindly disposed towards us.

Lim Kang-Yong, 28, a South Korean sailor on board the *May Star* carrying wheat from Liverpool to Bangladesh, fell overboard in the Bay of Bengal just before sunrise on February 24th, 1991. An hour elapsed before anyone even noticed he was missing. The captain, more in desperation than in real hope that they would find the sailor alive, turned the ship around. After another four and a half hours, Lim was spotted astride a giant turtle.

He has, it later emerged, been treading water for about sixty minutes when he sighted what looked like a large piece of wood floating on the surface. When he hurriedly climbed onto it, a huge green head turned around to look at him. He held onto the turtle's neck, recalling a story from his youth that this action would stop the creature from diving underwater. Amazingly, the turtle didn't thrash or try to shake him off, but he did get scratched slightly by its claws.

After the rescue, the turtle continued to float beside the ship, so the grateful crew hauled the nine-foot creature on board. The sailors then fed it on meat and bananas before returning it to the sea with a rather fetching rubber bracelet around its neck on which was written; *'This is the Saviour of Man. Protect Him.'*

*** And finally, following a great famine in Karamoja in Uganda, in 1981, Oxfam set up a fish farm as a relief project. Lungfish were to be put into local ponds, to breed and be fished out as protein when needed.

In times of drought, when the ponds dried up, the lungfish would burrow down into the mud, as is their habit, and remain there until the next rains came.

When one team was sent to Lake Victoria in a Land Rover to collect lungfish, it came back with a prize specimen, some 4ft long, heavy with eggs and in peak condition. It was driven 200 miles back to Karamoja, carefully lifted out of its drum of water and placed reverently into its pond.

The Lungfish Project came to a premature end a mere two minutes later. The Land Rover reversed away from the pond. Lungfish, like eels, can alight short distances over land and this one slithered out of its pond and began heading back towards Lake Victoria.

The Land Rover and the fish collided; the fish was squashed flat. The driver later complained that there should have been a sign warning; *'Caution! Fish Crossing!'* 4th August, 2000 General *'DAILY MAIL'* 10th September, 2000 General *'THE SUNDAY TIMES'*

GOLF IS THE DEADLIEST GAME

According to an Irish survey, reported in the British Journal Of Sports Medicine, the world's most lethal sport is not, as you might think, downhill skiing or American Football, but the comparatively leisurely game of golf.

The findings were made at the conclusion of a study of 51 people who died while playing various sports in the last eight years.

Of those 51 victims, 16 died whilst out on the golf course, and a 17th fatality occurred playing pitch and putt. The rest were made up of Gaelic Football, which claimed 11 lives, jogging and tennis (five each), footy and swimming (two each) and rugby, bowls, horse riding, squash, table tennis and badminton, which each claimed a single life.

The main cause of death in all cases was coronary heart disease.

Dr Michael Turner, former medical adviser to the British Ski and Snowboard Federation, said that other research had shown that golfers get hurt once in every 200 rounds of golf, twice the rate for downhill skiing.

8th October, 2000 General *'SUNDAYMANC'*

TSUNAMI RISING

According to reports in the highly-respected journal *'NEW SCIENTIST'*, a 150ft tidal wave could be about to surge across the Atlantic at the speed of a jet airliner.

It is then predicted to swamp the Caribbean and the eastern seaboard of America, before finally sweeping 15 miles inland, smashing everything in its path.

British 'experts' have, it seems, discovered that a massive volcano in the Canary Islands has become dangerously unstable.

At any time, up to 500 billion tons of rock could be sent crashing into the ocean from the summit of La Palma. A full collapse would create a tsunami or almost apocalyptic proportions.

Starting off at West Africa, it would likely remain unseen right up until the moment it reached the American coastline, where it would rise into a huge breaker, leaving absolutely no time for the cities inhabitants to make good their escape.

'If the flank of the volcano, called Cumbre Vieja, slides into the ocean, the mass of moving rock will push the water in front of it, creating a tsunami wave far larger than any seen in history,' Dr Simon Day of the Benfield Greig Hazard Research Centre at University College London, told reporters.

'The wave would then spread out across the Atlantic at the speed of a jet airliner until it strikes coastal areas all around the North Atlantic'

'There is no way of knowing when the disaster might strike. A catastrophic collapse might not happen for thousands of years, but it could happen a lot sooner.'

'We have discovered that a massive section of La Palma, the most westerly and most volcanically active of the main islands in the Canaries, is threatened by a fault line.'

'It has already suffered two eruptions this century, the last in 1971, and is the steepest island in the world.'

'Any eruption could trigger movement in a large unstable geological fault on La Palma, causing a massive collapse of rock.'

'The destruction and loss of life this would cause would be unimaginable. Already, a one-and-a-half-mile fracture has been opened up by eruptions this century.'

'Several square miles of land have started sliding towards the sea.'

'Tidal waves can have terrible consequences. When the Krakatoa volcano blew up in August 1883, the tsunami it triggered killed 30,000 people.'

'We began surveying the area back in 1994. We wanted to know if there was a risk of a future collapse of Cumbre Vieja, which means Old Peak.'

'Our analysis of the summit area identified dozens of volcanic vents that have been formed by successive eruptions over the past 100,000 years.'

'We were able to detect an active "risk zone" that shows the western flank of the volcano is becoming gradually detached from the eastern half. During eruptions in 1585, 1712 and 1949, vents opened up on the western flank of the volcano, while none appeared on the eastern flank.'

'We also found unexpected evidence that the 1949 fault had caused the entire land surface on the western side of the island to slip 13 feet compared to the eastern side.'

'It's the first time we've seen a fault like this on a volcano.'

The appearance of this fault has convinced me that the whole of the western flank of Cumbre Vieja is poised to collapse into the Atlantic.

5th October, 2000 La Palma, Canary Islands 'DAILY MAIL'

Fire Walk With Me

Firewalking has long been regarded as being a talent displayed only by the mystics of many disparate religions but, just recently, it has become something of a New Age fad.

Thea Jourdan, in an article in 'THE DAILY TELEGRAPH,' decided she would try it out firsthand during the supposed dog days of last Summer.

She readily admits that she had to mentally steel herself to put her bare feet in on red-hot embers burning at 1,200 degrees fahrenheit, 'the temperature of molten aluminium. Somehow, I forced myself to move onto the flaming path, 12 feet long by four feet wide. Even more remarkably, I emerged at the other end. My soles were steaming slightly in the cold night air but I was unscathed - not a burn in sight. I felt fantastic.

'The ancient art of firewalking is not for the faint-hearted, but it is attracting a growing army of people keen to stretch themselves to the limit. There are about half a million firewalkers in the United States. British fans of this potent demonstration of mind over matter run into thousands. The firewalk I am taking part in, involving 25 participants from all over the country, is occurring in Fife, Scotland.

'There is no such thing as a typical firewalker. A growing band of corporations send their employees on firewalks to learn teamwork and initiative. Cancer patients walk on fire hoping to regain a sense of control over their lives.

'Most people view it as a once-in-a-lifetime experience. Some people become addicts to the adrenaline rush and do it over and over again.

'Meeting flesh with flames may be the latest New Age craze, but it is not a new phenomenon. People have been testing their courage, asserting their adulthood and proving their faith by walking on red-hot coals at least since the days of the Vikings. Nordic macho men showed just how tough they were by picking up red-hot metal chains. Fijians still toast their toes on hot rocks in homage to their gods. Hawaiian firewalkers prefer to amble across boiling lava fresh from their local volcano.

'Few people know more about firewalking than Heather Rice, who is leading the "empowerment workshop" and firewalk I am attending. A chiropractor who studied at the Firewalking Institute of Research and Education in California, she demonstrates the technique all over the world.

'Raised in Vermont in the United States, she visits Britain several times a year, converting dozens of doubters with skills learnt from a Tibetan monk. Sitting cross-legged in front of the embers, she looks far younger than her 39-years.

"If you believe that fire burns and then see that sometimes it doesn't, it makes you reassess a lot of perceptions," she says, quietly, fingering some American Indian beads around her throat.

"People say to themselves: I'm never going to get a promotion, or I'm never going to get the man of my dreams, and they limit themselves. Suddenly, you've walked on fire. It changes your life because you realise all things are possible."

'Although the experience is a semi-mystical one - involving purification rituals and spirit invocations - safety is paramount. There have been incidents where firewalkers

hav been badly burnt, although none of Heather's trainees has needed medical attention.

'Tonight, Heather insists that all precautions are taken. Participants are asked to sign waiver forms before they walk. She also follows a strict rule that no one may walk who is under the influence of drink or drugs. "If someone wants to walk on fire nonchalantly, they will get burnt," she says, simply.

'Throughout the pre-walk session, she takes time to emphasize that no one is compelled to meet the flames. This is particularly important during corporate firewalks: employees keen to impress the boss may feel pressured to make the crossing against their better judgement. Typically, five to ten per cent of people involved in any given workshop decide not to walk across the fire.

"It is important to make sure that people understand that success and failure do not depend on whether or not you walk," she says. "Afterwards, everyone feels very empowered and it's an incredible bonding thing."

'Fear alone should be no barrier, according to Heather.

"In firewalking, this fear becomes an ally. Fear doesn't have to stop you. It can help you overcome difficulties. Use this fear as a source of energy."

'The right mental attitude can reduce the risks, but nothing is more important than the fire itself.

'Patrick MacManaway, a Scotsman who met Heather at a fire walk in Vermont in 1995, and married her in May, 1998, is official firekeeper during the workshop. It is his job to prepare the ground meticulously, removing any sharp objects or large stones that might cause injury.

'The wood too, must be just right. Fruit woods burn down to hard sharp embers. Pine burns down to fine ash. Softer hardwoods, including birch and beech, are perfect. "At one point I was firewalking at least once a month," recalls Patrick, 32, a trained doctor. "Then I focused on the firekeeping itself."

'Anyone can take part, and children as young as five have been known to walk, with their parent's consent. Patrick actually believes that children are safer because they do only what they want to.

"Ego starts to kick in around adolescence. The only thing that we do make clear to the parents is that walking on fire is not the desired result for the child."

'Younger participants who decide to face the flames show an uncanny resistance to the heat. James MacManaway, Patrick's nephew, was only 14 when he knelt on the fire, scooped hot coals up in his hands and rubbed his face in them. He crawled away with nothing to show for it but one little hot spot above his eyebrow. This extraordinary scene was witnessed by several impartial adults, as well as his mother and other members of his family.

'So what is the explanation? Various theories have been offered over the years. The most popular is that wood is a poor conductor of heat, and the embers do not burn in the fraction of a second that the skin of the foot is in contact with them.

Others suggest that water vapour evaporating from the skin surface protects it during the walk.

'Heather listens patiently but shrugs her shoulders. She has seen fellow firewalkers cross red-hot metal unscathed - and metal, unlike wood, is a superb conductor of heat.

"I see body and mind as inseparable. It is spirit moving through flesh," she says, before joining the queue at the fire's edge, to have herself another go.

"How we use our mind affects our physical experience. Some things cannot be explained away."

18th August, 2000 Fife, Scotland 'THE DAILY TELEGRAPH'

A Worse Thing Waiting...

Somewhere out there is an asteroid that may, just may, be heading towards the Earth in a mere 30 years time. On September, 21st, 2030, the chunk of celestial rock could smack into our planet with a force 100 times greater than than the nuclear strike on Hiroshima.

NASA Scientists reckon that the odds on the cataclysmic collision are about 1,000 times greater than for any similar object yet discovered.

The discovery of 2000 SG344 is the first time astronomers have actually felt confident enough to predict a firm date for a 'deep impact.' *'We've never had a prediction at this high level of probability,'* NASA's David Morrison told reporters.

The asteroid was discovered on September 29th this year by two scientists using a huge telescope in Hawaii. Its orbit was tracked by 'experts' at NASA and in Finland and Italy.

They have estimated it as being somewhere between 90ft and 210ft across, about the size of a three-storey office block, with an orbit that could coincide with the Earth's in 30 years time.

To be honest, at the moment, the scientists are not even precisely sure *what* the object actually is, opening up a welter of possibilities, and theories, from the mundane; a piece of space junk, like a Saturn IV booster rocket jettisoned from an Apollo launch back in the 1970's, to the exotic; an alien spaceship en route to initiate first contact with Man.

The worst case scenario is that it is a 23,000 ton lump of stone and iron which would have a devastating effect upon the area of impact; roughly the same effect as having a two megaton nuclear bomb explode, killing untold hundreds of thousands if it were to hit a built-up area.

Not particularly reassuringly, most scientists remain confident that the 'asteroid' will pass us harmlessly by. The aforementioned Mr Morrison was quoted as saying; *'My feeling is that an object this small would not be worth a great effort to deflect it, even if it is on course toward the Earth. I don't see an argument for any sort of crash effort.'* Well, I guess you can't argue with a confident man!!!

Some of his colleagues are equally chipper about the prospects. They reckon the nearest it will get to us is 15 times further away than the Moon.

If, however, the 'asteroid' were to hit say, Birmingham, it would kill up to 500,000 people immediately and completely flatten the city.

Towns within 50 miles like Coventry, Warwick, Worcester and Stratford would be caught in the edge of the blast. Trees and land would be badly scorched and people and animals killed or badly hurt.

Up to 100 miles away, in towns like Derby, Leicester, Gloucester, Milton Keynes in Buckinghamshire and Peterborough in Cambridgeshire, cars would be overturned and pedestrians blown through the air.

The air would be red hot across the entire area due to the heat of the asteroid burning up in the atmosphere and the blinding light would be seen up to 300 miles away in the north of England.

The impact would send up a massive cloud of dust covering the entire country, blocking out the Sun and causing a mini ice age, affecting major food growing regions.

If the asteroid landed in the North Sea, it would send a tidal wave, or Tsunami charging towards the British mainland, starting off at about 30 feet high, but growing to almost 100 feet when it actually hit land, swamping towns the length of the east and south coasts.

As outlined in the last issue of 'DON,' The Government has recently appointed a task force of advisers to look seriously at the threat of a devastating asteroid collision.

Professor David Williams, ex-president of the Royal Astronomical Society and a member of the said task force, was quoted as saying' *'The point is, these impacts are of very low frequency but very high consequence...'*

So we can all of us sleep soundly in our beds, tonight, then. 6th November, 2000 General 'THE DAILY MANC'

Eros: The Asteroid With Square Craters

Also in September this year, the 26th, to be precise, a strange discovery was made concerning asteroid 433 Eros, as the result of a sequence of photographs obtained by scientists.

A spokesman for the NASA team who acquired the pictures, told reporters; *'In the pantheon of cosmic geometry, curves rule. Astronomy texts are filled with spiral galaxies, elliptical orbits, and ring nebulae. There are no chapters on triangles or rectangles. After all, who ever heard of a square planet?'*

'Some of the simplest shapes, common in the handiwork of humans, are just plain rare in space.'

'Rare, but not, it would seem, impossible.'

Proof of this is provided in spades by NASA's NEAR-Shoemaker spacecraft, which captured images of a series of square-shaped craters on Asteroid 433 Eros.

Scientists have been quick to discount any suggestion that the square shapes might denote signs of extraterrestrial activity, and claim that they are perfectly natural, if a little unusual.

'These squares are not just novelties, they tell us something very interesting,' Andy Cheng of the John Hopkins University Of Applied Physics Laboratory was moved to comment (Cheng is the project scientist for NASA's Near Earth Asteroid Rendezvous spacecraft, which is orbiting Eros);

'It's an indication that Eros is permeated with an extensive system of fractures and faults. Typically on Earth when we find this type of fractured area, the fractures form intersecting systems. Craters in such a terrain look square, we call them joined craters. The best example of this is the Barringer Meteor Crater in Arizona.'

'We first saw long grooves in global pictures of the asteroid when NEAR was entering orbit around Eros in February 2000. Now, if we look carefully, most of the close-up pictures seem to show signs of grooves and ridges.'

'We have to ask ourselves how these cracks could have formed. Presumably, they are the result of large impacts. The question is: did these impacts take place after Eros was its present size and shape or while Eros was part of a large parent body?'

'Scientists believe that billions of years ago, when the Solar System was young and planets were forming, Eros circled the Sun in an orbit between Mars and Jupiter. It was a denizen of the asteroid belt.'

'Since then, collision with other asteroids and gravitational perturbations by Mars and Jupiter have altered Eros's orbit, so that now it comes close enough to Earth to study with spacecraft like NEAR.'

'We know a great deal about Eros today, but what was it like at the dawn of the Solar System, before it became a near-Earth asteroid? Was Eros once part of a moon-sized planet between Mars and Jupiter, or has it always been something as simple as an isolated chunk of Space rock?'

26th September, 2000 'NASA SCIENCE NEWS'

The Blood-Red Waterspout

A huge column of red-colored water suddenly began spewing forth from the parched soil around La Mancha, in central Spain, last July.

For a period of six weeks geologists were completely baffled by the phenomenon. The 100-foot high gusher of reddish water, mixed with soil and carbon dioxide first sprung forth on July 25th, at the rate of 13 gallons per second. Olive growers in the city of Granatula de Calatrava were deepening an existing well. They initially tried unsuccessfully to stop the flow of water by piling rocks over the opening. Geologists studying the site say that it is definitely not a geyser, because it is not an intermittent event and the water is cool. Enrique Calleja, director of hydrology for the Castilla-La Mancha regional government, also emphasized that the region has not seen a volcano in hundreds of thousands of years. He went on to 'explain' that the spout is probably caused by an aquifer, a water-bearing layer of rock or sand. Aquifers typically are of great volume and under tremendous pressure.

The water, which is emanating from a hole 460 feet deep, has shown no sign of diminishing. 'I've never heard of anything of this intensity in Spain, Europe, or anywhere else for that matter,' Enrique told reporters, with atypical honesty.

6th September, 2000 Granatula de Calatrava, central Spain 'DISCOVERYNEWS'

The Terror Of The Restless Deep



This might read like something out of the fevered imagination of a classic H.P. Lovecraft horror novel, but according to reports featured in the national press, a trawler found intact at the bottom of the North Sea, may well have been dragged to the seabed by a giant bubble of methane gas.

The 75-foot boat was discovered 450 feet beneath the waves, 150 miles off the coast of Aberdeen.

The crew met a terrible fate, it has been proposed by 'experts' investigating the tragedy. A methane bubble of gargantuan proportions had come surging up from the depths, reducing the density of the water to a point where ships can no longer remain afloat.

Marine geologist Alan Judd, who was in charge of the team attempting to unravel the mystery, told reporters; 'Any ship caught above would sink as if it were in a lift shaft. People jumping over board in lifejackets would sink too. No trace of the vessel or its passengers would remain. The trawler, built between 1890 and 1930, had little damage and went down "flat" in an area known as Wüch's Hole, where escaping gas is found.

Doctor Judd, from the University of Sunderland, went on to state that; 'When gas blow-outs occur during off-shore drilling there have been numerous occasions when floating rigs have been sunk.

'I've met a few people who have been on ships that have encountered gas and lost some buoyancy.

'The theory is demonstrable in a laboratory.

'We are currently attempting to identify the trawler so that we can study weather records and distress calls at the time to solve the mystery.

Meanwhile, another 'expert,' Steve Liscoe, was quick to pour scorn on the gas bubble theory:

'I'm very sceptical about it being sunk by a gas bubble because by the time the bubble gets to the surface it will be well dissipated.

I think the vessel hit the seabed and caused the gas to be released'

30th November, 2000 The North Sea 'DAILYMANC'.

KEEP WATCHING THE SKIES!!!

Mystery Missiles And Ghost Rockets

In an eerie echo of the reports from northern Europe back in the late 1940's, a spate of 'ghost' rocket' encounters has recently been making the news from the Atlantic coast of the United States to the skies above a war-wary Pakistan.

Just over a year ago, in November, 1999, it was revealed that in the immediate wake of the (still) unexplained crash of EgyptAir flight 900, U.S. air traffic controllers were busy diverting planes to new flight paths. The reason...Well, according to 'NEWS MAX.COM' editor Christopher Ruddy, while listening to control tower radio traffic piped through the headset on his own London-bound flight, he happened to overhear one controller advising pilots to follow new altitude coordinates. When a crew member asked why, he was told, 'There are rockets being fired in the area.'

This incident, wouldn't, it seems, be the first time air traffic control radio chatter has indicated some sort of missile activity off Long Island's coast, causing controllers to alter flight routes.

On April 26th, 1999, TWA 800 researcher Michael Hull, writing for the aforementioned website, reported a similar episode that took place just months after TWA 800 went down.

'TWA Flight 848 was to be involved in another incident four months after the downing of TWA Flight 800. On November 16th, 1996, Pakistan International Airlines Flight 712 left Kennedy at 9:25pm, bound for Frankfurt. One of the pilots reported an orange light, which he

described as a "rocket," coming from the left-hand side to the right-hand side of the airplane, and he stated that the "rocket" had ascended through the aircraft's altitude. Boston apparently confirmed two unidentified blips on radar. The tapes were turned over to the FBI and NTSB since the object(s) rose directly out of Long Island Sound. *'TWA Flight 884 (New York to Tel Aviv) was following close behind the Pakistani flight and was diverted by a controller. The government dismissed the incident as a meteorite observation, which leaves unanswered how it could be that the meteor ascended out of Long Island Sound.*

'In an even more frightening example, Hull documents a hair-raising encounter between a missile-like object and a Swissair flight bound for Zurich, Switzerland, on August 9th, 1997.

September 27th, 1997 (Neue Zürcher Zeitung)
Swissair has revealed that an unidentified flying object almost collided with one of its planes over the United States last month. The captain and his co-pilot said an oblong and wingless object shot past at great speed - only fifty meters away from their Boeing 747. The American air traffic authorities said it was probably a weather balloon.

March 5th, 1999 www.cbcnews.com Ottawa (CP)
A Swissair pilot reported his 747 jet was nearly hit by an unidentified flying object, possibly a missile, near the area off New York where a TWA airplane crashed in 1996, 'THE CANADIAN PRESS' has learned. Swissair Flight 127 was cruising at 23,000 feet on 9th August, 1997, when the pilot interrupted an address to passengers to report the near miss by a round white object, says a report by the U.S. National Transportation Safety Board. "Sir, I don't know what it was, but it just flew like a couple of hundred feet above us," he radioed Boston air traffic control. "I don't know if it was a rocket or whatever, but it moved incredibly fast in the opposite direction."

*"In the opposite direction?" asked the controller.
"Yes sir, and the time was 2107 (Greenwich Mean Time). It was too fast to be an airplane."
Hull's Web site even offers a transcript of the conversation between Swissair 127 pilots and ground controllers....*

SWR 127: Centre - Swissair 127

CONTROLLER 1: Swissair 127 - go ahead

SWR 127: Yes sir, I don't know what it was but it just overflew like....like a couple of hundred feet above us...I don't know if it was a rocket or whatever but incredibly fast in the opposite direction.

CONTROLLER 1: In the opposite direction?

SWR 127: Yes sir. And the time was 2107 (5:07pm. local time). It was too fast to be an airplane.

CONTROLLER 1: OK. Thank you.

CONTROLLER 1: USAir 986 - Did you see anything like a missile in your area - perhaps off to your right?

US AIR: I'll take a good look, but if it's goin' that fast I probably won't get a chance to see it.

CONTROLLER 1: Swissair 127 - how far above you was it?

SWR 127: It was right over us - right above - opposite direction...and...I don't know two, three, four hundred feet above us

SWR 127: All I can say is that the three of us saw a white object - it was white and very fast.

CONTROLLER 1: Northwest 550. Did you see anything similar to a missile or a UFO in your vicinity - maybe about three minutes ago?

NW 550: We heard that report, but we haven't seen anything.

CONTROLLER 1: USAir 1800 - you didn't see anything either?

USAir: We saw nothing

CONTROLLER 1: Hey, Chris. Swissair 127...he had a UFO or rocket or something almost hit him in my airspace.

CONTROLLER 2: A UFO or rocket almost hit the Swissair 127?

