

Dheghōm

Richard A. Bartle

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NotByUs

First published in Great Britain by NotByUs, 2023

Orchard House, Queens Road,
West Bergholt, Essex. CO6 3HE

<http://www.notbyus.com>

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ISBN 978-1-915964-00-7



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To non-player characters everywhere.

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Acknowledgements

This novel has benefitted greatly from the close, critical attention of the following stout-hearted individuals:

Madeleine Bartle
Hazel Speed
Bridget Agabra
Viktor Toth
Alexandros Katsiamakas
Sjak Centauri
Jenny Bartle
Jacob Cord
Pat Parslow
Stella Belessi
Christian Fonnesbech

Without their comments, you'd be reading typo-ridden chapters with a different (bad) ordering, featuring sentences that made little sense and a plot that made even less. That's if you hadn't taken one look at the cover and immediately recoiled in alarm.

I thank them all.

Richard A. Bartle

Matter 1

Summary

A Beheading in Baltimore

Account by:	William Miller, 26. Insurance salesman.
Source:	Carbon copy of statement to police.
Location:	Baltimore, United States.
Event:	10 May 1962.
Report:	10 May 1962.

Report

So here's what happened.

It was half-past one and I had a meeting with a client at two. I'm an insurance salesman by trade, an unglamorous occupation for unglamorous people with unglamorous lives. Still, it pays the bills and I'm good at it; I was in line for promotion, though maybe not so much now.

Anyway, in the morning, the paperwork for a claim ... oh, it doesn't matter. The point is, I only had twenty-five minutes for lunch, so I figured I'd

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pick up a sandwich at Manny's and eat it on the way back.

I didn't get to Manny's. I'm taking a short-cut down the alley off of Piedmont Street when I see this huge guy ahead of me, wearing a judo uniform but carrying what looks to be one of those big, medieval swords like El Cid has in the movie.

Now down this alley I often see a hobo by the name of Micky or Mikey. I don't bother him. He doesn't bother me. He's there asleep against the wall of the old bookstore when the guy with the sword strides up to him and runs him through. Just like that. He takes his sword and sticks it right in the chest of Micky or Mikey or whatever his name is, doesn't say a word. He looks at the end of his sword instead, as if that's what he's interested in, not the man he's just murdered with less emotion than I'd show for killing a hot dog.

Well having witnessed that, I do what anyone else would do if they still had control over their bowels: I run in the opposite direction screaming "HELP!" at the top of my voice.

Suddenly, though, the guy is in front of me. How did that happen? He swings his El Cid sword at me and whoosh, off flies my head. Jeepers but it hurt!

Next thing I know, I'm waking up at home, head still attached. As you can imagine, I'm in something of a state of confusion.

I go downstairs and there's my wife. She's talking to a friend on the phone, some kind of

gossip about another friend neither of them like. She's shocked to see me.

"Honey", she says. "When did you get home?"

"Just now", I reply. "I was on my way for a sandwich when a guy with a sword as tall as I am decapitated me."

My wife is not persuaded by my explanation. The time, though, is one forty-five. Jimmy Bale on the desk at the office saw me leave ten minutes earlier. I've had my head lopped off and seconds later woken up in my bed fifteen miles away.

I tell Judy – that's my wife – that I need to call the office, 'cause I still have a meeting in fifteen minutes, whether I'm alive or dead. She hangs up and relinquishes the phone.

I get through to Milligan, my boss, and tell him I can't make the meeting.

"Why not?" he asks me. "This is an important client, he runs a rental car service. He could be worth a thousand bucks a month to us."

"Because I'm at home", I reply. "Some guy with a sword chopped off my head and I've just woken up in bed."

"Jesus!" says Milligan, and not in a way that suggests he thinks I am the man, notwithstanding my resurrection. "That's quite the story."

"Isn't it just?", I reply. I am pleased that someone believes it.

I am not to be so pleased for long.

"Bill", says Milligan, which shows he is concerned because I'm normally Miller. "You've been

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under a lot of stress lately. Why don't you take the rest of the day off?"

In the insurance business, you check out people's claims with a cynical eye, because – now this may come as a surprise – they don't always tell the truth. I am attuned to the subtleties of this and realise that my story is substantially lacking in supporting evidence. I therefore do as Milligan says and treat the rest of the day as mine.

Now, I think, I should go back to the alley and see what I can find. I know I'm not dreaming, because my imagination isn't this good, and I know I'm not mad because when I open the garage my car isn't there. Of course it's not there: I parked it at the office five and a half hours earlier.

Judy doesn't want me driving her car if I could teleport to our bed at any moment, so I take a cab. I have it drop me off at the alley where I find a small crowd has gathered.

Seems that Micky or Mikey, or maybe it was just Mike, come to think about it, well he woke up in a pool of blood and when he got to his feet he found another, bigger pool of blood where my head had parted company with my body. A police officer is taking notes, but Micky doesn't seem to remember anything about it.

I approach the officer and say I have some information. He regards me as a somewhat more reliable witness than a rarely-sober hobo, and holds this opinion strongly until I reach the part where I'm murdered. This is when he invites me to the

station to make a statement, I suspect because he thinks I'm crazy and have killed someone else and maybe eaten the body or something.

So, here I am and here's my statement. You won't find a body, because there isn't one, or rather there is, but it's mine, and I'm no longer dead.

I can't say how what I've described happened, only that it happened. Believe me, don't believe me, your choice.

All I ask is that the next time someone reports being murdered and then waking up seconds later in the same place they last woke up, you gosh-darn remember what I've told you.

Notes

William Miller died of emphysema 18 Feb 2000 aged 64. This carbon copy of his police statement was obtained from his widow, Judith Miller. The original is believed to be in FBI files.

Judith Miller verbally confirmed the veracity of the part of the statement in which she features, but contended that her telephone conversation was not gossip but a political discussion.

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Matter 2

Summary

The False Destroyer

Account by:	Naitik Chaturvedi, 49. Physician.
Source:	Unpublished monograph.
Location:	Uttarkashi, India.
Event:	May 1962.
Report:	May 1962.

Report

I am an educated man.

I tell you this not to add credibility to this account, but to add incredibility to it. What I have witnessed I do not believe possible, yet I cannot deny the evidence of my own eyes. I cannot deny the evidence of the eyes of those who also saw what I saw.

I am a doctor of medicine. I practise in Garhwal in the north of India, a region thick with temples and holy places in the western foothills of the Himalayas. Although I am based in Uttarkashi, I visit many local towns and villages where my services are required. I drive when I can, but the

roads are not always good and sometimes I have to travel by cart or animal. The events I am about to describe occurred on one such occasion.

I was on my way to visit the wife of a farmer. She was heavily pregnant in fear of a breech birth. Already the mother of many children, she sensed that this one moved differently. One of the farmer's nephews, named Prem, picked me up in his cart on the way back from the market. Also with him was a labourer, Amit, whom I knew but did not like; he had little use for conversation and when he did speak it was generally to mock or to deny.

The incident unfolded as we followed a narrow track up into the hills. Prem was driving the oxen, I was reading and Amit was glowering at the world about him. Suddenly, he yelped in surprise and pointed towards a temple a little way below us. On the flattened earth before it was a blue man with three eyes and four arms, wielding a trident.

"Lord Shiva!" exclaimed Amit.

Prem pulled the oxen to a halt and turned around. "It cannot be!" he said, in hushed words.

I was as shocked as the uneducated men with me. However, I knew immediately that the entity I was witnessing was not Lord Shiva. I am not a religious man, but I study our traditions: the four-armed being swinging its trident in extravagant circles was a ghastly parody of received belief, as if imagined by a reader of a children's book.

I looked for cameras, because my first thought was that this must be a film shoot. Of course, it

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was not: no director would bring a crew all this way from Bombay to film what could have been filmed better in a studio.

Amit was both awed and afraid. He began to speak prayers beneath his breath, pleading with the Destroyer to spare his miserable life.

Prem was more level-headed and looked to me for guidance.

"Whoever that is, it isn't Lord Shiva", I said, with some apprehension.

"Then who is it?" he asked. "He has four arms and a third eye!"

I began to reply, but at this point a second being appeared. Rather than a god, he looked to be an ordinary man dressed in the garments of the past. He came out of the temple, then began to walk towards the trees as if False-Shiva was not there.

False-Shiva gave a great cry and set about the man with his trident. In three blows, the man was dead.

At this point, something strange happened. The body of the dead man turned into particles of glistening light that rose into the air and dissipated.

Prem and I exchanged glances in astonishment. Amit's fear only grew. "Get moving! He'll come for us next!" he shouted.

False-Shiva must have heard him, for he spared a look in our direction. He was distracted, however, by the reappearance of the dead man, who strode out of the temple looking very angry indeed. He pointed at False-Shiva and said something. None of

us caught his words, but they did not sound friendly.

False-Shiva laughed, and leapt trident-first towards the man. As if expecting this, the man stepped aside and held out his arm, his palm facing False-Shiva. Something came from his hand: it looked like a horizontal pillar of strong, blue light, but it could not have been because it cast a shadow. The light struck False-Shiva and pushed him back a great distance.

False-Shiva tried to laugh this off, but it was clear he was stung by it. He leapt at the man again, but this time was met mid-air by a golden globe of light that encircled him. As he flew towards his target, the globe shrank and crushed him. When he arrived at the man's feet, False-Shiva was dead.

The same rising particles of light that had accompanied the earlier death of the man now floated heavenward, only this time from False-Shiva.

"His soul departs!" gasped Amit.

The man bent down and picked something up, then walked out onto the flattened earth and faced the temple.

A few moments later, False-Shiva came out of the temple, his face wrought with ire.

"He has returned", said Amit, his faith recovered.

The man pointed both arms at False-Shiva and blasted him with what looked like fire but which also cast a shadow.

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False-Shiva disintegrated as before.

Amit was horrified. "Who is he, who could do that to Lord Shiva?" he asked, of himself more than anyone.

"That is not Lord Shiva", said Prem. "That is a demon pretending to be Lord Shiva. It is more likely that the man in the garb of yore is an avatar of Lord Shiva."

I found it quietly reassuring that, for the simple reason he did not believe the being in question to be Lord Shiva, Prem was not perturbed by the sight of a blue man with four arms and three eyes.

False-Shiva reappeared twice more and on each occasion, before he could act, received the same treatment that had earlier been meted out to him.

The man waited. We watched.

After a few minutes, the man was apparently satisfied that False-Shiva would not be returning. He turned to walk to the forest, but spotted us on the track above and halted his steps. He raised a fist before his chest and waved it slightly, then drank from something that had appeared in his grasp. The effects of this beverage seemed to indicate to him that we were of no consequence, and he continued his journey.

We also continued our journey, for we had no wish to be there should a wrathful False-Shiva suddenly emerge from within the temple.

On the way to the farm, we discussed what we had seen. None of us believed it had been an illu-

sion, but if it was real then what did that imply about reality?

Amit considered what we had witnessed to be a vision, and wished to speak to a holy man for an interpretation. Although we did not seek to deny him this right, Prem and I were less willing to expose ourselves to possible accusations of blasphemy. We agreed not to speak of the matter except to each other or to Amit, and that if those Amit told came to question us we would say he was asleep and must have dreamed it.

I am a man of science, however, so am writing this monograph while my memory of the event is still complete. In time, I may ask permission of Prem to send it to other men of science for their opinions.

As a footnote, the baby in the farmer's wife's womb was indeed transverse, but I was able to manipulate it into position. A healthy boy was delivered safely two days later with the aid of the woman's mother. Prem requested that the boy be named with reference to Lord Shiva, but his aunt did not think this auspicious and his suggestion was denied.

Notes

Received by FAX from a bureau in New Delhi. The identity of the sender is not stated, but it is be-

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lieved to be Prem Mahra, who moved to New Delhi in 1964. Efforts to locate or contact him have to date been unsuccessful.

The Amit the document references has been identified as one Amit Chakra. He died of liver failure in 1974.

Dr Chaturvedi died aged 90 in 2003 at his home in Uttarkashi.

Matter 3

Summary

Interesting Gods

Account by:	Peter Richter, 46. Psychiatrist.
Source:	Psychiatric report.
Location:	Hamburg, Germany.
Event:	17 May 1970.
Report:	17 May 1970.

Report

Prof. Dr. med. Peter Richter
Consultant psychiatrist

CONFIDENTIAL PSYCHIATRIC REPORT
On
Karin Fuchs
(date of birth 1937-02-15)

Instruction

This preliminary psychiatric assessment has been prepared at the instruction of Schreiber Vogt

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Rechtsanwälte of Hamburg, who represent Miss Fuchs.

Miss Fuchs is charged with three counts of Criminal Offences Dangerous to the Public, leading to eight counts of Homicide and 39 of Causing Bodily Harm. There are two separate charges of Criminal Offences against Public Order.

The purpose of this report is to assist the Court in understanding Miss Fuchs' mental state. The defence seeks to clarify Miss Fuchs':

- decision-making concerning her alleged activities;
- ability to form the intent necessary to have undertaken these activities;
- current diagnosis and prognosis of medical care;
- likelihood of receiving a fair trial in the light of her condition.

Introduction

I am Prof. Dr. med. Peter Richter, consultant psychiatrist.

I am currently approved as having special experience in the diagnosis of mental disorder. I qualified as a doctor in 1954 and became a consultant in 1963. My specialism is the assessment and treatment of high-risk adult offenders with mental disorders, particularly in the area of fitness to plead.

I confirm that I understand my duty to the Court in writing this report. I believe that the facts contained within it are true.

Confidentiality

Miss Fuchs has been made aware that the usual guarantee of client confidentiality could not be given because this report may subsequently be made available to the Court.

Sources of Information

- Instructions from Schreiber Vogt Rechtsanwälte dated 1970-03-26.
- Three two-hour interviews with Miss Fuchs at the pre-trial detention centre, Lübeck, in the mornings of 1970-05-05, 1970-05-07 and 1970-05-12.
- A 45-minute telephone conversation with Dr Ernst Fuchs, Miss Fuchs' father, in the evening of 1970-05-13.

Note that I am unable to corroborate all the information told me by Miss Fuchs or Dr Fuchs. If it is found to be incomplete or inaccurate, this may affect my assessment and recommendations.

Family Background

Miss Fuchs told me that there is no history of mental illness in her family. Her father confirmed this.

She is an only child. Both her parents were biochemists. Her mother died in 1946 in a labora-

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tory accident; her father, now retired, is still alive but in frail health.

Miss Fuchs is unmarried but has a partner, Dieter Hofmann, with whom she had a son. Her present crisis was precipitated by her son's death, aged four. While playing, he found one of his mother's handguns, loaded it as he had seen her do, then accidentally discharged it while looking down the barrel.

Development

Neither Miss Fuchs nor her father could recollect any instances of poor health during her childhood. She reached most early milestones (such as being able to walk and to talk) well before the majority of children.

She grew up in the town of Bargteheide, Schleswig-Holstein. She told me that she had a happy childhood, with Bargteheide being less affected by the war than were the bigger cities.

The most traumatic event to affect her development was the death of her mother when Miss Fuchs was aged nine. She told me that this was devastating and that it was several years before she fully came to terms with it.

Education

Miss Fuchs attended the local schools of Bargteheide. She told me that she was almost always at the top of her class and had private lessons in music and Latin. She said that she got on

well with her schoolfriends and was able to avoid being drawn into the cliques that formed and reformed among many of her peers.

She spent most school holidays with her maternal grandparents in Bad Oldesloe, some 15km from Bargteheide.

After leaving school, Miss Fuchs attended the Christian-Albrecht University of Kiel, which was in the process of being reconstructed on its present site following the original site's destruction by bombing. She told me that her association with the politics of revolution began during this phase of her life.

Employment

Upon graduating in 1958 with a 1.0 degree in physics, Miss Fuchs was encouraged to undertake a master's degree but declined to do so. She told me that she had had enough of education and wanted to get out into the real world. To this end, she took a job in operations management at the port of Hamburg.

Miss Fuchs told me that although she excelled at this and was promoted several times, she found the work boring and was not happy. She nevertheless remained in place until the day in 1965 when she affixed explosives to one of the port's chemical storage tanks. One person died and seven were injured in the resulting blast.

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Relationships

Miss Fuchs describes herself as heterosexual. She said that she had formed several relationships, two of them serious, before meeting Mr Hofmann in 1964.

She was critical of Mr Hofmann in his attitude to their child. She had wanted the pregnancy, but Mr Hofmann had been ambivalent. Miss Fuchs said that to her increasing frustration he had shown no interest in fatherhood. Other than this, she was supportive of him and spoke of him positively.

Character

Miss Fuchs was reluctant to make statements about her own personality and enduring character. Her rationale for this was that, following the death of her son, she didn't know who she was any more. She evaded even direct questions, such as whether she would describe herself as an introvert or an extrovert. She had no qualms about ascribing such qualities to other people, only to herself.

She did confess to having a very good understanding of her own thinking.

Dependencies

Miss Fuchs told me that she does not smoke and does not drink alcohol. She said that she has never tried recreational drugs. She asserts that she is against them in principle, because they impair thought.

Offences

Miss Fuchs was insistent that she had never committed an offence of any kind prior to causing the explosion at Hamburg docks. She said that she had been a well-behaved child, and while curious about the world around her was not so reckless as to break the law.

Although Miss Fuchs is a prominent member of the left-wing urban guerrilla group known as Red Protest, she professes that she has no interest – and furthermore never has had any interest – in the politics of revolution as such. Her driving motivation was to cause disruption and chaos. She formed Red Protest with Mr Hofmann as a means to an end. She stressed that, unlike herself, Mr Hofmann is totally committed to the group's stated political ideals.

Physical Health

Miss Fuchs is a 33-year-old woman in good physical health.

She told me that she had experienced no problems during either pregnancy or childbirth, even though at the time she had been on the run from the police and therefore unable to receive medical advice.

Mental Health

Miss Fuchs told me that she has never had any form of mental health problem – depression, anxiety, psychosis, personality issues or anything

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else. She said that I was the first psychiatrist ever to assess her. She considers herself to be a mentally stable and resilient individual.

Current Mental State

In my interviews, I observed no indications of mental health problems in Miss Fuchs. Modulo the necessities of her incarceration, her appearance was neither dishevelled nor unduly fastidious. She made full eye contact, breaking it only when in thought. She exhibited no perceptual difficulties.

There were no abnormal changes in her behaviour, such as restlessness or sudden changes in levels of activity. She showed no obsession with details and no vagueness other than when invited to comment on her own personality.

She engages fully with conversation. She does not embellish answers with half-truths. She neither rambles nor gives single-word replies except when appropriate.

She described her mood as fatalistic. She said that she had handed herself in to the police but expected to be shown little mercy by the Court. She explained that she had internalised her situation and was resigned to it. For this reason, she said that she did not feel despondent or dejected; rather, she felt as if a great weight had been lifted from her.

In undirected conversation, she spoke mainly of her parents, of whom she was proud, and of her (deceased) grandparents on her mother's side,

whom she missed dearly. She did not attempt to paint her family history as being either distinguished or humble.

The Question of Decision-Making

Miss Fuchs freely accepts that she committed the offences of which she is accused.

Nothing suggests that Miss Fuchs did not know what she was doing when she committed these violent acts. However, her stated reason for why she committed them is strongly indicative of a delusory state of mind.

Delusion can take many forms – of persecution, of grandeur, of love, of jealousy, of ill health – but Miss Fuchs' delusion is in the rare category of the bizarre delusion.

I shall now summarise what she holds to be true.

Miss Fuchs maintains that the world was created by gods who have lost interest in it. Her evidence for this is that for more than four thousand years no gods have walked among us. She does not know who these gods are or were, nor does she care; she does not worship them. The important point, upon which her philosophy is centred, is that these same gods, who created the world, will uncreate it unless it becomes interesting to them.

Miss Fuchs continues to maintain that this characterisation of reality is accurate, but now questions how she acted upon it.

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She told me that through her terrorist activities, she strove to add chaos and drama to the world, that the gods might notice. This, she believed, would give them reason to allow the world to continue to exist.

Miss Fuchs asserts that she surrendered to the police because she now believes this strategy to have been counter-productive. Her crisis of faith was, she told me, precipitated by the death of her son: having twice experienced first-hand the suffering that death brings to the living, she repudiated the idea that the gods would find it stimulating.

She claims that she had been concerned for some time that her cause was misguided. If the events of the war had not led to the reappearance of the gods, she had wondered what manner of disruption would. She had concluded that the world would have to be engulfed by a nuclear apocalypse to make the gods take notice. Destroying the world in order to save it did not, however, seem to her to be a desirable solution. Would not a devastated world give the gods greater, not lesser, cause to end it?

Miss Fuchs insisted that despite these doubts, she kept following her path because she wanted a future for her son. His death brought about much soul-searching. She felt that she had lived her whole adult life in vain, following a cause that she still believed but now no longer believed in. Her existence had lost its meaning. She no longer cared

whether the world was to be ended by the gods or by mankind.

When asked how these beliefs had originated, she advanced that she had been taught them as a child by her parents and grandparents. Although legions of others also knew the truth, she was not to speak of the matter in public because then self-interested forces would try to prevent her from saving the world.

Had the nature of Miss Fuchs' crisis been provoked by, say, disillusionment with the politics of revolution, then I could state with confidence that she was dealing with the effects of a breakdown in her world view caused by unsustainable cognitive dissonance. This is not the case, though. Put succinctly, Miss Fuchs has become disillusioned with what is itself a delusion.

It is therefore my opinion that Miss Fuchs was indeed competent to make decisions regarding her criminal activities, but that the foundational basis for making these decisions was a falsehood that she believed to be the truth.

The Question of Ability to Form Intent

Other than those mental conditions (such as alcohol abuse) that I have already dismissed, two dominate the proposition that an adult defendant is unable to form criminal intent. These conditions are manic depression and schizophrenia.

Miss Fuchs shows no signs of either depression or mania. Furthermore, the events in which she

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participated are not spaced in such a way as to indicate cyclical problems.

Bizarre delusions, while rare, are nevertheless a recognised symptom of schizophrenia. Other symptoms should also be present, however, and in Miss Fuchs' case they are not. She does not experience hallucinations, disorganised thinking, apathy, social withdrawal or any of the lesser indicators that such a diagnosis would require.