CONTROLLER 1: Yeah, it went right above him. Two or three hundred feet, he says. Some kind of white object. They're checking into it here, but if he says anything to you...just to let you know

CONTROLLER 2: OK. Thank you.

*** And that's not all. According to the *ASSOCIATED PRESS*, four fairly recent (1999) aviation accidents in the Atlantic Ocean involving planes flying from New York, have raised more than a few questions about the safety of one of the world's busiest air corridors. Predictably enough, the 'experts' have been quick to dismiss the 'phenomenon' as being merely a coincidence.

However, the fact remains that the combined death toll is pretty worrying, with nearly 600 people killed in the same area in just three years.

First up, as mentioned earlier, we have the July, 1996, TWA Flight 800 disaster. The plane exploded a few minutes after take off, coming down in the waters off Long Island, killing 230 people.

Then, in September, 1998, a Boeing MD-11 crashed a little further north, near Halifax, Canada, killing 229 people. In July of that same year, a Piper Saratoga piloted by John F. Kennedy, Jr, plunged into the ocean near Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts, killing him, his wife and her sister.

And then, in November, 1999, the EgyptAir Boeing 767 plummeted into the same stretch of water.

EgyptAir chairman Mohamed Fahin Rayyan, was quoted at the time as saying; *'It is a strange coincidence,'* as he noted that the site of the tragedy was near the TWA accident and the John F. Kennedy, Jr aircrash.

Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak was moved to comment that the two accidents in the same area made him question whether or not the air routes should be changed.

'There may be something in the atmosphere or weather conditions may be sometimes very tough there,' he told reporters, seemingly dismissing any possibility of a terrorist attack.

'So I think it should be investigated by the United States and if it is needed to change the routes, the airways, depending on the discussions and the assessment of the situation in this part of the world.'

Coincidence or not, three of the fatal flights started at New York's Kennedy Airport. The downed Piper was piloted by a Kennedy, further raising the suspicion that something more than mere chance was at work here.

Not everyone thinks it's that strange, however.

'It's pure coincidence,' the International Air Transport Association, Pierre Jeannot, was quoted as saying. *'The high volume of traffic near New York raises the number of accidents there.'*

'Every day, more than a thousand flights and 100,000 passengers take off from John F. Kennedy Airport. Two other large international airports, Newark and La Guardia also serve New York and send flights into the same corridor.'

'If they had all just all suddenly disappeared, for no reason, obviously that would be something else,' Ruddy Kapustin, a former investigator for the National Transportation Safety Board, was quoted as saying. *'But that's not the case.'*

And adding to the growing band of sceptics is James McKenna, the transportation and safety editor for the

magazine, 'AVIATION WEEK,' also challenging the notion of a new 'Bermuda Triangle.'

'Each accident involved a different aircraft type. They were all at a different point in the sky when they encountered problems. They encountered different types of problems.'

'While it may raise questions in some people's minds, I am sure those questions would produce answers that there was that there was nothing wrong with the airspace or the airport.'

November, 1999 New York 'ASSOCIATED PRESS'

*** Meanwhile, the reported sightings of mystery missiles over Balochistan, Pakistan, during the second week in August, this year, was causing the government of that country severe consternation as they failed to come up with an explanation for the flame-emitting objects.

Scores of eye witnesses claimed to have seen the 'missiles' flying in a row, and whilst the incident could well have been dismissed as being merely an optical illusion inspired by the high tensions that pervade the Indian/Pakistan border, the problem remains that they were seen by many people flying over a vast area. From Quetta, Chaman, Qila Abdullah and Qila Saifullah to Loralai and Barkahan, the reported direction of these 'missiles' was the same: from the west to the east.

Therefore, it is hard to believe that so many people could have simply imagined seeing these same objects flying in the same general direction.

In the absence of a convincing official explanation, conjectures predictably abound. Most of the populace of Balochistan thought the UFOs were missiles headed towards Afghanistan as part of the heinous US must get-Osama-Bin-Laden-at-all-costs campaign. This is perhaps understandable due to their experience in the fairly recent past when the 'The Most Moral Guardians In The History Of The World, EVER!!' elected to bomb Bin Laden's supposed headquarters in retaliation for terrorist attacks on the United States mainland.

However, no missile landings have been reported from Afghanistan, hinting that the 'target' of the mysterious objects did not lie outside Pakistan itself.

It has been theorised that the real cause was a top secret test firing of a new weapons system, which is all fine and dandy, until one comes to consider the fact that in view of the 24-hour satellite surveillance by the US defence authorities, no such test-firings could possibly escape detection.

Some local tribesmen could have fired the objects in a bid to settle some tribal dispute or perhaps, they were directed at the very centres of government control. Unfortunate as it may be, such disputes are disconcertingly common in Balochistan. Presently, one of the prominent tribal chiefs, Sardar Khair Bukhsh Marri, is in prison on a murder charge - which is in itself an extraordinary happening. Blood feuds and bids for greater political power over the years, have led to much violence and the resultant loss of many lives while also posing serious challenges to the governmental authority in the province. Hence, it would not be surprising if the flying objects do indeed turn out to have been launched by tribal antagonists.

Outsiders may find it hard to believe that people other than Pakistan's defence personnel could possess such sophisticated weapons as Surface To Air Missiles, but that fact would not surprise any resident of Pakistan. Those sufficiently interested and having the resources to buy such weapons, are known to have acquired missiles leftover from the CIA's war by proxy against the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. In the past, such weapons have also been used by outlaws in some other parts of the country. However, nothing can be stated with any degree of certainty unless and until the government comes out with a clearly stated account of what has happened in Balochistan.

Whatever was truly seen in the provinces skies must have landed somewhere, and if it has, the government will very likely have recovered it. The provincial authorities are said to have mounted a large search for the remnants of the 'missiles,' employing all available resources, though, at the time of going to press, they hadn't met with much apparent success.

21st August, 2000 Balochistan, Pakistan 'ASSOCIATED PRESS'

Anomalous Flashes In The Skies Over California

In Los Angeles, a green and orange flash that streaked across the heavens, from the high desert all the way to the Pacific Coast, may well have been a meteor, according to some 'experts.'

The flash was first seen in the clear Southern Californian sky at about 8pm during the last week in September of this year, and was visible more than 100 miles away, as far east as the Arizona line and as far south as the US-Mexico border.

'From the description I got, it sounds very much like a bright meteor or fireball as we call them,' Patrick So, an astronomer with the Griffith Park Observatory, told reporters. *'It was most likely a fragment from an asteroid that broke up long ago.'*

Such objects apparently often emit a greenish glow as they burn up in the Earth's atmosphere.

One of the witnesses to the phenomenon was a trucker named Tom Lawson. He was driving along Interstate 8 near Gila Bend, Arizona, when he claims he saw a 'green light with kind of an orange tail going from the southwest sky.'

'It just kind of faded out as it got to the West Coast.'

Other witnesses reported sighting the flash from San Diego and from Joshua Tree, in the Mojave Desert.

27th September, 2000 California, USA 'ASSOCIATED PRESS'

Nostalgia From An Age That Never Was

Gordon Cooper, the former Mercury astronaut who is a self-confessed believer in the extraterrestrial origin of at least some UFOs, has recently written a book entitled, appropriately enough; *LEAP OF FAITH.*

The opus presents the now, all-too familiar tale of a government cover-up and attendant conspiracy to hide the truth about UFOs, this one involving spy cameras, Area 51, and his own personal experiences whilst engaged on a NASA space mission.

The fact that he is rightly regarded as something of an all-American hero, has doubtless helped adorn his accounts with a fair helping of credibility.

However, it has recently emerged that several other space veterans have seemingly been slow to back up Cooper's claims, and have in fact chose to relate very different versions of the events outlined in Cooper's book.

According to Mr Cooper, back in 1965, he was carrying a super-secret spy camera aboard Gemini-5 and managed to accidentally snap a sequence of pictures of the notorious Area 51 in Nevada.

Consequently, the camera and its film were duly confiscated by those dastardly agents from the Pentagon, and never saw the light of day again. He claims he was personally ordered by then President Johnson not to divulge the films contents.

'One special mounted camera we carried had a huge telephoto lens,' Cooper writes. *'We were asked to shoot*

three specific targets from our spacecraft's window because the photo experts wanted to be able to measure the resolution of the pictures.

'And that's exactly what they did: Over Cuba, we took pictures of an airfield. Over the Pacific Ocean, we took pictures of cars in parking lots. Beyond that, we were encouraged to shoot away at other airfields, cities and anything else we wanted along the way.'



NASA's former chief photo analyst, Richard Underwood, confirmed the existence of an actual experiment, but had a very different recollection of the details of the test than did Cooper.

Now retired in Nassau Bay, Texas, Underwood recalled the camera was a 35-mm *Quester* with a Zeiss 'Contarex' lens. There was also something called a 'catoptic system' (folded optics, for all you camera fact fans out there), with a foot-long barrel giving 'several thousand' mm's of focal length (Cooper recalls it was 1250mm). Mounted on the spacecraft window it was shot at 1/50th of a second at various ground targets passing directly below the spacecraft.

'It was the same camera that Ed White took outside with him on his space walk in June, Underwood recalled. 'We just slapped a big lens assembly on the front end.

'Considering the optical characteristics of the camera, I can calculate that the theoretical maximum resolution - the smallest object discernable photographs - could be as small as a hundred feet or so. That was what the Pentagon was hoping for.

Cooper, however, distinctly recalls a marked difference regarding the image quality. 'After splashdown, and while Pete and I were still aboard the recovery vessel, the exposed film from that mounted camera was rushed to a darkroom and developed. I was shown a few pictures - including some unbelievable close-ups of car licence plates.

This was deemed to be absolutely impossible according to retired NASA space photography 'experts.' 'We never unloaded or developed space film in recovery ships, Gene Edmonds told reporters at his home in LaPorte, Texas. 'We always kept it safe for development in our own specialized labs back in Houston.

'Nor would licence plates be readable from a hand-held camera in space-or any other satellite back in the 1960's.'

Writing recently in *'THE WASHINGTON POST,'* Dr Dwayne A. Day, a civilian specialist in space reconnaissance, had openly criticized Hollywood mobles for precisely the same reason.

'The best resolution of an American spy satellite, achieved by an older series no longer in use, was reputed to be about 2 and a half inches. This means that the smallest visible object would be the size of a baseball, not the thin letters and numbers on a licence plate.'

According to Day and other 'experts,' Cooper's claim violates the laws of optics and prompts the question; 'How could he even aim it?' You can't visually make out parking lots from orbit.

Despite this, NASA's Dick Underwood does indeed recall that in 1965, the Pentagon did grab the film of the experiment while the crew was still aboard the recovery carrier. 'Cooper was really upset,' Underwood stated. 'I was livid,' Cooper himself writes, 'but there was nothing I could do about it.'

But Underwood and his cohorts remember a lot more about what actually became of the film. Perhaps this is not too surprising since it was their specialization: handling space photographs. As far as Cooper ever knew, the images had totally vanished, and that's the way he's been relating the story down the years ever since.

Not so, retorts Underwood. 'NASA was sent a set of prints from the roll after the Pentagon developed it and studied it. Nothing too exciting showed up.

'Those pictures wound up filed along with the other NASA-sponsored shots from Gemini-5.

'As I recall, more than a decade later, when astronaut Tom Stafford returned to military duty as a brigadier general and was assigned to direct space planning at the Pentagon, as a favour to me, he enquired after the original negatives. They were nowhere to be found. He was told they must have been destroyed.'

'Not at all,' recalls yet another NASA photo 'expert.' 'They sent back the original negatives later when they realised that they weren't very good. When I retired, they were still somewhere in the archives in Houston.'

And that's where they were later 'uncovered' by Jim Oberg, who is, would you believe, yet another of those 'experts.'

'When I visited the photographic archives building at the Johnson Space Centre, Archive director Mary Wilkinson had collected the documentation and transparencies for my inspection.

'Two rolls of 55 shots each, and 28 more from a third roll, had been catalogued in the NASA photo system on September 23rd, 1965, just a month after the flight, according to archivist David Sharron. The original documentation indicated the shots had never been classified, and from examining them it was easy to see why.

'Each shot covered an area several miles on a side, with sharpness a bit better than a typical TV screen. That's equivalent to a ground resolution of perhaps 50-100 feet, exactly what Underwood had estimated.

'The views showed precisely what Cooper recalled observing: airfields, islands, even a large US city (Dallas, it turned out).

'The pictures of airfields showed runways, but aircraft and buildings couldn't be made out. On the city shot, it was impossible to see small letters, or even licence plates, or even cars, or even parking lots at all. A crisscross pattern of roads and city blocks could be made out, but nothing smaller.

'The catalog for the NASA archives described one other problem. There was little, if any, crew documentation of exactly where the photographs were taken: "The astronaut

log is sketchy and difficult to use for any data of value," it said

'Dr Day had also heard of this problem when he had researched the history of US spy satellites.

"What happened with Gemini was that the astronauts were sloppy in recording where they took their shots. The guys at the National Photographic Interpretation Centre, determined that any manned reconnaissance system would still require a computer to keep track of where the camera was pointing and when it was shooting. People naturally started to ask "If we have a computer taking the photos anyway, why do we need the guys?"

'For a number of similar reasons, the Pentagon lost interest in a manned military space station (the Manned Orbiting Laboratory, or MOL), and cancelled the programme a few years later. The poor photography on Gemini 5 wasn't the main cause. But it was one of the early nails in the MOL coffin.

Cooper, meanwhile, never did learn that the photographs had been returned to NASA by a disappointed Pentagon. He later told a story about how somebody had explained the confiscation to him.

He later told a story about how somebody had explained the confiscation to him.

'Many years later, at a 1997 NASA reunion at Cape Canaveral, grey-haired man came up to me and asked if I remembered him. The man identified himself as the man who had confiscated my film, and then asked; "Did anyone ever tell you why the film was confiscated? It was because you had the most magnificent pictures of Area 51."

'I was thrilled. And as for Area 51, I hope the Air Force is conducting experiments with flights with highly unusual aircraft - even saucers with revolutionary propulsion systems. And the first person to come home with pictures of the mysterious Area 51? An astronaut from space.'

Sadly, as Jim Oberg points out, this has likely proven to be yet another of those stories that fails to hold up under even the most cursory of examinations. It turns out, on Gemini-5, Cooper never flew over Area 51 at all. The spacecraft orbit always passed far to the south. It was physically impossible for him to have taken any near-vertical snapshots of the super-secret test range.

'Even a simple check of his trajectory shows this. The Gemini's orbital inclination was 33 degrees, and the southernmost regions of Area 51 are at 37 degrees north. That's a horizontal distance of about 300 miles, from an altitude of at most 150 miles.

'Anybody can use satellite tracking software readily available on the Internet, with specific Gemini-5 trajectory measurements also on the Internet. Seek and you will find out that as viewed from Area 51, Gemini-5 never got higher than about 20 degrees on the southern horizon, barely above the mountains for only a few seconds, once or twice a day.

'As viewed from his spacecraft, that would be far out near Earth's horizon, lost in the dust and haze of the thick atmosphere. The camera experiment requirements, and Cooper's own memory of it, involved only straight-down views of the nearest portions of the surface, seen through the thinnest layer of the atmosphere. Area 51 would never have been imaged, even by accident, except by grossly violating the experiment procedures.

'There was one intriguing item in the catalog however: a shot of the Elephant Butte reservoir in New Mexico. That is at least in the direction of Area 51.

'I pulled the transparency out of its envelope and loaded it in the viewer for closer examination. But the picture, like most of the others, was another disappointment. Spotty desert sands, covered by scattered clouds, showed only a few

faint lines of what might have been roads. There were no runways. No mystery buildings. No UFOs.

'Cooper's narrative - the prematurely developed film with visible licence plates, the forbidden peek at a super-secret installation, the cover-up from the highest levels of the government - is by far the most exciting version of this incident. Cooper's sincerity and self-confidence remains unquestioned.

'His agent, Stu Miller, assured me that the details of the story were true.

"In fact, there were numerous 35mm cameras aboard Gemini-5, not just one as you postulated," he wrote, (presumably, the NASA camera experts simply forgot about the others, never listed them in the mission manifest or photo archives, and mislabelled one of them as 'DOD').

'Nor did Cooper ever claim "he flew directly over Area 51" - the camera really had "a range of view of about 1500 miles."

"As for the photos you were shown, it's possible that some of them have been declassified in the years since the mission, but the Colonel was unequivocally told that ALL of the film was placed under classification shortly after Gemini-5's return to the carrier and President Johnson subsequently acknowledged directly to the Colonel that he had personally given the order."

'But the testimony of several experts much closer than Cooper to the actual photographic process stands in shocking, and dismaying contrast to the version in the book. So do the cold equations of orbital motion, and the precise calculus of optics. And so, too, did the photographs and catalogs I held in my hands at the NASA photo lab.'

3rd October, 2000 Thanks to Jim Oberg Space.Com

Descendants Of An 'Alien Strain?'

This may not be quite the vindication Trevor James Constable sought when he proposed his theory that the upper atmosphere of the Earth might well be populated by 'space critters,' but scientists have apparently discovered what could be a primitive form of alien life floating miles above the surface of our planet.

Astrobiologists have gone on record as stating that the strain of bacteria found ten miles up in the stratosphere might have come from a passing comet.

The bacteria involved has never before been found on the Earth.

Its discovery may well help add credence to the theory that life on Earth could have been triggered by the arrival of a comet from the darkest reaches of space.

The bacteria was found in the filter of a high-flying balloon operated by scientists from the Indian Space Research Organisation.

The ISRO team had shared its finding with astronomers at Cardiff University and specialists from the University of Wales College of Medicine, who have come together to form Europe's first Astrobiology centre.

Professor Chandra Wickramasinghe, who is based at the university, first put forward the case for so-called 'panspermia' more than 20 years ago along with Sir Fred Hoyle.

Their theory was that the seeds of life - in the form of DNA or dormant microbes - may be carried by asteroids or comets, or drift in interstellar clouds, to fall and germinate on suitable planets such as the Earth.

Professor Wickramasinghe believes that the ISRO's discovery provides the strongest evidence to support his

theory. Predictably though, the sepetics have been lining up to voice their doubts.

The good professor remains stalwart in his convictions, however; *'This is a very exciting discovery and the first time we have had direct evidence for the hypothesis that comets seed life on planets,'* he told reporters.



'It is a hitherto unknown strain of bacteria. It is so different from anything we've seen before that are only two possible explanations. Firstly, that organisms have been lifted from the Earth to great heights in the skies and have somehow multiplied there and changed over time.

And secondly, that this is an example of primitive alien life.

'It is unlikely that the balloon probe was contaminated by earthly organisms because of stringent sterile conditions on board.

'The most recent geological evidence now suggests that life on Earth may be four billion years old. That is a very significant time scale because it was a period when the Earth was being pounded by comets and meteorites.

'And this idea of living things travelling through space was made far more plausible by the discovery recently of miniscule bacteria in salt crystals buried deep in a cavern in New Mexico (see elsewhere in this issue for more details on this).

22nd November, 2000 Cardiff University, Wales 'DAILY MAIL'

The Martian Chronicles

The possibility that life may once have existed on HG Wells' *'remote, forbidding planet,'* was considerably increased by the apparent discovery that Mars is covered with a series of long dried up lakes.

NASA's Mars Orbiter camera (this craft, unlike several of its predecessors, not falling victim, so far anyway, to the supposed 'Martian jinx' - See last issue) managed to capture images of layers of sedimentary rock outcrops dating from 3.5 million to 4.3 million years ago.

Some are a few miles thick and appear to be made from fine grained materials deposited in horizontal layers. Others consist of stacks of beds just three feet thick.

Doctor Michael Malin and Doctor Kenneth Edgett, of Malin Science Systems in San Diego, California, believe the rocks are likely to have been created at the bottom of lakes, in or around craters.

They say that the findings indicate that the early geology of the planet was more dynamic than previously suspected.

And if life did exist at this time, there may well be fossil remains sandwiched between the sedimentary rock layers, just as they are on Earth.

Sediments can be deposited in a variety of ways, including wind, water, volcanic activity, or from the dust thrown up in cosmic collisions. But the number of outcrops within basin-like features strongly suggests that they were deposited by lakes that formed within the craters.

'Some of the Mars Orbiter camera images of these outcrops show hundreds and hundreds of identically thick layers, which is almost impossible to have without the presence of water,' Doctor Malin told reporters.

'There is no evidence of wind deposition, while volcanic activity would have produced too little dust.'

The findings were published in the highly-respected journal; *'SCIENCE,'* and, at the time of going to press, were being closely scrutinised by the British team of space scientists who plan to send a robot probe to look for further evidence for life on Mars in 2003.

As Doctor Kenneth Edgett announced to journalists; *'This discovery makes Mars more complicated and more exciting.'*

3rd December, 2000 The Planet Mars 'THE DAILY MANC'/THE DAILY TELEGRAPH'

Crop Circles Created By Aliens?

Never one afraid to voice an opinion, no matter how outlandish it may seem, Colin Wilson, the respected author, has stuck his neck out once more, this time to propose the theory that the almost totally discredited phenomenon of Crop Circles, has been perpetrated by Aliens...

Mr Wilson has dismissed the theories proposed by the likes of Colin Andrews and Pat Delgado, that the circles are formed by the Earth's magnetic field, and states instead the increasingly elaborate patterns that have been appearing across the fields of southern England, can only be explained by a highly intelligent force.

'Corn circles hint that we are living in a stranger and more mysterious universe than scientists and cynics believe, and that tomorrow our lives might be transformed by some discovery that will astound us all.

'I believe that our instinct is right. Scientists seem to be possessed by an urge to short-change us, and to reduce all mysteries to the level of the commonplace. And I am pretty certain that, whatever the final explanation of Crop Circles, it is not going to be commonplace.'

So, that kind of rules out Doug'n'Dave, and their 'helpers' then, one assumes...

'There is one simple and obvious objection to Andrews' theory about Earth magnetism. If Crop Circles really are caused by some form of electricity, then why have the only appeared in the last 20 years or so?'

'England, Canada, America, Australia, have been full of gigantic cornfields for centuries and there have always been chroniclers of strange events.

'Why do we not hear about Crop Circles in the time of Chaucer or Shakespeare? Because, I am fairly certain, they did not exist. Whatever is happening, began in the 20th century. (er, what about the so-called "Mowing Devil" and

the many reports of supposed 'Faerie Rings,' then, Colin?).

'On September 1st, 1974, long before anyone had heard of the Crop Circle phenomenon, a Canadian farmer named Edwin Fuhr, who lived near Langenburg, Saskatchewan, was driving his tractor in a field of rapeseed when he saw a round, shiny disc, about 11 feet across, whirling above the crop and causing it to sway.

'Then he saw four more in different parts of the field. For fifteen minutes he sat frozen with fear, until suddenly the discs took off, rising in a kind of grey vapour. There in the rapeseed were five circles, 11 feet across. Hoards of journalists rushed to photograph and report on them.

'Other circles began to be reported: from Manitoba, Canada, from Victoria and Queensland, Australia, from Ibtuna, Brazil, from New Zealand, the Soviet Union, France and Switzerland.

'It wasn't until 1980 that the first Crop Circles were reported in England. A Wiltshire farmer, John Scull, found three of them, each 60ft wide, in his oat field near the famous White Horse landmark at Uffington.

'A meteorologist named Terence Meaden lost no time in providing a commonsense explanation. The circles, he said, were made by summer whirlwinds. But Farmer Scull's circles would have needed three whirlwinds, each 60ft across. In fact, they would had to have been tornadoes.

'In August, the following year, Crop Circles near the Cheesefoot Head beauty spot in Hampshire, refuted Meaden's theory. There were three of them, one 60ft across, and the other two, placed symmetrically on either side of it, 25ft across.

They were far too neat to have been made by a whirlwind. It was as if some giant pastry cook had leaned down from the sky with one of those metal cutters for stamping out biscuits. And the corn around them had not been broken or trampled.

So it went on year after year, with the British press growing more and more excited..

Right up until, in 1991, Doug 'n' Dave popped up to announce they had been responsible for the vast majority of the Circles.