It is therefore not my opinion that Miss Fuchs would have been unable to form the necessary intent to commit the acts of which she is accused.

The Question of Diagnosis and Prognosis

It is my opinion that Miss Fuchs is suffering from long-term psychosis.

I contacted Miss Fuchs' father, Dr Ernst Fuchs, by telephone so as to learn what he knew of his daughter's claims. In his response, he stated that as a child, his daughter had created many make-believe worlds, as imaginative children often do. He did remember one of them that involved gods who wanted to end the world, which at the time he had hypothesised she had constructed to help her to make sense of the war; it was, however, but one story among many, all of which she had abandoned before her teens.

Drawing on Dr Fuchs' recollections, my analysis is as follows.

As a child, Miss Fuchs invented many imaginary worlds. Although she did outgrow most of

them, the death of her mother was devastating to the nine-year-old Miss Fuchs. She held onto one idea, about a universe that could be ended at any moment by capricious gods, and incorporated it into her world view. This enabled her to project an aura of normality while giving her a secret internal demon upon which to vent her frustrations.

As an adult, while knowing that her by-now extensive fiction remained just that, a fiction, it had nevertheless come to form a sufficiently potent part of her sense of identity that she sought to live it out. That the consequences of pandering to these imaginings led directly to the death of her son, she found unbearable. To escape this truth, she did as she had done before: she retreated into herself. Only by accepting her fictional world as real was she able to absolve herself of responsibility for her son's death. She could frame it as a tragic accident arising from the pursuit of a noble ideal, rather than as an all-too-real consequence of acting out a self-indulgent fantasy.

It is my opinion, therefore, that Miss Fuchs' subconscious mind has acted to save her conscious mind. She has a rational, integrated and stable identity as a result, but is now possessed of a genuine belief that her tale is true. Were she ever to be disabused of this, there would be grave consequences for her sanity.

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The Question of a Fair Trial

My answer to this question is framed by my answers to the other questions in this report, most cogently the question of diagnosis and prognosis.

It is not my opinion that Miss Fuchs would be either unable to plead, unable to understand evidence or unable to give instructions to her legal counsel. However, it is my opinion that to do so would have dangerous long-term repercussions for her mental well-being, and that for this reason she should not stand trial.

Furthermore, while Miss Fuchs gives every appearance of being of sound mind, it is my opinion that were she to be cross-examined then her every response would be delivered through the lens of her imagined reality. This being so, it would not take the Court long to conclude, as I do, that she is more suited to spend her days in a psychiatric hospital than in a prison.

P. Richter

Prof. Dr. med. Peter Richter

Consultant psychiatrist

Notes

Translated from the German by Dr Krista Weiß,
Aug 1970. The original document was destroyed in

Matter 3

IGD

a fire that consumed the offices of Schreiber Vogt Rechtsanwälte the night of 21 Sep 1970.

Peter Richter was killed by a hit-and-run driver 2 Sep 1970.

Karin Fuchs died 28 Aug 1970 in a shoot-out with police during a failed rescue attempt by her partner, Dieter Hofmann. Hofmann himself died of his wounds two days later.

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Matter 4

Summary

Four Encounters with Ansnā

Account by:	Clive Phillips, 68. Retired professor.
Source:	Blog post.
Location:	Oxford, England.
Event:	Apr/May 1962, 1 Jul 1976, 21 Nov 1990, 11 Nov 2005.
Report:	7 Mar 2007.

Report

As many of you will know, I took early retirement last year. Released from the obligations that accompanied my standing as Professor of Philology, I am now in a position to write freely about my work. It is in this personal capacity that I shall be presenting over the coming weeks a succession of posts concerning the Proto Indo-European (PIE) language. The reconstruction of PIE as it currently stands is almost wholly correct in terms of gram-

mar and is largely correct in terms of pronunciation; that said, there are some extremely jarring faults that – despite my repeated attempts to argue against them over the years – remain accepted by the majority of researchers in the field. It is these misconceptions that I shall be addressing in this series of blog entries.

Although what I wish to outline is not based on citable sources (quite the contrary!) and is therefore unpublishable even as a conference paper, one might nevertheless ask why I waited over a year following my transformation from Professor to Emeritus Professor before presenting my findings. The answer is that my decision to do so has only come as a result of much soul-searching, for reasons which will shortly become apparent. I am fully aware of how, to put it charitably, ‘unlikely’ what follows will seem. Nonetheless, it is the truth – as future researchers will learn when they derive the same conclusions by more traditional methods.

In brief, I know what PIE sounds like because I have heard it from the mouth of a native speaker, or close enough.

In this first post, I shall relate the gist of my encounters with this native speaker, whose name is Ansnā (the terminal *a* is long). In subsequent posts, I shall explain the nature of those errors in the current reconstruction of PIE that I hope to correct – such as its dismissive treatment of the phoneme *a* – drawing upon my conversations with

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Ansñā both to illustrate and to justify my arguments. The most egregious fallacies will be dealt with first, followed by lesser ones until either I begin to sound petty or my blog sheds the entirety of its readership.

As promised, though, I shall commence by sketching out the strange circumstances surrounding each of the four occasions when I and Ansñā conversed.

When I say 'strange', by the way, I mean strange.

April/May 1962

I'm not certain of the exact date in 1962 when I first met Ansñā, but Easter was late that year and I encountered her one or two weeks after that, so it was probably late April or early May. I was in the first year of my DPhil in PIE morphology, still reading around the subject but coming to focus on declension (which eventually became the topic of my thesis and made my name as a researcher).

Language has always fascinated me. I am something of a polyglot, and at the time was fluent in English, German, Dutch, French, Spanish and Italian, with a conversational-level understanding of Portuguese, old English, classical Latin and classical Greek (I had yet to delve into the Scandinavian languages). My passion was PIE, however, which in my early teens I had worked out for myself must exist.

Over the next few years, I learned all I could about PIE and began to get enough of a feel for the tongue that by the time I graduated I could both think and communicate in it with relative ease, albeit using only the documented vocabulary. It was this ability that led Ansnā to me.

I'd like to say that the evening she knocked upon my door was that of a Thursday, but sad to say it could well have been a Friday. Unlike my friends, who viewed Friday evenings as an opportunity to socialise in town and Saturday mornings as a period for regretting the consequences of this, I was often rather too consumed by my work to go out and join them.

I recollect being irritated by the knock's interruption, so opened the door in something of a poor mood. The sight that greeted me was extraordinary.

Ansnā, you have to understand, was beautiful. Not in the same way that a sunset is beautiful, or a mathematical formula is beautiful, or that the older girl you had a crush on who worked in the local cinema was beautiful: Ansnā was the very definition of beauty. It was as if God had used her as His model for the concept. Her dark, wavy hair was tied in braids so intricate that they looked to be stitched together and her eyes were such a dark brown as to be almost black. Her skin was soft and without blemish, yet strongly tanned as if she spent all her days idling in the sun.

I stood there in astonished awe.

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"Alā", she said. "Ansnā kluwējō."

What? She spoke PIE? How perfect could she be?!

"Alā", I replied. "Meghei Clive nōmṇ. En sode."

I gestured for her to come in, for which, I believed, she rewarded me with a smile; only after several minutes did I realise that it was a reaction to my poor pronunciation of *sode* (meaning 'come').

"You speak Proto Indo-European very well", I said, by way of attempting to compliment her while avoiding any shallow reference to her stupendous looks.

She stared back, blankly. "Wéqesa ta nē pretō."

She didn't understand these words?

Thus began a vibrant, thrilling and extensive conversation that went on long into the night, the linguistically-important details of which I shall relate in later posts. For now, though, I shall simply state that my knowledge of PIE was enhanced immeasurably in these too-few hours, and I learned many words and turns of phrase that appeared in no PIE dictionary until I later 'derived' them from formal sources.

As I have so far described this first meeting with Ansnā, well it does seem odd but perhaps not entirely implausible. It isn't every day that a charming and immensely beautiful young woman knocks on one's door and speaks fluently in a dead language while professing to understand no live one, but it could conceivably happen.

There are three additional points I would like to make before I move on, however, which are less easy to explain away.

Firstly, there was the manner in which Ansnā dressed. She was not wearing the clothes of a young woman, but that of an older woman – and not just any older woman, but a very particular older woman: Mrs Stevenson, a friend of the Dean's wife, whom I had earlier observed from my windows crossing the quad in defiant disregard of regulations. Mrs Stevenson had something of a conservative view of fashion, still dressing as she did in the inter-war years. Ansnā was wearing an exact copy of her outfit – and I mean *exact*, even down to the hummingbird brooch she displayed on the left lapel of her jacket. I fleetingly considered that Ansnā might actually have robbed the older woman of her clothing, but Mrs Stevenson was a stout individual several sizes larger than Ansnā, so that couldn't have been the case: every component of Ansnā's attire was a perfect fit.

Secondly, there was the nature of Ansnā's departure. I was attempting to present an unbiased history of England and had just reached the Tudors when suddenly Ansnā seemed not so much to freeze as to zone out, to use a modern expression. She had been gently correcting my use of PIE all evening, so I had viewed my exposition as more dialogue than monologue, but at this point everything changed. I sensed that something was wrong

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and stopped talking, but she simply gazed her gorgeous eyes unfocused in my general direction.

After perhaps thirty seconds or so, she snapped out of it and told me that she had to go. I asked whether we could meet again – truth be told, I was falling in love with her – and she said yes, but it might be a while. With that, she walked to the door, opened it, went through, then closed it behind her.

Naturally, I was a little taken aback by this abrupt end to our evening. Having followed her to the door in the full expectation of opening it for her, after she had gone through I opened it anyway to wave her goodbye. She was nowhere to be seen. Two seconds earlier she had passed through that same opening yet now she was absent. I would have doubted my sanity, had it not been for the third point that I wish to raise before I continue.

This third point was what Ansnā revealed about herself over the course of that evening.

At first, she would talk about nothing other than me, and how glad she was to have found someone who could understand her words. I soon ascertained that PIE was the only language she spoke fluently, although she could make some slight sense of certain older languages such as classical Greek. She initially rebuffed questions about herself, saying that she had come to learn from me – even though from my perspective, it was I who was learning from her.

As the evening wore on, however, she opened up. I'd offered her a glass of wine, which she had

declined, but she seemed to grow more at ease of her own accord anyway as she developed a greater understanding of our world. I use those words 'our world', quite deliberately: Ansnā, you see, claimed to hail from another world entirely. She called this place Bhéwonom – 'reality' in English. The links between Bhéwonom and our world used to be strong, but had recently weakened. She'd arrived in our world to assess how much had changed in the interim. Her assessment was: almost everything.

I asked her to tell me more of Bhéwonom, but she refused on the grounds that she couldn't foresee what would happen if she did. I asked her if there were other visitors from Bhéwonom, or if she was alone. She replied that at the moment there was only her but others would come very soon. These would not be like her. Her name, Ansnā, was her own name; the others would use invented names. I asked if her appearance was her own, too. She smiled demurely and changed the subject.

1st July, 1976

The summer of 1976 is burned affectionately into the memory of all residents of the British Isles who lived through it, for it was long, hot and glorious.

I was 38 years old, married, with two young children. While not quite yet a professor, I held a tenured post at Oxford teaching Classics to scions of the wealthy while writing well-received research papers on PIE. The well of information on this topic

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that had been filled by Ansnā was now almost dry, but my zeal to learn more of the language of our late-Neolithic ancestors remained unassuaged.

Metaphorically, I had put my memory of Ansnā's visit into a private mental compartment, which I frequented myself (with decreasing regularity over time, admittedly) but never mentioned the existence of to anyone else. It was my secret – or mine and Ansnā's, if she wasn't the psychotic symptom of over-work that I now suspected she must be, created by my subconscious mind to give voice to my emerging theories.

My cosy rationalisation of the events of that night fourteen years earlier were shattered on the morning of the first day of July, which definitely was a Thursday. I arrived at my office at around half-past nine, with the temperature already rising. My intention upon entering was to go immediately to the windows and fling them wide open, but I stopped in my tracks the moment I beheld the room.

There, seated in the armchair by the second bookcase, was Ansnā.

"Ansnā!" It was all I could say.

She looked no older than she had done in 1962, but this time she was dressed more appropriately for her apparent age – although not for the context of Oxford University. She had adopted a rather more informal look, as might befit a young woman taking a day off in the expectation of enjoying a great deal of sunshine. It was rather less decorous

than many of my peers would have found acceptable; should one of them have seen her entering my office, there would have been some explaining to do – but I rather suspected that none had. She retained one item of the outfit she had worn on the occasion of our first encounter: the hummingbird brooch, which she now wore at the top of her left sleeve where a sergeant's stripe would go.

"Clive", she replied, at least approximately (the vowel *i* does not feature in PIE).

I'll relate in English translation the fragments of our exchange that now follow; were I to render them faithfully in PIE, I would need to use several terms that appear in no extant PIE dictionary, nor indeed could do so. You'll see what I mean shortly.

"You haven't aged", I said.

"I *have* aged, but only by a day", she replied, smiling. She rubbed her cheek with the back of her hand.

"Time runs differently in Bhéwonom?"

"In a way", she answered. "When there is at least one visitor from Bhéwonom in Dheghōm, your time is our time. When there are no visitors, your time is faster than our time."

I knew *d^héǵ^hōm* to be the PIE word for 'earth' – it's one of the most securely-reconstructed elements of the language. I also knew *D^héǵ^hōm* to be the name of the Earth goddess of PIE mythology. Ansnā did not stress either the *e* or the *g*, however, and both the *d* and the *g* were far breathier than on the other occasions when she'd used those conso-

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nants. The vowel sounds were as usual – *e* was still pronounced like a capital 'A' in English and *ō* was like 'aww' – but it sounded to me as if she was using a dialect of PIE, rather than PIE itself. *Dheghōm* is the best way I can express in the International Phonetic Alphabet the word as she spoke it.

I digress.

"How did you get into my office?" I asked. "Did one of the cleaners let you in?"

She thought for a moment. "I started here", she replied.

I could have pressed her on this, but had an idea that supernatural physics was perhaps involved, and after a decade and a half of persuading myself that I wasn't deranged I had no desire to reconsider the possibility that I might be.

"What brings you back to Dheghōm?" It couldn't be that she was missing me.

She seemed distracted. "What is that object you wear over your eyes?"

"These? These are glasses." I removed them and showed them to her. "They help correct my vision."

"There is a fault, I understand." She nodded.

"You wish to see clearly?"

"Yes, that's why I –"

I stopped. Although she still held my spectacles in her hands, everything was completely in focus.

"Is that better?"

"Er, yes", I replied, both grateful but somewhat fazed by what had just happened. "How, er, how did you –?"

She handed me my glasses back. "These are ingenious devices", she said. "Are they your own invention?"

"No, we've had them for hundreds of years." I put them on, but they now made everything look blurry so I took them off again.

She frowned in thought. It didn't affect her beauty one iota.

"I need to know how much has changed since we last spoke", she announced.

"I shall answer all your questions with the greatest of pleasure", I told her, sitting at my desk as I did so. "May I take notes?"

"Yes, but not a recording", she answered.

It should come as no surprise that the concept of recording sound did not feature strongly in the lives of our late-Neolithic ancestors. I had to ask her what the word she had used meant.

In the course of our conversation, I also learned the PIE words for electricity, colour television, hovercraft, space rocket and computer.

We talked until around 1 p.m., during which time I gained further knowledge of PIE and Ansnā gained further knowledge of contemporary British life.

As before, she was delightful. She was engaging, patient, inquisitive and understanding, although not, sad to say, imaginative. Now you might expect that with access to the kind of technology that seemed to be available to her she would be some kind of supra-genius, but this was not the case: she

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was intelligent but in a methodical rather than a quick-witted way, putting her roughly on a par with my weakest students – unless she was so intelligent as to be able to conceal the fact. She laughed at my awkward jokes and descriptions of life's absurdities. She frequently admitted to being surprised by what I was telling her, but doubted me not once. She kept on-topic, though, never straying from her purpose by offering anecdotes of her own or glimpses into her personal life.

I was getting hungry by now, so suggested we went somewhere to eat.

"I do not need to eat in Dheghōm", she confessed, "but I shall come with you to the eating place."

"You're not really dressed for where I had in mind", I said, worried that my colleagues might see me with her and draw the wrong conclusion. To be fair, any conclusion would have been a wrong one, but not all would impact my social standing in quite the same way.

"How about now?"

She was wearing the Mrs Stevenson outfit from 1962.

I tried to keep calm. A woman had changed her clothes in front of me while I blinked. It takes my wife at least half an hour.

"That's – that's a bit old-fashioned", I managed to say. "You – "

"Now?"

She was dressed as me, except the humming-bird brooch was back on her upper sleeve.

"No, no", I said hastily. I picked up the full-length colour photograph of my wife that I kept on my desk. "Like her."

Ansnā looked at the image, pursed her lips, rocked her head from side to side as if thinking about it, then a moment later was dressed exactly the same.

"The brooch is acceptable?" she asked, turning her arm to glance at it. "I like the brooch."

"It's a bit of an odd place to wear it, but yes", I said, trying to put her impossible transformation out of my mind. "Come on, I'll take you to the Eagle and Child, it's not far."

I was half-hoping that Ansnā might regard a lunch break as time off work, whatever work for her may have been (I was about to find out); I was pleasantly satisfied to learn that this was indeed so.

We chatted as we walked. I'll warn you now that what I'm about to relate makes barely any sense to me and will probably make even less to you.

"Do people in Bhéwonom need to eat?" I asked.

"Of course", she replied. "More often than you."

"So does that mean you *are* hungry, but you'll have to return to Bhéwonom to eat?"

"I've already eaten", she informed me. "I had something while we were talking."

"Really? I didn't notice. Can you eat as fast as you can change clothes?"

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She laughed. "No, our times are locked together while I'm here, remember? I ate in Bhéwonom."

"When did – ?" I suddenly realised the implication. "Wait, are you saying that you're in both Bhéwonom and Dheghōm at the same time? You don't come to Dheghōm, you", I struggled for a word, "connect with it?"

"Yes", she replied.

"Why do you come here?"

"It's my job."

The kind of jobs that we have PIE words for tend to be rather basic – shepherd, potter, herdsman, that kind of thing. I was intrigued to find out what it was she did.

Her explanation was vague, but to summarise she was like some kind of cross between a tour guide and a police officer, and she was quite junior.

I wanted to ask her how old she was, and (again) whether in Bhéwonom she looked like she did in Dheghōm, but I was concerned that if I pried too much then she might cut our conversation short.

"If your job is to manage the visitors to Dheghōm from Bhéwonom", I asked, "does that mean there are many visitors here at the moment?"

She stared into the distance for a few seconds, as if trying to recall the information. "There are seventeen."

"Is seventeen a lot?" I didn't know.

"No. We need at least two thousand."

The thought of two thousand people with Ansnā's abilities roaming the planet was disturb-

ing. "Can they all do the same things that you can do? Change their clothes instantaneously and appear from nowhere, that kind of thing?"

"They can do some things, but not others."

"What if we don't get two thousand visitors?"

She looked at me, as if deciding whether to tell me or not. "You needn't worry", she replied.

I took this to mean that she knew but either she didn't want to tell me or she wasn't allowed to tell me.

"Can I visit Bhéwonom?" I asked.

She smiled. "Here is better."

"But could I go there all the same? To hear everyone speaking this language – it would be my life's dream!"

She shook her head, still smiling. "This language is not spoken in Bhéwonom."

At the pub, we continued our conversation in PIE, which one might suppose would seem odd but no, this was Oxford.

I'd usually think about having a beer on such a hot day, and believe me, what Ansnā had casually revealed provoked in me a strong desire to have several; I refrained, however, as I wanted to keep a clear head.

After lunch, we went for a walk. I had been thinking about taking Ansnā to the meadows but she preferred the streets; she said it was so she could observe more life and ask me about what she saw. She was like a small child, brimming with

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unending questions, except that hers had rather more depth to them.

"What fuel do those vehicles use?" she asked, after I'd explained what automobiles were and how long we'd had them.

"Petroleum gasoline", I replied, then had to tell her how it was the result of a refining process. She figured out what I meant and disclosed the PIE for (I believe) hydrocarbon, expressing some concern that its use had not been predicted but confessing that she didn't know enough about how Dheghōm worked to be able to tell if it was a bad or good invention.

All of a sudden, she said "I must go now. I will be back tomorrow."

She stopped walking, opened the door of the building we happened to be passing – Pusey House – and went in.

"Wait!" I called, but no sooner had I followed her inside than she was gone.

I quickly exited back to St Giles' and returned, mind whirling, to my office.

Later that afternoon, one of my colleagues, Bill James, popped by and mentioned that he'd seen me at lunch with "a handsome young woman", asking if she was one of my students. I told him she was a prospective postgraduate from Italy, but that she was probably going to study in the USA instead. He expressed some disappointment at this news.

Sadly, Bill is no longer with us so is not in a position to verify that part of my story. However,

the mere fact that he'd seen Ansnā was, at the time, something of a relief to me: it meant that she was real, not some constructed figment of an ill or injured mind.

21st November, 1990

If you think what I've told you so far is weird, well, it's about to get weirder.

Ansnā had said she would return 'tomorrow', but given that few people from Bhéwonom were visiting our world there were sure to be periods when none of them were present; tomorrow for her remained, therefore, several years for me.

It was a month before Christmas, 1990, when Ansnā next reappeared in my office. The following day, the media would be full of the news that Margaret Thatcher had resigned as Prime Minister, but none of that would have made the headlines had reporters been privy to what was about to unfold before me.

Ansnā was not alone. With her was another individual, a man, stereotypically dark and broody as if intending to project an aura of mystery to someone with sensibilities differently-attuned to mine. I took an immediately dislike to him.

Three things are worth noting from the outset.

Firstly, Ansnā and the man (whom she was to introduce as Weghtrowénts) materialised out of nothing instantaneously, but not quite together; Ansnā arrived a split-second earlier. No pretence was made that they had arrived at my office natur-

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ally. There was no accompanying sound: they merely came into being.

Secondly, both Ansnā and Weghtrowénts were too tall. I'd estimate that Ansnā was perhaps 120% or 125% her previous height. She wasn't elongated, just scaled-up. If my office had been in a more modern building, her companion's head might have shared volume with the ceiling.

Thirdly, the pair were dressed identically in what I took to be a uniform. It's hard to describe because I couldn't properly distinguish between the components. I believe it was in two parts, corresponding to a jacket and trousers, but I was unable to tell because it appeared to be made out of bearskin, like a busby of the Coldstream Guards. The shoes were similarly constructed. I had previously speculated in idleness that Ansnā didn't feel temperature; this outfit confirmed it. Even in the middle of November, I'd have been roasting if I'd worn something similar myself.

Ansnā sported her hummingbird brooch discreetly on her left cuff, but this was the only departure from her companion's uniform that I noticed.

As before, I won't spend time in this already too-long blog post diving into the nuances of PIE that emerged during the conversation that ensued. I will, however, confirm that the name Weghtrowénts translates into English as something like 'endowed with plot' or 'plentiful in script'. It wasn't

his personal name, but more of a job title – his status was much, much higher than that of Ansnā.

Weghtrowénts spoke first. "You are the human who understands us", he set forth, in PIE.

"Yes", I replied. I didn't wish to trouble him with the fact I'd had to guess that *dheghōmon* meant 'human'.

"This is Weghtrowénts", said Ansnā. "He is here to make a very important decision. I have told him about you and your world. Please answer his questions. It is", she repeated herself, "very important."

She rubbed the backs of her hands against each other, nervously.

"I shall of course answer to the best of my abilities any questions you might ask", I said, reassuringly, but in a way that showed off my understanding of PIE tenses.

"It speaks Third Language well", said Weghtrowénts.

"It?" I interjected.

Ansnā cast me a pleading look, as if to tell me I shouldn't argue.

"Why do so few humans speak Third Language?" asked Weghtrowénts.

"It's reconstructed", I replied. "Thousands of years ago, it was spoken by a single group of nomads who spread across the land. As they separated from one another, each sub-group's use of the language gradually changed until it became a new language. Today, many such languages are spoken, but by comparing them we can work out

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the rules of change and calculate what the original language of our ancestors must have sounded like."

Weghtrowénts was frowning. "How many thousands of years ago?"

"From around six and a half thousand to four and a half thousand."

Weghtrowénts turned to Ansnā. "Is this true? So much in two weeks?"

I, too, was taken aback. Ansnā had visited our world in 1962 and 1976, fourteen years apart, so at most one Bhéwonom day was roughly fourteen Earth years. Two weeks – Bhéwonom uses the same time periods as us – would be maybe 200 years ago, not 4,500.

"What has changed since Ansnā came yesterday?" asked Weghtrowénts.

From my conversations with Ansnā, I took this to be a question about technological advancement.

"Computers are far more commonplace", I said, gesturing to the PC on the desk before me.

"They're also connected together, so we can use them to send messages and data."

Weghtrowénts looked towards Ansnā. "Two weeks ago, they barely had writing."

"I believe that the more the humans advance, the slower their time becomes", said Ansnā, very deferentially.

Weghtrowénts was deep in thought.

He said something to me in a language I didn't understand.

"I don't understand", I said.

He said something else in a different language.

"Is that Proto Sino-Tibetan?" I asked. It didn't have tones, but the syllables seemed vaguely familiar.

After a permission-seeking glance at Weghtrowénts, Ansnā explained. "First Language split into ten thousand pieces. Second Language and Third Language were created to replace it."

"Has First Language been reconstructed? Has Second Language?" asked Weghtrowénts.

"Not First Language, but attempts are being made", I replied. "More of Second Language has, but nowhere near as much as for Third Language."

Weghtrowénts and Ansnā both looked as if they were waiting for something.

They stayed like this for half a minute or more, and I began to wonder if I'd said or done something offensive.

Then, it hit me. "Are you communicating in Bhéwonom?"

Three or four more seconds passed, then Ansnā answered. "Yes, I apologise, it's easier in our own language."

"The language you use to speak to me isn't your own language?" I knew it wasn't, as she'd mentioned this before.

"No. I speak in my own language to you, but it is translated so you hear it in Third Language. When you speak to me in Third Language, it is translated into my language."

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"Your lips move as if you're speaking the language I hear."

She seemed distracted. "That is part of it."

"You correct me when I make errors."

"They are detected."

Weghtrowénts' attention returned to Earth.

"Why can you speak Third Language when so few other humans can?"

"I'm a scholar", I replied. "I study what you call Third Language."

He nodded. "Do you have a list of words in Third Language and their associated meaning in a commonly-spoken language?"

"Yes, I have a translation dictionary for English and Third Language – in fact, I have several."

"Where are they?"

"Here in the bookcase", I said, rising to my feet.

"Will you be able to read them?"

"Is there a way to hear what the symbols sound like?"

"Hmm, well it uses a phonetic alphabet so – ah, of course, yes, I have a set of recordings for my students." I opened a drawer and removed some cassette tapes.

"Is there a device to convert these recordings to sound?"

"Yes, here." I handed him a player.

"Is it enough?" asked Ansnā, anxiously.

"I doubt it", replied Weghtrowénts.

"Are you hoping to learn English?" I enquired.

"If we can't, I will have – "

"Yes", interrupted Ansnā, hastily. "We are."

Weghtrowénts glared at her.

"Then you'll need a regular dictionary, too", I offered. "Many of the words we use, we do not know in Third Language."

Weghtrowénts turned to me in mild surprise.

"That is a good suggestion."

I went over to the bookcase and selected some volumes.

He paused a moment. "These will help. You may put them back."

"Would a pictorial dictionary be useful? Or a book of words with similar meanings?"

"Only books with words."

I handed him a copy of *Roget's Thesaurus*.

He looked inside. "This will also help."

He handed it back.

I waited while another conversation took place in the Bhéwonom backchannel.

After about a minute, Weghtrowénts disappeared and Ansnā regained her Earth-based self-awareness.

"He will make a decision tomorrow", she said.

"A decision about what?" I asked.

"Dheghōm", she replied. "I must go."

With that, she vanished too.

"See you in 2004", I said to empty air.

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11th November, 2005

Ansñā did not reappear in 2004. It was a Friday in November, 2005 when, just as I was about to head for home, she materialised in my office.

It was a different, bigger office now, because I was entitled to one; Ansñā seemed not to have been expecting this, and took a moment to take the place in.

She looked as beautiful as ever and was back to her normal height; she was dressed as a female-undergraduate clone. I, of course, was by now in my late sixties and starting to feel decrepit; only my mind and my inexplicably-perfect eyesight seemed for the moment resistant to my creeping decline.

"Hello, Clive", she said – in English. OK, so her accent was an amalgam of many accents, but it was undeniably English.

"Ansñā!" I smiled. I was genuinely happy to see her. "I was wondering where you'd got to."

"It's late", she said. "I came to say goodbye."

"In English? You managed to build a translation system in a day?"

"Not me, the engineers. Because of this, Dheghōm is safe now."

"It wasn't safe before? You told me I needn't worry!"

"It is safe now."

I sensed that she was in a rush. "Is there any way that I might see your translations from Third

Language to English?" I wasn't hopeful, just desperate.

"I'll ask for your dictionary to be updated tomorrow", she replied.

"Tomorrow? That's fifteen years away!"

She smiled, apologetically. "As I said, it's late."

"Will I see you again?"

"No. I've been assigned to a different world – with a promotion, too! I prevented a calamity yesterday. I shan't be returning to Dheghōm any time soon."

I noticed how well the translation was contracting words – 'it's', 'I've', 'shan't'.

"Congratulations", I said – I meant it, too. "Will others from Bhéwonom still visit, though?"

"Yes, but how many, when and for how long has yet to be decided. An experiment is about to begin. Oh!" She pointed a finger in the air as she remembered something. "I have a present for you. Here."

She held out her left hand. In it was the hummingbird brooch.

"Don't you want to keep it?" I asked.

"I do, but I can't take it to Bhéwonom. I thought you might like it as a keepsake."

I accepted the gift. "Thank you, Ansnā", I said, quite touched. "I shall treasure it. Could I take your photograph, too, before you –"

"I have to go!" she announced, interrupting me. "I'm sorry, Clive – enjoy being human!"

She kissed me, full on the lips, then was no longer there.

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Now I know that this sounds crazy. It will sound even crazier when, in 2020 or thereabouts, my Proto Indo-European dictionary miraculously expands to include translations of every word present in my *Collins English Dictionary, Millennium Edition*.

Hear me out, though.

The Dean's wife's friend from 1962, Mrs Stevenson, was born Maria Shuyalova. Her family were Russian nobility, who fled Petrograd during the Bolshevik revolution. Among the few possessions they escaped with was a hummingbird brooch designed by Carl Fabergé, the only one of its kind. Records from Fabergé's workshop attest to this: the singular piece was manufactured for the wife of Count Shuyalov in 1879. No others were made, at his insistence: it was unique. Eventually, it was inherited by Maria, who upon marriage to an Englishman became Mrs Stevenson. When she died, her widower donated it to the Victoria and Albert museum, where it now forms part of their collection of Russian costume jewellery. I saw it there once, at an exhibition in 1998.

Nevertheless, sitting before me as I type this is an identical hummingbird brooch, indistinguishable from the one now in the vaults of the V&A.

I don't believe I shall sell it.

Notes

Professor Phillips removed this blog entry six days after posting it, having found the near-universal ridicule of his peers too much to endure. He now refuses to discuss his experiences or to answer questions on the topic.

[Update 17 May 2022]

According to his daughter, Anna Phillips-McBride, her father's PIE dictionary remains as it was in 2005. He now expects it to be updated circa 2035, when he will be aged 97. He intends at that time to publish all his post-retirement work on what he now calls Third Language.

Dheghōm

Matter 5

Summary

The Holy Grail

Account by:	Unknown. Staff reporter.
Source:	<i>Egyptian Gazette.</i>
Location:	Cairo, Egypt.
Event:	1954.
Report:	1 Apr 1959.

Report

ASTONISHING FIND NEAR SAINT CATHERINE'S MONASTERY

Holy Grail discovered in Sinai?

A team of experts has speculated that a well-preserved bowl discovered 1954 in Sinai could be the "Holy Grail" of medieval legend.

The bowl was unearthed by four boys, aged between 9 and 10, who were clearing an ancient rockfall encountered while they were exploring a cave near Saint Catherine's Monastery.

Local archaeologists had long been aware of the rockfall but had left it undisturbed for fear that its removal might bring down the entire cave roof. The plucky youngsters moved the rocks regardless and behind them found a niche containing the bowl and a copper scroll.

Scholars in Cairo, led by the renowned American Egyptologist, David D. O'Connell, were asked to study the artefacts and have this week published their findings.

Ancient Tongue

The bowl is corded ware, manufactured in the region of the Sea of Azov some four thousand years ago.

The scroll is written in Tannaitic Hebrew and dates from around 100 A.D.. Words in this ancient tongue describe the bowl as having had the property of healing all ailments in any who supped from it.

The scroll further states that the bowl was brought to Antioch by Pelles of Athens and that

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later it became the property of a physician named Loukâs, whom Prof. O'Connell's team believes to be Saint Luke the Evangelist.

Legend

The scroll goes on to explain that upon the death of Saint Luke, the bowl ceased to function. It was buried according to his wishes on the slopes of Mount Sinai, close to where the Ten Commandments were revealed to Moses.

Professor O'Connell suggests that the story of the bowl is the source of the legend of the Holy Grail, which the bowl itself predates by over two thousand years.

When asked by this newspaper if the bowl retained any of its curative properties, Professor O'Connell quipped, "Well I've still got this damn-able cough, so I guess not!"

Notes

Prof. David D. O'Connell died in New York of lung disease 12 Mar 1965.

The facts of the article were confirmed by one of the four boys, Magdi Ragab, interviewed as an adult, Suez 4 Aug 1996.

The bowl and copper scroll were sent to Moscow for further study Oct 1960, but were lost in transit.

The Egyptian Museum in Cairo is rumoured to possess O'Connell's original research materials, including a set of detailed photographs and a charcoal rubbing of the scroll. The museum's director denies this rumour.

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Matter 6

Summary

The Mirror Crack'd

Account by:	Jane Marple, 85. Retired.
Source:	Carbon papers.
Location:	Harrogate, Yorkshire, England.
Event:	13-16 Jan 1976.
Report:	16 Jan 1976.

Report

I am a character from a book. I know this to be true, for I have read the book: "The Mirror Crack'd from Side to Side", by Agatha Christie.

I am also a character from a number of other books, of course, but those I have not read; given that I myself experienced the content of their pages, I feel rather confident that I have no need to do so. I am also under some pressure of time, the nature of which I shall explain in due course.

If you were paying attention, you will have noted that I said I was a character from a book, not a character in a book. I was very careful with my language. Plenty of real people appear in books one

way or another, but I myself am a fictional character from a book, become real. Specifically, I am Jane Marple, or Miss Marple as you may know me.

The author who created me died four days ago on January 12th. I awoke in unfamiliar surroundings on January 13th. I do not believe the two events to be unconnected, but I shall come to that in due course, too.

To begin with, though, I shall address your strong suspicion that I am an addled old lady who was so stricken by the death of her literary idol that her broken mind concocted a tale in which she became the living embodiment of her favourite novels' heroine. I shall achieve this by outlining two pieces of evidence in full; I could bore you with more, but these particular ones have some bearing on what I have to say.

The first piece of evidence is the birth certificate in my handbag. I don't know anyone who carries a birth certificate in their handbag, least of all me, but nevertheless let us suppose that the addled old lady who believes herself to be me placed it there.

The certificate states that the infant to whom it refers is a girl, but it omits her name. It gives the date of her birth as fifteenth September, 1890 – the same as that of my creator, if the newspaper obituaries are to be believed. It records the girl's place of birth as Ashfield in the Urban Sanitary District of Torquay – precisely where Mrs Christie, née Miller, was born. It is not, however, Mrs

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Christie's birth certificate: the infant's father is declared to be Frederick Alvah Marple; the mother, Clarissa Margaret Marple, formerly Beoehmer (which looks to me to be a mis-spelling, but I wouldn't know). The informant is listed as F. A. Marple, father.

This is quite ridiculous. If I were to be presented with a document about Agatha Christie written in Chinese and asked to change it to refer to myself given knowledge only of the characters for Miller and Marple, the result would be much the same.

The physical condition of the certificate is as one might expect for a document 85 years old: worn and yellowing but still intact and readable. It appears in its format and printing to be genuine, yet how could it be, given that it's nonsensical? It looks to be the work of an expert forger provided with inexpert advice. If the intention of planting it in my handbag was to support the conceit that I am a real person, I'm afraid it has done quite the opposite.

The second piece of evidence that I shall present to persuade you I am not delusional is rather more mundane. When I awoke three days ago in a strange room, I of course made some effort to discover where I might be. It rapidly transpired that I was lodged in a hotel: the Old Swan Hotel in Harrogate, to be precise, where in 1926 one Agatha Christie was eventually located following her sudden and mysterious disappearance.

According to the clerk on the desk – a warm-hearted young thing by the name of Claire – I was booked in on the 12th for four nights. I am to check out by noon on the 16th, which at the time of writing is to say two hours hence. There is nothing untoward about this thus far, other than the fact that no-one seems to have observed my arrival. It only becomes odd when one notes that the booking is shown to have been recorded by Claire herself. The young woman has no recollection of making such a booking, yet there it is in her own handwriting. Furthermore, the 12th was a Monday and she has Mondays off; she was visiting family in Knaresborough, and so was in no position to accept a booking for anyone in any capacity, still less one of which she has no memory. When I asked, she insisted that she would have remembered, too, because she has seen Miss Marple in several feature films so knows the name. She professed mild disappointment that I bear scant resemblance to the thespian, Margaret Rutherford.

From the above, I believe it is safe to deduce that I am not a misguided old lady lacking full possession of her mental faculties – a Miss Marple who has lost her marbles, so to speak. I am the genuine article – a fictional character made real. The questions then naturally arise: by whom and for what purpose?

I suppose that the obvious answer to the question “by whom” is “God”. I have been led to believe, however, that God is a perfect being; His

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working in mysterious ways aside, it does not seem likely that He would make such a hash of my supposed birth certificate in His attempt to persuade the world that I am meant to be here. Neither, I suggest, would He have allowed so many other discrepancies of my existence to have come to my attention.

Could, then, a scientist or government agency perhaps have created me? The girl Claire – I'm afraid I don't know her surname, but she isn't married – might have been bribed or blackmailed to falsify a booking, but I don't believe her to be a good enough actress to disguise such an involvement. Again, although I could conceivably entertain the notion that I am a sophisticated automaton unaware of the fact, I find it difficult to accept that anyone with even a basic knowledge of British bureaucracy could have littered a birth certificate with so many errors. Bringing me into being the very day after the author who created me died is in exceedingly poor taste, too.

As for a foreign power, well if it hoped to foist a replica of a human being on the British public, I submit that there are better choices than a fictional character whose factual knowledge of her past is restricted to that presented in the works in which she appears. You'll have to take my word for this, but whereas most people's memories of their childhood are great in number, mine are almost entirely absent. I remember my sister and my aunt, but not my parents. Why would someone go to the trouble

of creating a thinking simulacrum of a human being yet not furnish her with basic (even if quite invented) memories to fill in any large gaps? It's as if the books, or perhaps their author's recollection of them, constituted the only source material available, and whoever introduced me to reality was either unwilling or unable to stray beyond that except by providing me with what might be called general knowledge (I am fully aware that Harold Wilson is the Prime Minister).

It is my conclusion, therefore, that I was brought into being by some power not of this Earth.

Creatures from another planet may have devised advanced technology capable of fabricating me, perhaps; I entertained this possibility for a full fifteen minutes of yesterday afternoon, at the behest of a small boy named David whom I'd met in Valley Gardens (he had given his mother the slip and was somewhat ruing it). I determined, however, that little green men were not responsible for my creation. This is because certain aspects of my personality and background would not be evident in the books, yet are evident to me – and, until January 12th, would also have been evident to Agatha Christie. While her stories provide the background that flesh out my existence, they do not reveal the essence of who I am. That intelligence was singularly realised in Mrs Christie's imagination – the only place where, until three days ago, I truly lived.

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Now much as I can accept the contingency that alien beings might have comfortable access to published works, I cannot accept that they might have access to the constructs of the human mind. I only existed in my author's imagination when she was thinking about me; to be able to fashion a working model from such thoughts-in-action would, I advance, require complete moment-to-moment access to my author's entire brain.

I adjudge this to be an impossibility. I am happy to defer to any physicist who chances to read this, of course, but then would put to that same physicist the question of how I materialised in the first place. Matter at a human scale is not wont to appear out of nothing, and even a birth certificate or a line in a hotel ledger should, I suggest, have been accompanied by much more of a fanfare than appears to have been the case.

My existence would seem therefore to be a supernatural phenomenon; furthermore, because of the attempts to provide credence for it, one resulting from intent. I am here because a being from another dimension meant for me to be here.

Let us now address the question of this being's motivation.

My appearance followed the death of Agatha Christie so swiftly that I am tempted to suppose that the latter triggered it. It's also possible that Mrs Christie's death merely presented an opportunity to make a fictional character real, which was seized upon purely because it was timely. I would

be most disappointed if Mrs Christie's death was brought about specifically so that her mind could be mined for the details necessary to construct me.

If my author's death caused me to come into existence, what could my purpose be? Am I an alarm, intended to catch the attention of an extra-dimensional being? Am I a probe, made to absorb or to record information not present in Mrs Christie's mind? Perhaps I am a combination, given substance automatically at the detection of a fault so as to collect details about the world that may lead to the fault's correction. I am endowed with something of a reputation for possessing unusually potent observational powers, so this proposition does have merit.

Of course, I have no evidence that I am the only fictional character to have been made real upon Mrs Christie's death. For all I know, Hercule Poirot may also be out there, impressing the stuffy occupants of some country house with his over-imposing intellect. Come to that, there could be other Miss Marples scattered around the shires, too, in locations as important to Mrs Christie's history as was the Hydro in Harrogate. Nevertheless, it's undeniable that however many of me there are roaming wild, there's at least one more than there ought to be.

Let us suppose that I am unique. Why, I then ask, of all the characters, real or fictional, ever to appear in books, would I be selected to be rendered human? In part it must be because my occupation

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involves discovery and observation, but in that case why am I not Sherlock Holmes? Why am I not Phillip Marlowe? Why am I not Father Brown, or Nancy Drew, or Lord Peter Wimsey? Why am I not Inspector Hanaud? If they, like Poirot, are significant enough that my worldly knowledge was filled in to include them then surely they must also have been candidates to receive the unasked-for fate that was eventually mine.

I feel that the answer must be that I am believable. Agatha Christie was the world's best-selling author, and her leading characters are accordingly well-rounded. If a being with an incomplete understanding of our world required an inoffensive, near fully-formed individual with investigative powers to show up for a few days, I would be an attractive choice.

Ah, yes – “for a few days”.

To keep me around for a lengthy period would be to invite attention. I am meant to be discreet, to blend into the background, so as not to tip off humanity to the possibility that it may be the plaything of a greater power. I cannot be suffered to exist indefinitely. I am told that I must check out of the Old Swan Hotel by noon today, but I have nowhere to go. I am therefore of the opinion that at noon today I shall cease to be. My memories may continue to exist unchanging in a different dimension, to be picked over and studied either immediately or when someone gets around to it, but my time in the real world will almost certainly end.

I shall have existed for too short a time to have gathered a great deal of information. I believe, therefore, that I am an experiment. If I work, so to speak, then I suppose I could subsequently be granted a second helping of reality, but I feel it's more likely that the opportunity will go to someone else. Whoever made me real did not want their presence announced to the world, yet that is precisely what I am in the process of doing right now; this fact will doubtless not sit well with them.

I expect that all evidence of my existence will go with me. My room will return to how it was on the 12th, calendar and all. My clothes and other belongings will cease to be. The line in the ledger that records my booking will be blank. My signature in the copy of "The Mirror Crack'd from Side to Side", which I borrowed from the hotel library, will be erased. Nothing that could inconveniently prove I had ever spent time on Earth will be allowed to persist. It will be expunged as efficiently as it was created.

The one exception, I have reason to hope, will be that the three people to whom I have spoken – the boy David, his distraught mother and particularly Claire on the front desk – will yet remember me. Any power with a preference to create a proxy to record the world lacks either the will or the ability to look into the mind of a living person. If Claire's memories could be selectively cleared, then surely they could be collectively read, in which case what would be the point of creating me? My author's

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mind was read in the instant of her death, and from its contents I was formed. Claire is very much alive.