The fact that they couldn't replicate the lack of any obvious damage to the field containing the 'genuine' Circles, doesn't impress Mr Willson a great deal, and he was also keen to point out, somewhat unnecessarily, you might feel, that Doug'n' Dave had been unable to cause the Circles in Canada, Australia, and the Soviet Union.

'Besides this, again and again, observers noticed odd phenomena associated with the Circles. In June, 1990, six observers at Wansdyke, near Silbury Hill in Wiltshire, heard a high-pitched trilling, and saw "black rods jumping up and down," among the wheat; next day there were Crop Circles.

'A radio ham in Devon had his listening spoilt in June, 1991, by a series of high-pitched blips and clicks the next day, a 70ft Circle was found nearby.

'Astronomer Gerald Hawkins was so fascinated by the subject that he began to study the precise measurement of all the Circles in Colin Andrews' bestselling book on the subject 'CIRCULAR EVIDENCE.'

'He soon noticed that these Circles - often with patterns inside them - had been constructed very precisely according to the geometry of Euclid, the Greek mathematician who lived around 300BC, and compiled what was the standard text on geometry until the 19th century.

So, if the Circle-makers were hoaxers, they must also be first-class geometers too.

'Then Hawkins noticed something even odder - that a large number of the Circles had complex musical ratios, rather

like the simple fractional relationship that exists between the pitch of different notes on a keyboard.

'None of the Circles made by Doug'n'Dave, or indeed, any other self-confessed hoaxers, had been made with this musical code.

'As a scientist, Hawkins was naturally cautious in announcing his conclusions. But he admitted to me that these complex patterns were made by extra-human intelligence (oh, Mr Hawkins is gonna thank you for that, Colin, ol' bean....And I don't think - Ed).

'Their purpose was not to convince the whole human race of the reality of the extraterrestrials, but simply to convince a few intelligent scientists and philosophers that there are intelligences apart from our own, and that they are attempting to make a breakthrough in communication.

'When I started to study Crop Circles and UFOs in the mid-90's, I was convinced that they were due either to hoaxers or over-heated imaginations.

'It took less than six months to leave me in doubt; that someone or something is trying to communicate with us, but with the exaggerated caution of beings trying to get us slowly and gradually accustomed to the idea.

'So far the Circle Makers have managed to keep one step ahead of the 'explainers,' and I strongly suspect that they will continue to do so.'

Now, I want it to be known that whilst I have the greatest of respect for Colin Willson, in my humble opinion, this article ranks right alongside any of the 'works' of such 'luminaries' as Erich Von Daniken, John Mack and Frank Searle.

I'm all for retaining an open mind on any aspect of the paranormal (you only have to wade your way through this issue's typically rambling Editorial to appreciate that), but not only has Colin played with the facts to fit his own outlandish theories, but he has left himself, and the subject he studies, open to ridicule from both the media and the general public alike.

For a thorough debunking of the otherwise esteemed Mr Willson's article on the 'Alien Origin of Crop Circles,' see the latest edition of Jenny Randles consistently excellent 'NORTHERN UFO NEWS' (available from: 1, Hallsteads Close, Dove Holes, Buxton High Peak, Derbyshire SK17 8BS

10th August, 2000 General 'DAILYMAIL'

UFOs Over The Philippines

A team from no less an illustrious organisation than the United Nations, were investigating a series of sightings of anomalous objects traversing the skies over Las Pinas, last September.

The team of seven scientists from the UN led by Doctor Jean Chu, viewed a 40 minute video of the phenomenon shot by Antonio Israel.

During the screening, they fired a constant barrage of questions at Israel like how the dancing balls of light moved, what the weather conditions were like at the time the footage was obtained, and whether he or his neighbours were feeling anything unusual when they all saw the mysterious lights.

'It would be interesting if we gather more data, talk to the neighbours who witnessed it, and find out whether residents of other neighbouring places in Metro Manila were able to see them,' Chu told reporters.

The scientists inspected Israel's home, particularly the spot where said he was stood when he filmed the lights. They also checked out his neighbourhood and the nearby streets

to see if the lights could have been caused by anything on the ground.

They asked Israel if anything unusual had happened at the time of the sighting such as malfunctioning electrical gadgets or appliances at the time of the UFO sightings.

They were at a loss for words after viewing the video: 'Maybe one can't really say when given just that footage to look at,' one of the scientists told journalists, when asked whether he thought it possible that the lights were indeed entirely anomalous.

Chu and her team had initially visited the area to study the Philippines disaster preparedness, had their interest piqued by a series of still photographs published in 'THE PHILIPPINE STAR.'

Chu was keen to stress that their visit to Israel's home was a wholly private one.

She told him that their field of study also delved into the connection between strange environmental events and disasters taking place where the phenomena occurred.

'Experts' from the Philippine weather bureau were likewise stumped by the video footage. Israel said he and his neighbours were convinced beyond doubting that the object(s) they saw was indeed an extraterrestrial spacecraft.

24th September, 2000 Las Pinas, Philippines. 'THE PHILIPPINE STAR'

Glimpses Of Other Worlds Unseen

The chances of anything coming from er, not just Mars, but a couple of newly discovered planets, has increased appreciably with the recent revelations regarding the Martian surface and the discovery of at least 11 new planets in our own Solar System.

Firstly, back in August of 2000, astronomers from Europe and the United States located ten planet in one fell swoop using ultra-powerful telescopes. They went on record as stating that they believed discovery greatly increases the possibility of other solar systems bearing more than a passing resemblance to our own and even a planet similar to the Earth.

Jacqueline Mitton, of the International Astronomical Union, told reporters; 'Life is most likely to exist on planets which have liquid water and are rocky like the Earth. The discoveries suggest that solar systems other than our own have more than one planet, and therefore may contain smaller rocky planets like Earth which may have life of some sort.'

The new planets were unveiled at the International Astronomical Union's general assembly in Manchester, last Summer, and scientists were quick to point out that they hoped very much that one 'a mere 10.5 light years away,' may be close enough to be pictured through the Hubble Space Telescope.

8th August, 2000 General 'DAILY EXPRESS'

*** Two months later, and scientists in New York were announcing that they had discovered a planet orbiting the Sun between Neptune and Pluto.

The ball of rock and ice is 373 miles in diameter -about one quarter the size of Pluto -3.6 billion miles from Earth.

It has a red-coloured surface, probably caused by being baked in radiation over billions of years.

Thousands of minor planets orbit the Sun, but the new discovery, christened with the name 2000 EB173, is one of the largest ever discovered.

27th October, 2000 General 'DAILYMAIL'

*** And finally, for the time being at least, scientists in New Zealand have succeeded in growing vegetables in soil imported from Mars.

Asparagus and potato plants grew to a few tenths of an inch high in extracts from a meteorite that crash landed on the Earth and was found in 1998. The extracts contained high levels of phosphate, ideal for growing green vegetables.

It was also found that extraterrestrial soils could support micro-organisms, thereby adding credence to the possibility that meteorites could have helped trigger life on Earth, and that some form of existence may well still thrive on the surface of Mars...

2nd January, 2001 General 'THE TIMES'

Strange Days In The Animal Kingdom: The Revenge Of The Creatures: Toilet-Dwelling Rats and Worms, Bombing Seagulls, Killer Elephants And Crocodiles

A monster catfish, believed to be at least nine-feet long, has pulled an angler to his death after dragging him into Eva Maria Lake near Vienna.

Anto Schwarz, 45, had proudly shouted to his friends that he had hooked a real whopper as his rod bent double.

After a struggle lasting several minutes, the fish, if such it really was, (no one actually saw the creature...Perhaps it was a lake monster?) finally pulled Anto off balance and he became entangled in his line. Unable to swim, he quickly drowned.

28th July, 2000 Eva Maria Lake, Vienna 'LIVERPOOL ECHO.'

*** Perhaps someone should have told Anto that it now appears that fish are clever enough to wise up to angler's tricks and can be trained to respond to the calls of a 'fishherd,' in a similar way to a sheepdog responding to the whistle of a shepherd.

Research at the University of Plymouth and in New Zealand seems to show that fish have a better memory than currently recognised.

Trout caught and put back by anglers soon learn to become 'streetwise' and will later stay out of sight, according to a study reported in 'NEW SCIENTIST' by a team at the Cawthorn Institute in Nelson, New Zealand.

Other evidence of piscatorial memory comes from studies of the grey mullet (no, that's not a reference to Cliff Richard) by Jonathan Lovell at the University of Plymouth. He found that fish could be trained to perform complicated tasks by linking sounds to rewards of food.

He also claims that some could be trained to recognise feeding calls, making it possible to raise free-range fish instead of rearing them in cages.

24th August, 2000 Plymouth/New Zealand 'DAILY TELEGRAPH'

*** Last September, police were hunting three monkeys who hurled crab apples at passing motorists in the North Carolina, USA. They were believed to have escaped from a circus that was travelling to the state fair in Richmond.

State trooper Mike Scott told reporters that he was flagged down by a driver near the town of Jarratt, who informed him that there was a gang of apple-throwing monkey's on the loose.

'A man told me: "I know this sounds crazy, but a monkey threw an apple at our car."

'Lo and behold, there were three brown monkeys in an oak tree throwing crab apples.'

The monkeys then escaped across the road and into the nearby woods.

22nd September, 2000 North Carolina, USA
'INDIVIDUAL.COM'

***Lyme Regis in Dorset, was the setting for a series of attacks by the local seagulls, utilising a rather unique and ingenious weapon, for a seabird, anyway.

At least one holidaymaker who hails from Nottingham, was bombarded by a gull carrying a whelk in its beak. The whelk had been plundered by the bird from a nearby fishing boat and it scored a direct hit on the tourist's head, causing an inch-long cut.

Assistant harbour master Michael Higgs, who later treated the unnamed female victim (we wonder if she was any relation to the ill-fated Tippi Hedren, from Hitchcock's *'THE BIRDS'*?), said; *'She was quite distressed. She was covered in blood and thought someone had thrown a pebble at her.'*

'She was very surprised when I explained what had happened. It was very painful, because though they are small, whelk shells are pointed, very sharp, and heavier than a golfball.'

More worryingly, Ken Gollop, of Lyme Regis marine aquarium, stated that he believed the birds were not merely acting as 'mindless vandals.' Rather, they drop the shells to break them so they can eat the contents.

'This accident has been waiting to happen for weeks. They steal whelks off fishing boats and crack them open by dropping them. I often hear the dull thud as they land on concrete. Sometimes they drop the same whelk up to 12 times until they break it open.'

Slightly more reassuring are the words of Leigh Lock, of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds; *'I do not believe that they would deliberately target humans. They are just trying to get food. They are clever and cunning animals.'*

28th August, 2000 Lyme Regis, Dorset *'DAILY SLUR'*

*** Also on the warpath, were two giant seagulls traversing the skies over Monaco...The feathered fiends swooped to pluck a Yorkshire terrier off a beach only to drop the unfortunate dog hundreds of yards out at sea, where it drowned.

A panic set in across this stretch of the French Riviera not least because the attack was merely the latest in a series of assaults by giant gulls. Environmental 'experts' were quick to point out that the attacks were increasing because the birds were gradually losing their fear of both humans and other animals. Ironically enough, the same 'experts' are powerless to intervene as the gulls are a protected species. It's only a suggestion, but perhaps someone should suggest Yorkshire terriers, especially ones on holiday, should be added to that list...

8th July, 2000 Monaco, France *'DAILY EXPRESS'*

*** Meanwhile, a pensioner by the name of Lily Reeve, aged 76, was recovering after being knocked clean off a bridge and falling into a river after a Canadian Goose charged at her in woodland near Sheffield.

3rd October, 2000 Sheffield *'LIVERPOOL ECHO'*

*** A plague of rats in high-rise flats is causing people extreme discomfort in Zagreb, just now. Up to six of the pesky rodents have been reported as having appeared in toilet bowls within the space of the month of August, last year.

One man needed treatment after he was bitten whilst sitting on the pan, reading a newspaper, one of life's great pleasures.

The plague was blamed on the exceptionally high temperatures at the height of the heatwave then sweeping the country.

29th August, 2000 Zagreb, Croatia *'DAILY EXPRESS'*

*** This may seem like a sequence from a low-brow horror movie, *'SQUIRM'*, say, from 1976, but the truth of the matter is, in Orlando, Florida, an unnamed woman was shocked senseless when she turned on her bathtub faucet and out came a mass of tiny red worms....

The creatures spilled into her tub, and she fled screaming from the bathroom.

Not long after, Water Department officials called at the house and deduced that the midget larvae had somehow made their way into part of the local water system.

The larvae would eventually have turned into winged, gnat-like bugs, but the worms themselves were not dangerous. They seemed to have hatched inside the water storage tank that serves the rest of the neighbourhood, but their was no health risk involved.

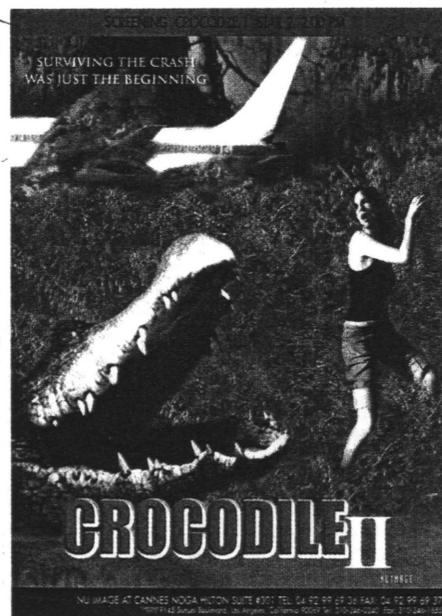
Aside from a heart attack induced by the sight of a countless squirming horrors pouring into your bath when you're looking forwards to a dip, that is.

29th September, 2000 Orlando, Florida *'THE ORLANDO SENTINEL'*

*** A 'big, brave' hunter of (supposedly) defenceless animals got his just desserts when she was shot in the foot by his own puppy, Stinky. Kelly Russell cornered a wild pig in New Zealand, and was just about to kill the beast when Stinky jumped on his gun, and thereby leapt to the creature's rescue. Well played, Stinky.

13th December, 2000 New Zealand *'SUNDAY PEOPLE'*

*** Meanwhile, a South African woman has been eaten by a crocodile while indulging in a midnight swim in a lake on the country's east coast.



The dismembered remains of Tracy Hunt, 22, who formerly lived in Johannesburg, were recovered by wildlife officers and police in Lake St Lucia, 36, hours after her boyfriend, Claudio Celestino, first reported the attack. Mr Celestino told of how he had heard Miss Hunt scream in horrified pain, he turned quickly, but was only able to see her disappear under the water, as something, presumably a crocodile, pulled her under.

13th December, 2000 Johannesburg, South Africa *'DAILY TELEGRAPH'*

*** A wild elephant which trampled a man to death was refusing to allow officials anywhere near the corpse, at the time of going to press.

At the time the story broke, the body had been with the Asian elephant for two weeks after it pulled the man down from a tree and killed him. The elephant has even been reported to have washed the corpse.

The unfortunate man, named as Kotia Bora, climbed the tree in a bid to escape a herd of wild elephants rampaging through his village about 80 miles from Guwahati, the largest city in Assam.

PK Barua, from the Mazigoan forest range in Assam, told reporters that he was absolutely baffled by the behaviour of the elephant.

'We cannot get the corpse away from the elephant. We think the animal might be feeling some remorse for having killed the villager by shaking a tree on which he was perched. Now he bathes the corpse and sits guard in front of it.'

3rd January, 2001 Guwahati, Assam 'LIVERPOOL DAILY POST'

ALIEN ANIMALS



Beyond The Gate Of Dreams Bigfoot Sighting Near Granite Falls

A brand new possible sighting of a Sasquatch has reportedly been made in a place called Granite Falls, USA. Two witnesses, Cliff Crook, and Fred Bradshaw, went into the woods to search for evidence to back up the claim of a high-tech worker who believes he saw Bigfoot.

While Chris Wright, 29, was taking a much-needed ciggie break on the porch of his mobile home, last August, he noticed something moving in the shadows. The security lights came on and he clearly heard a loud inhuman scream. When he looked closer, Wright, 29, was shocked to see a dark, fur-covered creature, more than six-feet tall, and standing upright on two legs.

He later claimed that it simply *had* to be Bigfoot. Nothing else fit the description.

This sighting had led to Wright contacting Cliff Crook and Fred Bradshaw, two Bigfoot hunters who had on the track of the elusive creature for years beyond counting.

Wright subsequently showed the 'experts' where he was standing when he encountered the Sasquatch, and told them how tall the 'animal' had looked.

He pulled a carpenter's tape measure from his pocket and began sizing up the distance. It was about 110 feet between Wright and where whatever it was he saw standing.

With that distance, Crook estimated that the creature had to have been more than 6 feet tall.

Then the trio began their trip through the wooded edge of the property where Wright lives. They saw some broken tree limbs that could have happened when the creature ran away when the lights came on.

They stopped to investigate some hairs on a branch.

'Too curly,' Bradshaw reckoned. They concluded that the hairs probably belonged to Wright's Australian shepherd, Buddy.

'Buddy's a good watch dog,' Wright announced. 'But ever since the other night, he's all shaken up. He doesn't seem to want to go too far into the woods at all.'

Wright also stated that he's noticed that other wildlife, including deer and birds, have stayed away from the area.

'Normally they're all through that area, especially early in the morning,' Mr Wright stated.

'It's not uncommon for other animals to be reluctant to enter a place where a sighting has occurred,' Cook believes.

'They usually move out when there's been a sighting. There's an eerie silence for a day or so, and then the animals come back and things return to normal.'

The search took them deeper into the woods where they saw what they thought were partial footprints.

'They aren't good enough to make a casting,' Cook deduced, his expression somewhat crestfallen. 'But that happens a lot. When Sasquatch is running, he steps with the ball of his foot, and you can all see where he digs his toes into the dirt.'

But by looking at the tracks, the 'experts' claim they can conclude that the creature has about a 36-inch stride, which would make him at least 6 feet tall.

And Bradshaw concluded that the width of the ball of the foot in the tracks was too wide to belong to a bear.

After trekking another 20 minutes into the woods north of Mount Pilchuck and along the southwest bank of the Stillaguamish River, the trio returned to Wright's house to pronounce its verdict.

'Whatever it was, it wasn't human,' Crook announced with complete confidence.

'And there was definitely something huge down there, and it wasn't a bear,' Bradshaw added.

Wright, apparently, looked partly relieved and partly scared at their findings.

'I know what I saw, and I know what I heard,' he said. 'But I know people are going to think I'm crazy.'

'I even heard people talking about it in town last night, conversations that I overheard at an eatery and a gas station. Since word got out of my sighting, my phone has been ringing constantly.' Even "THE NATIONAL ENQUIRER" called

'When reporters start questioning me, I just tell them that if I was going to make up a story, I'd have had a UFO land in my backyard and take me off into outer space.'

'Right now, all I want is for my life to return to normal. But I guess that's not going to happen for a while. I can't even make myself go outside for my midnight smoke anymore.'

28th August, 2000 Granite Falls, USA 'THE HERALD'

...And a Yowie Encounter In Queensland, Australia

Also during the dog days of last August, American 'experts' were conducting a series of tests aimed at establishing whether new evidence for the existence of the Yowie, (the Aussie equivalent of Bigfoot), was genuine or not. Dean Harrison, who heads the Yowie Hunters, a Queensland group dedicated to searching for the elusive ape-like creature, says the American scientists were due to examine the evidence found last year on a property near Springbrook, in the Gold Coast hinterland.

'We are sending off the footprints and hair samples to the Texas police pathology forensic unit, who are world leaders in forensics,' Mr Harrison told reporters in his Australian homeland. 'The prints will definitely be matched with those from Bigfoot.'

The Aussie samples were to be examined by Texas police, pathologist Dr Jim Chilcut and Dr Jeff Meldrum, of Idaho State University, as part of a documentary to be filmed by the Discovery Channel.

Mr Harrison said the footprint casts were made after a nighttime expedition, last October.

'We had been tracking this creature for about 15km and towards the end of the night he actually followed our cars through the bush,' Mr Harrison says.

The Yowie hunters then contacted the owner of the property, who went out the next morning and cast the prints in plaster.

'The next weekend, we had fallen asleep about 3am, and woke up at 6am and found the same footprints around our camp.

'So he'd actually come up from the valley and walked around us in our sleep, and we have the photos of those footprints.'

And a Discovery Channel film crew headed out to Taree, on the New South Wales mid-coast, where Mr Harrison claimed he had seen evidence of Yowies.

The film crew did not leave disappointed.

'The cameramen were as white as sheets after their encounter. They were growled at by a creature about 20 metres away and they saw the red eyes of the creature coming through the bush.

'But the crew failed to film the Yowie'

At the time of going to press, it was not precisely clear when the Discovery Channel documentary would be aired, although we await the results with interest.

17th August, 2000 Queensland, Australia 'AAP'

Government Gives The Go-Ahead In Bid To Trap 'Nessie'

Yet another bid to capture the legendary beast of Loch Ness has been dreamed up by the Swedish 'monster-hunter' Jan Sundberg, according to reports in the Scottish press.

The plans to catch a baby 'Nessie' in a large net, are hardly the most original, but they have caused a fair amount of outrage amongst those who believe in the existence of the monster. Their ire wasn't assuaged any by the announcement that the Scottish Natural Heritage, the agency charged with protecting Loch Ness, has granted permission to the less-than-trustworthy Mr Sundberg (*I remember seeing him featured on a Channel Four documentary concerning the Monster Of Lake Selsjord. At one point, following the screening of some decidedly unconvincing video footage Jan had shot from the deck of his research vessel,, he openly admitted that the expedition he had organised was concerned solely with making money.. This revelation caused several of the disillusioned team members to walk out, sickened by Jan's insistence that that the footage, along with his testimony, could be sold to the highest bidder... Openly Suspicious Ed*) to attempt to carry out his nefarious scheme.

The Scandanavian Global Underwater Search Team are due to arrive in Scotland this March to carry out a fishing expedition codenamed Operation Cleansweep.

Mr Sunderberg told reporters; *'We've been given the green light by the Scottish Executive and the time is up for Nessie. Thanks to this unique permission, it will be the first time that anyone has tried to actually capture the monster and experts around the world are holding their breath.*

'SNH had a number of concerns about the trap, but we have been corresponding with them for a month and have answered all their worries.'

The deal that has been struck between SNH and the hunters will see any salmon caught immediately released

and the net placed in shallow water so no air-breathing creatures will be trapped underwater.

Fears expressed over the accidental capture of otters and seals have also been addressed with a pledge that live fish won't be used as bait and any creatures caught will be released unharmed.



The 20ft by 15ft trap, made of fishing net with 30mm-thick stitches, will be sterilised in case it introduces any foreign organisms into the Loch.

The monster net, secretly constructed by a Norwegian fish trap manufacturer, is called COMET (Co-operative Monster Eel Trap), and has an inner net that closes over the entrance to trap the monster, in theory, at least.

Mr Sundberg also told journalists; *'If we do capture an unknown animal, we have a respected Scottish scientist standing by to take a DNA skin sample, which is not harmful.'*

'We tested our net last year when we failed to capture Nessie's cousin Selma in Lake Seljordsvatnet in Norway, after we identified a strange animal snorting coming out of the depths.'

'Using the same listening equipment, loaned by the Swedish Navy, we recorded similar noises in Loch Ness last year.'

'For Operation Cleansweep, we have linked up with an Aberdeen-based maritime electronics company to scan the Loch for Nessie.'

'The main objective is to establish whether she's there, but the only thing that will prove the existence of a creature once and for all is to trap it and show the world.'

'Witnesses say these creatures are bigger than the trap, so we're aiming for a baby. If they've survived this long, there must be families of creatures.'

Scottish Natural Heritage have stated that they are more than satisfied with Sundberg's plan and it has already been agreed that should they succeed in capturing the monster,

It would immediately be released back into the Loch, once the DNA sample had been obtained.

7th January, 2001 Loch Ness, Scotland 'SCOTTISH SUNDAY POST'

The Beast Of Buchan

Farmer James Fletcher was shocked to find that one of his sheep had been quite literally torn apart, and its innards strewn across a field, one December morning, last year.

He claimed that he had never seen anything like it, and that he could state without fear of contradiction that the sheep had not been the victim of a dog or a fox.

Prior to this dreadful discovery, the most recent recorded sighting of a mysterious cat-like creature in the area of Buchan, Scotland, was at the town's south entrance near a 'McDonald's' er, fast food store, during the summer of 2000.

Wellbank Farm, the site of the mutilated sheep, is roughly in the same area as this Allen Big Cat sighting.

James Fletcher told paranormal investigator Mark Fraser; *'I came out into the field at about 11:30 am on Saturday morning. I noticed one of the sheep was lying dead. At first, I thought it had been killed by a fox or a dog, but when I went to look closer, I realised that I had never seen anything like it. The sheep had been cut open - slit right up the middle of its stomach. The insides had been pulled out and were lying around the field, all chewed up. There was so much wool lying about you could have made it into a mattress. It looked like the sheep had been physically dragged around the field. Whatever had done this had to be fairly big and it was certainly no dog or fox. I have seen what they can do and it's nothing as bad as this.'*

December, 2000 Buchan, Scotland With thanks to Mark Fraser, author of the excellent pamphlet 'SCOTTISH BIG CAT SIGHTINGS' (available from 35, South Dean Rd, Kildrarnock, KA3 7RD, Ayrshire, Scotland).

Mark can also be contacted at his website: <http://scotcata.tripod.com> BigCatsInScotland, for all the very latest in UK Allen Big Cat news.

A Couple Of Decidedly Out-Of-Place Kangaroo's

Firefighters in Hamburg, Germany, thought they were the victims of a prank when they were forced to respond to call saying that a kangaroo had been found in a swimming pool, only to find it was true.

The firefighters had to get their nets from the fire engine and fish it out. The four-year-old kangaroo called Hop Singh had apparently broken out of its owner's garden and somehow (though it wasn't explained quite how), fallen into the pool at another house up the road.

It was safely returned to its owner.

25th September, 2000 Hamburg, Germany 'ASSOCIATED PRESS'

*** And perhaps in some ways, even stranger, was the case of the kangaroo sighted on, of all places, a golf course near Lewisham, South-East London.

Beckenham Place Park Golf Course has been plagued by at least four separate sightings of the native Australian, apparently bounding across fairways and the 15th and 17th holes. Strange noises were also heard emanating from the surrounding trees. An elderly woman also complained that her small dog was propelled from the undergrowth by *'something with a powerful kick.'*

A large footprint was discovered and photographed by council officials and was sent for analysis.

Mary Tidnam, bar manageress at the golf club, told reporters; *'People make up all kinds of stories to cover up the fact that they've messed up a shot. But this guy was*

adamant. They were still talking about it when they came back.'

Players pinned up kangaroo Wanted posters in the bar and coined the nickname 'Chippy' (as in a 'short chip to the green'), whilst other sang Rolf Harris songs en route to the first tee.

One of the alleged witnesses described the creature as *'bloody gigantic,'* thus lending immediate weight to the belief that this was in fact *macropus giganteus*, Australia's legendary Eastern Grey Kangaroo.

Lewisham council's two-strong animal welfare team visited the park in search of evidence, snapping the aforementioned footprint on the 17th.

Suggestions that the print might belong to a dog did not impress council spokesman Richard Rose.

'I've got size 11 feet, and it was bigger than my footprint. It would have to be an enormous dog.'

Mayor David Sullivan was dispatched to the scene, although, it must be said, that he took some coaxing to treat the matter with due seriousness.

'Someone first told me the story in a pub, so I thought it was probably a wind-up,' he was quoted as saying. *'Then I heard that the council was gathering evidence, so I assumed we were in fact taking it seriously.'*

'However, I must add that I've been in this area for twenty years, and never seen a single kangaroo as far as I can recall. In the spirit of public service, I would advise residents to leg it, if they were to encounter the creature. I'm told that kangaroos can sometimes turn nasty.'

As per usual, with this type of out-of-place animal phenomena, the theories surrounding the origin of the marsupial were as predictable as they were prosaic. A local museum was said to keep wallabies, but all of their stock were present and correct. There was a circus in town at the time of the sightings, but it was of the animal-free variety... 'Experts' at the World Wild Fund For Nature were quick to point out that a golf course would be a good place for a kangaroo to settle. The animals tend to laze in the shade during the day, and they graze mainly on grass.

At the time of going to press, we were no nearer establishing an answer to the mystery, and the 'nine day wonder' soon faded from the pages of the popular press.

22nd August, 2000 Beckenham Place Golf Course, South East London 'DAILYMAIL'

RELIGIOUS PHENOMENA

St Luke's Remains

Transferred To Greece

In one of the most intriguing transfer deals since Jarl Litmanen joined the The Mighty Reds on a free from Barcelona, the remains of Gospel writer St Luke have been sent from Italy, to his birthplace in the Greek city of Thebes.

The Catholic Church had agreed to the move after a request from the Greek Orthodox Church in Thebes, central Greece, a Catholic official was quoted as confirming in Athens.

A Mass was held at the Orthodox cathedral in Thebes, before the relics were lowered into a Roman-era funeral urn. A delegation from the Catholic Church attended the Mass. According to tradition, St Luke was buried in the early years of the first century AD. Shortly afterwards, his remains were removed to Constantinople, before being taken to Padua, northern Italy, at the time of the Crusades.

19th September, 2000 Thebes, central Greece 'DAILY TELEGRAPH'

Death Of A Miracle Woman

Maria Emilia Santos, whose 'miraculous' recovery from a crippling spinal injury was officially recognised as a miracle by The Vatican, has sadly passed away at an old people's home in Leira, 70 miles north of Lisbon, Portugal. She was 70 years of age.

Formerly bedridden for an astonishing 22 years with a spinal injury, she claimed that her totally unexpected recovery in 1989, was entirely due to the the divine intervention of two of the three children who swore that they had visions of the Blessed Virgin Mary at Fatima, Portugal, back in 1917.

The two children died within two years of the apparition. The third is still alive.

Interestingly enough, Ms Santos' apparent cure occurred on the anniversary of the death of one of the aforementioned children.

During a visit he made to Fatima in May, 2000, Pope John Paul beatified both children.

28th November, 2000 Lisbon, Portugal 'THE TIMES'

THE 'MIRACLE OIL' OF LONDON

During a Jesus Fellowship group meeting in some undisclosed area of London, last September, a mysterious oil was said to have appeared on the hands of three of the four women present while they were praying and worshipping.

They laid hands on the other women in the group and the oil began to appear on her forehead and on her hands also. One of them attempted to wash the oil off with copious amounts of water only to find that the oil immediately appeared again.

The next day, during lunch time the same four women began to pray for Ruth, a young woman who had suffered severe pain in her neck for the previous two months. The pain was so bad that Ruth had become housebound and was taking large amounts of morphine in an attempt to control the pain.

As they prayed they watched her face change from the chalk-white they had become accustomed to, to a normal healthy-rosy glow. Ruth found a large degree of healing and was able to run and dance about as well as walk around the block (although, one suspects, not all at the same time!).

Meanwhile, another woman who had become deaf in one ear after suffering an infection was apparently healed when she felt oil dripping into her ear.

The most powerful effect of the experience though, it seems, came as a 'result' of an anointing to pray for others: and in particular to intercede for people on the housing estate where they had been meeting.

In the month since that late summer evening, two residents of the same block of flats have come to the worshipping's door in tears, claiming they were seeking faith in the Lord. 17th September, 2000 London 'THE MODERN JESUS STREETPAPER'

With Guardian Angels At Our Side

Christine Astell gave up her career in nursing to study comparative religion - and to put people in touch with their Guardian Angels. People of all religions, as well as confirmed atheists, apparently descend upon her East

London home in veritable droves to take part in so-called 'visualisation workshops.'

Christine, who recently featured on the BBC's 'EVERYMAN' programme - an Angelology special (which we'll be reviewing in the next issue of 'DON'), is a fortysomething who believes her Guardian Angel helped win her a mountain bike as the 1st prize in a 'NURSING TIME,' draw.

'You'd be amazed at how many wonderful things start to happen once you're in touch with your Angel,' she told reporters.

'I was brought up as a Methodist, but lost interest in my late teens. As a child, I used to hover over my bed, watching myself sleeping, and it was years before I discovered that not everybody underwent Out Of The Body Experiences.'

'But anyone can be introduced to their Guardian Angel.'

'Meeting your Angel is a moment of intense joy. It's like an electric current of love that you feel, for which words are totally inadequate.'

Christine sought to convince an avowed sceptic, Judith Woods, a journalist from 'THE DAILY TELEGRAPH,' of the reality of Angels, by virtue of a series of introductory sessions.

Judith described her experiences thus; 'My session begins with a lengthy discussion about Archangels, and deep breathing to help me relax. I close my eyes as Christine asks me to picture a garden full of flowers.'

'For some reason, the garden that occurs to me is one at Waltham Abbey, which I visited years ago and haven't thought of since.'

'She says the sun is shining and I should be calm as I walk out of the garden and into a meadow towards a river. Although the scenes in my head appear remarkably vivid, there is no sign of an Angel. But just as I am thinking, "Well, this is a load of old rubbish," I can feel myself smiling. Once I start, I can't stop. I'm aware I must look ridiculous, but I don't care. The sun is shining and I am warm and happy.'

Finally, I come across a gate at the end of a path. Incredible white light is shining through the bars as it swings open. It is here that I am supposed to meet my Guardian Angel. But as soon as I walk through the gate, my view is obscured by billowing dark silk veils. I can feel by the shadows that there is light behind them, but I can't see it. I feel an odd combination of elation and frustration.

'Christine tells me the Angel will give me a gift, and in the top left of my field of vision I see a silver brooch set with turquoise that belonged to my mother, who died in 1993.'

"It is time to go," Christine says, and reluctantly, I turn and head back down the path again. I cross the river, pass through the garden and return to Christine's sofa.

'She asks me what happened and seems delighted with my progress. Some people apparently don't even make it as far as the garden.'

"My initial reaction" says Christine, is that when you came here you were almost subconsciously determined you weren't going to experience anything. But you were enjoying the walk through the countryside so much, it was likely you would meet your Angel, hence the swirling veils: you knew your Angel was there, but you wouldn't let yourself see it."

'By now, I'm not quite sure what I saw.'

'The experience was wonderfully pleasant, yet I feel uncomfortable about analysing it - especially the appearance of my mother's brooch.'

'But something happened didn't it?'

Judith's assertion that 'something' happened, was predictably, 'rationalised' by that 'great and terrible' sceptic; Dr Susan Blackmore. 'There is a simple

psychological explanation why individuals believe they have seen an Angel, especially when you have been involved in a Near Death Experience.

'People very often associate Angels with a vision of light, probably due to a hyperactive firing of the visual cortex.

'At the other end of the spectrum, relaxation therapy creates a state of mind that can make even a sceptic highly suggestible.'

We'll let Christine have the final word, though; 'The point of Angels is that even if you don't believe in them, much less see them, they still look after you. I'm just here to light a spark. You can go back to the garden at any time you want and go up the hill to see your Angel.'

12th December, 2000 General 'THE DAILY TELEGRAPH'.

The Garden Of Eden: 'Discovered' In Turkey

Michael Sanders, a British scholar, and director of the Mysteries of the Bible Research Centre based in Irvine, California, has gone on record as stating that he believes he has successfully located the original Garden Of Eden, in Eastern Turkey.

Michael apparently made the discovery while analysing a series of satellite photographs from NASA.

Mr Sanders, 60, who originally hails from Leeds, but now has the good fortune to reside in sunny California, claims that his research indicates that all the earliest Bible stories occurred in what is now Turkey, and not in the Persian Gulf as previously believed.

'The Garden Of Eden, the Flood, the Tower Of Babel, the Story of Abraham, all took place in a relatively small area between the Black Sea in the North and the Ararat range in the East,' Sanders maintains.

'According to the Biblical story in Genesis, the Garden of Eden was an earthly paradise created by God as a home for Adam and Eve, the first man and woman.

'They were expelled after disobeying God and eating an apple from the Tree Of Knowledge.

'The second chapter of Genesis describes a river which watered the Garden Of Eden, and then split into "four heads." The Bible calls these heads; Pison, Gihon, Hiddekel and the Euphrates.

'Until, now scholars have identified these waterways with the head of the Tigris and Euphrates in the Persian Gulf. I suggest however, that they are actually hundreds of miles further north-west.

'We obtained a startling satellite image of a configuration of river which seemed to fit the above description much better than any other theory so far proposed.

'It is obvious from the Biblical account, when you read about a river rising out of Eden, that river's don't rise in the desert. With the satellite image, it is just remarkable that there are four rivers in this region of Turkey.

'The four rivers are the Murat, which runs through Samsun on the Black Sea coast, the Tigris, the Euphrates and a northern branch of the Euphrates.

'It is quite remarkable that one of the four rivers out of Eden runs directly into the Ararat range. Ararat was the mountain top where, according to the Bible, Noah's Ark came to rest after the Flood.

'It is quite likely that the Biblical account describes a situation that after the great catastrophe of the Flood, where the survivors were at Ararat, they proceeded to "go home," that is follow the river back to Eden.'

In 1999, Mr Sanders led a submarine expedition to the Dead Sea to search for the lost cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, also using NASA satellite photographs .

He claimed to have discovered some unexplained forms at the bottom of the sea, which he believes are the remains of the cities destroyed by the fire and brimstone for the sins of their wicked inhabitants.

17th January, 2001 Eastern Turkey 'DAILYMAIL.'

The Knights Templar Responsible For Ritual Killing?

Allisdair Sinclair, who was found dead in mysterious circumstances in Israel, during April, 1998, may have been murdered due to his involvement with the sinister organisation known as The Knights Templar.

The sect, whose origins can be traced back to the days of Robert The Bruce and The Holy Crusades, are believed by some to have been responsible for the removal of Sinclair's heart after his death.

Allisdair, who used to live in Arran, had made a five-day trip to Israel, and was arrested as he tried to leave the country, later dying in police custody.

When his body was returned to his native Scotland, an autopsy revealed that his heart was missing.

The official version of events went something along the lines that Mr Sinclair chose to hang himself in a police cell and that his heart had therefore been removed for closer examination, only to be somehow misplaced.

The Israeli health authorities then sent a heart to his family, but it was impossible to test it and, therefore, confirm its true origin.

It seems however, that the Scottish guitar maker was a direct descendant of a high-ranking family which helped found the Order of The Knights Templar.

The Order is embroiled in an international battle for control of the holiest sites in Jerusalem.

An investigation into Allisdair's death was carried out by Israeli author Barry Chamish.

Many of Chamish's findings are backed up by Allisdair's brother.

Barry Chamish told reporters; *'I have examined every available piece of evidence relating to the death of Allisdair Rosslyn Sinclair.'*

'In my opinion he was murdered and his killing was linked to a greater conspiracy. After his death in police custody, Allisdair's body was taken to the Abu Kabir Institute of Forensics where an autopsy was carried out.

'Last week (7th January, 2001), the Israeli government launched an investigation into Abu Kabir after numerous allegations that body parts from corpses were being illegally removed by staff and sold on the black market for transplant.

'But it was painless removing Allisdair's heart for medical reasons. It has to be kept alive via a life support system if it's to be transplanted.

'More damning is the fact that in Israel we don't have heart transplants.

'Allisdair Rosslyn Sinclair, was murdered and his heart removed because of his bloodline. He may not have realised it, but he was one of the leading members of the Knights Templar hierarchy.

'I am convinced that there are currently no fewer than six organisations or nations who believe they have first claim to the holy sites in the old part of the Israeli capital. As well as Israel and the Palestinians, others who believe they are entitled to bits of the land include the Vatican, the Greek Orthodox Church and the Russian Orthodox Church.

'In addition, the Order of the Knights Templar, have their own ambitions for what is a holy city for Jews, Muslims and Christians.

'The modern-day Scottish Knights make no secret about their ambitions for the future of Jerusalem.

'Their spokesman is John Ritchie, who lives in Gorebridge, East Lothian, two miles from the village of Temple, the site of the original Knights Templar HQ in Scotland.

John Ritchie, a journalist who works for Reuters, added his voice to the debate; *'The modern order has a hundred members. Our main aim is to protect Scottish history. I suppose you could call us cultural nationalists.*

'We are also very concerned about what is going on in Jerusalem, in particular the areas in the old city which includes the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the Dome of the Rock, and Solomon's Temple.

'We believe that these holy sites should not be left in the hands of the Israeli Government, who are denying Christians proper access to them. We would like to see the UN assume control of this important place and we are working hard to achieve this goal.'

Barry Chamish, in the meantime, is of the firm opinion that this battle for the control of Jerusalem, which has its roots in medieval times, is central to the death of Alisdair Sinclair.

In his book *'WHO MURDERED YITZHAK RABIN?'* Chamish reveals that Mr Sinclair is a descendant of one of the original Knights Templar, an order set up by a French relative of the St Clair family of Rosslyn.

The order, which flourished in the 13th century, spread across Europe and became wealthier than many nations.

But in 1307, the King of France arrested thousands of Templars in an attempt to destroy the Order and claim its assets. A small number escaped to Scotland where they were protected by the St Clair (later Sinclair) family and continued to flourish. They eventually played a major role in Robert The Bruce's triumphs, including Bannockburn.

Alisdair Sinclair knew all about his forefathers: *'He and I learned a great deal about the Knights Templar and our family links to them from our father,'* says his brother James.

'We often visited Rosslyn Chapel from our home in Arran and I can recall the original Sinclairs, who are our ancestors. We also knew about other Sinclair relatives in Caithness who lived in a castle and enjoyed great wealth and power. They are still the Earls of Caithness.

'But these were no child's fairy tales. Alisdair and I always knew we were direct descendants of the original St Clairs who founded the Knights Templar. Alisdair loved books and spent a great deal of time reading about the family bloodline.

Both James and Barry Chamish believe it was a fascination with this bloodline which led Alisdair to Jerusalem and his death.

'I believe Alisdair was murdered,' says Barry Chamish. *'He came to Israel because of his Knights Templar background and became caught up in the conflict over Jerusalem. The official explanations about his death cannot be believed. He was stopped trying to leave the country allegedly because he had 9000 Deutschmarks (£3,500) in a secret compartment of a suitcase. There is nothing illegal about that. If I were carrying that sum of money I might want to hide it as well.*

'Then he allegedly confessed that the money was paid to him for smuggling ecstasy tablets into Israel. But there is no evidence that he had drugs. Why confess to a crime when there is no evidence?'

'Finally, it is alleged he hanged himself with his shoelaces. It sounds highly unlikely, if not impossible for a man of his size to do that. I believe Alisdair was trying to escape from Israel when he was killed. The Knights Templar are not welcomed by the authorities and other organisations here.

'I'm still investigating why his heart was taken out. It was a custom in medieval times to cut out the hearts of knights who died abroad. The hearts were then taken back to the knights' homeland for burial.

'Perhaps Alisdair's heart was cut out as part of that ritual. But whatever the truth, there is something very evil going on in Israel today and he became caught up in it.'

14th January, 2001 Israel 'SCOTTISH SUNDAY POST'

'WHAT THE PAPERS SAY'

Paganism And Witchcraft Lore From North Ghana

Ancestor worship in Africa still continues side by side with Christianity. My North Ghanaian pen-friend, A Anabillo, tells me that when he got good marks at school, his playmates jokingly accused him of sacrificing two cocks at his ancestors' shrine. Newspapers he sends me from Ghana are filled with Tales Of The Supernatural, all reported as being true. Paganism and Christianity are drawing closer together, and why not? There is absolutely no reason why they should be forever opposite.

In England, atheists sometimes jokingly say "I am a Pagan," meaning that, in their eyes at least, they have no God. But African Pagans have a superfluity of Gods, far beyond the Christian Three In One. "Paganism" in the African sense simply means "traditional religion." It should not be used as a derogatory term.

As it is used as such, particularly by African Christians, the Pagans whose designs are reported in A. Anabillo's newspapers have asked to be called "Godians." They share the notions of a "Supreme Being" and of the power of prayer with Christianity. One news story told of a Christian woman who had been summoned at night by the Goddess of a lake. The Goddess took her by the hand and led her to the "womb of the lake," a kingdom under the water, where she met many dignified people, some with fish's tails. Returning to land, the Goddess told the woman to make a shrine by the waterside. When the woman demurred, the Goddess said; "Becoming my servant, at my shrine, should cause no conflict with your Christian beliefs."

Finding this to be true, the woman becomes a priestess with a dedicated following. Women helpers guard her body when she was left in a trance to journey to the people in the lake. *THE GHANAIAN "MIRROR,"* a paper not dissimilar to its English name-sake, once, (in September 1989), carried a headline; *'GIRL PRIEST RETURNS TO DWARFS'* An accompanying photograph shows a wild-eyed maiden in a grass skirt performing a 'fetish dance.'

Here is part of the report, by journalist Dwamena Bekoe: *'True to her promise that she would return to the "dwarf land," for the third time, to fortify her powers, twenty-year-old Afua Tabisi has disappeared once again and is believed to have gone to the mystery world of supernatural powers. One her first disappearance, in 1985, when Afua was seventeen, she spent three weeks in the mystery world. In 1986, she disappeared for eleven days. It is not known how long she will be away this time.*

'Afua's disappearance was noticed last Tuesday morning by elders of the shrine when she was not found in her bedroom. In her place was a white egg on a large green leaf on a red calico bedsheet, with powder sprinkled on the bed and in her room. The door to her room was tightly locked from within. The traditional priestess Afua Tabisi was a pupil of the Seventh Day Adventist School. At the age of

seventeen she was said to have been mysteriously taken away by dwarves, in August 1985, for three consecutive weeks.

'On this latest occasion, the chief linguist of the shrine, Okyewone Kwame Sasu, also narrated his version of the story and said, for some time now the fetish priestesses kept telling him of her impending visit back to the dwarf land for supernatural powers. In anticipation of this, she, for the past two weeks, stopped sleeping with children in her room, upon the instructions of the Gods.

'...Meanwhile, the police of Kiforidua have been informed and the elders of the shrine and the town are keeping vigil, waiting for her arrival, which is unknown.'



Pygmies, now supposed to live only in the Congo, may once have dwelled in all the rain forests of West Africa. Rumours of pygmies (or "dwarfs") abound throughout the West African forests, so it is not impossible that meetings between these mysterious nomadic hunters and other Africans should occur.

More probably, the magical dwarfs of the story can be seen by the Eye Of Faith. A Christian Seventh Day Adventist upbringing is evidently no barrier to the supernatural world of dwarfs.

Incidentally, a more recent issue of *THE GHANAIAN "MIRROR"* carries a full-page article on "Dipo," an initiation ceremony for adolescent girls of the Krobo peoples. In a secret camp on Krobo Mountain, girls are not only taught how to cook and clean, but are subjected to the ordeal of female circumcision. To reach the camp, the girls have to scramble over sacred rocks beneath which (according to tradition) a long-ago Dipo-candidate has been buried as a human sacrifice.

Fetish priestesses and others give their views on Dipo, most of them approving of this custom, but some deploring the

fact that candidates today often include girls as young as two years old. Such toddlers are excused training in cooking and housework, and so, it is said, grow up to become unsatisfactory wives. They are sent to Dipo so early in life because their parents see the ceremony as a protection against schoolgirl pregnancies.

Nana Kloweki, the first "Dipo" priestess, received a vision in the early 1800's, in which she was shown the Cross of Christ and was told by a Heavenly voice that the Cross would overcome her cult. Missionaries arrived later and called for an end to "Dipo." Not everyone has obeyed that call, for "Dipo" continues to this day.

In a distant echo of this tradition, the Children of Western evangelicals are often urged to be "saved" and baptised at the earliest age possible, to protect them from Satan. Teenage girls, in the West Indies, are often fiercely turned out by their parents if they become pregnant.