If I am certain that all physical evidence of my existence is shortly to be consigned to oblivion, it may seem somewhat contrary for me to be sitting in the hotel library writing this. Surely these pieces of paper, with my neat, ballpoint script adorning their faces, will evaporate when I, too, evaporate.

I'm confident that they will. However, before they do so I shall hand them to Claire. I doubt that any copy she made would survive noon either, but it's clear that those who wish to learn about our world must have only partial knowledge of its details – otherwise, why am I here?

Claire is a clever girl; she reminds me of my household help, Cherry Baker, but is not a carbon paper copy of her. I am confident that she is capable of making her own deductions.

My time was never long, but it is now very short. Nevertheless, I do feel that I can make a contribution. If humanity is indeed the plaything of a greater power, it needs to know it.

I shall pass this letter to Claire while there is time enough for the poor girl to read it, then retire to my room. When the clock strikes twelve and I am no more, it would be most impolite for there to be witnesses.

Notes

Claire Gunwell took a photocopy of Miss Marple's statement. This, along with the statement itself and the carbon copy Miss Marple had left in the library, went blank at noon on 16 Jan 1976. However, Miss Marple had chosen to use a fresh sheet of carbon paper for each page; resourcefully, Miss Gunwell checked these and discovered that the impressions made upon them had remained intact. She subsequently typed up a transcript from these mirror images.

Miss Gunwell reports having sent a copy of the transcript to the police. She was told there would be an investigation but heard nothing thereafter.

The carbon paper was exhibited at the Old Swan Hotel on the 25th anniversary of Dame Agatha Christie's death. It was presented as a work of fiction that had been left by an unknown guest. It was electronically scanned with Claire Gunwell's permission.

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Matter 7

Summary

The Blue Man

Account by:	Jaitra Mistry, 48. Construction worker.
Source:	Transcript of telephone call.
Location:	Narora, India.
Event:	Dec 1977.
Report:	3 Aug 1989.

Report

Interviewer: Melanie Bailey (MB) trans. Ravi Balakrishnan.

Interviewee: Jaitra Mistry (JM).

MB: Thank you for agreeing to take this call, Mr Mistry. I'll try to keep it brief.

JM: International calls are very expensive!

MB: Quite. So you were a construction worker at the Narora nuclear power plant, is that correct?

JM: Yes indeed.

MB: Could you tell me in your own words about the incident with the blue man?

JM: I can tell you what I saw, yes – what several of us saw. You want me to tell you?

MB: Yes, please do.

JM: Well it happened in December 1977, six or seven weeks after construction had begun on NAPS-2.

MB: NAPS-2 – that's the name of the reactor?

JM: Yes, in English 'Narora Atomic Power Station'. Work on the first reactor, NAPS-1, began in December of 1976. I was working on NAPS-2, which started in November of 1977.

MB: Neither has been activated yet, though?

JM: That is correct. Operation of NAPS-1 is a year and a half away; NAPS-2, three years away.

MB: Sorry for the interruption. Can you tell me what you saw that day?

JM: I can tell you yes. You want me to tell you?

MB: Yes, yes, please.

JM: Well, we were done for the day and getting ready to go home, when suddenly a truck *crashed* through the perimeter fence and drove at speed towards us. There was however a bulldozer on the road blocking the way, so the driver had to *swerve* to get past – right into a trench that we had dug earlier in the day. Well that stopped him! The driver climbed out of the cab and started running towards us. Now here is something unusual: he was by appearance no ordinary man, but a caricature of Lord Shiva.

MB: How do you know he *wasn't* Lord Shiva?

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JM: Lord Shiva would not have to drive a truck to get through a perimeter fence.

MB: I'm sorry, please carry on.

JM: This blue man, his false arms moving as if they were real – it was a very good costume – ran directly to an open space then halted. Meanwhile, security guards were chasing after him, batons drawn, but he ignored them to do two very strange things. First, he reached into the air and produced a device. I would have thought he was performing a magic trick, but for whose benefit? Then, he raised the device above his head and *floated* upwards to five or six times his own height!

MB: You say other people saw him do these strange things, too?

JM: I have only told you one strange thing. Producing the device and using it to carry him upwards is a single strange thing made up of two components.

MB: Sorry, I should stop interrupting.

JM: You want me to continue with the second strange thing?

MB: Yes, please do.

JM: Well the second strange thing he did was to disappear (snaps fingers) like that! Into nothingness! (snaps fingers) Like that!

MB: And your workmates also saw all this?

JM: Yes, eight of us in total, we all saw it. Also, the security guards saw it. A blue man with four arms and three eyes being pulled up by an invisible rope then disappearing (snaps fingers) like that.

MB: What did the other people think?

JM: Well they thought the same as me: this is not something you see every day.

MB: They didn't think it was Lord Shiva, though?

JM: No. Lord Shiva would not need a device to fly. Also, he would not leave his trident in the cab of a truck he had just driven into a trench.

MB: He left his trident behind?

JM: He did, one of the security guards saw it, but it disappeared when the blue man disappeared.

MB: Is the place where he disappeared still open ground?

JM: He didn't disappear on open ground. He disappeared *above* open ground.

MB: Is there anything now at or below the location where he disappeared?

JM: Yes, the NAPS-2 reactor core. Where the blue man disappeared is now the location of the NAPS-2 reactor core.

MB: Did the police investigate any of this?

JM: Yes, but to no avail. They did find the original driver of the truck. He said that Lord Shiva had stabbed him in the chest with his trident and so killed him, but that by some miracle he had then awoken unharmed at home in his bed.

MB: Would it be possible to speak to this man, do you know? Or to the police who investigated the incident?

JM: I do *not* know.

MB: Is there anything else you can tell me about any of this?

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JM: You said you were going to keep this brief.

MB: Yes, sorry, it's taking longer because we're having to speak through a translator.

JM: Well I have nothing else to add.

MB: Are you sure? Even the tiniest detail might help?

JM: Help what?

MB: Help me to understand what happened.

JM: I don't understand what happened and I was there! Now if you don't mind, I am a very busy man and have much to do.

MB: I'm sorry, thank you for your time Mr Mistry. This has all been very interesting.

JM: It has been my pleasure. Good evening and good evening to your translator, too.

MB: Good evening Mr Mistry, thanks again for your help.

Notes

Live-translated from the Hindi by Ravi Balakrishnan, 3 Aug 1989.

Jaitra Mistry died of Alzheimer's disease in Anupshahar, India on 30 Sep 2021 at the age of 80.

Matter 8

Summary

Spinners

Account by:	Gillian Merry, 48. Professor.
Source:	<i>Hildeslaw Hundred Bulletin.</i>
Location:	Uffington, Oxfordshire, England.
Event:	11 Aug 1978.
Report:	4 Sep 1978.

Report

Dear Editor,

I'm sure that many of your readers will by now be aware that a Mediterranean man was handing out button spinners to children last month as he walked along Broad Way. According to my son, who was in receipt of such a spinner, the man was tall and in his mid-20s; he wore druidic clothing and exhibited no ability to comprehend English.

The spinners that this individual was freely dispensing are each made from a disc and a length of twine. The disc has two symmetrically off-centre holes in it, like a two-hole button. The twine is

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passed through one hole then back through the other, whereupon it is tied to form a closed loop upon which the disc dangles.

Traditionally, the toy is played with by taking hold of the twine either side of the disc then rotating the disc manually a little. Pulling the twine causes the disc to spin. By successively pulling and relaxing it, the disc can be made to spin increasingly fast, alternating in direction with each well-timed tug. Such toys must have provided countless children with five minutes of amusement for generations.

The particular manufacture of the spinners handed out last month involved a disc of oriental beech (*fagus orientalis*) approximately 5cm (2in) in diameter, along with a 60cm (2ft) length of twine made of hemp (*cannabis sativa*).

I am not writing to warn parents about the dangers of allowing their offspring to interact with oddly-dressed foreigners handing out toys partly made from the fibres of a plant designated as a controlled drug by the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971. Rather, as a professional botanist, I have a more directed interest.

The spinners that the man produced were identical. I don't mean that the discs were sections of the same beech branch: I mean that they were the same sections of beech branch. I don't mean that the twine was cut to the same length and tied the same way: I mean that the specific piece of twine used by any one spinner was identical at

microscopic level to that of any other spinner. I conducted the experiments personally: trust me on this.

Furthermore, these details may not be immediately apparent to those readers who have seen or handled one of the spinners; this is because most of the discs boast photographs bonded onto the side that faces away from the knot in the twine. It seems that one of the children decided to decorate her spinner, whereupon the man created all subsequent spinners with pictures on them of objects pointed at by the children, including trees, coins, items of clothing and the faces of the children themselves. Unfortunately, I have yet to find an example of one showing the face of the man who synthesised the spinners.

According to all those children I have spoken to who were given a spinner, the man produced his toys "by magic". He didn't appear to use a camera to capture the images, he merely looked where the children were pointing then opened his hand and the spinner was there.

As a scientist, I don't believe in magic. Neither, however, do I believe that creating literally identical toy spinners then instantaneously binding fine-grained images of randomly-selected objects to them using chemically-complex dyes is possible using today's technology.

If you saw or spoke to this man, I would very much like to hear from you.

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Prof. Gillian Merry
St John's College
Oxford

Notes

Professor Merry, now retired, regrets that she did not receive a response to her appeal for information. Nevertheless, in time she was able to acquire a total of eight spinners from various sources. Three of these spinners were destroyed during analysis. Two were partially damaged but are still largely intact. To the best of her knowledge, the remaining three (which she calls "football", "Jackie" and "clouds") have yet to be the subject of any detailed investigation. All five of the surviving discs are currently in a controlled-environment storage facility operated by Oxford University.

Professor Merry was able to vouch that beneath the pictures, the discs, like the twine, were also identical at microscopic level.

Matter 9

Summary

The Numerical Basis of Edwaerd Mallan's Auras

Account by:	T. L. Charters, age unknown. Historian.
Source:	Unpublished monograph.
Location:	Birmingham, England.
Event:	1863.
Report:	1951.

Report

THE NUMERICAL BASIS OF EDWAERD
MALLAN'S AURAS

By T. L. Charters, *Historian*

Edwaerd Mallan was the stage name of the Victorian-age spiritualist Edward Mallan (1832-1889)¹, who was renowned during the latter period of his life for possessing the ability to see the "aura" of individuals.

Mallan was born into a wealthy family in Derby, where his grandfather had established a successful furniture manufactory. Being a younger son,

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Mallan did not anticipate his future to be in industry, so, possessing something of an adventurous streak, he set about building a career dealing in antiquities; these, he acquired on extensive travels abroad.

After two profitable visits to the Near East 1855-1857, a third outing barely broke even. Competition from collectors on the continent² was by now increasing, so Mallan determined to explore opportunities elsewhere. To this end, he visited the Gulf of Guinea in 1860.

Although Mallan's trip to Africa proved lucrative, he had the misfortune to contract malaria. Relapses of this illness were to dog him for the remainder of his days and ultimately led to his death at the relatively young age of 57.

Disliking Africa, Mallan's next target was India. The exotic treasures he brought back in 1862 were regarded in high esteem by his clients, so in 1863 he embarked on a second expedition. Most of the trade in antiquities at this time was by sea, so Mallan reasoned that little of exceptional quality remained in the vicinity of the ports. He hypothesised that superior pieces awaited further inland that might be bought in abundance at a low price.

His journey took him from Bombay northeast to Lucknow, thence northwest into the Himalayan foothills. There, in temples and other holy places, he found many objects of great age that would have been prized by collectors in England. The locals declined to part with them at any price,

however, because they venerated them as part of their faith.

Mallan was disappointed by this result but was struck by a sudden revelation³. There were parts of India where for millennia Hinduism had reigned supreme but which were now the dominion of Islam. Far from a reluctance to sell items dating from ancient times, these followers of Mohammed might be eager to have the opportunity to do so.

Mallan headed northwest to Kashmir and the city of Srinagar. Here, he was to make the discovery that would define the rest of his life.

His account of what happened changed markedly over the years as he introduced elements of showmanship into his retellings. Two early sources^{4,5} and a slightly later one⁶ suggest that the following is a plausible synopsis of what occurred.

After advertising that he was in the market for antiquities, for the first two weeks Mallan was only offered inferior examples. He had expected this, and on each occasion gently explained through his interpreter that he was seeking artefacts of a higher calibre. In the third week, an item of astounding quality was brought to his lodgings by an old man⁷. It was a bowl, which Mallan immediately recognised as being corded ware of what we would now call the late Chalcolithic period, some twenty-five centuries B.C..

The bowl had been kept in an exceptional state, so Mallan did not hesitate to make an offer for it. This was rebuffed. The bowl, it seemed, had a story

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behind it, which the old man believed increased its value. It was said that in the past, those who drank from the bowl would gain the ability to see the human soul.

Mallan asked how the old man had come by the bowl, which (its absent mystical properties aside) was in superlative condition given its considerable age. He was told that it was bestowed upon the old man's grandfather as a wedding present by a wealthy merchant, but that the old man didn't know much about it beyond this⁸.

Intrigued, Mallan increased his offer and purchased the bowl.

Mallan was not a believer in the supernatural, but the old man's story had sufficiently impressed him that he supposed there might be a scientific basis to it. Perhaps, he conjectured, it had once contained a drug or narcotic of some kind. He decided to use himself as the subject of a series of experiments to uncover the bowl's secrets.

To this end, that evening at his lodgings he poured a cupful of water into the bowl. Next morning, he drank it. He was unsurprised to learn that this had no appreciable effect on him. He repeated the experiment using milk, but the result once more met with his pessimistic expectations.

In analysing the bowl visually, he noticed that there were sand-like grains embedded within by time, like sugar crystals left too long in a sugar pot⁹. He reasoned that the purported powers of the bowl might have originated with these grains, but

they did not yield to his physical attempts to release them. He determined that a solvent would be required. He first tried warm water, but the grains remained in place. It is unclear whether he also tried boiling water, which might have damaged the bowl, but he did also try a saline solution.

Following these initial failures, Mallan contemplated the matter. If the bowl had the reputation it did then other people would also have subjected it to study and would also have attempted to dissolve the grains. Was he therefore wasting his time, and the grains weren't grains at all but a part of the fabric of the pottery?

It then occurred to him that earlier investigators might not have tried alcohol as a solvent, its consumption being against the religious texts of both Muslims and Hindus. For medicinal purposes, he had brought with him to India a bottle of French brandy, a quantity of which he was now willing to spare to stem his curiosity. He poured some neat into the bowl and, upon stirring it, was excited to observe that it did indeed dissolve the grains.

Once all the grains had been absorbed into the alcohol, Mallan drank it.

He noticed no immediate effects, other than those normally associated with French brandy, so concluded that the sand-like grains were not responsible for whatever properties the bowl might once have possessed. At this point, he gave up on the idea of trying to uncover its secrets.

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It was when he went for supper that evening that the effects of consuming the dissolved grains became all-too apparent.

Above the heads of all those in attendance floated strange symbols, visible only to Mallan. They had no physical presence – he couldn't touch them and they didn't catch on door frames as people passed through – but they were universal. They had the look of being printed, rather than handwritten, and they always faced Mallan whatever the orientation of those to whom they were invisibly attached.

It seems that upon witnessing this scene, Mallan was seized by both a sense of wonder and a sense of panic. He went outside and discovered that the illusion extended to strangers. He sketched copies of the symbols, lest the ability to discern them desert him. Alas, these have not survived to the present day

The ability did not desert him, however; indeed, it was to remain with him for life.

Over the course of the next few weeks (and in some cases, years), Mallan ascertained that the sets of symbols he saw shared a number of common properties. On a trip to the United States in 1874, he elaborated in an interview with the noted philosopher C. K. Coops¹⁰ the

following series of observations about what by now he called *auras*¹¹:

- They were visible even in complete darkness.
- They were always in focus, even when he looked through a lens.
- They were opaque, rather than transparent.
- They were made up of individual print-like symbols.
- They didn't vary in "typeface" whatever written language was used by their bearers.
- The symbols that constituted them were always blue with a black border.
- They appeared to be unique. No two auras were exactly the same.
- They were possessed by human beings only.
- Each person had exactly one aura, regardless of whether he was a new-born baby or a centenarian.
- They had no mass, passing through solid objects unhindered.
- They were occluded by physical objects. If someone was leaning against a wall, only half his aura might be in view.
- They were subject to the laws of perspective. At the same rate that a man diminished in size with distance, so did his aura.
- They always floated the same, fixed height (about 18 inches) above the scalp of the person who bore them, regardless of how

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large or small that person might be. It made no difference whether the person being observed, or Mallan himself, was standing, in repose or even upside-down.

- The moment a person died, his aura vanished¹².
- Auras did not appear in photographs, reflections or Mallan's dreams. As a consequence, he never knew whether he himself bore an aura.
- Identical twins did not have identical auras, although they were largely similar.
- Mallan did not know whether Siamese twins would show one aura or two.

Mallan came to regard this change in his perception as both a blessing and a curse. It was a blessing, because he could identify different individuals by a mere glance; it was a curse, because the mass of auras he saw in crowded places obscured large parts of his field of vision. On the whole, though, he felt that its positive effects far outweighed its negative effects, so he embraced the condition rather than seek a cure.

Upon his return to England from India, Mallan sold all the items he had procured excepting the corded ware bowl, which he kept for himself¹³. The sale attracted great interest

and realised a substantial profit. Although the temptation to return to India must have been great, Mallan nevertheless elected for a change of career at this point. G. S. Clarke speculates that health issues arising from malaria might have been the fundamental cause, but concedes that Mallan's visual problems among crowds could also have been a factor¹⁴.

Restyling himself as Edwaerd Mallan, Mallan set about establishing for himself a reputation as a spiritualist. Unlike other spiritualists of the time, he did not speak to the dead nor disgorge what would now be called ectoplasm. Rather, he would perform various acts of identification for private and public audiences.

A contemporary account¹⁵ of an exhibition he performed at the Brighton Pavilion in 1877 serves as an example typical of his set. He began by inviting a small number of impressionable young women and cynical older men onto the stage, instructing them to stand behind a long curtain that extended just above head-height. An older woman was asked to join Mallan to verify that he could not see either through or (with the aid of a booster step, her use of which was played for amusement) over the curtain. The people behind the curtain were then asked to move around into different positions. A stage hand began to open the curtain from one end, stopping before each person was revealed. Without approaching the curtain, Mallan reliably identified whether the person next

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behind it was male or female, whereupon the curtain was moved on to show that his guess was correct. In one instance, he commended the ingenuity of the volunteers, for there was both a man and a woman occupying the same space. The audience was much impressed by this.

A series of further demonstrations of his abilities followed, growing in sophistication. He arranged a set of volunteers by height, for example. One such demonstration of particular noteworthiness from the perspective of this monograph involved instructing volunteers to line up in any order they chose behind the curtain, then to come out individually when he waved a union flag above their head. He proceeded to use this method to call them out in age order, youngest first.

Mallan ended his act by taking note of the names of every member of the audience from the back row, which he wrote down in a notebook alongside a number of "arcane symbols". Facing away from these individuals, he instructed them to change seats with one another, leading to great mirth among those uninvolved because of the implied impropriety. Once they were in place, Mallan then instructed that the house lights be extinguished, cautioning people to hold onto their valuables lest the person sitting next to them be a thief. The Pavilion did not have electric lighting yet, so the procedure must have taken some time, adding to the tension. With the room in total darkness, Mallan turned around and lit a small,

bull's-eye lantern, which shone such that the audience could see him but he could not see the audience. He then mounted the booster step, whereupon, in consultation with his notes (which he had light enough to read), he correctly identified exactly which member of the audience was seated where. This feat was greeted with thunderous applause.

At most of his performances, Mallan afterwards destroyed the notes that he took, but occasionally, at private events, he let the host retain the paper as a memento. A handful of these notes have survived to the present day, and it is regarding these that the remainder of this monograph is concerned¹⁶.

It might be assumed that the symbols which Mallan claimed that he could see would be alphabetical in nature but, as Mallan himself seems to have realised (but not revealed), this is not the case. The symbols are, in fact, numerical. There are ten of them, representing the numerals 1 to 9 and 0. As we shall shortly see, the presence of 0 is of particular and important interest.

Mallan invariably drew the symbols using diagonal lines. His renditions of them are consistent and have been reproduced for this monograph by a professional draughtsman¹⁷ as shown in Figure 1.

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Figure 1

Mallan's symbols.

Top line: 1 2 3 4 5. Bottom line: 6 7 8 9 0.

So as to avoid typographical complications, henceforth these will be transcribed herein using the characters / and \ and the letter X.

Mallan left no hint regarding how he interpreted the symbols as digits, always writing them as he saw them rather than in translated form. However, the sequence can readily be reconstructed using the following logic:

/ 1 This is the easiest mark to make for a right-handed person.

**** 2 Two continuous strokes to represent the number 2 seems natural.

\/ 3 Ditto three strokes.

V 4 Those familiar with Roman numerals might assume that V should represent 5, but I argue that it does not. Rather than proceed with a wavy line of four strokes, which is easy to over-extend and might be mistaken for two 2s, the designer of this system dropped the first stroke from 3 to deliver 4.

X 5 This symbol is the crux of the system. Again, there is a disparity with Roman

numerals. X here is used as an anchor symbol and is combined with the symbols for 1 to 4 to give the symbols for 6 to 9.

X/ 6 The symbol for 5 combined with the symbol for 1 gives the symbol for 6 (6 being 5+1).

X/ 7 Likewise, the symbol for 7 is the symbol for 5 followed by the symbol for 2.

/X 8 This symbol is comprised of the symbols for 5 and 3, but their combined length seems to have required a foreshortening. This has been accomplished by dropping the final stroke of the 3 and crossing the second stroke to give the 5 element¹⁸.

\X 9 The symbol for 4 is crossed to indicate that 5 must be added to it to give the symbol for 9. This may have been done for aesthetic reasons to mirror the symbol for 8, or for ease of writing.

\/ 0 As the only remaining symbol, this must represent 0. It is a reflection of the symbol for 3, but this does not seem to carry significance.

In the extant examples of Mallan's use of these symbols, it is rare that he transcribed more than three per person. However, the note in the possession of the Wilmington family includes a dedication to Hiram H. Wilmington followed by a transcription of a full aura representing the number 99,349,610,255 using the above translation. The body of the note associates 255 with Mr Wilmington's name. This suggests that Mallan saw

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for each individual an 11-digit aura and that the chance two individuals from a small group would share the final three digits was low. Therefore, either: there was more variance in the rightmost symbols of each aura; or the entire pattern was essentially random and Mallan sometimes chose the leftmost characters. Without further examples of a complete aura there is insufficient evidence either way.

Fortunately, such evidence is forthcoming. If we recall the part of Mallan's act in which he identified participants by age, it would seem that an aura's symbols were not purely random but were systematically ordered in a manner that reflected each individual's date of birth. Either lower numbers were associated with younger people or they were associated with older people; as we shall see later, the latter is actually the case, but to show this we must first establish a separate line of reasoning. This conveniently arises from a consideration of the pressing matter concerning the symbol representing 0.

The presence of a symbol for the concept of 0 is, dare I say it, exciting. To understand why, we must turn our attention to corded ware. Although (at his instruction) Mallan's corded ware bowl was buried with him in 1889, other examples of corded ware abound. The style gave its

name to a pre-Bronze Age culture that stretched across northern Europe from the low countries deep into what is today the U.S.S.R.¹⁹, but corded ware was also manufactured by the Yamnaya culture of the Pontic Steppe, which ranged south of this territory from the foothills of the Carpathians to the foothills of the Urals²⁰.

Corded ware is so named because impressions in the pottery look to have been made by pressing cord or rope²¹ into the clay (or, more likely, *vice-versa*, using a cord frame as a mould). Typically, pieces exhibit several rows of short, diagonal lines, although sometimes the rows are empty and sometimes the rows are themselves diagonal. Most often, the diagonal lines resemble a / character, running from southwest to northeast (so to speak); very occasionally, they resemble a \ character, running from northwest to southeast.

Although the vast majority of the diagonal lines seen on corded ware are purely decorative, most vessels of Yamnaya provenance also present a small sequence of other, more deliberate impressions. These occur only once on each pot and have been interpreted by archaeologists to be makers' marks²². This could well be true, because the marks look strikingly close to Mallan's symbols.

Figure 2 shows a particularly fine example, at present in the collection of the Staatliches Museum für Vor- und Frühgeschichte in Berlin. The maker's mark clearly reads: "X/ \ X/ \ / \ X /X /X" or 60721988 in conventional Arabic numerals. Note

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that because the sequence is preceded by a long series of / marks, one or more 1s may precede the other eight symbols²³.

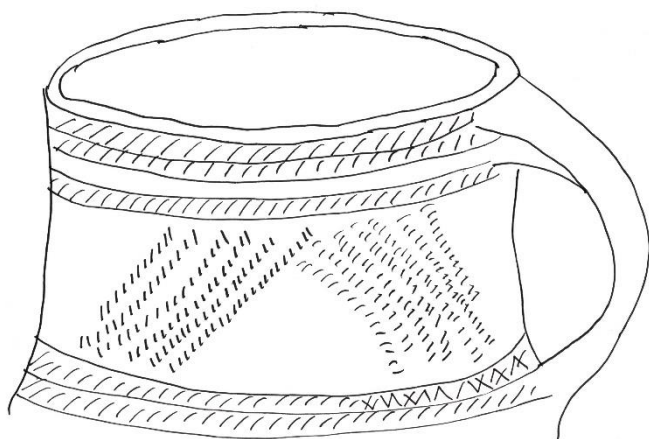


Figure 2

Sketch of a Yamnaya corded ware jug.
Maker's mark on penultimate row to the right.

That a primitive people such as the Yamnaya would have written numerals at all at a time when cuneiform script was yet to be developed in Mesopotamia is itself remarkable, but the use of a positional notation with a symbol to represent the concept of zero is no less than astounding. There is no evidence elsewhere that zero was used before the first millennium B.C., but Yamnaya corded ware shows that it was invented some two thousand years earlier. This is potentially of huge historical significance; researchers are urged to invest

time considering the broader implications of this discovery.

One of the rarer pieces of corded ware that has its cord marks appearing as \ rather than / can be found on display in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York; it is sketched in Figure 3.

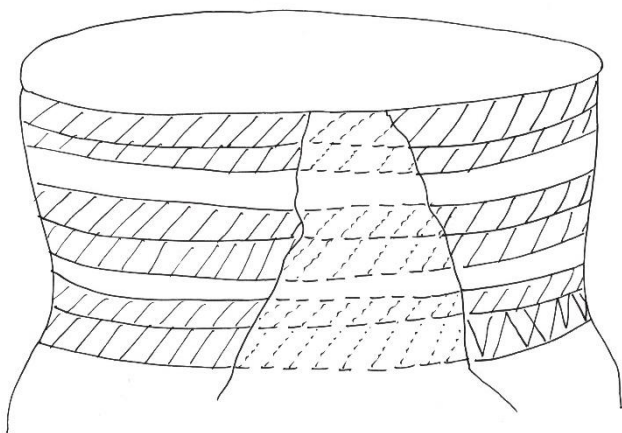


Figure 3

Sketch of a Yamnaya corded ware jug.
Partial maker's mark on bottom row to the right.

The item, which is a beaker, has been reconstructed from a number of sherds. It also bears a maker's mark, although because this continues on a missing sherd its left-most symbols are absent. The symbols that remain are \ /X /V \X, which are mirror-images of / \X / \X/, or 2 7 0 6. This suggests that the maker was left-handed and found mirror-writing more convenient. Whatever

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the rationale, it would seem that the maker's mark is reversed, and so begins 6072. This is the same opening series of digits as that on the pot in Berlin. From this intelligence, we can deduce that makers' marks are numbers and that the positional notation they employ is the same as we use today, with units to the right and increasingly higher powers of ten to the left.

Almost all makers' marks on Yamnaya corded ware begin with X/ \/, to the extent that archaeologists inferred that X/ \/ was an indicator that what followed was a maker's mark²⁴. There is a single exception, found on a late example uncovered in sediment extracted from the Volga river during a dredging exercise in 1928. This piece, now in the State Museum of Ceramics, Kuskovo, begins with the symbols X/ /, or 61 in Arabic numerals. Because other artefacts found in the same dredging operation can be dated very accurately, we can therefore safely conclude that earlier makers' marks are lower than later makers' marks; that is, the numbers they represent increase over time rather than decrease over time.

What are we to make of these discoveries? This essay is not the place to speculate; its purpose is simply to present the evidence and from this establish a set of fundamental propositions, based upon which more able researchers can begin their investigations.

It would seem that the ability Edward Mallan gained when he supped from an ancient vessel in 1863 was that of being able to read a kind of label that is invisibly attached to every human being at birth²⁵. He called these "auras", but in fact they were numbers displayed using a positional notation in base ten and featuring a symbol for 0. The earlier an individual's date of birth, the lower their number. At the time when corded ware was made, the values on these labels were in the 60 millions; by Mallan's time, they had reached close to 100 milliard. It would therefore not be unreasonable to suppose that every human being was somehow allocated such a number incrementally at birth.

This raises a final question, determining the answer to which I leave to others.

By whom?

¹ This and the other biographical details noted in this manuscript are drawn chiefly from G. S. Clarke's *The Life of Edwaerd Mallan* (Clerkenwell, 1902).

² He had a particularly acrimonious relationship with D. D. von Groß of Düsseldorf, who alleged that Mallan had substituted a Biblical-era necklace with a modern copy.

³ This is how he described it in his 1886 lecture to the Oxford Union, according to the diary of one who was present in the audience, the hon. James Landish.

⁴ A letter dated 8th October, 1863, sent by Mallan from Delhi to his second-eldest brother, Thomas Mallan, outlines the general sequence of events.

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⁵ Specific, but limited details appear in the formal documents that Mallan composed to authenticate the provenance of his finds in preparation for their sale to collectors.

⁶ An extensive monograph entitled آثار باستانی تاشکند, published in 1869 by the Persian (today, Iranian) academic, Ibrahim bin Javad, concerns the antiquities of Tashkent, a city in the present-day U.S.S.R.. Ibn Javad went to Srinagar as part of his research, his visit coinciding with that of Mallan. In a long digression, he describes two encounters he had with the man, one before and one after his change.

⁷ Mallan would later claim it was a young woman, before settling on a street urchin who had found the piece while scavenging in a rubbish tip.

⁸ Beginning in 1878, Mallan introduced a new element to his story, in which a fakir had told him that the bowl had been found on the shores of the Caspian Sea and carried to Maracanda (Samarkand) by the armies of Alexander the Great. There it had been lost, centuries later, when Islam reached those lands.

⁹ This simile is present in all three sources.

¹⁰ C. K. Coops *On Labels and Identity* (Boston, Massachusetts, 1876).

¹¹ An aura in Mallan's terms is a unified collection of symbols. As an analogy, an aura is akin to a word and a symbol is akin to a letter of that word.

¹² Mallan professed to have seen this happen when visiting a hospital in London. He embellished his tale over the years, and by 1888 was claiming that he had personally intervened to put an end to a knife fight that he had come across in the street, unfortunately too late for one young man; Mallan accompanied him to hospital in an ambulance, but upon arrival the youth expired from his wounds in Mallan's arms.

¹³ It appears to have been Mallan's hope that the secrets of the bowl's grains would yield to scientific analysis, but his application to them of French brandy had evidently proven too effective. Mallan paid for a chemist, W. D. D. Halfield, to

undertake a detailed study of the bowl, but it ended fruitlessly.

¹⁴ *Op. cit.* G. S. Clarke, p182.

¹⁵ Taken from the early edition of the *Brighton Herald*, 27th October, 1877. In later editions, it was replaced by an article about the Brighton Aquarium.

¹⁶ The most substantial such note is pinned to the wall of the main dining room of Rules restaurant in Maiden Lane, London. A number of shorter notes that have been consulted in this research are in the possession of the Strachey family. A single note possessed by the Wilmington family of Connecticut proved invaluable.

¹⁷ Mr Nigel Buchanan of Crawley.

¹⁸ In an informal test of fifteen right-handed adults: twelve found /X easier to write than X/V; two found it harder; one found them to be about the same level of difficulty.

¹⁹ M. C. Burkitt *Prehistory: A Study of Early Cultures in Europe and the Mediterranean Basin* (Cambridge, The University Press, 1925).

²⁰ S. P. Tolstov *The Early Culture of Khwarizm* pp 92-99 *Antiquity* Volume XX, issue 78 (Cambridge, June 1946).

²¹ The term *corded ware* is a translation of the German *Schnurkeramik* introduced by F. Klopffleisch.

²² W. Hauptmann *Der Marken der Weiblichen Hersteller auf Schnurkeramik* (Berlin, 1937).

²³ Preceding other symbols with so many occurrences of the symbol for 1 is troublesome. The issue could be resolved happily by hypothesising that the / symbol means 0, rather than 1, although this does not sit well with the interpretation of the other symbols used in Mallan's auras.

²⁴ J-E Chrétian *Premières Marques de Potiers* (Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1949).

²⁵ Or possibly before birth; Mallan could not see into the wombs of pregnant women.

Notes

This monograph was discovered as a set of loose-leaf papers in a folder during the relocation of the collection of Birmingham Central Library to a new building in 1973. A note handwritten on the folder states that it is a rejected article that was submitted to *Notes and Records of the Royal Society of London* in 1951.

Few of the books or articles referenced by this research have been catalogued either by the British Library or the Library of Congress. The same can also be said of several of their indicated authors.

The identity of T. L. Charters is unknown.

Matter 10

Summary

I Don't Know my Father

Account by:	Love Ellis, 26. Poet.
Source:	Self-published book of poetry.
Location:	England.
Event:	Sep 1992.
Report:	1 Jul 2019.

Report

I am the product of a one-night stand,
 Child of a stranger from a foreign land.
 Who was this libertine, so tall and tanned?
I don't know my father.

Mum says, "You're similar inside – he's you."
 "You see yourself, and so you see him too."
 Yeah, right – you really think I have a clue?
 I **don't** know my father.

Thirteen, I was, when he showed up one day,
 Listening with love to what I had to say.
 Why would he care so much then go away?

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I don't **know** my father.

Jo's dad is boisterous and he likes to shout,
Sarah's lusts after me – he creeps me out.
Patrick's dad worries, is his son devout?
I don't know **my** father.

One day, a branch fell from a rotting pine,
Two friends and I stood underneath, in line.
One friend was killed, the other smashed his
spine.
Why was I flattened yet escaped just fine?

One day, my boyfriend drove us past a
shrine,
Ice, brakes and hills contrived to intertwine.
One slip-up flipped us down a sharp incline.
He died, I lived. Could that be by design?

One day, I found some tickets tied with
twine,
All were for Euromillions, marked "Love –
thine".
One, thirteen, forty, forty-eight, four-nine.
Five hundred grand for having balls align?

Good luck accompanies this life of mine,
Always watched over by a force divine.
Who is this spirit who seems so benign?
I don't know my **father**.

You, guardian angel, have a lot to learn,
My life is my life: none of your concern.
How will I tell you this if you return?
I don't know, my father.

Notes

Ellis, L. (2019) "I Don't Know my Father", in *This Thing Called Love*. London: Love Ellis, pp. 18-19.

The winning numbers for the Euromillions lottery drawn 17 Oct 2014 were: 1, 13, 40, 48, 49, with star balls 8 and 10. No tickets matched all five numbers and both star balls, but four matched all five numbers and one star ball. Each winner received €764,204.94 (£551,772.88). One winner was from the UK and opted to remain anonymous.

At present, Love Ellis denies all requests for interviews.

Love Ellis's mother, the artist Alison Ellis, will say nothing about her daughter's father other than that he was "tall, dark and handsome". Alison Ellis's sister, Catherine Garvey, who also met the man, only repeats this description.

This Thing Called Love was removed from sale 5 Sep 2020, three months after Love Ellis's 27th birthday.

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Matter 11

Summary

The Fraternity of Philosophers

Account by:	Unknown.
Source:	Handwritten notes of a seminar.
Location:	Strasbourg, France.
Event:	24 Jun 1984.
Report:	24 Jun 1984.

Report

4049 2

9:30

Fisherman

"Stories"

~~Pretentious title

Signs the gods are returning. Fomenting war is working?

No. Current wars in Middle East, Africa, Southeast Asia – why no gods interested?

Only attracted by big wars? How big is big? Where were they [in] 4010?

~~ Indeed...

Waiting for a bigger war? Nuclear weapons –
catastrophic!

Aim is to protect human life, not to end it

~~ Good point

Hypothesis that disorder attracts gods has failed –
for 1,500 years

Hypothesis that war creates greater disorder is
true

~~ Wars can also end disorder

Greater disorder [is] not attracting gods. No
disorder is attracting gods

Wasted our efforts for centuries!

Gods not returning for war – not returning for
disorder

Returning for what disorder creates – drama, story

~~ Really?

Gods are similar to us

We dislike war, dislike disorder. We like story

~~ Depends on the story

When gods visited – heroes, adventures, demigods

Iliad: drama isn't the war, it's the people

~~ True

Not extrinsic disorder, intrinsic disorder

~~ ?

Gods [have] conflicting goals, conflicting desires

Disorder interferes with these

They don't want to visit to stop us fighting, they

want to visit to enjoy [them]selves

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[The] only disorder they care about is created by
other gods
~~ Possible, speculative

Need to abandon resolution of 52nd
~~ 78th, definitely

Need new hypothesis: gods want story
If we provide story, they will come
~~ Maybe we're irrelevant?

World [will] once more be meaningful to them –
[they] won't choose to end it

Perhaps gods always visited, didn't stay because
nothing to do
~~ No evidence

Questions & Answers

Seamstress: How do we create story for the gods?
~~ Yes!

Fisherman: Make lives of individuals meaningful to
the gods, so [gods] feel invested in them.
Create problems a hero could solve

Seamstress: What if they can't solve them? People
die?

Fisherman: No, [we] solve them ourselves, plan
journeys for gods to follow

Shepherd: What if stories conflict? 2 groups can
work on 2 wars independently, but 2
independent stories might clash
~~ Good point

Fisherman: Hadn't thought of that – [we] may need
to communicate more

Shepherd: Dangerous?

Fisherman: Yes

~~ Very!

Have to be careful – world already becoming more
dangerous, technology moving quickly,
need to work to protect ourselves

This conference paid for in cash. Ten years from
now?

Cash might arouse suspicions, computers track
everything – false identities harder to
create

Separate issue, though – can discuss another time

~~ When? 82nd?

Shepherd: Form a working party?

Fisherman: Organise it!

Potter: How to advertise stories to gods?

Fisherman: Good question! Identify gods first then
scatter stories

~~ How?

Potter: By time we notice gods they've left

~~ Exactly

Fisherman: So far, yes, but technology on our side
here – can expect to get better at detecting
& at knowing where they'll appear

Hunter: Gods are currently coming – maybe to
stop humanity destroying itself? If so, we
should instigate wars for them to stop

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Fisherman: If we're wrong? If gods fail to stop us?

Destruction of what we're trying to save

~~ Yes, more wars untenable

Carpenter: In 4,049 years, never identified a god
until too late

If we find one, why give story? Why not ask the
god what gods want?

~~ Great question!

Fisherman: Wouldn't be authentic

Carpenter: They might not care

Fisherman: We don't know that

Carpenter: Ask what they don't want? If answer is
"war", there you are

Fisherman: Could work – need to approach

[subject] carefully, should think about it

~~ When?

Seamstress: If gods [are] returning anyway, why do
anything?

Fisherman: It may be one last [unreadable] – even
if not, isn't creating stories harmless?

~~ Depends on the story...

Less harmful than more war

Musician: Seamstress asks how we create stories.

Potter asks how we advertise them.

Stories concern characters. The [characters] that
interest gods are [those] connected to gods.

Fisherman: Are they?

Musician: Yes – self-evident?

~~[check mark]

Gods take interest in particular mortals. [They]
fight over them

Fisherman: [Therefore] we should help create these
characters?

Musician: You could father a demigod!

~~ Haha!

No – no need. Seamstress notes gods [are] visiting
anyway

[They] will make characters themselves

Fisherman: And if they don't?

Musician: They did in the past

Fisherman: And if their self-made stories lead to
[our?] destruction?

Musician: Fomenting war does that

Weaver: [I] agree fomenting war/chaos is counter-
productive

Why switch to stories? After millennia of no gods,
now have gods – why risk experiment?

Need more data

~~ Definitely!

Should watch these gods, find out everything we
can – can't squander this chance

Fisherman: Agree we should gather information –
it's a Founding Article

Doesn't mean can't try something else too –
especially if harmless

~~ We don't know it will be!

Weaver: Not all stories have happy endings

Fisherman: Have to ensure ours do

Dheghōm

~~ It's not our stories that are important, it's their stories. [The] idea that gods aren't attracted by war [is] solid, but stories? Characters, maybe

Notes

Over the weekend 23-24 Jun 1984, a small conference took place in the Hôtel Monopole Métropole in Strasbourg, organised by a group calling itself the Fraternity of Philosophers (*Bruderschaft der Philosophen*). The names of all attendees and of the group itself were subsequently found to be false.

After room 21 had been vacated, these handwritten notes were discovered apparently mislaid among a small pile of newspapers and tourist information leaflets that its occupant had left for disposal.

The notes were retained by the room's housekeeper, Lisette Charbonneau, because they were written in Latin; Mlle Charbonneau was at the time a student at the Latin Institute of the University of Strasbourg.

Translated from the Latin by Lisette Charbonneau, June 1984.

Matter 12

Summary

The Red Lion

Account by:	Ursula Leadbetter, 66. Retired postmistress.
Source:	Letter.
Location:	Uley, Gloucestershire, England.
Event:	4 Aug 1987.
Report:	13 Aug 1987.

Report

Dear RSPCA,

I wonder if you might be able to help me identify a small creature I encountered while walking my dog last week.

It was Tuesday morning at around 8:15 a.m., and we were up on West Hill near the Roman shrine. There are some very nice woods nearby. The weather was sunny, the air crisp and clear, and the skies were yet to cloud over.

I had my dog (a springer spaniel named Reuben) on a long leash. We had been walking for perhaps a

Dheghōm

quarter of an hour when he caught the scent of something. I tried to call him back, but he was insistent. Well, sometimes one hears of dog-walkers finding the remains of dead bodies in remote places, so I thought I'd better indulge Reuben's instincts and find out what was diverting him.

He led me to an open patch of ground among the trees, where played the creature about which I wish to ask your advice. I use the word "played" quite particularly, because it romped and rolled around as if enjoying itself.

The creature had the appearance of an adult male lion with antlers, yet it seemed to be young – a kitten, rather than a cat, if you will. It was about the size of a Scottish terrier, red in colour with disproportionately-large yellow eyes. I have come across nothing like it before in either fact or fiction.

Although the creature seemed friendly enough to me, Reuben apparently regarded it as a threat. He crouched down low, monitoring the animal, the movements of which were somewhat repetitive. His intention was clearly to protect me, but I had not anticipated that he would embrace an "attack is the best form of defence" policy! He leapt at the creature, teeth bared, when its back was turned.

I can't be sure of what happened next. It looked to me as if Reuben passed straight through the red lion; Reuben himself was certainly confused! He made a second attempt to chase it off, but again seemed to have a problem. He thereupon swiftly

returned to me, in a state of some fear. All the while, the creature continued to frolic as if nothing had happened.

A few moments later, a tall man appeared. By his colouring, he looked to be an Indian or Persian gentleman. I bade him good morning and asked if the creature was his, but he replied in a language I don't know. The small, red lion stopped its gambling and scampered to his heels, whereupon it followed him as he strode off towards Nymphsfield.

Reuben is a sensitive dog and his nerves were in tatters, so I elected to take him home rather than to follow the stranger – who looked to have chosen his clothes from an Iron-Age catalogue, I might add.

I wonder if perhaps you could enlighten me as to what the odd creature that I saw may have been, or, if not, perhaps direct me towards an authority that could?

Yours sincerely,

U. E. Leadbetter

Notes

The creature Mrs Leadbetter describes shares several features with the Stratford Lion, a beast

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that appears in a folk tale native to the New Forest (some 70 miles south-southeast of Uley).