My pen-friend A. Anabilo told me that he would often get into trouble with his aunt, for absent-mindedly referring to her twin boys as "they" instead of "he."

The whole family tried to keep up an elaborate pretence that the two boys were one, in case the spirits overheard. If the spirits realised that "the boy" was actually two twins boys, great evil might have befallen the family. Before missionaries arrived in the district, twins had been put to death.

As a naughty boy, A. Anabilo would often walk behind a pregnant woman and then suddenly overtake her. Such behaviour was said to change one baby into two, and cause the woman to give birth to twins.

Usually the woman would shout angrily, and my future pen-friend would laugh and run away. One day, however, a mother-to-be, when overtaken in this way, lay down in the road and sobbed bitterly. Anabilo, her tormentor, felt ashamed, and never tried the prank again. Mixed with his remorse were fears that God would send him to Hell for his crime.

'Oddly enough, in South Ghana, twins are considered to be lucky," he added, in a postscript.

My own local paper, in London, the other week, showed a picture of local Ghanaians "booting at hunger," led by a "fetish priest." This custom, the reporter claimed, had begun during a famine long ago. A fetish priest had urged the people to hoot as loudly as possible, to frighten away the evil famine-spirits. Everyone promptly hooted, the spirits fled and the earth became fruitful once more.

This report would have seemed less incongruous if it had appeared in *'THE GHANAIAN "MIRROR,"* rather than in the *'WILLESDEN AND BRENT CHRONICLE.'*

It seemed odd to think of fetish priests inciting my fellow Londoners to hoot.

Nigerian newspapers on site in London (mostly in the East End), also carry reports of magical goings-on, narrated in a matter-of-fact style.

Despite being warned by her mother, a girl urinated near a Goddess's shrine and was struck dead on the spot. An "agony aunt," supposedly a white American, advised most of her correspondents to fast for nine days, burning a candle every day.

Such advice might be given by the leader of many West Indian or African church in England. Nine is a magic number everywhere in the world. "Aunt Mary" advised one woman to improve her luck by giving money to the first nine beggars that she met.

"You have been cursed by someone you know," a barren woman was informed. "I am one of my husband's four wives," a woman wrote in to say. "In the last five years, I have had four children. Lately, I have been unwell..."

Like a flash, the appalling aunt replied, "You are pregnant, but the baby will die. You must have an abortion. If you are in further doubt, see a native doctor."

A diet of such literature eventually induces in me a feeling of being trapped in a doom-laden fog of error and intrigue, in a world that borders on The Land Of The Insane.

The English equivalent, an astrology star-sign column, seems by comparison, to be Sweet Reason itself.

ROYKERRIDGE

London, 1996

'Internet Mother' Accused Of Black Magic

Judith Kilshaw, the woman who was catapulted into the media spotlight after she and her husband 'adopted' twins on the Internet, found herself the victim of a spiteful press campaign to smear her name. Perhaps the most scurrilous of the accusations levelled against her was *'THE NEWS OF THE WORLDS'* assertion that Judith was a practising Witch. She was, according to the less-than-reputable tabloid, quoted as saying that she would employ all means necessary to have the twins returned to her, including dabbling in the Occult.

'I will use the hardest forms of Black Magic to get my twins back and to get my own back on those people who have ruined our lives. I will never hurt animals but I would hurt other human beings. This could go as far as ruining their lives, political career and businesses. I don't care. I have only used mild forms of Black Magic...until now.'

The rag went on to claim that Judith, 47, had used her 'powers' on other people in the past.

'There was one, for example, a man who was lodging in one of our caravans, who we fell out with over some clothes we still had in our house. I wrote his name backwards on a piece of paper, put salt into the piece of paper and put it into his coat pocket. Later that night he was arrested by for the police over a kidnapping. Was it Black Magic? We don't know.'

Judith allegedly became adept in the Black Arts by er, reading a lot of books on the subject. *'We have all kinds of magic spells in those books. There is a difference between spells which cause good things to happen, White Magic, and which cause harm. This is Black Magic.'*

Well, thank you for that deep, meaningful analysis of the esoteric world of the Occult, Judith, if indeed, she wasn't hopelessly misquoted by the gutter press. The article goes on to include an insight into Judith's 'bizarre world,' courtesy of the family's former child-minder, Joanne Rumsey.

'Judith had Voodoo dolls on a unit in the house. They were supposed to bring fertility if you handled them in some way. They were wooden carvings, one was about a foot tall and the other was half that size. They had faces carved into them and Judith used to sit in her chair stroking them.'

'Judith was obsessed with having a baby girl. On of her books on Black Magic had instructions on what to do to conceive a boy or a girl. I went into work one day and was told that Judith had been looking around a graveyard in the village at night. Apparently standing over a child's grave is supposed to convey magic. I was horrified.'

But not so horrified that she could prevent herself selling her soul to the Sunday press, it would seem. A Faustian Pact if ever there was one!!!

21st January, 2001 'NEWS OF THE WORLD'

The Curse Of The Devil Monkey

As a 'coincidental' postscript to the Roy Kerridge article featured elsewhere in this issue, (strangely enough, I only came across the following after I'd already decided to re-print Mr Kerridge's excellent feature, originally

published in Issue 5 of 'DON,') came publication of a series of revelations concerning some of the more bizarre cases dealt with by British customs officers. Included in this was the news that a Ghanaian Witch Doctor had elected to 'post' himself a 'Devil Monkey' loaded with cannabis.

Nigel Knott, a spokesman for South-East England Customs, based at Dover Docks, revealed to reporters that the Witch Doctor who had attempted to send the 'Devil monkey' had subsequently put a curse upon the beast after his arrest.

And if all this sounds a little too like some Christmas ghost story, a winter tale in the vein of *'THE MONKEY'S PAW'*, consider, if you will, the undeniable fact that scores of officials have since been injured by the figure, either through being pricked by splinters, tripping over the damned thing or having the figure suddenly falling onto them from the height of a stack of shelves.

'It's very dangerous,' Mr Knott informs us, displaying a dose of er, *Hobbesian* insight...

2nd January, 2001 Dover Docks, England 'THE DAILY TELEGRAPH'

KILLED BY 'ATTEMPTED EXORCISM'

One of the most heart-rending cases of recent times concerns the tragic death of eight-year-old Anna Climbie, a beautiful little girl from West London.

The jury at the Old Bailey murder trial heard how, just before her death, Anna's aunt, Marie Therese Kouao, took the child to hospital with 128 injuries on her body. Marie told the perplexed doctors that Anna was possessed by evil spirits that had to be exorcised.

Dr Ivan Dillon, described Anna's body temperature as being 27C, almost 10C below normal. She was unconscious, had a low heartbeat rate and had *'multiple marks all over her body.'*

Some of these wounds were later found to be slash marks, and she had chafe marks around her wrists and ankles. Anna sadly died at St Mary's Hospital. Kouao allegedly announced that *'Anna was a bad girl, who was possessed by evil spirits. I took her to church and they said she needed exorcising.'* Kouao's scumbag boyfriend, Michael Canning, also described the poor child as a *'disruptive child,'* and that she had a *'bad spirit living in her body.'*

Kouao, 44, and Manning, 28, both from Tottenham, North London, were both found guilty of manslaughter and murder respectively.

8th December, 2000 Tottenham, London 'DAILY MANC'

The Legacy Of The Blair Witch

History was repeating itself last Fall, when, with the opening of the highly-underrated *'BOOK OF SHADOWS: BLAIR WITCH II,'* hordes of tourists descended upon the town of Burkittsville, Maryland, eager to snap up any potential souvenirs.

In a yet another example of life imitating art, these obsessed fans were aping the actions of the actors featured during the introductory segment of the movie, when the town is besieged by people intent upon snapping up everything from mass-produced 'Stickmen' to slabs of gravestones from the local churchyard.

Debby Burgoyne, who hails from Burkittsville, tried, one suspects fruitlessly, people not to visit her hometown.

'We don't have bathrooms and we don't have a restaurant. People are pissed by that. Well, we didn't make the movie.'

Just as well with a minge-bag attitude like that!!!

CLOWNS ON THE RAMPAGE

Russell West, 32, was left in a serious condition that required a blood transfusion of six pints after being attacked by two clowns in the front garden of his house. Russell was stabbed a total of ten times, in the chest, legs and head when he went to investigate a strange noise at his home.

27th November, 2000 Brighton, East Sussex 'DAILY EXPRESS'

Dracula's Last Living(?) Relative

According to an article published in the 'DAILY EXPRESS,' the last living member of Vlad Dracula's clan, one Count Ottomar Rudolphe Vlad Dracula, aka Prince Kretzulesco, is intending to come to Britain to acquire a job at (oh, the sheer irony) the Blood Transfusion Service. He has apparently been forced to flee his castle in Germany after receiving death threats and an arson attack by a gang of Neo-Nazi's.

The Prince has, it seems, already succeeded in persuading thousands of Germans to donate blood, and is now determined to find out whether the British blood donation chiefs can help him out.



'I can do great things with the British Blood Service people,' he was quoted as saying. 'I plan to come over first and do a special event for free, to lend my name to getting people to donate blood to save lives.'

The 60-year-old Prince has lived in the village of Schenkendorf for six years and has turned his 'Castle Dracula' into a tourist attraction, bringing much-needed money to the economically depressed region in the former East Germany. Not that such financially rewarding efforts have helped endear him to the local populace. On the contrary, the Prince claims to have been victimised by people who have tried to set his castle on fire on at least 10 occasions, and who daubed swastikas and neo-Nazi slogans on the ancient walls. These attacks are thought to have been in reprisal for having upset neo-Nazi youths because his ancestors are concerned with non-Christian activities.

As a result of these death-threats he has decided enough is enough. *'I am frightened. I don't feel secure in my own*

castle, and the grounds, at 160,000 square metres, are simply too big to make secure from people determined to break in. I have been offered two castles and a monastery in Bavaria, and am currently looking at my options, but I cannot stay here.'

The Prince, whose family were once rulers of Romania and owners of no fewer than eleven castles, lost everything under the Communists. He managed to make new fortunes, however, first in the catering and entertainment business and then as an antiques dealer. In more recent times, the Prince has had to turn his hand to attracting tourists in order to earn enough money to keep the castle running.

'Castle Dracula' is often hired out for exclusive parties and jousting contests. Tourists come to look around and buy souvenirs, including blood-red schnapps and cloves of garlic. He was persuaded to take part in collecting blood by the German Red Cross, which decided that Dracula would be the perfect icon needed to bring some degree of glamour to the request for donors. Since then parties at 'Castle Dracula' have regularly attracted more than 12,000 guests who make financial as well as blood donations to the last of the Dracula dynasty.

Despite their success, the fund-raising activities at the castle - actually an ornate Italian Renaissance-style villa - have sparked numerous complaints about the level of noise. One family even managed to persuade a court to stop the outdoor parties. *'I'm sure Britain would be different,'* said the Prince. *'I could work with someone to create another Castle Dracula. Britain has lots of castles and old stately homes which could benefit from being turned into a Dracula home. I am the only person in the world with the name and I am going to use it for good causes.'*

16th October, 2000 Schenkendorf, Germany 'THE DAILY EXPRESS'

The Hunt For A Sex 'Vampire'

Police in the Hayling Island and Portsmouth areas of Hampshire, were attempting to track down a sex attacker who was described as wearing a Dracula mask. last December.



The human(?) pervert had carried out a series of assaults over the 12 months that made up 2000, and had, at the time of going to press, succeeded in making an arrest.

The 51-year-old man from Havant, was arrested following a mass DNA-screening programme of men in the area. The victims were all set upon in roughly the same locale, and some have been as young as eleven years of age.

1st December, 2000 Hayling Island and Portsmouth, Hampshire 'LIVERPOOL ECHO'

Glimpses Of The World Unseen

'My Merseyside! What airy hosts
Turn still thy gilded vanes
What winds of elf that with grey ghost
People thine ancient lanes?*

(*With apologies to) H.P.Lovecraft,
May, 1927



Is it just me, or is it getting really difficult of late to find the slightest trace of a genuine, open-minded approach to the study of the paranormal?

I could be mistaken, but it surely seems that in these post-cool, "truth-seeker's" times, the prevailing attitude is one of at best, barely concealed cynicism. (And at worst, of course, we have the likes of Blackmore, Wiseman and Persinger, still pedalling their Temporal Lobe Of The Brain Hypothesis for all their worth, and gathering up a growing number of converts, by all accounts).

Things have gotten so bad, that I have recently been plagued by a recurring mental image. One that troubles me greatly:

It starts with a bunch of Fortean investigators gathered around an honestly befuddled eyewitness. Let's say, for the sake of argument, he's captured some video footage of a daylight UFO. The assembled researchers are nodding sagely, taking notes, and making 'umming' and 'aahhing' noises in all the right places, before retiring to the pub, minus the witness, of course, to guffaw over a few pints of 'Oak Wobbly Bob,' at the woeful ignorance of the average man in the street.

'Oh, it's quite obviously a weather balloon, Tarquin.'

'Quite right, Alan. Still, at least it will suffice as a perfectly fascinating example of the Psychosocial Hypothesis. You know, Man's penchant for misperceiving the mundane and attributing to it extraterrestrial properties at the drop of a hat.'

'Oh, super. I'll be able to holdover that article concerning "Hypnagogic And Hypnopompic Visions And How They Are The Only Viable Explanation For Sightings Of Every Type Of Reported Physical Entity EVER!!!" until the next issue of our esteemed publication.'

'Shall we inform the tabloids now then, Gerald?'

'Oh, no, no no. Let them publish their stills and carry the story for a few days. Give good ol' Joe Public something to natter about over their Cornflakes. We'll look far more superior if we provide the real explanation, after everyone else claims to be completely flummoxed.'

'Excellent. Fancy another pint, Wilfred?'

No thanks. I'm just off to Sheffield to patronise some poor deluded soul who believes his house is haunted. What's that? Yeah, I know ghosts are so passé, Tim. Still, beats working for a living, eh?'

A mite unfair? Well, maybe. But Lordy, even the good guys, those who provided this particular writer's inspiration for dreaming up 'DON,' and who, if truth be told, served to instil in me a sense of childlike wonder, even they seem to have grown increasingly sceptical as the years without definitive answers have rolled by.

And yes, I guess that's understandable. One of the very saddest things about the passing of time, of growing older, is the gradual lack of a willingness to suspend ones disbelief. To question every 'explanation' proffered by the so-called 'experts,' until such a time as their more 'acceptable' theories are proven to your own satisfaction (and maybe even then....)

Extraordinary claims require extraordinary proof, and all that, but we shouldn't simply sit back and allow the eclipse of our youth to blind us to the fact that there are about a million and one unsolved mysteries out there. Just because the new Millennium dawned without major incident, 'THE X FILES' have waned in popularity, and countless paranormal magazines have now ceased publication (and, lest we forget, scepticism is now hip 'n' trendy) it shouldn't mean we all have to sell out. To dispense that aforementioned sense of wonder. Our questing instinct. Our objective, open-minded, Fortean search for answers.

That would undoubtedly have old Charlie himself, spinning in his grave.

Never mind though. If Mr Fort couldn't rest easy in his grave, Tarquin, Wilfred and the boys would drum up a fashionably sceptical explanation for this Gyrating Body Phenomenon, just before last orders...
Am I right, guys?

2

Despite the above, or perhaps in some perverse way because of it, I went searching for the Lost Fortean Boys on a mild, windless night in early October, just as the leaves were beginning to turn and the air held that first faint tinge of woodsmoke.

I'd read about a group calling itself '*ParaScience*' in the local press back in the summer-that-never-was, and even managed to give them the briefest of mentions in the last issue of '*DON*.'

But it was a more recent clipping featured in '*THE BIRKENHEAD NEWS*,' that had grabbed my attention like a cat's eye marble shining amidst a pile of brown decaying leaves. Okay, so the contents of what amounted to a ten-line advert were hardly encouraging. There were too many references to '*Ghostbusters*,' '*recruitment drives*,' and '*people being brave enough to attend*,' for my liking.

Still and all, there was a phone number at the conclusion of the snippet, and there didn't seem to be anything to lose in giving Steve, the head of the group, a call.

I'm not at all sure what I expected: A fast-talking hustler, keen to sell me a gen-u-wine '*Extraterrestrial Detector*' or an '*Absolutely-Can't-Fail-Book-Of-Love-Spells*.' A religious fanatic, who was seeking out new members to join his spiritualist cult (*Kool Aid* and a one-way ticket to Guyana, provided). Or the eternally sad bloke with a habit of standing on street corners, screaming that the Beast of Revelations is loose in the land.

By the time I'd finished speaking to him however, I'd discovered (much to my relief) that Steve was about as down to earth as it was possible to get without getting ones nose and face dirty.

He seemed to know his stuff, too.

He talked of allegedly haunted schools, houses, museums and pubs. Of a bunch of mad Americans convinced that a mist that had descended (in an admittedly spooky fashion) over Marston Moor, was in fact, the gathering of the spectres of the slain. And, most interestingly of all, of people who had turned up at the group's meetings complaining that they had alien implants inserted in various parts of their bodies. Or believed they had stumbled upon the underground entrance to

Richard Shaver's Hollow Earth. Or were possessed by the Devil.

Intriguing stuff, I'm sure you'll agree.

The group's first meeting since the late spring of this year, was to be held that coming Monday (October 2nd), at one of my favourite (a, and if you will, hem) 'haunts,' The Bebington Civic Centre Library, at 8pm.

And so, in the company of my trusty Assistant Editor, Jase *I ain't ever gonna get that baked po-tater*' Dignam, we arrived at the large, 1970's art-deco building, just as the St Andrew's Church clock chimed the three-quarter hour.

There was a gang of young teenage scallies sitting on the wall that lined the car park. I caught sight of one of their faces, bathed in the sodium glare of a streetlight. I could have been wrong, but he'd looked to me as though he were weighing us both up, maybe trying to decide whether we had anything worth robbing, and I mumbled as much to Jase. But you know, it's kind of funny. The threat may very well have been real. I may have misjudged the situation entirely. Whatever.

The fact remains that by silent agreement, Jase and I paused for a moment at the entrance to the library.

I can't speak for my friend, but my stomach was roiling with that queasy mixture of excitement and not a little fear, a recipe familiar to anyone when faced with the unknown: A first date. A job interview. A stage appearance.

Or a ride on the fairground ghost train....

'Are you sure you really want to do this?' I asked, trying to keep the tremor out of my voice.

'Well, we've come this far,' Jase replied, not unreasonably. 'We might as well.'

'Okay. But if we see anyone looking even the slightest bit Charlie Manson-ish...Y'know, mad in the heeeeiid, we're out of here, agreed?' 'Fuckin' *right!*'

Right!!!!'

We nodded in unison, the automatic doors slid open, and we stepped inside....

3

I suppose it's fair to say I felt more than a tad embarrassed when we had to ask the blue-uniformed security guard, stood at the front desk, exactly where the 'Paranormal Group Meeting' was being held.

It's not that I'm in any way ashamed of my interest in strange phenomena, far from it. But I always half-expect people, especially authority figures, to poke fun whenever I broach the subject. Quite frankly, they usually regard me as though I've just informed them

I'm looking to go busking in the fun pub at the very Gates Of Hell.

This chap didn't so much as smirk, however, Instead, he politely advised us to take the stairs up to the third floor.

Unfortunately for us, he neglected to mention which room the meeting was being held in.

Not that this seemed to present too much of a problem, at first. Although the landing contained a door-studded corridor, the very first room we came to was brightly-lit and was filled with a crowd of old men and women, sitting around drinking coffee or studying the various display boards.

Jase and I exchanged a worried glance. I think I've already made it clear that neither of us had known quite what we were letting ourselves in for. But attending a seminar with an audience who, with all due respect, looked so ancient, it was hard to shake the notion they were the restless spirits of those who had recently crossed over, had certainly *not* been high on any list of expectancies.

I shrugged my shoulders, and repeated Jase's 'well, we've come this far' speech of a little earlier. And hey, after all, it wasn't the audience we'd come to listen to, but a speaker, who, if he proved to be half as interesting as he'd sounded on the phone, would ensure our journey hadn't been entirely in vain.

So we took a couple of seats near the back. In truth, they were the only ones available. All the others were either occupied or had coats draped across their backs. If nothing else, the meeting was certainly well-attended.

I'd barely taken out my pen and begun scribbling in my notepad when a bearded, middle-aged man, kitted out in what appeared to be a mountaineer's outfit, strode purposefully into the room.

He was wearing a woolly jumper beneath a blood-red *Berghaus* coat, matching thermal trousers and a sturdy pair of climbing boots. His upper body was criss-crossed with thick coils of rope, and a pair of opaque goggles hid his eyes from view.

Oh, and he was clutching a lethal-looking ice-pick in one gloved hand.

I was so surprised by his appearance I dropped my pen on the floor, and I watched it roll unerringly towards this Chris Bonnington wannabe as he continued to stride forward to the very edge of the circle of chairs. He crushed it beneath one of those Frankenstein Monster boots, as carelessly as if he'd trod on a bothersome bug. I opened my mouth to say something, but then I remembered the ice-pick and, and I snapped my gob shut double-quick.

A hush descended then. That sort of caught-breath, respectful silence you only ever hear in

a church or when you're in the presence of a truly great orator and you're mustard keen to catch every word.

The grey-haired, hook-nosed man sitting next to me even stopped slurping from his polystyrene cup as we waited for Mr Mountain Man to speak.

And after making a great show of clearing his throat, he duly did....

'I'd like to start my thanking you all for coming. It really warms my heart to see so many enthusiasts gathered here for what it assumed, by our critics, to be a minority pursuit. Hobby. Interest. Call it what you will.' He paused for effect, and I was certain that if we could have seen his eyes at that moment, they'd be shining with pride.

'Well, my dear friends, may I just say that you are living proof that the efforts of those who would pour scorn on our beliefs are totally in vain. Thank you all, once again.'

This last inspired a spontaneous round of applause and Jase and I had felt compelled to join in. Why not? He might be dressed in an unconventional manner, perhaps even bordering on the very edge of 'Mad In The Heeeiid' Territory, (to be honest, I'd only been prevented from running screaming from the room by the slightly comforting notion that the costume was just *that*. An outfit that would help him get into character when he launched into tales of Yeti-hunting in the Himalayas, Almas-tracking across the Russian Steppes, or collecting evidence for the existence of the Big Grey Man Of Ben Macdhui in Scotland), but he seemed genuinely sincere in his appreciation at being in the presence of so many (you'll pardon the pun) kindred spirits.

I began to feel sure that we'd made the right decision in coming here. I fished in my pockets for a spare pen, came up with a biro, and afforded myself a little smile. I wanted to jot down as much as I possibly could of what I assumed would be a hugely rewarding lecture.

As it turned out, I was right

Though not here. Not in this room, with its assembly of attentive pensioners, and with Mr Mountain Man as the speaker.

Oh no...

4

It seems hard to believe, looking back now, but when our lecturer opened up the talk proper by saying; 'Right, ladies and gentlemen, The Geology Of The Alps...Where to begin?' I actually wrote down the five words that made up the title of the speech, mishearing the last one so that it became: 'Geology Of The *Apes*,' in my *Penketh's* notepad, without their significance sinking in.

It wasn't until Jase nudged me, and whispered, 'What in the name of Doctor Zira, does "Geology Of The Apes" mean, Lee?' that the words swam into focus and I began to have my first sneaking doubts that we just might be sitting in the wrong room.

These suspicions were confirmed when Mr Mountain began launching into tales of the savage grandeur of the snow-capped peaks and the fabulous fauna and flora to be found in abundance there, and I'm sorry, but it was all I could do to keep from braying wild gales of laughter.

'Juh...juh...juh...eeolo...Juh...juh...eeollogee Juheeeollogee Of The *FREAKIN' APES!!!!*' I snorted into cupped hands, and shook my head in disbelief.

I shot a peek at Jase, and just as quickly looked away. His face had gone a beetroot shade of red, his cheeks were puffed out and tiny little fart-like sounds emerged from between the thin line of his lips. He put me in mind of an over-heated boiler about to explode.

One thing was abundantly clear; we had to get the hell out of there before we succumbed to a gargantuan fit of the giggles and risked incurring the wrath of Mr Mountain Man and his deadly ice-pick. We could try explaining that we weren't to know that the Merseyside Conservation Group held their meeting the same night as the '*ParaScience*' people. But something told me he wasn't the kind of guy who would listen to 'half-baked excuses from a couple of lily-livered city types.'

I thanked our lucky stars that we were sat at the back and that our escape route appeared to be free of obstacles. Without daring to look at him, I tapped Jase on the shoulder and pointed in the general direction of the door. He got the message, got to his feet, and bent half-over as though he were afflicted with the world's worst belly ache, he staggered to the exit.

I wasn't far behind, although for one terrible moment I was sure I wasn't going to make it. I could clearly see and hear Jase cackling so hard, he'd collapsed in a boneless heap in the middle of the corridor.

'Close the door behind you, sonny Jim,' someone croaked behind me.

'Yes sir, General Urko,' I said, snapping a salute prior to pulling it to. Once on the other side, I slithered to the polished floor, emitting a laughter that was so intense, it was all but soundless.

A good while passed before I was able to gain some measure of self-control (my stomach muscles ached like Hell the following day, like I'd done a hundred sit-ups, or something), and it took Jase a little longer, despite the fact that he'd had a head start.

In the end, the chiming of the church clock, far-off and somehow dreamlike, served to bring us both to our senses.

I struggled to my feet.

And felt my heart sink.

It was 8:15. We'd very likely missed the start of that damned elusive paranormal meeting. We both might as well slope off home.

At that moment, a young woman, dressed entirely in black, and carrying a stack of official-looking papers, appeared at the top of the stairs. She glanced briefly in our direction, before hurrying past and knocking gently at a door five rooms along from 'Geology Of The Alps.'

'Maybe we're not too late...We can still...' Jase and I said at the exact same time. Without another word, we raced up alongside the Mysterious Woman In Black, just as a voice from within shouted; 'Okay, you don't have to knock. We haven't started yet.'

'Excuse me, is this where the ParaScience Group meets?' I asked the lady, as she pushed open the door, hastily confirming that we weren't about to lurch into the Port Sunlight Flower Arranging Class or the Anne Widdicombe Appreciation Society, by mistake.

'Well, I should hope it is,' she said smiling. 'I'm due to give a talk on the Ellesmere Port Boat Museum Ghosts, tonight.'

Reassured, and not a little delighted, I afforded myself a silent cheer as, for the second time that evening, we stepped into a brightly-lit room filled with people (of thankfully, *various* ages) yattering away merrily or nosing at display boards.

My eyes were immediately drawn to a newspaper headline posted up on one of the stands, that proclaimed; '*GHOST CAUGHT ON CAMERA*,' but before I could get close enough to check it out, a stocky, short-haired man wearing a *UCLA* sweatshirt, (but not the slightest trace of any mountaineering gear, praise the Lawwwd!!!) called for everyone to take their seats. Once again, the only chairs available were located right at the very back. Fortunately, that didn't make a whole pile of difference because the room was so small, wherever you sat you were no more than a few feet from the table behind which Steve, the Group Leader, (for it was he) and the Woman In Black were seated.

As the crowd of forty or so people settled down, Steve rose slowly, surveyed the audience, then pointed directly at me and said; 'Oh, you *must* be Lee, right?'

I had no way of knowing it then, but the second big shock of the evening was just a sentence or two away....

5

One of my favourite ever horror movies is the Columbia 1957 classic, 'NIGHT OF THE DEMON.'

Based on M.R. James's wonderfully atmospheric short story; 'CASTING THE RUNES,' the plot revolves around a black magician named Julian Karswell (played with an understated sense of menace by the excellent Niall MacGinnis), who places a curse upon disbelieving paranormal investigator (jeeppers, creepers, sceptical was fashionable, even back then!!!), John Holden (Dana Andrews).

The reason for this decidedly unsociable behaviour? Dr Holden threatens to expose Karswell's Devil cult for the bunch of fraudsters he assumes they are. In response, the Warlock conjures up an ancient Fire Demon and secretes a parchment containing runic symbols in Holden's papers, during a visit to the library at the British Museum.

And it's during this impromptu encounter that Karswell, in answer to the good Doctor's question as to how he knew he would find him there at the library, states, in a voice dripping with sarcasm; 'Oh, isn't it the scientist who tries to dismiss what he can't explain as coincidence? Let's call *this* coincidence.'

Okey dokey. Let's call it just that.

COINCIDENCE.

What's good for the cinematic world is equally applicable in what passes for everyday reality.

I mean, come on, what's the alternative? There is absolutely no hard evidence to suggest that anything remotely supernatural can ever influence random chance.

No Sir. No Ma'am.

No way.

And you can therefore close your ears when certain other, well-respected investigators whisper darkly about the involvement of Mischievous Sprites, Cosmic Joker's and The Hands Of Fate.

It's just *COINCIDENCE*, and that's all!!!

My apparent acceptance of this logic should make me feel a whole lot better about what was soon to take place in that tiny, spartan conference room in the early autumn, as a raw wind suddenly sprang up and began buffeting around the windows.

But it doesn't, you know.

Not a bit.

6

When Steve pointed me out at the beginning of the meeting, I hadn't felt particularly embarrassed. He explained that he'd only guessed my name because I was carrying a

copy of the then current issue of 'DEAD OF NIGHT;' The Werewolf Special that I'd posted to Steve a few days earlier.

I had to pretend to ignore the people who had craned their necks to gape at me with puzzled expressions on their faces, but that was no big deal.

What certainly did have me squirming in my seat however, was what Steve said next: 'So, how long have you had an amputee fetish then, Lee?'

Now, for those amongst you who didn't get to read the last issue, the blatantly self-indulgent Editorial featured a true-life, tragi-comic account of my brief holiday romance with a gorgeous Sophie-Ellis Bextor lookalike during the impossibly long-ago summer of 1986.

So far, so 'Mill's & Boon.' The interesting wrinkle was that I subsequently discovered, at the *most* inopportune moment, that she had a false leg made of plastic, which she duly took off and placed on the bedside table. As a passion killer it was right up there with dancing the watusi with Vanessa Feltz (even the *slimmed* down version). Nevertheless, it sickens me now to think that I had left her weeping in the dark, just because of that one blemish on her otherwise flawless beauty. The truth is though, I felt that by at least writing about it, I just might be able to exorcise some of the sense of shame that has since haunted me.

Cynics have since suggested that I only wrote it because I knew it would appeal to the more voyeuristic of our subscribers and help shift a few more issues, and nothing I say now is gonna change their views...

Whatever, Steve bringing the subject up in front of a room full of people, none of whom I'd ever met... Well, that was pretty bad.

But worse was to follow.

'I have to say, Steve said, smiling strangely, 'I can particularly relate to your story.'

'Why?' I asked. 'Have you ever been to North Wales for a spot of holiday romance?'

'Er, not recently, no. My affinity goes a lot deeper than that.'

'Aye, aye. You haven't got off with a girl minus a leg, have yer?' I said, smiling a smile that felt for all the worlds as though it were ironed on. I'd been suddenly aware that was I stood on the brink of a revelation that I'd rather not see the shape of.

'Not quite.' He paused, as if considering whether or not he should go on. Then, with a shrug of the shoulders, he sighed; 'Okay, take a look under the table.'

I looked. And did a double-take as Steve hitched up the left leg of his jeans to reveal a shiny metal artificial limb.

I could only stare in disbelief as I heard the sound of something hitting the floor below me. I only suspected later that it was probably the noise of my jaw dropping like an out of control elevator.

For a single, endless moment, no one spoke, and in truth, there didn't seem a whole lot to say. All I can remember thinking is, what were the odds stacked against this particular set of circumstances?

Writing 'The Girl With The False Leg' story in the first place (and believe me, it was not an easy decision to set about publishing that article).

Spotting the 'ParaScience' advert in the local press.

Sending Steve that edition of 'DON,' when any other back issue would have sufficed...

I wasn't able to come up with an answer, but that couldn't stop a Harry Hill voice piping up in my mind to enquire; 'What are the chances of that happening, eh?'

It was difficult to shake the notion that the whole thing had somehow been scripted, though of course, according to accepted scientific reasoning, such things simply cannot be. I was therefore left with no other option than to stare wide-eyed at the complex mechanics of Steve's artificial leg whilst mentally quoting the words of Julian Karswell; 'Isn't it the scientist who tries to dismiss what he can't explain as coincidence....Let's call this coincidence.'

7

If Steve had been in any way embarrassed by my reaction to his 'revelation,' to his credit, he never showed it.

The formalities dispensed with, he immediately launched into a brief description of what 'ParaScience' were all about.

'We are non-profit making organisation dedicated to investigating, at first hand, all forms of paranormal phenomena,' he began.

'We try and adopt scientific methods, hence the computers and various gadgetry you see placed on the table before you.

'Now, although we take the subject very seriously, we've found it helps if you're equipped with a strong sense of humour, on occasion. When we're conducting an investigation of a reputedly haunted site, the vast majority of our time is spent sitting very quiet and very still in total darkness with nothing much to occupy you mind. It's pretty near total sensory deprivation during the forty minute spells, or vigils, as we prefer to call them, that take place throughout the night, so let nobody be under any illusions, this ain't 'THE X FILES.' It's not glamorous or thrill-a-

minute Hollywood excitement. More often than not, it's boring, arse-numbing, mind-deadening work, and it takes a special kind of person to show that kind of dedication.

'Anyone who doesn't think they can hack it shouldn't even bother signing up for the on-site fieldwork. I'm not trying to put anyone off. On the contrary, the whole point of us organising this meeting was to, quite frankly, recruit as many fresh victims....Oops, sorry, new members, as possible. I just want you all to be aware of the downside of investigating haunted houses, schools, factories or whatever.'

Steve paused, an expression of wry amusement on his face as though he were thinking; 'Right, that just about rounds off my Negative Aspects speech. Now, let's see how many of the prospective victims....Oops, sorry, members get up and leave'.

Everyone remained seated, however.

And, I'm not sure, but I could have sworn Steve had looked slightly disappointed. Like the Ghost Train owner surrounded by a bunch of bickering kids who declared they weren't in the slightest bit scared by his ride.

Okay, 'he cleared his throat 'Rather than have you listen to me waffle on endlessly, I'm going to hand you over to one of my colleagues, who'll recount the details of one of our more intriguing vigils.'

So saying, that mysterious Woman In Black (whose name was disclosed to us, but sad to say, I failed to record it), took the chair, so to speak, and began narrating the following...

SEEKERS IN DARKNESS

The Ghosts Of Ellesmere Port Boat Museum

Between November, 1998, and the February of this year, 'ParaScience' began a 'long term study' of the reportedly supernatural events said to have occurred in certain areas of the Boat Museum.

The group are still actively involved, as a matter of fact, and plan to return to the site with the onset of winter.

The town of Ellesmere Port, located smack on the Cheshire/Merseyside border, is in itself, an unusual enough place, populated as it is, by a mixture of 'EP's' (EllesmerePudlians) 'pseudo' Mancs and exiled Scosers. The docks, situated on the banks of the River Mersey, contributed greatly to the success of 'The Port,' but in

since the halcyon days of the 1960's, the locale has acquired some of the washed-out, faded-glory of a ghost-town in waiting.

The building we're talking about here however, The Island or Grain warehouse, was most gainfully employed during the boom years of the late 1800's. It was used to store various foodstuffs, although, as the name suggests, grain was principal amongst them.

Its fortunes waxed and waned throughout the first half of the 20th century, being utilised variously as a storage depot for the army, a base for construction companies and a maintenance garage, interspersed with periods of disuse and outright neglect.

The building would very likely have long since been demolished if it had not adopted its current incarnation as a museum. It was probably chosen as being a suitable site due to its ideal location, situated as it is on a man-made island. According to our speaker; 'within the upper dock level, externally the building is essentially the original brick construction. It's position allowed narrow boats to dock either side of the structure and even underneath a first floor extension permitting easier loading and offloading of cargo.

'Internally, the building has two levels, ground and first floor. The first floor has wooden planking beam floors and a wood trussed roof. Several modifications to the internal layout have been made to accommodate the present museum and its associated displays including a full-size canal boat; *'THE FRIENDSHIP.'*

'The originally open-floor plan has since been divided into smaller units comprising a restaurant, lecture theatre, staff rooms and other associated areas.'

That the area has long had an eerie reputation for strange happenings is confirmed by the volume of anecdotal evidence collected by various members of *'ParaScience.'*

The phenomena reported by museum staff and visitors passing through, include "sightings of apparitions, weird smells, feelings of unease and unexplained noises."

It was during the Museum's (some would say cynical) attempts to cash in on the rumours of strange goings-on. Unfortunately christened with a title cornier than a whole shelf-full of *CHEERIO'S*: 'Spooky Night,' (now an annual event, and you can read what ever you *want* into that level of success), first took place on the evenings of October 30th and 31st, 1998.

Perhaps not surprisingly, a couple of visitors during these occasions reportedly underwent strange experiences. A male, who preferred to remain anonymous, stated that he had seen *'the ghostly figure of a young girl around six or seven years old, with long black hair*

peering form behind 'THE FRIENDSHIP,' near the bow. The apparition only lasted for a few seconds before vanishing suddenly when the tour guide started to speak.

'Although now invisible, he continued to have the impression of something being there for several minutes afterwards.'

Another witness, an unnamed female, reported that she 'felt an icy cold chill' permeating the room, and drifting around her legs like a bothersome draught. This drop in temperature left her feeling uneasy especially when she approached the bow of *'THE FRIENDSHIP.'*

A group of children became increasingly frightened during the tour, although this may have had more to do with the fact that the guide was more than successful in his efforts to generate an atmosphere of menace. Apparently, his acting abilities are excellent and his ability to dole out a case of the heebiejeebees, are damn near legendary.

ParaScience were sufficiently intrigued to launch an appeal for information in the local paper; *'THE PIONEER.'* In response to this request, a volunteer worker at the museum came forward to tell of his experiences when walking in the vicinity of the island warehouse. He was in the company of another worker changing lightbulbs, when he climbed atop a ladder to carry out his task. Whilst he was stood at their summit, he felt a sharp tug in the trouser leg of his overalls and assumed his colleague was attempting to gain his attention. But when he looked down, he was astonished to find that there was absolutely nobody there, and that in fact, his co-worker had been on the ground floor at the time of the 'incident.'

Taken by itself, this would hardly be worthy of inclusion in the paranormal group's files, but there was a second incident, hot on the heels of this one....

'As he was coming up the central stairwell, he noticed that his dog, Toby, was behaving strangely and refusing to go any further. The dog continued to refuse to move and he was forced to take it back outside via the central stairs and ground floor door. He returned alone and went into an office to discuss some unrelated matter. It was when he was leaving the office and moving through the restaurant, that he experienced a great difficulty in walking. There was a strong smell of burning sulphur (*an odour frequently reported in many types of Fortean phenomena, from UFO occupant sightings, to encounters with 'Old Shuck, Bigfoot and Men In Black....And of course, it was once believed, that manifestations both of Demons and of The Devil Himself, were often accompanied by the*

acid smell of burning sulphur-Ed), and he felt as though he were being crushed (another oft-reported phenomenon reputedly linked both to Bedroom Invaders and the otherworldly presence(s) said to inhabit the world's so-called Window Areas: The appearance after midnight, of creatures, be they Alien Greys, insanely cackling Night-Hags, or The Gibbering Things That Lie Waiting In The Black, frequently convey a sensation of a crushing weight, sitting on one's chest and bending to whisper in your ear:

"You knew I would come"

And at sites such as Clapham Wood, Chanctonbury Ring, and The Derbyshire Peaks, witnesses often claim to have been immobilised by some invisible, all-powerful force – Ed, again).

The man in this case was sufficiently frightened by the experience to give it toes to the outside landing., even though it seemed to him if he were running in the midst of a waking nightmare. Everything seemed to take place in slow motion dream time.

Strangely enough, when he finally managed to stumble out of the exit, everything returned to normal.

In the days and weeks that followed, Toby, the dog, would never again approach the bow of *'THE FRIENDSHIP,'* no matter how much cajoling was involved. 'He would consistently growl at the area and behave strangely as if he could see something that he didn't like.'

Perhaps most chillingly of all however, was the account related to the Group, by yet another witness who requested anonymity.

He told of a series of mysterious knocks and bangs emanating from the front of *'THE FRIENDSHIP'* and during the previous Winter (one would assume this means the Winter of 1997, although this was not confirmed by our narrator).

He was working alone on the ground floor of the warehouse. The museum had been closed for the day and therefore there were no parties of schoolchildren on site...or anybody else, for that matter.

None of that served to change the fact that he paused in his labours when he heard the unmistakable sound of children singing. He could even identify the song; *'Ring a Ring a Roses!!!'*

(I hate to interrupt again, but this particular aspect frightens me somewhat. And it seems I'm not the only one. The ghostly, childish singing of this nursery rhyme, which has always had a sinister reputation, not least because of its association with the plague, has been reported several times before. See the conclusion of this article for more – Ed).

Needless to say, despite a thorough search of the premises, as the last faint echoes of the 'singing' faded away to a waiting silence, no trace of any human presence could be found.

ParaScience's first vigil took place during the night spanning November 21st-22nd, 1998.

To assist in the proceedings, the Group were joined by a couple of psychics, clairvoyants, call them what you will, who were given a free role so long as they recorded their 'impressions' on audio tape or video.

Two areas of the museum were, according to the psychics, "active": The area around the bow of *'THE FRIENDSHIP'* and a secondary area in the restaurant.

According to the Group, neither of the two psychics had been anywhere near the Boat Museum prior to this visit and that were not aware, so far as the investigators knew, of the history of the building.

Our speaker informed us that 'Children featured very strongly in the psychic impressions and were described as "running about, playing and laughing."' Three adult spirits were also identified, these were confined to the area around the front of *'THE FRIENDSHIP'* and seemed to be displeased by either the Group's presence or the activities of the children.'

The clairvoyants also reported the impressions of a *'great sadness, chains and coal.'*

'The date of 1852 was mentioned and once again the psychics sensed traces of a death linked somehow to coal and a loading area.'

As for the vigil itself....Well, there were some interesting developments. Aside from a sequence of knocks and bangs, that were likely attributable to the natural noises of an old building 'settling down for the night,' there were other sounds, less easily dismissed in such prosaic terms.

'There was a series of loud knocks and taps from the area at the front of *'THE FRIENDSHIP.'* These were unlike general building noises with which we soon became familiar and were often considerably louder and appeared close by the observers. Several of the observers had visual occurrences during the night. Mysterious shadows moving about, blurred impressions of people and changes in apparent light levels.

'One member did report seeing a small child in his peripheral vision for almost a full 15 minutes which left him feeling both disturbed and confused.

'Interestingly enough, his sighting was confirmed by another Group observer sitting some feet away.'

There were also pretty frequent significant drops in temperature and feelings of menace

hung in the air like the tension you get before an electrical storm.

As the night wore on, several of the team members claimed that they had been touched by an invisible something that snagged at their clothing (*echoes of The Invisible Assailant* panic currently plaguing certain parts of India). 'Perhaps the most interesting phenomena however,' our speaker pointed out, 'were the manifestation of what we have christened "Cold Columns" that several observers reported coming into contact with during the night. Concentrated around the front of *'THE FRIENDSHIP,'* and near the shipwright's display, these areas of intense cold could easily be differentiated by bare hand and felt tangible, although nothing could be seen.

'They appeared to move quickly about and the bare hand could easily distinguish a boundary to them and a slight resistance to the hand passing through. They were around four inches in height but all attempts to measure any temperature change were thwarted by their apparent speed of motion. The observers breath was clearly seen to form condensation when encountering these intensely "Cold Columns." This condensation was not seen at any other time during the night. This clearly suggested to us that the phenomena did indeed take the form of a sudden drop in the immediate air temperature.'

Thus ended the group's first vigil at the Boat Museum...

2

The team reconvened at the site in early January, 1999. The by now, customary knocks and bangs were recorded once more, although you can add to this the sound of disembodied footsteps echoing hollowly on the wooden floor.

The appearance of quickly moving shadows along the walls in various parts of the building. Bright white lights were also sighted near the front of the narrow boat.

The undoubted highlight, of this vigil, however, only made itself apparent during subsequent analysis of a series of sound recordings made by one of the digital recorders. The anomalous recording was made as members of the group were setting up the equipment at the ungodly hour of 2am. Chillingly, those children's voices, who, you'll recall were reported by a singular witness the previous year, were recorded on digital tape without actually being heard by any of the investigators present at the scene.

And guess what, dearly assembled, they were singing *'RING-A-RING-A-ROSES,'* once again.

The singing was said to be quiet and far-away, but to be clearly discernible....

'Subsequent computer analysis of the sound does seem to confirm that they are indeed a group of children singing,' claims the speaker. 'Traffic noise from the M53 is also clearly heard although it is below the level of the voices. *ParaScience* group members may also be heard talking and moving about and it is clear that they are oblivious to the singing.

So what do we have here. one wonders. Some sort of hoax? An electromagnetic disturbance of some kind? Or a classic example of Electronic Voice Phenomena (EVP)? - (Ed).

On February 3rd, the investigation co-ordinator was paying a visit to the warehouse intending to conduct a photo study using a digital camera. Our narrator takes up the story....

'He was accompanied by his father and for a time, the museum events co-ordinator. During the early part of his visit, the warehouse was hosting a school party many of whom were dressed in Victorian costume. Several of these children were photographed as he thought they may be able to illustrate future reports with their pictures in relation to the earlier recording of the ghostly children's singing. After the children left, he continued to take more pictures whilst speaking with the museum events co-ordinator. Therefore there were three people on the museum's first floor level at the time one particular picture was being taken.

'This picture, when examined afterwards, appeared to contain a semi-transparent and incomplete figure of a man. Although a low resolution image, it was examined further by computer analysis and appeared to be the upper body and head of a man near the front of the narrowboat.

'A right arm with the sleeve rolled up was clearly visible and the apparition appeared to be wearing either a hat or hood with a shoulder drape.'

Understandably, this photograph, generated a great deal of publicity, at least on a local level. The authenticity of the picture has been further enhanced by the revelation that *'Sony UK'* later confirmed that the camera used to obtain this shot could not have produced a double exposure 'or other optical phenomena which could manifest itself in such a manner.'

As with the audio recordings, mentioned earlier, no one saw anything out of the ordinary at the time the picture was taken.

There have, according to some of the people at *'ParaScience,'* been a number of positive steps taken towards possibly identifying the 'figure' in this photo.

They were at pains to stress however, that the following remains pure supposition.

'The figure seems to be a male wearing what appears to be either a hood or a drape of fabric down over the shoulders, or perhaps a cloth sack as often worn by the likes of coal delivery workers. Within the museum display there is a photograph of a man wearing just such a garment.

'When the image was published, whether by accident or design (*'Let's call this coincidence'*) it appeared alongside an article from The Boat Museum reporting a memorial service for a young worker killed 100 years before, whilst loading coal at the docks.

'Samuel Hill, aged just 18, was a porter employed by the Shropshire Union Railway and Canal Company, when he met his death around 5pm on Friday, February 10th 1899. He was working as part of a team at the coal tip loading a steamer.

'During this dangerous task, the vessel had to be moved and the coal shoot re-positioned. Samuel was disconnecting a chain and stooping so that his head was in between the chain and the upright. Suddenly, and without warning, the shoot slipped, tightening the chain and trapping the unfortunate boy's head between the chain and the upright. He was quickly freed, but was sadly found to be already dead, his neck and windpipe crushed.'

'The Group claimed that they knew nothing of this story, until its publication in the local press, and this is kind of backed up by their contacting the Boat Museum to express their surprise, only to be informed that the tragedy of Samuel's untimely death had only just been made public as they themselves had only just stumbled upon its discovery.