On 18 Jan 2013, the poet and songwriter Love Ellis (19) was involved in a car accident near Uley in which her boyfriend, Simon Clarke-Spencer (21), was killed.

Matter 13

Summary

Mysterious Atmospheric Effect in Platte County

Account by:	Brad Cassidy, 48. Reporter.
Source:	<i>Platte County Record-Times.</i>
Location:	Sunrise, Wyoming, United States.
Event:	22 Sep 1983.
Report:	28 Sep 1983.

Report

Mysterious Atmospheric Effect in Platte County

Reporter: Brad Cassidy

Residents of Hartville were surprised and confused Thursday morning following a freak atmospheric effect.

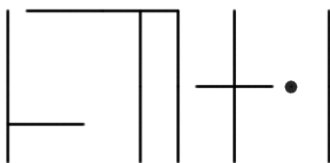
A series of strange lines appeared overnight on the slopes leading to Sunrise. Each close to 25 yards in length, they were formed from the bodies of hundreds of dead chickens.

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Meteorologists speculate that a mini-tornado picked the chickens up from a broiler house and deposited them when the tornado touched down.

The tornado must have travelled for quite some distance. No local broiler house has reported to date any missing chickens and the birds are white, which is not typical for chickens in Platte County.

Further mystery surrounds the lines themselves. They were arranged in groups, almost as if they were letters. This artist's sketch shows the layout as seen roadside.



Similar marks and circular patterns have appeared flattened into crows in England. They are typically dismissed as pranks intended to fool the gullible.

As far as this reporter can ascertain, none of the English symbols have involved the death of several hundred chickens. This suggests that the Sunrise marks are an entirely different phenomenon.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration is keen to hear from anyone who witnessed the tornado as it passed by or who might have other information regarding the mystery.

The remains of the chickens were incinerated Friday to protect public health.

Notes

No photographs of the lines of dead chickens have been made public.

Sunrise is an abandoned mining town. In 1986, it was revealed to be a rich source of artefacts from the Clovis culture, dating to around 13,000 years ago.

[Update May 31 2022]

Archaeologists have discovered that the Sunrise excavation site known as Powars II was a red ochre quarry. Red ochre was used by the Clovis culture for a variety of ritual purposes.

Dheghōm

Matter 14

Summary

Death of a Child

Account by:	Marjorie Laleek, 54. Kindergarten teacher.
Source:	Transcript of Interview.
Location:	Epps, Louisiana, United States.
Event:	26 Sep 1983.
Report:	8 Mar 2014.

Report

Interviewer: David Scott (DS).

Interviewee: Marjorie Laleek (ML).

Other: McDonald's restaurant employee (MRE).

DS: ... just testing this is on, OK, so, it's 10:43 on Saturday, the eighth of March, 2014. I'm David Scott, and I'm interviewing Mrs Marjorie –

ML: Miss.

DS: Oh, I'm sorry, Miss Marjorie Laleek – in the McDonald's restaurant on Constitution Avenue in Oak Grove, Louisiana. Can you just confirm that you're OK with my recording this, Miss Laleek.

ML: Call me Marjie. Yes, I don't mind being recorded. I can stop the interview at any time?

DS: Yes, of course, this isn't official or anything, I'm just interested in what you have to say.

ML: Good, don't suppose I *will* stop it, you've come a long way, but in this day and age you can't be too careful, lot of people around with strange ideas and stranger agendas. Anyway, you want to talk about what happened at Little Rascals?

DS: That's the kindergarten you worked at in Epps.

ML: Yes, it's closed now – love your accent, by the way, you sound so ... educated!

DS: Why thank you. I was hoping you weren't going to say "villainous" – Hollywood has a lot to answer for.

ML: (laughs) "Cancel the kitchen scraps for lepers and orphans, no more merciful beheadings, and call off Christmas!"

DS: *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves*, right? I'm a fan of Alan Rickman's.

ML: Me too! (laughs) I think we've established a connection.

DS: A rapport!

ML: (laughs)

DS: (laughs) So, about what happened in Epps: the way the newspapers reported it, two men in judo uniforms, armed with swords, went into the kindergarten; they attacked you when you tried to stop them, then they killed a child and left. Is that account broadly accurate?

Dheghōm

ML: Nothing you've just said is *wrong*, but there's a whole lot more to it than that. Firstly, there were two of us working there that morning, me and Nadine. Nobody ever mentions Nadine. I came out of it looking the regular heroine, but I was only wounded. Nadine, she was killed. One of the two gentlemen – grey, wiry hair he had, like unpicked steel wool – he walked right in, didn't say a word, Nadine asked him if she could help: he lopped her head right off her body where she stood, backhand, as if he was returning a serve in tennis.

DS: The police say she overslept and was still at home.

ML: I do *know* why they'd think that, but I saw what happened: decapitation.

DS: So *why would* they think that?

ML: Well let me tell you what happened next. The second gentleman – he was big, like the first – came in and tried to chop me in half. He raised his sword above his head, two-handed, then brought it down on me. I saw what was coming and moved aside, he struck my shoulder instead of my head. I almost lost my arm – I'm so grateful to the doctors and nurses who managed to save it. Heaven knows what would have happened if I hadn't had insurance.

DS: Did he make a second attempt, to finish you off?

ML: No, the wire-haired gentleman said something, I don't know what, then they both

laughed and went for the children. Sorry, I find recollecting this a little emotional.

DS: Take your time, there's no hurry.

ML: I'll – I'm OK.

DS: We can pause if you like.

ML: No, it does me good to think of this once in a while.

DS: You're sure?

ML: I'm sure.

DS: OK, well stop me if you change your mind. So, you said that the men went for "the children". They didn't just attack the child who died?

ML: All the children died. They killed all of them. Some, they ran through, others they (sobs) hacked at, their little bodies (sobs) ... I'm sorry, this was thirty years ago, but you don't (sobs), don't forget something like that. Be strong, Marjie.

DS: The newspapers said that the children were all asleep except for one, Jimmy French, who had been stabbed.

ML: Well that's what makes this even crazier. I was losing a lot of blood, but I was still fully conscious, and what I saw was ... well, I don't know if it was a miracle or what it was. The bodies, the (sobs), the body parts, they disappeared. Same with Nadine. They were there, then they weren't. Only little Jimmy remained where he fell. The other children were back in their cots, as if they were just waking up after a nap.

DS: Did they know what had happened?

Dheghōm

ML: Oh, they *knew* what had happened, they started crying in fear, some were calling for their mammas (sobs) – the two gentlemen were still there, see, weapons drawn. Soon as they were sure that Jimmy hadn't resurrected or whatever it was that the rest had done, that seemed to satisfy them. They cleaned their swords on the drapes and left. One of the kids, Donny, was together enough to bring me the phone so I could call 911. The police and an ambulance showed up a few minutes later – they were quick, wonderfully quick – and I was taken to the hospital to have my life saved.

DS: What did the police make of what they saw?

ML: Well what could they make of it? There was blood everywhere – way more than could be explained by my and Jimmy's injuries. It was like a horror movie, *Carrie* or something. I explained what I'd seen, the children backed me up, and Nadine told her side of it, too – she arrived while I was being loaded into the ambulance. She was so out of breath, poor thing. She lived four or five blocks away, and right after she'd died she'd found herself in bed at home; she'd picked up her revolver and run back to help.

DS: Does she still live locally?

ML: No, she married and moved to Canada, she was getting a lot of hate. People said that if she hadn't slept in, maybe the gentlemen with the swords wouldn't have killed Jimmy. A fat lot *they* know.

DS: Are you still in touch with Nadine?

ML: She had kids, I never married; we still swap cards at Christmas, but we have our own lives now.

DS: Do you have any clue why Jimmy French didn't wake up in his cot?

ML: Sure, he was dead. Jimmy is easy to explain – it's why the others *did* wake up in their cots that's unnatural.

DS: Was there anything special about him, do you remember?

ML: I discussed this with Nadine. No, he was just this precious, sweet little boy, never any trouble except for that one time he gave us a scare.

DS: What did he do?

WL: Well Nadine and I were occupied at the time – Stevie Dubbs had bitten Tiffany Glassia and drawn blood. Jimmy must have managed to open the door to the office on his own when we weren't looking, Nadine wouldn't have left it ajar. Anyway, we heard this crash and found him with the printer on top of him. He must have caught himself on the cable or something.

DS: Was he hurt?

WL: Not at all – but he should have been. Lucky kid: we were expecting to have to call an ambulance, but he was right as rain.

DS: Can you tell me anything about his parents?

ML: They weren't married. His mother, Nicole, said his father was in the army and had died in a training incident before Jimmy was born. That little boy meant the world to her.

DS: Do you know where she is today?

Dheghōm

ML: No, Jimmy's death broke her, she left Epps and moved to New Orleans.

DS: Has anyone else asked you about what happened that day?

ML: Lots of people. Whether I tell them the truth or stick with what the police cooked up depends on who they are. Mostly, I follow the police's line. It's easier that way.

DS: I'm honoured, then?

ML: You don't seem to be hoping to exploit my story, so yes.

DS: Is there anything you'd like to add, anything I've missed?

ML: Hmm, well I can tell you this: I think the two gentlemen with the swords were specifically seeking to kill Jimmy French. They didn't know what he looked like, so they simply killed every child in Little Rascals, and then they hung around to make certain that one of them didn't recover.

DS: They killed girls as well as boys, though.

ML: That might have been for sport.

DS: Ah. So you think they knew that only Jimmy would stay dead?

ML: Seems that way to me.

DS: Interesting.

ML: Nicole's brother.

DS: Sorry?

ML: Nicole has a brother, I've just remembered. Ben French, he's a construction worker.

DS: Do you think he'd speak to me?

ML: I doubt it, he's kind of taciturn, but he might speak to me. Would you like me to try his number?

DS: If you would, yes please! Ask him if he ever met Jimmy's father.

ML: OK, well I think I have him on my iPhone.
(sound of handbag opening)

The one advantage of not having children or a husband is you get to spend your money on yourself.

DS: I don't –

ML: Hold on, it's ringing.

Hi, hi Ben, it's Marjie here, Marjie Laleek.

--

Yes, very well thank you – and you?

--

Glad to hear it. Is it OK to talk, or are you on site?

--

Fantastic, listen, I have a nice, English gentleman here with me who wants to know about your sister, Nicole.

--

No, he doesn't want to speak to her, he seems genuine, he wants to know about the father of little Jimmy.

--

Yes, your nephew.

--

You did meet him, though? Jimmy's father?

--

Dheghōm

OK, let me just repeat what you're saying so Mr Scott can hear. You were driving along highway 134 with Nicole and you saw this gentleman...

--

Hispanic-looking, yes...

--

You picked him up because he seemed lost...

--

You took him to Epps ... Sorry, when was this?

--

Between Christmas and the New Year, OK.

--

He didn't understand English...

--

Nicole suggested taking him to the church, so you dropped the pair off there.

Did you wait?

--

Oh yes, so she did.

--

OK, there was no-one at the church so she took him home and one thing led to another and she got pregnant...

--

I'm glad to hear that, I was going to ask.

(whispers) He didn't force himself on her.

--

I'm sure you would have. Do you know what did happen to the Hispanic gentleman, then?

--

Neither of you ever saw him again.
So Nicole made up that story about his
being in the army?

--

I guess it's a possibility.

DS: Can he describe the man in more detail?
How old was he? What was he wearing?

ML: Sorry, just a moment.
What did you say?

DS: Could Mr French describe the man in more
detail? His age, his clothes?

ML: Mr Scott would like to know if you remem-
ber how old the man was.

--

In his twenties. Do you remember what he
was wearing?

--

No, no, that doesn't matter, it was a long
time ago.

DS: Nothing strange or unusual, though?

ML: Nothing strange or unusual, though?

--

Not that you remember. OK.

--

He's trying to figure out what happened to
little Jimmy.

--

Yes, I'll let you know if he does. How's
Nicole, by the way?

--

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Married? Oh, that's wonderful! When did that happen?

--

Oh, I'm so happy for her!

--

Yes, I understand. Pass her all my love when you next call her, if you think –

--

Yes, nice talking to you, thank you for your time, I appreciate it.

--

(laughs) Yes!

--

OK, well I don't know if that was any use, but it's all he had.

DS: It was very useful, thank you.

ML: Do you know the Hispanic gentleman?

DS: No, but I have a theory.

ML: Care to share?

DS: It's ... somewhat off the wall.

ML: I showed you mine, you show me yours.

DS: (laughs) OK, well I think the Hispanic man and the two in the judo outfits are from a different reality.

ML: A different *reality*? What, like ... a different universe?

DS: Sort of. The thing is, I have evidence that when someone from that – let's call it universe – when someone from that universe kills someone from our universe, instantly the deceased disap-

pears only to wake up, moments later, unharmed – usually in the nearest place they last slept.

ML: So for Nadine that would be her house and for the children the cots? (laughs) For me, it would be the desk where I fill out the tax forms!

DS: (laughs) Yes, you've got it. Furthermore, if people from the other universe kill each other, they also come back to life, but somewhere else, nothing to do with sleeping. I have a suspicion that there's a connection with ancient sites: they seem to be able to move between them with impunity.

ML: Poverty Point is only a few miles from here.

DS: On highway 577, yes, I drove past it on the way.

ML: Just over a mile north of the junction with highway 134.

DS: Indeed.

ML: So the Hispanic-looking gentleman, Jimmy's father, was ... from another universe?

DS: That's what I believe, yes. I don't know why the two men in the judo outfits would have wanted to kill Jimmy, though; perhaps they object to cross-universe children or something.

ML: But if what you say is true, they shouldn't have been able to take his life anyway, should they? Why didn't he wake up in his cot like the other children?

DS: Well that's what's troubling me, but I *think* I have an answer. So: there are certain indications that individuals from the other universe are largely invulnerable while they're in our universe. Jimmy's

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experience when the printer fell on him suggests that this protection extends to people like him, too.

ML: In that case, there are two separate reasons why he should still be with us.

DS: Right, OK, well this is all conjecture, but I think, as an analogy, I *think* it's a little like how a light switch works. Suppose that if your light is on then you're invulnerable and if it isn't then you're not. When the judo men showed up, all of the children's lights were off except for Jimmy's, because of his parentage. Now, what apparently happens when people from the other universe kill people from ours is that it *flicks* the light switch for a moment or two. For most people, this means that their invulnerability light comes on in time to save them and they wake up mended where they last slept.

ML: But because Jimmy's light was *already* on, when *his* switch was flicked his invulnerability light went off?

DS: Yes, it toggled. That's why he stayed dead: he was no longer invulnerable when he needed to be.

ML: I see. So what happens if one of us kills someone from the other universe? Is it even possible?

DS: At a guess, yes, but –

MRE: Excuse me, ma'am, sir, but we're getting complaints from the other guests.

DS: Oh, I'm so sorry, I do apologise! I hadn't realised we'd got so loud.

MRE: It's more to do with your topic of conversation.

ML: That's OK, I think we're done here, we'll go. I'm sorry if we caused anyone distress.

DS: That wasn't our intention at all. Could I perhaps pay for everyone's food?

MRE: This is McDonald's, sir.

DS: Ah. Maybe a big tip then.

(sound of chairs moving)

MRE: Thank you, that's very much appreciated.

ML: Shall we continue outside?

DS: We're getting funny looks. Perhaps informally.

ML: I have further questions.

DS: Interview ended at ten past, er, at 11:12.

Notes

Nicole French is now Nicole Maddison. She bears heavy psychological scars from the death of her son, so no attempt has been made to contact her.

Nadine Monroe lives in Moncton, New Brunswick. When asked over the telephone about the incident at Little Rascals, she stuck to the police version of events.

Dheghōm

Matter 15

Summary

The Celebrity Culture of the Greek Gods

Account by:	Michael P. Prewitt, 21. Student.
Source:	PhD Proposal.
Location:	Edinburgh, Scotland.
Event:	18 Jan 2017.
Report:	18 Jan 2017.

Report

Research Proposal for a PhD in Classics

Michael P. Prewitt

Provisional title: The Celebrity Culture of the Greek Gods

1. Overview

When, as a ten-year-old in late 2005, I played the strategy game *Civilization IV* [1], I was particularly struck by the quotation read by the actor Leonard Nimoy that accompanied the discovery of Polytheism:

Not at all similar are the race of the immortal gods and the race of men who walk upon the earth.

It seemed to me that this statement, ostensibly from Homer's *Iliad*, was wrong. The gods of ancient Greece were very much like us, from their petty squabbles and emotional outbursts to their family ties, friendships and desire to do the right (in their view) thing.

I had read the Penguin Classic version of the *Iliad* translated by Fagles [2], but did not recall this powerful line. Checking through, I found that Fagles had a rather different way of expressing it:

We are not of the same breed, we never will be, the deathless gods and men who walk the earth.

In my teens, I sought out other translations by Buckley [3], Chapman [4], Lattimore [5], Pope [6], Cowper [7], Lang *et al* [8], Fitzgerald [9], Murray [10] and Edward, Earl of Derby [11]. None had the same turn of phrase as each other, let alone as in *Civilization IV*.

Setting aside my frustration with the vagaries of translation, this exercise inspired in me a desire to explore the psychology of the gods of ancient Greece (and thus of the ancient Greeks themselves). The structure of my undergraduate degree helped to focus my ideas, and in my Masters

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dissertation I was able to test them. The method I adopted involved assuming the personae of a number of major Greek gods and, for each one, taking a set of standard psychology tests (Big Five IPIP [12], MMPI-2-RF [13] and MBTI [14]).

Although I have yet to complete the analysis component of my dissertation, I am persuaded that personality inventories are insufficient to gain an in-depth understanding of the “minds” of either the gods or the cultures that created them. A better way presents itself: using the apparent motivations of the gods as expressed in the classics to reveal their personal mental make-ups.

2. Background

The ancient Greeks were similar to us, but not the same. Their culture was very different (slavery was its bedrock [15]) and their beliefs often seem strange to modern ways of thinking. As the quotation from *The Iliad* suggests, the Greek gods likewise were similar to our ancestors, but not the same. Nevertheless, as the product of the collective minds of generations of poets, orators, priests and common people, the gods of the ancient Greeks must reflect *something* of the populace’s shared psyche.

As a way of teasing out what this shared psyche might be, I propose to use the model offered by celebrity culture. In the same way that celebrity culture reveals something about how we see ourselves in a mass-media society [16][17], so

celebrity culture in the Classical period reveals something about how the people of those times saw themselves.

Without question, fame was important to our ancestors in ancient Greece. Herostratus set fire to the second temple of Artemis at Ephesus for the simple reason that he wanted to become famous (a desire that was fulfilled, but only after he'd been executed). Achilles chose a brief but glorious life over a long but uneventful one.

Celebrity was more commonly found in the form of demonstrations of athletic prowess[18]. Individual Olympiads were named after the winner of the most prestigious race, the stadion, which was over a distance of a stade (about 200m); thus, we know the name of Coroebus of Elis, who won the stadion at the first Olympiad.

In addition to athletes, fame followed poets, philosophers, courtesans and high-profile criminals [19]. These were *pre-figurative* celebrities [20], though: there wasn't a feeling that they were part of the ordinary person's life, and many of them only achieved fame after death [21].

There is a glaring exception to this, however, which nonetheless does not appear to have been considered in any great depth by the academy: gods *were* part of every ordinary person's life, and individuals felt that they had a parasocial relationship [22] with them just as much as someone today might feel they "know" a newsreader or actor or footballer who has no awareness that the individ-

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ual even exists. The Greek gods were figurative celebrities in the modern sense.

It is my hope that by examining the Greek gods as if they were people, insight can be gained into the minds of the ancient Greeks themselves. In particular, I hope to argue that the interactions between the gods and mortals were driven in part by a sense of celebrity: the gods directed their visitations towards those who were known to them.

My research question is:

RQ1: To what extent did the gods of ancient Greece treat key mortals as celebrities?

If I have time, I would like to add a second research question:

RQ2: To what extent did key mortals of ancient Greece treat the gods as celebrities?

My contribution is the creation of a new and original lens through which the interactions between the ancient Greeks and their gods may be viewed.

3. Methodology

I shall begin by identifying those Greek myths that show interactions between gods and mortals. I shall then iterate through them line by line, tagging all instances of such reactions with their nature, participants, cause and results. I hope to classify at least a thousand interactions this way.

To determine what tags to use, I shall first conduct a preliminary study of Homer, then use

the data obtained from this to construct a robust set of tags to use for the remaining selected works.

For example, in the first 400 lines of book five of the *Iliad*, there are the following direct interactions between gods and mortals:

- Athena endows Diomedes with courage.
- Hephæstus rescues Idæus (his son).
- Artemis chooses not to intervene to save Scamandrius (whom she had taught).
- Pandarus boasts that Apollo is on his side.
- Diomedes asks Athena to help him kill Pandarus.
- Athena endows Diomedes with the spirit of Tydeus (his father).
- Athena endows Diomedes with the ability to tell the difference between gods and mortals.
- Athena urges Diomedes to wound Aphrodite (her half-sister) if she appears.
- Athena directs Diomedes' spear to kill Pandarus.
- Aphrodite protects Æneas (her son).
- Diomedes wounds Aphrodite.
- Apollo rescues Æneas.

There are also six direct interactions between gods and two cases where mortals act in accordance with their interpretations of the gods' motives.

Even from this short analysis, it is clear that the Olympians regarded certain mortals as celebrities

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and *vice versa*, and that this is what drove them to behave as they did with respect to each other.

Although I am familiar with basic quantitative methods, I believe that I may need further training to do justice to the analysis. Most notably, I'm very weak in the area of clustering techniques.

The tagging can be done in translation, rather than in the original ancient Greek.

4. Timescale

I expect to spend the first year reading up on what others have written about the psychology of Greek gods and about celebrity (both in the ancient and modern eras). I shall spend the second year collecting data and the first half of the third year on analysis. I shall devote the remainder of the third year to writing up my thesis.

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Notes

Prewitt's proposal was rejected for lacking sufficient impact. He went on to embark upon a PhD on the topic of a Deleuzian reading of Aphrodite's interactions with her siblings.

[Update 22 Aug 2022]

Prewitt passed his *viva voce* 9 Aug 2022.

Matter 16

Summary

Deliberations of the 82nd Confabulation

Account by:	Unknown
Source:	Reassembled strip-shredded message.
Location:	Bad Oldesloe, Germany.
Event:	Mar 1986.
Report:	May 1994.

Report

The 82nd Confabulation recalls:

Firstly, that preventing the end of life on Earth is a Founding Article;

Secondly, that studying the behaviour of gods is a Founding Article.

The 82nd Confabulation observes:

Firstly, that between the 1st and 81st Confabulations there were no visitations by the gods;

Secondly, that following the 81st Confabulation there have been visitations by the gods
as documented in the Annals;

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Thirdly, that the behaviour of the visiting gods has been studied after the fact;

Fourthly, that no visiting gods have been studied during the fact.

Furthermore

The 82nd Confabulation recalls:

Firstly, that the 51st Confabulation hypothesised that disorder would attract visitations by the gods
and that the 52nd Confabulation accepted the hypothesis of the 51st Confabulation

and that the 52nd Confabulation resolved to foment disorder;

Secondly, that the 77th Confabulation hypothesised that war causes disorder

and that the 78th Confabulation accepted the hypothesis of the 77th Confabulation

and that the 78th Confabulation resolved to foment war;

Thirdly, that the 81st Confabulation recalled that the 80th Confabulation observed that the many wars fought since the 78th Confabulation did not attract visitations by the gods;

Fourthly, that the 81st Confabulation observed that the Great War did not attract visitations by the gods;

Fifthly, that the 81st Confabulation hypothesised that the gods are not attracted by war;

Sixthly, that the 81st Confabulation observed that a Greater War was predicted;

Seventhly, that the 81st Confabulation invited the present Confabulation to assess the hypothesis of the 81st Confabulation by reference to the Greater War.

The 82nd Confabulation observes:

Firstly, that the Greater War did not attract visitations by the gods;

Secondly, that the hypothesis of the 81st Confabulation is supported;

Thirdly, that a Greatest War, which would bring about the end of life on Earth, is predicted;

Fourthly, that none of the recent visitations by the gods were related to wars
as documented in the Annals.

The 82nd Confabulation hypothesises:

That the hypothesis of the 51st Confabulation is false.

Therefore

The 82nd Confabulation resolves:

Firstly, to make all efforts to prevent a Greatest War

because a Greatest War would lead to the violation of a Founding Article;

Secondly, to accept the hypothesis of the 81st Confabulation

because the evidence of the Great War and Greater War support it

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and because to use a Greatest War to test it further is incompatible with the first resolution;

Thirdly, to suspend the resolution of the 52nd Confabulation

because the hypothesis of the 51st Confabulation is not proven

because fomenting disorder has not attracted visitations by the gods;

Fourthly, to suspend the resolution of the 78th Confabulation

because this follows from the third resolution;

Fifthly, to make all effort to determine why the gods visit

because the suspensions of the resolutions of the 52nd and 78th Confabulations leave no remaining explanation for why the gods visit

and because studying the behaviour of gods is a Founding Article.

The 82nd Confabulation invites the 83rd Confabulation:

Firstly, to accept or to reject the hypothesis of the present Confabulation;

Secondly, in the event of a rejection of the hypothesis of the present Confabulation

to resume the resolution of the 52nd Confabulation

and to resume the resolution of the 78th Confabulation.

The 82nd Confabulation invites a future Confabulation:

Firstly, to consider using English instead of Latin;

Secondly, to consider meeting every 25 years instead of every 50 years.

Notes

Translated from the Latin by T. Mark Walter for his unfinished book, *Double Trouble*. The original, untranslated document is in the possession of the German counter-intelligence agency, the *Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz* (BfV).

The original document is handwritten and was found among other shredded papers at the home of Rolf Pabst in Bad Oldesloe. It was reassembled by the then West German BfV, which was investigating Pabst as a suspected agent of the East German *Staatssicherheitsdienst* (Stasi). The investigation was eventually dropped. It was Walter's contention that this was because Pabst was a double agent in the employ of the West German foreign intelligence agency, the *Bundesnachrichtendienst* (BND).

Rolf Pabst's father is the brother of Karin Fuchs' mother.

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T. Mark Walter died 4 Jan 1987 of carbon monoxide poisoning caused by a fault with the heater in his apartment.

Rolf Pabst still lives but answers all requests for interviews with a statement that German law forbids him from speaking about his time in the intelligence community.

Matter 17

Summary

Seat in the Gods

Account by:	Love Ellis, 27. Poet.
Source:	Transcript of podcast interview.
Location:	England.
Event:	27 May 2021.
Report:	29 May 2021.

Report

Interviewer: Celia St Paul (CS).

Interviewee: Love Ellis (LE).

CS: So for my guest this episode, I'm delighted to welcome the poet, Love Ellis, whose second collection, *In the Name of Love*, has just been published. Love, welcome to *Seat in the Gods*!

LE: Thank you for inviting me.

CS: The pleasure is all mine, I assure you. After the success of your first collection, *This, er, This* –

LE: *This Thing Called Love*.

CS: Yes, sorry, I was just collecting my notes, yes, so, after the success of *This Thing Called Love*,

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I'm sure you received many invitations for interviews.

LE: A few.

CS: Yet this is your first broadcast interview.

LE: It is.

CS: So I can't help wondering why you chose to speak to *Seat in the Gods* rather than, say, Radio 4's *Front Row*?

LE: Leaving aside the fact that I wasn't invited to speak on *Front Row* –

CS: (laughs)

LE: – I liked your podcast's name.

CS: Simple as that?

LE: Simple as that.

CS: OK, well obviously we've exchanged a few emails in the run-up, but this is the first time we've had a chance to speak properly, albeit over Zoom.

LE: At least we don't have to wear masks this way.

CS: Indeed, indeed.

LE: Although everyone wears masks of one kind or another, don't they?

CS: Er ... quite. Anyway, for the benefit of our listeners, not all of whom may be familiar with your work, perhaps you'd like to say a little about yourself?

LE: Well, I'm Love Ellis, I'm 27, 28 next week, I live in leafy Oxfordshire and I don't really have a job.

CS: You're a poet, though.

LE: That's true.

CS: Have you always been a poet?

LE: Everyone has always been a poet.

CS: Can you explain what you mean by that?

LE: You are who you are. It's just a question of how long it takes you to find out.

CS: I, er, see, I see. So, Love (giggles) – oh I'm so sorry! When I say that I keep thinking I'm talking to my husband!

LE: It happens a lot, don't worry. I'm inured to it.

CS: Love is your real name, though?

LE: It is. I have an artist for a mother: this is the kind of thing that happens.

CS: Oh, I know – my mother is a sculptor and she lumbered me with Celia!

LE: It's heavenly.

CS: You like it? I think it's a bit old-fashioned myself.

LE: No – I mean I do like it, but it's ultimately from the Latin word *caelum*, meaning 'Heaven'. That's why I said it was heavenly.

CS: Oh, I see!

LE: I'd thought it was one of the reasons that you called your podcast *Seat in the Gods*.

CS: No, I chose it because 'the gods' is what –

LE: I know: the upper balconies in a theatre. It's a clever name –

CS: Well for an arts podcast, everyone sits in the cheapest seats!

LE: I wasn't about to suggest that –

CS: You're too polite.

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LE: – no, I thought it was clever because it promises a long view.

CS: Oh, er, that too of course! Anyway, Love (giggles), so you first burst brilliantly onto the scene with your collection *This Thing Called Love*.

LE: So I'm told.

CS: Now this was widely seen as having a theme of identity.

(pause)

Er, so was it about identity?

LE: It was about whatever you want it to be about. I only write the poems; it's for others to interpret them.

CS: So if I wanted to read, say, your poem *Flight* as if it was about, oh, say, the mechanics of a car, that would be acceptable?

LE: Of course. If you were fleeing from a car mechanic, even more so.

CS: Er...

LE: The essence of art – all art, not just poetry – is that it says something. As for what it says, well it says itself: the artwork is the expression and the expression is the artwork. They're one and the same.

CS: I'm not sure I follow.

LE: I can't tell you what the poem *Flight* is about. Well, I *can* tell you, but my explanation would be the poem itself. I reduced – condensed – what I wanted to say in that poem *into* that poem. You have to read the poem to find meaning in it.

CS: The title is a pun, though, right?

LE: Is it?

CS: Well I thought it was about both flying and fleeing. The past participle of both 'to fly' and 'to flee' is 'flight'.

LE: It can also be a noun. A flight of stairs. A flight of swans. A helicopter flight. A wine flight.

CS: A wine flight?

LE: It's a collection of wines at a wine-tasting event. The point I'm trying to make is that the word 'flight' has many meanings, as do all words. The key to understanding poetry is to find the meaning that works for you.

CS: I see, I see. Now one of the things about your poetry – in both your collections – is that it's orthogonal to many of the present trends in British poetry.

LE: Each to their own.

CS: Be that as it may, most modern poetry has eschewed rhyme entirely, yet in your work you mix older forms with experimental forms of your own.

LE: So?

CS: Well, why haven't you abandoned the old-fashioned ways like everyone else?

LE: They haven't abandoned them, they just wield them differently. Rhyme is one of a range of tools available to them.

CS: And also to you?

LE: And also to me, yes, I use the same tools that everyone else uses.

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CS: Yet you have an emphasis on rhyme and metre that others don't. George the Poet, for example –

LE: I'm familiar with his work, of course I am. Look, if you're hoping that I'm going to criticise someone else for following their own path, you can hope away: I shan't be taking that bait.

CS: OK, OK, so can you tell us what's so important about rhyme and structure to you that you put such an emphasis on them?

LE: Sure. I started out as a songwriter – not a very good one, I didn't like what I found myself saying.

CS: Saying?

LE: Yes – the message, I mean, not the words. It was too easy to be sloppy in libretti, too easy to be pretentious in rap. Neither of those are me. I liked the structure afforded by music, but was drawn to rhyme because it presents the listener with a way to anticipate what's coming. For me, poetry is a playful process. I choose rules to focus my statements, because otherwise I'd have too much to say. If I subsequently broke those rules because I couldn't keep to them, why would I even have them? Or if I made them so slack that meaning came from superficial, serendipitous connections? Play is free movement within a rigid system: too much rigidity and there's no movement; too little and there's no system. Either way, there's no play.

CS: You seem to be criticising those who don't follow rules.

LE: Not at all. I'm me, they're them; they follow different rules peculiar to their processes. They might use epistrophe and anaphora as their basis then insert one exquisite end-rhyme to skewer the listener; I might do it the other way round. It's a question of accent.

CS: So it's not because you *can't* write in the modern form, it's that you choose not to because you need more structure.

LE: Not *more*: different. The affordances I associate with assonance and alliteration are shaped for shrouded shadows that show shallow shimmers. See? Easy – but I don't want easy.

CS: But ... that was actually quite thought-provoking. Shrouded shadows, shallow shimmers: you seemed to be saying something that surpasses what the sentence itself said.

LE: (laughs)

CS: Sorry?

LE: Oh, weren't you joining in? With the sibilance?

CS: (laughs) So I was! (laughs) My subconscious is a better poet than I am!

LE: (laughs)

CS: Now, what's next, ah, yes: I wonder if you'd like to read one of your poems from your new collection for our listeners?

LE: Of course, which one?

CS: How about *Generous to a Fault*? It's nice and podcast-friendly short.

LE: OK.

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CS: Before you start, can you perhaps tell us a little bit about it? You chose to write it in iambic tetrameter, rather than the more usual iambic pentameter, which –

LE: No, that's wrong.

CS: Sorry?

LE: It's trochaic, not iambic. Iambic puts the stress on the second syllable, "Because I could not stop for Death" –

CS: That's Emily Dickinson, isn't it?

LE: Yes, but you see how it stresses every even-numbered syllable? *Generous to a Fault* is trochaic, like Shakespeare's couplet "Double, double, toil and trouble". It stresses every odd-numbered syllable.

CS: Ah, I apologise – I must have slept through that lecture in college. The question remains, though: why this particular form?

LE: That's its form.

CS: Yes, but *why* is it its form?

LE: Because it is its form. That's how it had to be.

CS: How it had to be so that what?

LE: No, just how it had to *be*.

CS: Ah. Well perhaps if you were to read the poem to us now, it'll become clearer.

LE: OK.

Generous to a Fault

Understand, I can't repay it:
What I've borrowed outlives owing.
Reparations won't decay it,

Day by day my debt is growing.
If my younger self could weigh it,
She would want what she's bestowing.

I want what I'll be tomorrow:
She whose life I'm guaranteeing;
She whose self is hers to borrow;
She whose character I'm freeing.
Love and life and storm and sorrow:
Who I am encodes my being.
(pause)

CS: Well, thank you, Love, that was quite an extraordinary reading. I read it earlier myself, but it sounded quite different in my head; it was less ... impactful.

LE: We have different heads.

CS: So it's about what your past self is paying forward to your future self?

LE: If that's what it's about to you, yes.

CS: What's it about to you?

LE: I've just told you what it's about. I read the poem. That's what it's about.

CS: (laughs) Enigmatic as ever!

LE: OK, let me try to elucidate. So, you've just used the word 'enigmatic'. It means something to you, and although you can dance around that meaning, explaining it using different words, that's never going to capture *quite* what you meant when you said it. The reading distances itself from the text. What you meant by 'enigmatic' is that very word itself: 'enigmatic'. Now I heard the word, and

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I interpreted it as meaning something, and even if it's close to what you meant, it's not *exactly* what you meant, and never can be. It encoded one of your thoughts and I decoded it into one of mine. It's the same deal with the poem. It's as if it was a very long word.

CS: Like in German?

LE: (laughs) Not quite *that* long!

CS: (laughs) OK, so, er, yes, so, moving on, your new collection: *In the Name of Love*. That's autobiographical, like *This Thing Called Love*, yes?

LE: In the sense that all art articulates the self, indeed it is.

CS: Your name is in the title, though.

LE: That doesn't mean it's a central theme.

CS: Nevertheless, it does seem to be saying that you now accept, or at least are reconciled with, who you are.

LE: If you say so.

CS: Well what else can it mean?

LE: Stop.

CS: Sorry?

LE: Well, if you wanted to interpret *This Thing Called Love* as self-indulgent navel-gazing, it could mean that I wanted to stop with that.

CS: It could? How?

LE: The Supremes: (sings) Stop! In the name of love, before you break my heart. Think it o-o-ver.

CS: (laughs) Oh, I see! (laughs) Reading poetry is a bit like doing a cryptic crossword.

LE: I'm hopeless at those, I see too many words and can never decide which is the right one.

CS: The cover of your book is a bit strange.

LE: You were going to say 'enigmatic', weren't you?

CS: (laughs) Maybe! So, for the benefit of our listeners, the cover is off-white, the title, *In the Name of Love*, is in – what typeface is that?

LE: DIN 1451.

CS: (mutters) I should stop asking off-the-cuff questions....

LE: DIN stands for *Deutsches Institut für Normung*. DIN 1451 is used for road signs in Germany.

CS: (laughs) Is there nothing you don't know?

LE: (laughs) It took me two full days to choose that font – I was as surprised as anyone to find out where it originated.

CS: So what about this large symbol underneath the title, before your name?

LE: That says 'Love'.

CS: It does? I've looked at it every which way but I can't made head nor tail of it. It's like H dot T, all rotated upside-down.

LE: No no no, that upside-down T is an L. The vertical line with a dot to the left of it is the vowel sound. The plus-like symbol with a short crossbar is a V.

CS: I'm not seeing it.

LE: It's three separate letters written together, cursive style. The first letter is a vertical line with a

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horizontal bar at the bottom that's about the same length as the vertical line.

CS: So that's the upside-down T?

LE: Yes, the 'l'. The next letter is a vertical line with a dot to the left of the top end. That's the 'u' sound in 'Love'.

CS: A side-dotted I is a U?

LE: A vertical line with something to the left is a vowel. The height shows how closed the vowel is, and the length of the bar is how near to the front of the mouth it is. If it had been a long bar instead of a dot, that would have made it an 'i' sound, like in the word 'sit'. If there had been two vertical lines next to one another, it would have been a long vowel, 'seat', 'move'.

CS: Ah, so the plus is a V? There's not an E at the end, it's just three letters?

LE: Correct, it's phonetic. The bar crossing the vertical is only half-length because if you order by where sounds are formed in the mouth, it's in the middle. A long bar would have been a 'th', as in 'that', and two dots either side would have been a 'h', as in 'hat'. If the bar had just been to the right instead of crossing the line, it would have been the same but unvoiced, so 'f' rather than 'v'.

CS: Did you invent this code yourself? It must have taken ages.

LE: No, I didn't invent it. My father taught me it.

CS: The father you don't know?

LE: Yes, that one.

CS: Well, that was oddly educational! Did you study phonetics at college?

LE: No, my degree is in mathematics, I just find this kind of thing weirdly fascinating.

CS: Well I certainly wasn't expecting our conversation to cover the Supremes, wine flights, Latin names and cryptography, but I suppose that's the beauty of podcasts! Love Ellis, poet and genuinely interesting person, thank you for such an invigorating conversation. Your latest collection, *In the Name of Love*, is available where?

LE: Just look it up on Amazon. Get it while it's hot!

CS: Your previous collection, *This Thing Called Love*, that's there too?

LE: No, I withdrew it from sale. It's not hot any more.

CS: Oh! OK, well once more, thanks for speaking to us – Zoom managed to hold out for once!

LE: Thank you for inviting me.

Notes

Ellis, L. (2021) *In the Name of Love*. London: Love Ellis.

This is the only media interview Love Ellis is known to have given.

Dheghōm

In the Name of Love was removed from sale 5 Jun 2021, Love Ellis's 28th birthday.

Matter 18

Summary

Entangled

Account by:	Qasim A. S. Khan, 53. Nuclear scientist.
Source:	Email.
Location:	Toronto, Canada.
Event:	31 May 1993.
Report:	5 Nov 2006.

Report

From: qaskhan@worldemail.com
Sent: 5 November 2006 11:55
To: mscott@linkadoo.com
Subject: NAPS

Dear Melanie,

When we spoke at the conference in Dubai last week, I hinted that there was more to the incident at the Narora nuclear power plant than was widely known. You expressed some curiosity about this, but at the time I was disinclined to elaborate.

Dheghōm

I have since given the matter some thought and have decided that I shall share with you my experience of that day in 1993 when the reactor known as NAPS-1 malfunctioned. I ask you to look upon what I have to say with a very open mind. You will, having read it, perhaps understand my earlier reluctance to go into details.

As for why I had a change of heart, well today it would have been my grandfather's 98th birthday. When he realised that he did not have long to live, he planted a cherry tree outside his house. He knew that he would never see it blossom, but he left it as a gift to the world.

Immediately after the incident I am about to describe, I and my colleague Dr Sharma composed a full report. We arranged for it to be released upon the death of whichever of us lived the longer. This was so that neither of our careers would be harmed by the report's contents. Dr Sharma breathed his last in 2004, so the report will be made public when I do likewise.

After my grandfather died, my cousins chopped down his cherry tree so they could use the space to park a car. The report written by Dr Sharma and I is to be our gift to the world, but I do not wish to risk the possibility that metaphorical cousins may take a metaphorical axe to it before it metaphoric-

ally blossoms. This is why, today, I have decided to break my silence on the subject.

The full report is some 48 pages in length and is very technical in places. It is lodged in the vault of the law firm in New Delhi of which Dr Sharma's brother is a partner. I myself no longer have a copy of the full text, so what I am about to impart will perforce be wholly from memory.

This incident took place on the last day of May in 1993. I and my colleague, Dr Sharma, were on duty monitoring the operation of NAPS-2 – not, you will note, NAPS-1. The reactor was functioning properly, well within parameters, when suddenly the power output dropped. We inspected our instruments and quickly traced the problem to the reactor chamber itself. When we checked the cameras, we saw a sight that made both of us doubt our sanity: there was a man *inside* the containment vessel, standing above the reactor core. Even more incredibly, he – for it was a he – had the appearance of the Hindu god Shiva.

Immediately, Dr Sharma and I initiated an emergency shutdown because that's what you do if you see the mythical Destroyer of Worlds in your containment vessel. I don't recall which of us actually hit the SCRAM button, but we both went for it.

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The shutdown should have taken around five seconds – although with the decay heat given off, the reactor would have remained a deadly environment for some considerable time. The shutdown did not take place, however, because the control rods did not descend. All objective indications were that the shutdown system had worked and that the rods had fallen, but the rods had not fallen.

It was at this point we noticed that one of the control rods had been removed from its spider. Into its hole – a hole with direct access to the nuclear core! – Mr Shiva had planted a device. How he achieved this without either triggering our detectors, dying, or both, I cannot explain. Then again, I cannot explain why he was blue with four hands, either. This was a day for things I cannot explain.

In two of his hands, Mr Shiva held his device in place. I can't say it was definitely a perfect fit, but if it wasn't then surely the result would have been catastrophic. The device consisted of a thin tube that extended perhaps 40cm above the reactor head before widening into a cone that ended in two chambers. It was by handles attached to these chambers that Mr Shiva held it. The handles were quite thick; on reflection, they may each have incorporated a power supply.

It was impossible to tell whether the device was adding something to the reactor, drawing something off the reactor or neutrally measuring the reactor. Whatever it was intended to do, it was apparently doing it to Mr Shiva's satisfaction. He waited patiently while it performed the task he had in mind for it.

Periodically, our uninvited guest would hold a phial of a red liquid in one of his free hands, then seemingly copy it to his remaining free hand. He would then quaff the liquid, whereupon the glass – if glass it was – would disappear. If it was some kind of medication to safeguard his health, it certainly worked.

It needed to work, too, because all our systems (excepting the control rods) were functioning as they should following a shutdown. The containment chamber had been sealed off and dousing sprays were filling it. The redundant coolant systems were drawing off what would have been decay heat if the reactor had shut down. The reactor, however, was still operating. There was no immediate danger of a meltdown, but we had no fine control over the reactor's output; if the situation persisted, the chance it might conclude in disaster could not be ignored.

While Dr Sharma and I were watching this in a shared mental state that mixed scientific curiosity

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with blind panic, another person blinked into existence in the containment chamber. It was either a very tall man or a very, very tall woman. He or she was dressed head to toe in fur, looking something like a yeti or a wookiee with a human head. Something small on his or her left cuff reflected the light, but I was unable to make out what it was.