'A plaque marking the event had been recovered from some building spoil, and this has now been put on display in the museum.

'It was quickly realised that the notes of the two psychics, (their impressions had been placed on file) contained similarities to the death of Samuel Hill...In particular, the reference to 'coal and chains.'

'It is even more interesting to note that the picture of the 'ghostly worker' was taken pretty much exactly 100 years to the day that Samuel was killed, and for that reason, the image has been christened 'Sammy.'

3

The Group held a further vigil during the March of the same year, but aside from the auditory assault courtesy of The Knocks and Bangs Brigade, nothing of real note occurred. Slightly more encouraging is the fact that since the team commenced their investigation, they have been contacted by a total of 12 witnesses, who at various times, claim to have seen

something strange take place within the museum walls.

All of these alleged incidents took place in the vicinity of the Island warehouse. Eight of the percipients stated that they had experienced sensations of being touched and of having their clothes tugged, like the man at the top of the ladder at the outset of this piece.

A further two said that they had seen what appeared to be children playing a game of Hide And Seek by the narrowboat, although, needless to say, there were 'real' children present at the time.

The final two witnesses both claimed that they had smelled a strong odour of burning wood or something similar (sulphur?) which was only noticeable within the building and not outside.

The strong smell of burning was also reported by several members of 'ParaScience' during the Group's inaugural vigil back in November, 1998.

4

To sum up then, our speaker drew the following conclusions...

She was quick to point out that the eyewitness testimony, whilst important, we should be cautious in accepting it at face value. She accepted that science has proven that our brains are susceptible to the misinterpretation of all kinds of external stimuli, and that we can quite easily be fooled by the perfectly ordinary when we are tramping around unfamiliar territory...

Especially a site that is reputed to be haunted.

She was equally quick to point out though, that 'in the case of the Island warehouse, we have a scenario whereby multiple witnesses, independent of each other, and on several different occasions, have reported what appear to be identical events.

Additionally, we were able to pinpoint the location of these accounts, by drawing up a map, based on a plan of the warehouse. Thus were we able to observe a close correlation in the location of the various phenomena. By personal observation, Group members also provided first hand accounts of similar events: The smells, the touching, the visions of children and the sounds.

'The sound of children singing was reported by a volunteer when the building was closed to the public and absolutely no children were present. To record the sound of children apparently singing at 2am is highly interesting from a paranormal investigator's point of view...

(to say nothing of the fact that it carries eerie echoes of the scene in 'THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT, where Mike, Heather and Josh are

cowering in their tent as the high-pitched laughter of children drifts towards them from out of the depths of the midnight woods!!!)

As the narrator was keen to draw to our attention, the evidence for the “existence” of the ghostly children is pretty convincing, supported as it is by several independent witnesses, Group members and, perhaps to a lesser extent (depending on your point of view) the impressions of the two psychics.

The anomalous image captured on camera has been subjected to fairly intense examination and ‘expert’ computer analysis. This fact should be tempered a little however by the consideration that modern computers are capable of highly convincing image manipulation – you’ve only got to check out some of the more recent UFO video footage, especially that shot over Mexico, to obtain proof of that.

What is interesting though, is another indisputable fact, namely, that a credible witness who works at the Museum was present when the photograph was taken, and ‘the subsequent time period between leaving the Museum to e-mailing the image to other Group members tends to rule out the possibility of a hoax.

‘It must therefore, be accepted as a genuine image of something unusual.’

Although what, precisely, the term “unusual” means in this case remains open to interpretation.

And before anyone asks, yes, I did try to include a copy of the aforementioned photo, but the reproduction would have rendered the image all but indiscernible.

‘In summing up then, many of the events of all types do seem to be confined to specific areas within the Island Warehouse and this suggests that only parts, and not the entire building are subject to paranormal activity.

‘It is also not clear if the events are linked to the building itself or one of the many exhibits it contains. Certainly, the narrowboat ‘*FRIENDSHIP*’ appears to be linked to many of the phenomena that have taken place, and it is the Group’s intention to examine the vessel’s history in the near future, as part of the ongoing investigation.

‘The area of the restaurant opposite the servery, also shows a strong consistence of reports of unusual activity taking place, and that area will be examined more closely during future work by *ParaScience*.’

I was expecting this to be the end of the talk, and in truth, I found myself almost wishing it were. Don’t get me wrong, this was all fascinating stuff, but I was writing that fast, I swear steam was rising from the notepad and

my hand all but disappeared in a constant blur of motion.

Our speaker hadn’t quite reached the end of her talk, however. As Del Griffith says to Neil Page, while travelling in the back of an open-topped truck en route to Witchita, Kansas, ‘There’s a little ways to go yet!!!’

5

‘Our very latest visit to the Boat Museum took place between November, 1999 and February, 2000.

‘The highlights of these vigils were occurred during the third and final session at the building.

‘At approximately 10pm, as the Group were thinking about packing away their equipment at the dog end of a fairly uneventful vigil, there came the sound of heavy door being closed with extreme force.

Undeterred, they actually set about packing up, and it was as they were doing so that a strong smell of ‘*CORNFLAKES*’ suddenly filled the air near to the middle of the narrowboat, and almost exactly where the EMF meter had been positioned. Unfortunately, the smell only lasted for a few seconds and wasn’t noticed by another Group member called over to see if he could detect anything.

‘Due to the lateness of the hour, it wasn’t possible to examine any of the photographs taken that night, but after the vigil was over, the keys to the Museum were dropped off at another member’s house. It was here, during a description of the events that evening, that the ‘*CORNFLAKE*’ smell was mentioned. The member to whom the keys were being deposited described how she smelt a similar odour whilst driving past the Seaforth Grain Silos, some weeks earlier, It was only then that we all remembered that the Island’s warehouse was a grain warehouse, something we all knew, but neglected to recall at the time of the smell. The following day, the first indications of something unusual in the still pictures began to emerge. The pictures from the ‘*SONY*’ camera positioned nearest the EMF meter were looked at. Out of more than 30 photographs taken, eight had what appeared to be a fuzzy ball of light on them.

‘Subsequent computer analysis revealed that there did not appear to be any camera fault at work here. Nor were there any indications that a trick of the light or some sort of reflection might be involved.

‘Dim, and without definition, they defy further interpretation. They are about the size of a tennis ball and appear to have a denser core surrounded by a lighter halo. Each of the three pictures were taken within a second or so of

the EMF meter registering a response and perhaps there is a link to be made between the two events.'

She went on to state that more pictures from the second camera were also obtained, and these too, contained images of these 'fuzzy lights.'

Nothing was seen at the time these images were captured. They were only taken at all because the EMF meter detected 'an audible response.'

'The building was in darkness and although a flash was used in each picture, the overall images were very dark and required computer enhancement before the 'Light Balls' were properly visible.'

It seemed that this phenomena moved around 'THE FRIENDSHIP' from the floor level to the rafters.

The theory has been proposed, and would likely be endorsed by Fortean researchers such as Paul Deveraux and John Keel, that this 'Light Ball' phenomena has its origins in some form of electromagnetic energy.

That may well be the case, but further investigation needs to be carried out before any firm conclusions can be drawn.

'And we that's just what we plan to do in the near future,' our speaker announced. We will keep you posted as to developments.'

6

That part of the meeting over, Steve stood up to declare it was high time for a coffee break, and everyone duly shuffled into the corridor to insert their coins in the vending machine.

I managed to catch up with Steve, intending initially, to apologise for any offence that (fast approaching legendary status)'amputee' article may have caused him.

He merely shrugged his shoulders, and to my great relief, told me that he had thoroughly enjoyed the magazine, and thought that it was almost on a par with 'THE FORTEAN TIMES,' back in its pre-'hit-the-big-time' days of the 1970's and 80's. (High praise indeed!).

We then talked of many things: The Group's fruitless search for Alien Big Cats in the pitch-black depths of some stretch of woodland, which resulted in nothing more than several injuries as members collided with each other in the near impenetrable darkness.

Of visits to military installations where, according to Ufologists, top secret experiments were taking place involving clandestine meetings with EBE's, back-engineering from recovered alien spacecraft and sinister deals aimed at protecting the Earth from imminent invasion by the Reptoids. 'There's hidden floors within that installation,' one Ufologist

informed Steve in all seriousness. When the Group went round to the facility to see for themselves, fully expecting to be refused admission, they were shown around without any problems whatsoever. (And yes, I've seen *QUATERMASS II*, and its 'refinery' which really secretly serves up synthetic food; ammonia no less, to a race of blob-like aliens hidden in giant domes, but hey, if you're a conspiracy theorist, no amount of apparent candour displayed by the authorities is gonna quell their fears by something as innocuous as a guided tour)

Steve also told us of trips to reputedly haunted pubs, only to find, that when they arrived there, the landlord refused then admission and, treating them like Jehovah's Witnesses, sent them packing with a flea in their ear.

Saddest of all however, was the case of an old woman who contacted the Group as she believed her house was haunted by a poltergeist that kept hiding her money. When the team arrived and began their investigation they soon discovered the true origin of this cash-vanishing spirit: 'It was what we refer to as a "Scum Bag Ghost," Steve announced, a grimace of distaste clouding his features. 'In other words, an all-too *human* culprit who delights in breaking into pensioners homes and stealing their belongings.

He heaved a world-weary sigh and shook his head 'The terrible thing was, she was convinced that a ghost must be responsible because she simply couldn't accept that anyone would break into her home. She'd been brought up in an earlier, more innocent age, the sort Billy Butler and Wally Scott are always waffling on about on 'RADIO CITY. 'You know it often seems easier to believe in Angels, Ghosts and Ufonauts, than the reminiscences of our grandparents, but they swear there really *was* a time when you could leave your front door unlocked at night, and trust your neighbours implicitly.'

There were about a trillion and one other things that we wanted to discuss, but it was another unfortunate case of so many questions, so swift time's flight...

The adjournment was over. It was time to head on back to the assembly room.

To be honest, the second part of the meeting was something of an anti-climax. Several people seemed to have cried of (so perhaps Steve's attempt at culling the audience *had* been successful, after all), and most of the final hour was taken up with viewing the group's website on the computers. There was just time however, to pick up a couple of press releases concerning further investigations at locations throughout Merseyside, including an

Intriguing, not say frightening account relating to the Group's investigation of an unnamed school in downtown Birkenhead. Amongst the phenomena reportedly observed, were, once again, the distant laughter of ghostly children. Is it just me, or do you see a pattern emerging here?

Fascinating stuff, but if it's all the same to you, I think I'll make like Tarquin, Alan and the boys here, though, and hold over the full details of this article until the next issue.

And so, clutching our *ParaScience* application forms, (the prospect of joining the Group on their all-night vigils, mind-numbingly boring or not, were nonetheless calling to me like the seductive song of the siren), we stepped out into the October chill, with another quote from Julian Karswell running round my head;

'Where does imagination end and reality begin? What is this twilight that you (the sceptics) profess to know so much about?'

Hopefully, the search for answers was about to begin....

Lee Walker October 24th, 2000

New Ferry, Merseyside

Shawls Of Indolent Gossamer "Clearing Negative Energies" From The Heart of Lancashire

A psychic investigator by the name of Gary Darkin, was making the news as the tabloid build-up to Hallowe'en began in earnest.

The article I came across referred to Gary as (oh, what a surprise,) "Ghostbuster," and in fairness to him, he probably cringed when he was labelled as such.

He was quoted as saying that he surmises more than 50 per cent of people who move into new homes have experienced weird phenomena, ranging from bouts of sudden, unexplained illness, to unaccountable cold spots in various parts of the house along with electrical anomalies.

He told reporters; *'Sometimes, it's just dampness or faulty wiring, but on other occasions, there is more going on than meets the eye, perhaps in as many as a third of the cases.'*

'People just don't know what's going on when they get headaches or feel depressed for no apparent reason, sense that they're being watched or feel strange just being in a room. It could be a spirit or Poltergeist but very often it's energies that are left in the home.'

'For example, a house in Leigh, Lancashire, that I have just 'cleared,' once belonged to an old woman. The builder wanted good vibes before he decorated and allowed potential buyers to view it. So he called me.'

'When I walked in, it was like cobwebs all over my face. I felt terrible. There was a lot of negativity which I had to clear up. 'Around Leigh, Wigan and other mill towns there's been a lot of suffering, people struggling through life, and the home reflect that. 'I psychically sealed the windows and projected positive energy into the house.'

'I don't use prayer, but I do have other guides, such as the Native American Indian Red Cloud, who will channel energy through me to purify a room or escort wandering spirits to the next world.'

'It's a comparatively short process, and I don't see anything particularly strange in what I do. I'd liken it to the now mainstream feng shui.'

'It's about projecting energies. For example, on Christmas Day, I wake up and feel special because, even though I'm not religious, there's a good atmosphere, everyone projects love on that day. A house is similar.'

'When people go back to the houses I've cleared they say the atmosphere is completely different. And builders say houses sell 50 per cent faster than I've been in.'

'It works on the principle that when a couple view a house it's usually the woman who has the final say and she's more likely to go for a house with a pleasant atmosphere.'

'I've been cleaning for four years, and I have "seen" everything from phantom Roman soldiers to ghostly cats. The sceptics may pour scorn on my work, but those who come into contact with me swear that my methods work.'

One such satisfied customer is "Jake" (pseudonym), who told reporters of his experience: *'When I walked into my house it was like walking into a fridge.'*

'There were items going missing and the TV wasn't working but worst of all I experienced scratch marks on my body. Gary told me that there was a spirit of a cat in there. I don't like cats and apparently, it had sensed that. I was understandably dubious at first but Gary did what he did and I've had no problems since.'

These so-called 'negative vibes' or 'energies,' don't always materialise into recognisable entities. Many properties also run through ley lines, or invisible energy forces, which can often, it is said, produce pretty much the same symptoms.

'Sometimes, it's just a question of shifting beds around to avoid sleepless nights or "bending" the lines away from the properties. One supermarket successfully moved its tills forward by three feet after I discovered a ley line running along the malfunctioning check-outs.'

'I can usually tell if people are really experiencing happenings or just letting their imaginations run away with them. But my job is to make sure that reported paranormal phenomena is sorted out before new residents move into the property.'

'If you're thinking of moving house or there's a room in your home that you've never felt comfortable in, perhaps there's a lost spirit or negative energy caught between this world and the next. And if there is, I'm sure you'll be glad of a helping hand to guide it on its way.'

15th October, 2000 'THE SUNDAY POST MAGAZINE'

Fear And Loathing In South Wales

A troublesome Poltergeist has apparently been plaguing a family in Pentre, South Wales, ever since they had the temerity to redecorate their new home. The Cowell family hadn't long been living in the council house when, according to the mother, Tracey Cowell; *'One night we were in the kitchen when some wooden utensils flew out of a jug and landed in a line on the worktop. We were terrified and ran from the house screaming.'*

A few days later, light bulbs started exploding for no discernible reason, their lights began switching themselves on and off, and the entire house was filled with mysterious bumps and bangs of an unknown origin.

Eventually, things got so bad that both Tracey, 33, and her husband Andrew, 34, decided that the entity, whatever it might be, was a ghostly 'woman hater.'

And how did they arrive at this conclusion?

Well, according to Tracey; *'One night when Andrew went downstairs for some water, I felt something pinning me to the bed. I could hardly breathe and thought I was going to die.'* (Classic 'Bedroom Invader' Incubus, Night-Hag-type-phenomena. We wonder if it said anything... 'You knew I would come!!!' for example - Ed).

'Another time, I was about to get in the bath when two hands gripped me by the shoulders and shoved me in.'

'When I finally managed to get out, I looked around but there was no one there...And the door was locked. Then my daughter Laurie was dragged out of bed by her feet. It got so bad I'd only go upstairs when there was someone else in the house.'

The family's children John, 13, Laurie 11, Gemma, 9, Rebecca, 8, and Nathan, 6, slept in the same room until their own rooms had been redecorated. They simply refused to sleep near the door, saying that they were too scared to put their heads down with something standing, waiting on the other side...

Nathan, the youngest of the children, managed to strike up an affinity with the spirit, and Tracey, once more takes up the story; *'John came in from the hall screaming that there was something wrong. Little Nathan was walking backwards down the stairs, his eyes fixed on the landing, and he seemed to be talking to someone.'*

'Nathan told me the ghost was called Queenie, who wore a long, grey dress covered by a pinafore.'

'When we appealed for information in our local paper, people stopped us in the street and even called our home, warning us to leave.'

'Many former owners of this house have been terrified by ghosts. One woman begged us to move out for the sake of the children.'

Perhaps we shouldn't be too surprised however, by the fact that Tracey wasn't about to give up her new home without a fight. They had only just moved in, after all.

Instead, she turned to the self-styled 'Exorcist To The Stars,' David Lambert (and to be fair, he has,

numbered amongst his clients, David Bowie, Tina Turner and Mick Jagger, to name but three), to enlist his aid in ridding the house of the problematic sprite.

Tracey, fearing for her family's well-being, actually beseeched him for help, and Mr Lambert, who hails from Cardiff, came on the run.

David later told reporters; *'There are more hauntings that you would imagine because a lot of people just do not see ghosts. Children are more receptive to spirits because they don't think that there is anything to be scared of.'*

'Most spirits just watch the new people in their home, but sometimes they want to be noticed. When they are not, they get frustrated and make noises, banging on walls and things.'

'Something else that can trigger Poltergeist activity is if a family starts decorating. The ghost may disagree with a wallpaper pattern, or get angry with things being changed around.'

David could apparently discern, the very moment that he met Nathan, that he was possessed of a psychic gift.

'He has an aura. When he's older, he may develop his skills for use as a medium.'

'I was also able to determine that there were actually a total of three spirits in Tracey's home; a benevolent old lady, who is quietly watching everything. A girl of about eight, who looks like a servant, wearing a grey dress with long skirts and an apron. She met a very sad and tragic end in the house. And a young boy, just as mischievous as the girl, who also met with a sudden death.'

David's exorcism was stark and simple in its execution; He speaks to the ghosts and persuades them to return to the 'spirit world.'

Tracey was hugely impressed by David's psychic impressions. They seemed to match perfectly, the descriptions passed on to her by the locals and by her own son.

'I was a bit nervous about him coming here. I had visions of someone really strange doing all sorts of weird things. But he has put our minds at ease.'

In the several months that have since slipped by, the house has remained calm and apparently, ghost-free. Tracey, needless to say, felt more than a little vindicated in her decision to stay and fight; *'We were on the verge of moving out, but our home is just how we imagined it now. I never believed in ghosts before and it amazed me to hear about Nathan's gift but I will be happy if I never come across a ghost again.'*

*18th September, 2000 Pentre, South Wales
'SUNDAY PEOPLE MAGAZINE'*

The Sceptics Strike Again

Jeezly ol' crows, and still they come...

To the list of sceptics banging out their theories as to the true origin of various types of anomalous phenomena, (and very much in the mould of the likes of Wiseman, Persinger, Blackmore et al), you can now add the name of Dr Dominic Ffytche (if you can pronounce it, that is) to the pantheon of hard-headed realists.

The not-so-good Doctor has gone on record as stating that accounts of ghosts and associated

the random activity of an idle brain.

The theory, such as it is, was arrived at after a study of the hallucinations often experienced by those afflicted with blindness.

Dr Dominic Ffytche, of the London Institute of Psychiatry, claims that individuals who go blind through experiencing eye disease, or have their whole eyes removed, often report frightening visions, such as grotesque faces with prominent eyes and teeth, and figures in old-fashioned costumes, such as Edwardian clothes, Napoleonic uniforms and knights in shining armour.

Scans carried out while the patients were hallucinating showed activity

in specialised regions of the brain's visual cortex.

Dr Ffytche proposes that sightings of ghosts and the experience of *'The Terror That Comes By Night,'* could well have the same biological cause. The 'Old Hag' or 'Crone' that often appears when a person is still only partly awake at the edge of a nightmare, was perhaps, one example.

'You think a monster with a distorted face is right in front of you,' Dr Ffytche told the British Association Festival of Science in London, last September. The hallucinations were thought to be what he termed, *'release phenomena.'*

'When there's no information coming in, and the brain is idle, you get cells firing away to produce these images.'

'I'm sure ghosts, witches and faeries all relate in some respect to these disembodied hallucinations.'

'Near Death Experiences may also be related to activity in these specialised brain areas.'

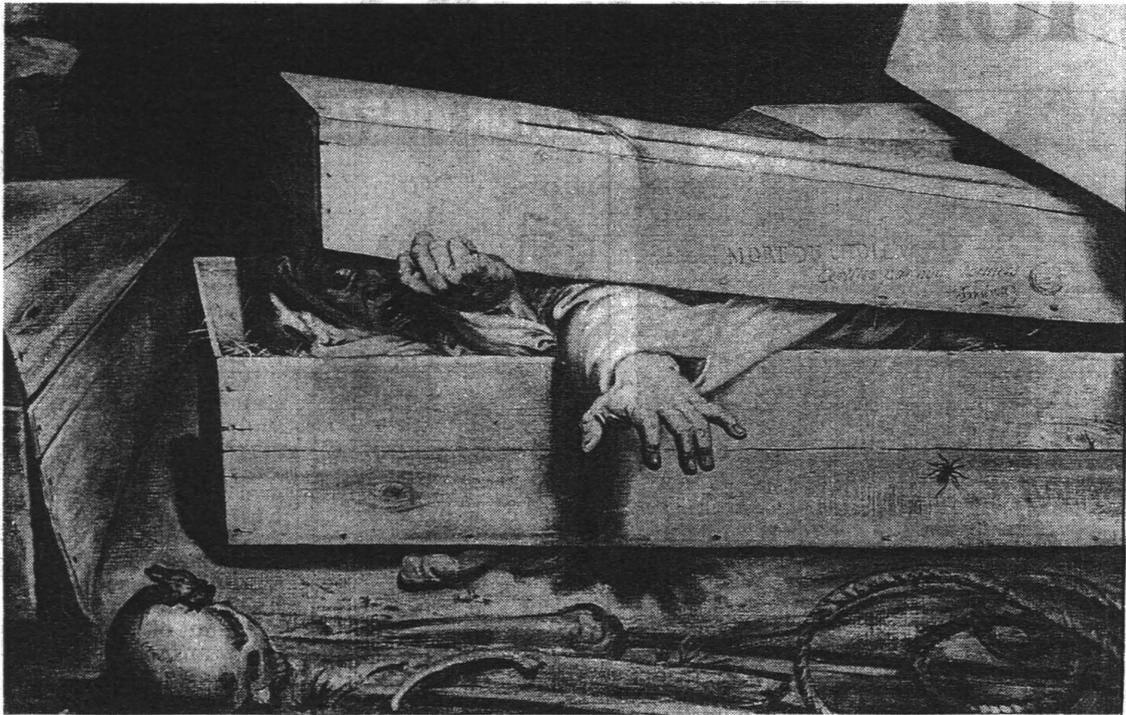
Dr Ffytche also maintains that strokes could possibly trigger similar visions, as could having the eyes covered by patches for long periods.

9th September, 2000 General *'DAILY MAIL.'*

'THERE IS A LIGHT AND IT NEVER GOES OUT..'

The previous snippet and its attendant theories are all well and good, as hypotheses go, but there are many who would seriously question their validity in explaining away every aspect of encounters with 'otherworldly beings', ie; occasions when the ghost or whatever is seen by more than one witness, or when apparitions are accompanied by unaccountable sounds, like footsteps echoing along an empty corridor, or the plaintive cries of invisible children from the playing fields, after dark.

You can also add to this the findings of two doctors who claim that they have uncovered evidence that Near Death Experiences may be caused by the consciousness or the 'soul,' proving that the mind continues to work after the brain has died.



Perhaps not surprisingly, this announcement has been seized upon by clerics and acolytes of various faiths as being vindication of their beliefs, foremost among them, that there is indeed life after death.

The controversial findings (though, in this writer's humble opinion, they are no more speculative than Dr Ffytche's theorising), followed a year-long study of 63 heart attack survivors at Southampton General Hospital by Dr Peter Fenwick and Dr Sam Parnia.

The patients were interviewed within a week of suffering their attack and asked if they remembered anything of their period of unconsciousness.

Although 56 had no memory whatsoever of their time when they were, quite literally, dead to the world, a still highly impressive seven did manage to recall a variety of experiences. Four of these, including, interestingly enough, three non-practising Anglicans and a lapsed Catholic, were formally assessed by the research team as having had Near-Death-Experiences. They recounted feelings including peace and joy, that time itself had somehow speeded up, of having heightened senses and of losing awareness of the body.

They also reported images including a bright light, encountering another dimension, meeting a mystical being and coming to a 'point of no return.'

The study is due to be published in the medical journal '*RESUSCITATION*,' sometime in 2001.

Dr Parnia, a clinical fellow and registrar at the hospital, was quoted as saying: *'These people were having these experiences when we wouldn't anticipate them happening, for example when the brain shouldn't be able to sustain lucid processes or allow them to form memories that would last.'*

'So it might hold an answer to the question of whether mind or consciousness is actually produced by the brain or whether the brain is a kind of intermediary for the mind which exists independently.'

Dr Fenwick, a consultant neuropsychiatrist at the Institute of Psychiatry in London, said: *'If the brain and the mind can be independent, then that raises questions about the continuation of consciousness after death. It also raises the question about a spiritual component to humans and about a meaningful universe with a purpose rather than a random universe.'*

Dr Parnia went on to say that when he began the research he had been, quite frankly, highly sceptical about the reality of the phenomenon, but has become increasingly convinced that there is 'something' going on.

'Essentially, it comes back to the question of whether the mind or consciousness is produced from the brain. If we can prove that the mind is produced by the brain, I don't think that there is anything after we die because essentially we are human beings.'

'If on the contrary, the brain is itself an intermediary which manifests the mind, like a television will act as an intermediary to manifest waves in the air into a picture or sound, we can show the mind is still there even after the brain is dead.'

'And that is what I think these Near-Death Experiences indicate. The theories that Near-Death Experiences are the result of a collapse of brain functions caused by lack of oxygen are unlikely because none of the four had low levels of oxygen.'

We've also discounted the effect of drugs because the resuscitation procedure in the hospital unit was the same in every case.'

The Reverend Jonathan Jennings, speaking on behalf of the Church of England, was quoted as saying: *'This should come as no surprise. Simply*

because we can fix the point of death in bodily terms does not mean that is the end.'

'There is a quote from MACBETH: "When the brains are out the man is dead," but that's never been the Christian view. I hope this study provides food for thought.'

The article also featured a couple of case studies, the details of which are included here for your delectation...

First up, we have the experience of Marian Leak, who was aged just 22 when she underwent an NDE. She'd been forced into an emergency operation following the death of her new-born baby, and as a result was critically ill at St Giles Hospital in Camberwell, South London. She had to have a caesarean and it was during this operation that she described everything turning incredibly quiet.

'I was in terrible pain and then suddenly I wasn't in the bed anymore,' the now 63-year-old grandmother told the team.

'I drifted sideways, then up and all sound disappeared completely. I had no pain and I felt absolutely fine.'

'I was aware I was dying or had already died. I looked up and all the light turned to silver around me.'

'Suddenly, in the silence, I heard a baby's cry. I thought; "It's my baby!" and it would have been very easy to keep going. I was warm. It was a beautiful feeling.'

'I then thought of how upset my parents and my husband would be and I decided to go back.'

'I had to make sheer physical effort to get back and I returned to my body with a thump. Immediately the pain returned.'

Mrs Leak, who hails from Collier Street near Tonbridge, Kent, states that she is convinced that her out-of-the-body experience back in 1959, was not brought on by mundane physical factors.

'I wasn't on drugs or anything. I am sure I was somewhere in between life and death.'

*** The second case concerns another woman, Evelyn Hazell, who suffered a bout of meningitis at some unspecified point in her life.

The art historian from Wimbledon, South London, divulged that when she was at the peak of her illness she experienced a *'very real struggle for my life.'*

'I was at the critical stage of my illness, in fact, the next day, I got better, but at this point, I was getting worse.'

'Through the illness I became aware of being involved in this terrible struggle for my life.'

'It was like being pulled down to infinite depths by something, a three-legged figure like the symbol for the Isle Of Man.(interestingly enough, there are various Demons depicted by the likes of Colin de Plancy, that resemble three-legged beings...)

'What I was aware of was fighting to live. I knew if I let whatever it was pull me down, I'd die. It wasn't a dream because you don't remember dreams this vividly, and this was very vivid.'

'I always thought Near-Death Experiences were supposed to be pleasant but this was horrible and seemed to go on all night.'

'I can't say whether what happened to me was some sort of spiritual encounter but it didn't feel like a

The patients were interviewed within a week of suffering their attack and asked if they remembered anything of their period of unconsciousness.

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Dr Parnia, a clinical fellow and registrar at the hospital, was quoted as saying: *'These people were having these experiences when we wouldn't anticipate them happening, for example when the brain shouldn't be able to sustain lucid processes or allow them to form memories that would last.'*

'So it might hold an answer to the question of whether mind or consciousness is actually produced by the brain or whether the brain is a kind of intermediary for the mind which exists independently.'

Dr Fenwick, a consultant neuropsychiatrist at the Institute of Psychiatry in London, said; *'If the brain and the mind can be independent, then that raises questions about the continuation of consciousness after death. It also raises the question about a spiritual component to humans and about a meaningful universe with a purpose rather than a random universe.'*

Dr Parnia went on to say that when he began the research he had been, quite frankly, highly sceptical about the reality of the phenomenon, but has become increasingly convinced that there is 'something' going on.

'Essentially, it comes back to the question of whether the mind or consciousness is produced from the brain. If we can prove that the mind is produced by the brain, I don't think that there is anything after we die because essentially we are human beings.'

'If on the contrary, the brain is itself an intermediary which manifests the mind, like a television will act as an intermediary to manifest waves in the air into a picture or sound, we can show the mind is still there even after the brain is dead.'

'And that is what I think these Near-Death Experiences indicate. The theories that Near-Death Experiences are the result of a collapse of brain functions caused by lack of oxygen are unlikely because none of the four had low levels of oxygen.'

We've also discounted the effect of drugs because the resuscitation procedure in the hospital unit was the same in every case.'

The Reverend Jonathan Jennings, speaking on behalf of the Church of England, was quoted as saying; *'This should come as no surprise. Simply*

because we can fix the point of death in bodily terms does not mean that is the end.'

'There is a quote from MACBETH: "When the brains are out the man is dead," but that's never been the Christian view. I hope this study provides food for thought.'

The article also featured a couple of case studies, the details of which are included here for your delectation...

First up, we have the experience of Marian Leak, who was aged just 22 when she underwent an NDE. She'd been forced into an emergency operation following the death of her new-born baby, and as a result was critically ill at St Giles Hospital in Camberwell, South London. She had to have a caesarean and it was during this operation that she described everything turning incredibly quiet.

'I was in terrible pain and then suddenly I wasn't in the bed anymore,' the now 63-year-old grandmother told the team.

'I drifted sideways, then up and all sound disappeared completely. I had no pain and I felt absolutely fine.'

'I was aware I was dying or had already died. I looked up and all the light turned to silver around me.'

'Suddenly, in the silence, I heard a baby's cry. I thought; "It's my baby!" and it would have been very easy to keep going. I was warm. It was a beautiful feeling.'

'I then thought of how upset my parents and my husband would be and I decided to go back.'

'I had to make sheer physical effort to get back and I returned to my body with a thump. Immediately the pain returned.'

Mrs Leak, who hails from Collier Street near Tonbridge, Kent, states that she is convinced that her out-of-the-body experience back in 1959, was not brought on by mundane physical factors.

'I wasn't on drugs or anything. I am sure I was somewhere in between life and death.'

*** The second case concerns another woman, Evelyn Hazell, who suffered a bout of meningitis at some unspecified point in her life.

The art historian from Wimbledon, South London, divulged that when she was at the peak of her illness she experienced a 'very real struggle for my life.'

'I was at the critical stage of my illness, in fact, the next day, I got better, but at this point, I was getting worse.'

'Through the illness I became aware of being involved in this terrible struggle for my life.'

'It was like being pulled down to infinite depths by something, a three-legged figure like the symbol for the Isle Of Man.(interestingly enough, there are various Demons depicted by the likes of Colin de Plancy, that resemble three-legged beings...)

'What I was aware of was fighting to live. I knew if I let whatever it was pull me down, I'd die. It wasn't a dream because you don't remember dreams this vividly, and this was very vivid.'

'I always thought Near-Death Experiences were supposed to be pleasant but this was horrible and seemed to go on all night.'

'I can't say whether what happened to me was some sort of spiritual encounter but it didn't feel like a

physical experience. I made a full recovery but I have never forgotten what happened that night. 'I do not believe it was a dream or an hallucination. In every way I was lucid – I was just terribly ill. 'If nothing else, it did prove to me that in certain situations refusing to fight an illness will lead to death.'

23rd October, 2000 General 'DAILY MAIL.'

SMELLS LIKE TEEN SPIRIT

One of the most preposterous reports we've come across in recent times, hummed down the wires from Essex, England, and concerned a 24-year old woman named Gemma Franks, who claims she has been contacted by the spirit of none other than Kurt Cobain, the former lead singer with one of this writer's all-time favourite band's, *NIRVANA*.

Gemma purports to have established a line of communication courtesy of the late Mr Cobain appearing on the Compaq notebook programme on her computer.

Kurt manifested on her screen and demanded she 'give us a kiss, love!.'

The ghostly visage also pleaded with her for help.

Gemma was quoted as saying; *'There was a distorted strange noise. Kurt was in pain screaming: "Help me, Help me." Then he stopped and he just said; "Kiss me," so I put my lips to the screen and kissed him. Kurt said 'Mmm, you're a good kisser.' Then the screen went blank.'*

Kurt, sadly, committed suicide back in 1994 (why is it that so many of my rock idols die so tragically young? Ian Curtis, Malcolm Owen, Sid Vicious, Michael Hutchence, to name but a few? I sometimes think there's never been a greater truism than the well-worn saying that only the good die young – Ed) and Gemma told UK newswire *ANNANOVA* that she'd been looking at a website that publishes obituaries to rock stars who have passed away.

At first, she strongly suspected a virus was at work, and so Gemma had her hard drive checked, but there was no sign of any infection. And anyway, she claimed Kurt only materialised when the machine, a '*PRESARIO*,' was shut off.

Finally, at her wits end, she decided to have the computer exorcised, despite the fact that she professed; *'I'm not a spiritual person, but I simply had to do something.'*

The ceremony appears to have been successful because certainly, Kurt has not graced the machine with his presence since.

This development has been somewhat tempered by the news that Gemma's software has also failed to start up since the Exorcism, although this may be something to do with liberal quantities of Holy Water that had been thrown at it during the ceremony.

'Where do bad folks go when they die?' Kurt Cobain sang in that unique, throaty style of his, during the *MTV UNPLUGGED* version of '*LAKE OF FIRE*,' back in the early 1990's.

If Gemma Franks' 'ghostly' experience has even the slightest basis in what passes for reality, it may

be that we now know. They wind up haunting the computer screens of young Essex girls....

21st August, 2000 Essex, England 'THE REGISTER'

Singer's Most Haunting Numbers

And if you find that somewhat unbelievable, consider if you will the following snippet concerning one member of the highly (ahem) 'talented' boy band; '*BOYZONE*.'

Stephen Gately, as well as publicly stating his sexual preferences, has elected to make it common knowledge that he has the ability to see ghostly apparitions.

Stephen believes he is possessed of a psychic ability and is able to perceive the 'eerie outlines' of incorporeal spirits.

Not only that, but his mother's home is apparently haunted by a less-than-friendly Poltergeist, filling the singer with a dark sense of dread.

'The scariest time was as we were sitting on my mother's bed. My brother asked me to go fetch a lighter and as I went to do so, it simply flew across the bedroom.'

Stephen's family became so exasperated by this and countless other examples of Poltergeist-type phenomena, that they felt they were left with little option but to call in a priest to Exorcise the premises.

Mr Gately, 24, who resides in a 16th century mill, told reporters: *'I think that has a ghost, too.'*

'I stayed at one old hotel and there was a ghost of a girl who tore the sheets off guests in the dead of night.'

This is another very interesting reoccurrence...The annals of paranormal research are filled with similar examples of Invisible Bedroom Invaders who are intent upon preying on people while they lie blissfully asleep, sending them speechless with fear and shivering with the sudden cold as the blankets are wrenched from the bed.

The author knows of someone who has had just such an experience whilst staying in an old 16th century tower in the idyllic village of Brimstage.

We will be featuring his story in the next issue...

17th September, 2000 Ireland 'SUNDAY MANC'

The Figure In Black

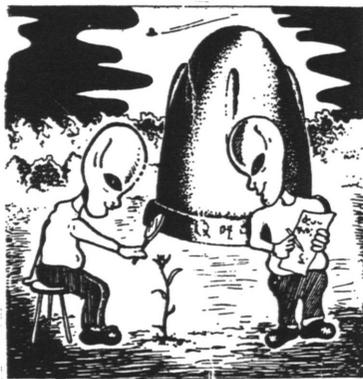
And finally, for this issue at least, in West Virginia, USA, the courtroom of Circuit Judge John Hutchinson, is supposedly haunted by the ghostly figure of a man in black.

Unusually enough, this particular phantom has only ever been seen on the Circuit's TV monitors, and when the courtroom is dark.

Sheriff Lt Bill Garaffa first sighted the ghost and though he was a tad skimpy in the descriptive department, he stated to reporters that he believed the figure to be the spirit of someone who had undergone a bad experience whilst in the courtroom.

23rd October, 2000 West Virginia, USA REUTERS

Lights Above The Edge Of Town UFO's Over Merseyside



Just a few days before going to press, the residents of my home county found themselves in the midst of one of the biggest UFO 'flaps' since the halcyon Summer of 1976.

No one can say with any degree of certainty precisely when the spate of sightings of anomalous lights traversing the Liverpool skyline became a fully-fledged 'flap,' but my attention was first grabbed by a brief snippet of footage featured on a January edition of 'BBC NORTH WEST NEWS'. Unfortunately, I was in the pub at the time, the sound was turned down, and I'm particularly adept at lip-reading, the newscaster, the words of Gordon Burns, for it was he, were lost upon me.

All that I could discern, from the writing on the screen was that the images captured on home video were shot in the darkened night sky over Childwall, Liverpool. The pink-coloured lights, (there appeared to be at least two of them) were hovering high above a line of trees, and seemed to be flashing intermittently.

I'm afraid I can't give you any more detail than that, for the reasons outlined above.

A couple of weeks later, however, 'THE LIVERPOOL ECHO' carried a double page spread featuring a round-up of recent UFO sightings in the Merseyside locale.

As well as referring to 'brilliant white arrowheads' being seen over Wavertree, 'bronze lights with blurred edges' scudding through the night towards Childwall' and 'glowing red discs' moving on formation over the rooftops of Huyton, the article claims that the 'flap' seems to have hit its zenith during the week of 12th-16th February....

One of the most detailed accounts came from an amateur astronomer, Dave Lancaster, who hails from Huyton.

'I was outside my house with my binoculars just after 10pm, when I noticed an unusual red light appearing over the horizon.

'I looked out in the direction of Jupiter, towards the west when I saw the light and thought at first it was a police helicopter. But the light was too red and then I saw another and another, all more or less in a straight line from the horizon upwards.

'They were in a kind of triangular shape and seemed to stay still for about 10 seconds before moving eastwards across the sky, with two of them seeming to be ahead of the other and the lights seeming to keep in this strict formation all the way.

'Because I couldn't get enough detail with my binoculars, I went indoors to get my birdwatching telescope, which has about 20 times the magnification, but all I could see was

that they were solid red discs, though one seemed to have a halo. I know quite a bit about astronomy and I have seen plenty of meteorites and fireballs in my time, but I have never encountered anything like this.

'I kept on looking for about three or four minutes as they suddenly seemed to fade, just leaving the kind of glow you get if you turn off a red bulb or a gas burner.'

At more or less the same time, the magnificently named Corina Rigazio, who lives in Wavertree, decided to let her two pet chihuahuas out into the front garden during the TV adverts, so they could er, relieve themselves.

She told reporters what happened next.

'Immediately I saw these really strange white lights in the sky. They were very bright, but not too dazzling to look at.

'There were four lights and at first I wondered if they were from a helicopter, but you quite often get police helicopters round here and the lights were nothing like I had seen before.

'There was absolutely no noise either and the atmosphere was quite eerie. I bundled the dogs inside but even though I was quite frightened and part of me wanted to go and knock on a neighbour's door, there was something very mesmerising about the lights and I had to go on looking.

'They were moving quite fast across the sky and eventually seemed to settle over Kensington, where they seemed to manoeuvre out of their original arrow-head formation into a straight diagonal line.

'They stayed in the sky for about 10 minutes and then just seemed to fade away.

'I do look at the night sky often but this whole experience was so strange that I didn't sleep at all.'

And finally, at the time we had to wrap up this issue, anyway, a third sighting on the same evening, concerns another female eyewitness from Wavertree, who chose to remain anonymous.

'I saw a series of bizarre lights from my garden at about 6:35pm. I glanced up at the sky, looked to the left and saw four deep bronze coloured lights which looked circular but with blurred edges.

'There were five of us watching including one of my daughters who is a police officer. We often see helicopters and we are also under the flight path to the airport, but this was something completely different.

'They moved in the direction of Childwall and after about 10 minutes they just flickered and disappeared.'

'THE LIVERPOOL ECHO' decided to call on Anthony Eccles, co-founder of MARA (Merseyside Anomalies Research Association - with whom this publication maintains some degree of contact), for his opinion as to what the mysterious lights might be.

'I do not believe that this week's reports qualify as being inexplicable. In the past strange lights in the sky which have been wrongly claimed as alien experiences have actually been caused by meteorites.

'Having looked at the sky this week, though, I am sure that the lights people have been seeing have been caused by a combination of factors, including aircraft, rogue shooting stars and the International Space Station.

'There are also two very predominant stars in the sky at the moment, Arcturus and Sirius. And there has been a bolide or fireball - which has been visible in Merseyside, the Manchester area and Derbyshire.

'It also has to be said that people are often not very good observers - they don't actually study the sky in detail very often or stand outside late at night - so they don't necessarily know what's normal.'

Anthony goes on to state, with a fair degree of scepticism:

'The idea that something can move from one planet to another in a physical spacecraft is now very old-fashioned.

'However, there could well be time and energy implications and what is possible is that what we term UFO activity may well be to do with a complex dimensional factor which is capable of manipulating our world and takes us into the realms of quantum physics.'

The article then goes on to quote Dr Tim O' Brien, from Jodrell Bank, who states that the observatory has had more than its fair share of calls than is usual during the period of the 'Flap' and that astronomy alone cannot explain away the recent spate of sightings.

'We do often experience an increase in strange sightings after a big astronomical event and we did have the Lunar Eclipse in January.'

'There was also meteor activity last week, which means that the Earth passes through debris left by a comet.'

'And there are several bright planets which have been visible this week because of the clear sky, including Jupiter, Venus and Saturn.'

'However, the kind of experiences which people have described to us in the last few days could not be attributable to astronomy alone.'

And so, as the man says at the conclusion of the 1951 science fiction classic *'THE THING FROM ANOTHER WORLD'* **'KEEP WATCHING THE SKIES!!!!'**

16th February, 2001 Various Merseyside locations 'LIVERPOOL ECHO'

*** And during late December, 2000, residents on a 125-mile stretch of Australia's east coast were left in a state of near-Orson Wellsian panic when mysterious bright lights and a series of unexplained explosions lit up the evening sky, whilst a sequence of equally disturbing sonic booms shook their homes.

Police were predictably flooded with phone calls from the Bateman's Bay area, not far from Canberra. The reports sparked fears that chunks of space debris may have fallen to Earth and, perhaps not surprisingly given the circumstances, there were those who believed a full-scale alien invasion was under way.

Major Jamie Robertson, of the North American Aerospace Defence Command, claimed to have all the answers though; *'It was probably a meteor,'* was his brilliant, all-knowing deduction.

So that's alright, then.

28th December, 2000 Bateman's Bay, Australia 'DAILY EXPRESS'

COSMIC JOKES GALORE

Staff at a bank in Naples, Italy, managed to accidentally soak a grand total of £31,000 of lira notes whilst using a fire extinguisher during a fire drill.

In desperation, they attempted to dry them out in a microwave, with the all-too predictable result that they only succeeded in reducing the cash to ashes.

17th September, 2001, Naples, Italy 'NEWS OF THE WORLD'

*** A garage owner who decided to install a closed circuit TV camera with the intention of deterring would-be thieves had the spy camera stolen in Horton Heath, Hampshire.

3rd December, 2001 Horton Heath, Hampshire 'SUNDAY MANC'

*** A magistrate with all the Christmas spirit of Ebenezer Scrooge, decided to send a prisoner to jail for allowing his festive tie to beep out the tune *'SANTA CLAUS IS COMING TO TOWN.'*

Hector Graham could not switch off his tie, despite his best efforts at Luton Magistrates Court.

23rd December, 2000 Luton 'LIVERPOOL DAILY POST'

*** A burglar who attempted to break into the home of Richard Brannon, made just about the biggest mistake since some luckless soul gained illegal entry to Duncan Ferguson's humble abode...Scott Howard, 19, chose to rob the home of the deputy chief of police.

Even worse, Mr Howard then had the temerity to turn up in a pair of the cop's favourite boots.

14th January, 2001 Cooperville, Kansas 'NEWS OF THE WORLD'

*** A bus driver in New Delhi, India, was killed after the passengers whom he had asked to push his stalled vehicle gave it a too-hefty shove, and he was sent plunging hundreds of feet to his death at the bottom of a ravine.

Mohammad Issad met his end as he sat at his wheel trying to jump-start the engine.

4th December, 2000 New Delhi, India 'ASSOCIATED PRESS'

AND WHEN FATE SMILES DOWN

By virtue of one of those miracles that sometimes seem the exclusive province of those interminable made for TV tearjerkers *CHANNEL 5* seem to be forever screening amidst the endless hours of softcore porn, a baby boy was born during a road accident in which his mother's body was cut completely in half.

Paramedics, who found the child lying in snow at the roadside with the umbilical cord still attached to his dead mother, described it as a 'miracle birth.'

The child, who has been christened with the name Patrick, after the teenager who discovered him and stood vigil until the ambulance had arrived, had suffered no injury other than a slight scratch on the knee.

The mother, Olga Maria Nunes Bera-Cruz, 31, was eight months pregnant.

She was travelling with the unborn child's father, 42-year-old Furtado Boaventura, in a tractor in Kentucky, when he lost control on an icy road and hit an embankment.

A police spokesman was quoted as saying; *'Shewas caught under the vehicle and dragged a short distance before she was thrown clear.'*

'Then her head hit a culvert and she struck a sign, which severed her torso.'

Doctors later stated that the reason the baby survived was down to the fact that the umbilical cord was attached, but added that in normal circumstances, the chances of survival would have been incredibly slim.

'For the way he came into the world, he is a miracle baby,' Jeff Landers, an emergency medical technician told reporters. *'This child is going to be special.'*

Mr Boaventura survived the accident with only minor injuries.

Charles Shepherd, who was the first paramedic at the scene, was quoted as saying; *'The baby was blue and motionless when I got there, but was still breathing. He had been lying in the snow for almost an hour.'*

'I praised the Lord and started to work. I cut the cord and gave the baby oxygen during the fifteen-minute drive to the hospital.'

'I prayed more on that run than any I've ever prayed before. He is truly a miracle from God.'

And what is particularly remarkable, is that, not only did this incident occur just a few days before Christmas, but that rescue workers and local people later claimed that they had found an open Bible, lying in the road near the scene of this terrible crash.

23rd December, 2000 Kentucky, USA 'THE DAILY TELEGRAPH'