This person argued with Mr Shiva for a few seconds, then evaporated his device. Mr Shiva immediately dematerialised, although whether this was of his own volition or that of the wookiee person was not obvious. The missing control rod was instantly returned to its spider and all the rods then descended as gravity dictated they should.

The wookiee person looked around, spotted the cameras, then he or she too dematerialised.

The cameras now showed only snow.

The superintendent and others arrived in the control room moments afterwards. Dr Sharma took the initiative and said that we had shut down the reactor because the cameras had failed. This was a flimsy reason for initiating a SCRAM, but it was by the book so we could not be criticised for it. The superintendent was nevertheless not happy, even though the cameras began operating as normal while he was expressing his displeasure.

It was at this point that alarms rang out indicating that NAPS-1 was in trouble. Dr Sharma and I were left to manage the shutdown of NAPS-2 while the superintendent and other senior staff raced to deal with the rather more pressing problem.

Dr Sharma and I checked the camera recordings and found them to show nothing but static. Having no evidence to support what we had seen, we agreed not to put our careers to the sword by attempting to persuade the world that something very odd had occurred. We did not know it at the time, but later learned that a security guard had suffered a mental seizure shortly after the SCRAM. It is my belief that he witnessed the later events on his screen and did not have the fortitude to cope with them. Regardless, the poor man was committed to an asylum where he spent his remaining years.

Although Dr Sharma and I did not wish to make ourselves look foolish by reporting what we had seen, nevertheless we felt that we must write it up while it was clear in our minds. This we did, and the resulting document is the one that will be made available by Dr Sharma's brother upon my earthly demise.

It may help you to know some additional thoughts that I have had since we submitted our report.

Dheghōm

Some years after the events I have herein related, I heard a tale that early in the construction of NAPS-2 there was an incident in which a blue man drove a truck through the site's perimeter fence then ran to where today the NAPS-2 reactor core can be found. Could it be that this was our friend Mr Shiva, disappearing from our dimension for 14 or 15 years only to return when the reactor was fully operational?

Also, I may have an idea as to the nature of the device Mr Shiva was operating. It seems to me that it was a very compact quantum entanglement apparatus. To be portable, such a device would have to use parametric down-conversion multiple times in sequence, so would need high energy input. Essentially, then, Mr Shiva was capturing quantum-entangled photons from the reactor and directing them to separate chambers.

As for why he was doing this, I am unqualified to speculate. Nevertheless, I shall do so, because as a physicist I see some interesting possibilities.

It seems that Mr Shiva had the means to copy vials of red liquid. Perhaps, then, he had the means to copy other things. Could it be that he was planning to copy one or both of the chambers of his device?

If so, then surely the very act of copying would collapse the quantum waves of the photons he had entangled, so what then would be the point of having separated them? Well, perhaps he didn't know whether it would collapse the quantum waves or not. Perhaps he thought – or knew? – that the mechanism of copying was done wholesale.

Ordinary objects have quantum entanglement as standard; electrons in atoms are entangled. Copying those, as Mr Shiva did with the red liquid, caused no problems. If he only copied half of an entangled pair, though? And if the copying didn't collapse the wave form? How, then, would subsequent collapsing work?

If one of the original chambers was observed, that would determine the state of the other chamber. What would it do to the copied chamber? How could *that* one's field collapse? Would it mimic the state of the photons in the chamber it was a copy of? Or would the fact that its photons were entangled with nothing cause some kind of endless entanglement-flipping? The universe could hang, like a program stuck in a loop, or cause an error, like a divide by zero.

If so, doing this could crash the physics of the universe.

Dheghōm

In such an event, Mr Shiva really *would* be a destroyer of worlds!

With best wishes,

Qasim

Notes

Dr Khan died 18 Feb 2020 of COVID-19, aged 66. His joint report co-written with Dr Sharma was not released, and the law firm of which Dr Sharma's brother is a partner denies its ever having been in possession of it.

Matter 19

Summary

Leather Jacket

Account by:	Carnell Nicholls, 17. A-level student.
Source:	Transcript of interview.
Location:	Brixton, London, England.
Event:	7 Jan 2012.
Report:	7 Jul 2012.

Report

Interviewer: David Scott (DS).

Interviewee: Carnell Nicholls (CN).

DS: So, it's, let's see, 14:53 on Saturday, the seventh of July, 2012. I'm David Scott, and I'm interviewing Mr Carnell Nicholls at his home in Brixton, south London.

CN: You're recording now?

DS: Yes, I'm recording. Can you just confirm you're OK with this?

CN: I'm good, man, I want this to be recorded – for posterity like, you know?

Dheghōm

DS: So if you'd perhaps begin with maybe a quick introduction to yourself?

CN: OK, so my name's Carnell Nicholls, I'm British but my family's from Jamaica. I just finished my AS-levels, I think I did alright.

DS: You're planning on going to uni next year?

CN: Yeah, to study mathematics. I'm looking at Greenwich or maybe Kingston.

DS: Not Oxford or Cambridge?

CN: (laughs) Someone like me? What do you think?

DS: (laughs) It's fair to say, though, you're a pretty smart young man.

CN: Smart enough to keep out of trouble, yeah.

DS: OK, so can you tell me in your own words about the incident that happened back in January.

CN: Right, yeah. So it was a Saturday, and I was going round my mate's to play *Gears of War 3* on his Xbox.

DS: When was this exactly?

CN: I don't know, maybe ten, ten-thirty in the morning?

DS: I mean the date.

CN: Oh, early January, I don't remember dates, man.

DS: It's not a problem, we can work it out later. Please, carry on.

CN: Yeah, so I'm walking down Railton Road and I'm coming to this boarded-up place, used to be a Chinese, and –

DS: A Chinese restaurant?

CN: Yeah, all shuttered-up now, but anyway the door opens and these two guys come out, *big fellas*, dressed like some kind of martial artists, they looked *serious*, man.

DS: Did they exit the building normally or did they perhaps fade or pop into view?

CN: Normally, no fading or popping.

DS: Had you seen them before?

CN: No, and I don't want to see them again, neither.

DS: So they weren't local?

CN: No, they looked maybe Indian or something, except one had long, like metal hair, looked to be made out of like super-thin wire. Ain't seen nothing like it before.

DS: Did they notice you?

CN: They didn't seem to notice anyone.

DS: So you weren't the only person to see them?

CN: It was a Saturday, man! People were out and about, plenty of us saw them.

DS: What happened next?

CN: Well the one without the hair –

DS: He was bald?

CN: No, he had regular Indian-like hair. Short, black, straight – no face hair, though.

DS: Ah, sorry, I misunderstood. Carry on.

CN: Anyway, he has this backpack on, and he says something to his mate, then they start walking towards me. This is when I notice they're packing like katanas, so I step *well* out of the way as they go past.

Dheghōm

DS: Katanas, they're Japanese Samurai swords aren't they?

CN: Yeah, but these were bigger, man, longer. I didn't see the blades 'cause they were in their sheaths –

DS: Scabbards?

CN: Yeah, made of like bamboo or something. Anyway, people are moving out of the way same as I am, but I'm curious, you know? I want to see what they're up to.

DS: So you followed them?

CN: At a discreet distance, yeah.

DS: Where did they go?

CN: They went into this railed-off area, someone's garden.

DS: The gate wasn't locked?

CN: That's the thing, man, there was no gate! They just sort of shimmed through.

DS: Shimmed?

CN: Yeah, like they were wriggling through a gap, 'cept there was no gap. There were bushes and stuff the other side, that must've been why they went there.

DS: Could you see them at this point?

CN: Nah, but I could hear them talking.

DS: What were they saying?

CN: I don't know, man, I don't speak their language. It wasn't Hindi or Gujerati, though, I could tell that.

DS: OK, well that's useful information. What happened next?

CN: Well I hung around, listening. One of the guys seemed to be impatient and the other was like telling him to wait or something, then after maybe half a minute or so he said something like "age a mosee" and then it went quiet.

DS: You remember the words?

CN: I remember the *sounds*, don't know if they were words.

DS: Did anyone other than you hear this conversation?

CN: Nah, just me, leaning nonchalantly on the railing looking at my phone.

DS: It's a pity you didn't record them.

CN: Recording people in Brixton without their say-so's how you get your phone smashed.

DS: So I take it you waited a while then went to investigate?

CN: Yeah, not straight away, obviously – those guys had swords, man! After maybe a minute of silence, though, I chanced it. I tried the shimmy thing but it didn't work, so I vaulted over the railings and had a look around. The guys were gone, man! Like vanished, into the thinnest of thin air.

DS: By "vanished", you mean?

CN: They was nowhere to be seen! No way could they have left without me spotting them, not unless they can shimmy through walls or something. That wasn't the focus of my attention, though, 'cause they'd left behind like a treasure trove! There were baseball caps, trainers – quality

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stuff, man, Nike – and these two leather jackets, oh man, sweet, just my size.

DS: You tried one on?

CN: Well I looked around first, made sure there was no-one watching, no CCTV, that kind of thing, but yeah, I put one on. Good fit, too! I thought: I'll have this. That's when I put my hands in the pockets and found the note.

DS: OK, so this is the crucial part. I want you to think clearly and try to –

CN: Man, like I haven't done that a hundred times in my head already?

DS: Sorry, sorry, it's just, you know...

CN: Let me tell my story my way.

DS: Yes, sorry, I'm just being a bit too eager.

CN: Too right. Anyways, I read the note. I'm paraphrasing here, but it went something like this. "Help! There's a fight going on, knives and shit. Big guys keep killing us then we're alive again. They take our stuff but it reappears. We can't get out, the door's got like a force field. You got to help us."

DS: Was there a name?

CN: Yeah, looked like Jamal or something, kinda hard to read 'cause of the blood.

DS: The note was bloodstained?

CN: Nah, just fingerprints, man.

DS: Was it written in pen or pencil?

CN: Pen, blue biro.

DS: Is there anything else you can tell me about it?

CN: Well it'd been written in a hurry, wasn't folded exact. Oh, there was a number in red printed at the top, like on the pads waiters use when they take your order, see?

DS: Was the note written on both sides of the paper or just one?

CN: Both. Those waiter's pads are small, you know? The last two or three sentences were on the back.

DS: What about the jacket? Were there any signs of damage to it?

CN: Like katana cuts? Nah, it was like brand new, just a few creases to show it had been worn. Same as the other one, they were identical.

DS: Did the other one have a note in the pocket too?

CN: I never found out. That jacket, my jacket, everything – it disappeared.

DS: Disappeared how?

CN: How? I don't know *how*, man, it just disappeared! One moment it was there, next moment it wasn't. The note, the trainers, the caps – everything just went.

DS: Did it all go at the same time?

CN: Nah, most of it went before the jackets, but it was quick. I saw the shoes go pair by pair; last to go was the backpack.

DS: How long was this after the two men had disappeared?

CN: Maybe five minutes. You think it was on some kind of timer?

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DS: It's a possibility.

CN: Whatever, it freaked me out, man! I picked up my old jacket and I was out of there, ran half the way to my mate's before I stopped.

DS: Did you try the door on the Chinese restaurant?

CN: I was going to, that evening, on the way back, but the cops had it cordoned off. There'd been some kind of gang fight inside, six people dead. It was on the TV news, all over the papers next day.

DS: Did you tell the police what you knew?

CN: What's the point, man? Who's going to believe me?

DS: I believe you.

CN: (laughs) Yeah, but ain't nobody going to believe you.

DS: I suspect you may be right!

CN: (laughs) So that's it, anyway. You got anything else you want to ask?

DS: No, I think that's enough to be going on with. Can I contact you again if I have any follow-up questions?

CN: Sure, why not?

DS: Great! In that case, let's draw this to a close. I'll stop recording. Interview ended at 15:12.

Notes

No CCTV cameras on nearby properties were in operation. The police put out a call to the public for information. Consistent reports emerged describing two men in karate uniforms who were seen leaving the former Chinese restaurant at around 10:20am. No arrests were made.

One of the deceased, Jamal Kinkaid, was wearing a leather jacket that he had been given as a Christmas present.

Dheghōm

Matter 20

Summary

Security Breach Report

Account by:	Kirill Kulish, 38. Security guard.
Source:	Security breach form.
Location:	Kyiv, Ukraine.
Event:	23/24 Aug 1991.
Report:	26 Aug 1991.

Report

Name of individual completing this form:	Kirill Ivanovych Kulish
Date of creation:	26.08.91

Site Information	
Site Address	CBV Warehouse, Yams'ka Vulytsya, Kyiv
Security Manager	Josyp Vsevolodovych Palamarchuk
Products/Services	Warehouse
Number of Employees	12 (3 shifts of 3, 3 on call)
Operating Hours	Always in operation

Description of Security Breach	
Time and date of discovery	24.08.91
Period during which breach occurred	Between 22:00 23.08.91 and 6:00 24.08.91
Indicators of malicious intent	Wire cut north fence Window forced open north wall Cabinet J 191 forced open
Isolated or repeated event	Isolated
Brief overview of breach	Perpetrator entered through window, making no noise One item stolen Perpetrator left by same window

Affected Resources	
Individuals affected	2 senior guards 4 guards
Information affected	None
Assets affected	Corded ware bowl taken

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Containment	
Emergency response contingency plan	Enacted when forced entry was discovered at change of shift
Crisis communication management	All guards were in constant communication by walkie-talkie
Steps taken to contain breach	Immediate lockdown Thorough search of premises Police immediately informed
Spokesman to deal with enquiries	To be decided

Harm	
Possible harms arising from breach	Comparatively minor financial loss, estimated 1,000 roubles

Latest Risk Assessment	
Date of latest risk assessment	18.07.1988
Physical security risks identified	Perimeter fence rusting Camera blind spot southeast Broken bolt on flat roof access door

Access control risks identified	Boom gate needs replacing Up-to-date visitor badges required
Management policy risks identified	Insufficient investment in maintenance
Information risks identified	Filing cabinet keys lost
Personnel risks identified	None
Location risks identified	Northeast corner open to vehicle assault

Threat Identification	
Key vulnerable resources identified	Gold and silver coins Jewellery Ikons
Credible threats identified	Criminal gangs Enemies of the Soviet Union
Have the police reviewed the threats?	Yes

Policies in place to address:	
Fire, explosions, bomb threats	Activate manual sprinkler system Summon fire brigade Remove important documents

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	Evacuate building, assemble at main entrance Secure perimeter, await fire brigade
Civil disturbance	Secure all doors and windows of facility Alert police If perimeter breached, staff still outside are to find a place of safety
Suspicious mail	All mail is returned unopened
Visitor registration and ID badges	Visitors are checked against the list of expected visitors Visitors must show identification Visitors are provided with a badge Anyone seen not wearing a badge is to be challenged
Background checks on visitors	These are performed by police Visitors not cleared in advance are not permitted entry

Escalating security threats	The on-call team is contacted, to report within 30 minutes
Hiring of security staff	Police background check Physical health check Psychological health check Weapons training check
Lost or stolen keys	All locks that the missing keys can open are replaced within 24 hours

Barriers	
Physical barriers in place	Wire mesh fences Trees to prohibit vehicle attack Security hinges on doors and windows Blast-resistant glass in windows
Unmanned access points	Normally the access point is manned In an emergency, chain and padlock
Perimeter lighting	Good in east, excellent in west

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Alarms	Fire alarm tested monthly Burglar alarm tested 6-monthly
Surveillance camera monitoring	Live, archived to tape
Frequency of perimeter patrols	Every 4 hours and at random intervals in between
Warning signs posted	"Restricted Area" on each fence
Redundant protection for key assets	Coins and jewellery in the safe Ikons in bulletproof, fireproof cabinet Security staff have no keys to the above

Complete Description of Breach

My name is Kirill Ivanovych Kulish. I lead Green Unit, which is one of the three units assigned to protect the CBV warehouse on Yams'ka Vulytsya. The warehouse is under the direct jurisdiction of the Supreme Soviet of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic. It contains rare objects and valuable items obtained in the aftermath of the Great Patriotic War that are being held until their owners can be traced. Other unclaimed goods are also added to the inventory on occasion.

Yams'ka Vulytsya is an area of light industry and warehouses close to a railway siding. It is run-down, yet because of this is relatively free of criminal activity. No break-ins have previously been attempted in the 45 years of the CBV warehouse's existence.

Two-weekly shift rotation is in operation for the site. On the day in question, Green Unit took over from Blue Unit at 6:00 and handed off to Red Unit at 14:00.

I assembled with the other two members of Green Unit, comrade Denys Omelyanovych Fesenko and comrade Petro Savych Tymchenko, at 6:00. We were greeted as usual by the leader of Blue Unit, comrade Borys Antonovych Kyrylenko. As per handover policy, a patrol of the premises was undertaken jointly by members of both units. It was during this patrol that evidence of the break-in was discovered.

At once, comrade Kyrylenko and I initiated lockdown procedures, in case the perpetrators were still on site. The police were immediately informed by telephone. A thorough search was conducted, with all members of both teams in constant communication by walkie-talkie. No perpetrator was found.

Two police officers arrived at 8:20 in response to our call. By then we had established (and the two officers were able to confirm) the following:

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1. Entry through the perimeter fence had been effected by cutting a man-sized door in the wire mesh. This was not visible at a distance, because the wire is thick and wished to keep its shape. It must have been held open by one person while another entered. At least two people were therefore involved in the break-in.
2. There were no footprints or other marks left in the dirt between the fence and the building. It is assumed that the perpetrators traversed the distance from the fence to the warehouse wall by laying tarpaulin.
3. The frame of the westernmost window of the north wall bore signs of having been attacked by a corrosive substance. This left the frame sufficiently intact that the alarm circuit was not broken, but it enabled the silent removal of the glass and its later makeshift return upon the perpetrators' exit.
4. The window gave access to the locker room where unit members keep their personal belongings. An unlocked door there opens up onto the warehouse space. The perpetrators made their way to crate J 191, which is situated two thirds of the way down looking from the north, close to the western wall. It is clear that the perpetrators knew exactly where it was and knew exactly what they wanted to

take from it. This was a targeted operation.

The police officers stated that they would record the incident and check it against similar incidents in their files. They added that because the building was under the direct jurisdiction of the Supreme Soviet of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, it was not the responsibility of the police to investigate further.

I asked comrade Kyrylenko a number of questions regarding the break-in.

Why was the gap in the wire and the damage to the window not noticed by patrols?

– No patrols were undertaken between 22:00 and 6:00.

Why was the perimeter break-in and the traversal of the space between the perimeter and the building not observed by the officer monitoring the security cameras?

– No officer was monitoring the security cameras.

Why wasn't entry to the warehouse space from the locker room detected?

– No-one was in either the warehouse space or the locker room.

Why wasn't the opening of crate J 191 heard?

– No-one was in the warehouse space.

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From the above, it appears that Blue Unit was negligent. I doubt that this will worry the members of Blue Unit in the slightest.

I am filling in this form because to do so is a requirement following a break-in. However, it is not a requirement of me to do so: it is a requirement of the security manager.

The security manager of the CBV warehouse is Josyp Vsevolodovych Palamarchuk. He knows nothing about security. His position is but a sinecure. He visits the premises every two weeks for the shift rotation, if he can be bothered. He wouldn't know what to put in this form if he had a month to find out. The only reason I am filling in the form in his stead is because of the tiny chance that, if I didn't, I could find myself and the other members of Green Unit framed should the break-in ever be investigated.

I nevertheless do not expect the break-in to be investigated.

The CBV warehouse is supposed to be under the direct jurisdiction of the Supreme Soviet of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic. It is not. If it were, it would be guarded by members of the army and would be in a more appropriate location than a nondescript warehouse adjacent to a forgotten railway siding.

It would also have proper funding. Although losing a dozen employees in a list of twelve thousand may be easy, it is not so easy to lose

roubles. Roubles are tracked and accounted for with great precision. This is why the CBV warehouse has no money for maintenance. The keys for the filing cabinet have been missing for five years yet the locks have still not been replaced.

Nobody knows what the letters CBV abbreviate. When I joined Green Unit, its leader at the time informed me that he'd started his job at the warehouse on the day it opened. He didn't know what the initials stood for. He believed that they were chosen at random for no better reason than that the warehouse needed a name.

None who work in this warehouse are stupid. We all know that the Supreme Soviet of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic does not control it. Members or former members do. The valuable items are not awaiting return to their rightful owners. They are stolen. They have been stowed away for the use of the families of the privileged in times of crisis.

On the night of 23rd – 24th of August, an Act of Declaration of Independence was written. It was passed by the Supreme Soviet of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic. Everyone knew this was happening. Everyone hoped that the act would be passed. Everyone – including the members of Blue Unit – was listening to the radio or watching the television as events unfolded. Only the people who had been waiting

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for this moment to break into the warehouse and steal the one object they wanted did not.

The items in the warehouse will undoubtedly be collected in the next few days as increasing numbers of their original owners are miraculously discovered. None of us who work here expects to keep our job for much longer. The gold and silver coins, the jewellery and the ikons will be removed from the safe and the cabinets. Anything that remains will come under the jurisdiction of a new government. Perhaps a museum may be found to put them in. Perhaps they will be sold off.

I am nevertheless certain that the most precious item has already been removed. Whatever the corded ware bowl kept in crate J 191 truly is, its thieves are welcome to it.

Signature:

К. И. Кулисх

Notes

Translated from the Russian by Julija Mikhailova-Ross and Lara Petrova.

Matter 21

Summary

Heaven is Hell

Account by:	Revd. Dominic Hughes, 34. Vicar.
Source:	Transcript of sermon.
Location:	Abingdon-on-Thames, Oxfordshire, England.
Event:	5-6 Sep 2020.
Report:	6 Sep 2020.

Report

You may be wondering why the reading today was the Sermon on the Mount.

My response threatens to be a long one, I'm afraid, but it's probably going to be my last for a very long time. I haven't really prepared it, but I've invested a lot of thought in its subject matter. I've had something of a crisis of faith, you see, and I need you, my parishioners, my flock, to understand why.

Oh, I'd appreciate it if you didn't record this, by the way. It's just between us. Heaven knows what

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conspiracy theorists would say if they got hold of it. Thanks, thank you.

So it concerns this: my right hand. As many – in fact all, I think – of you are aware, I lost this hand to meningitis when I was a child. It appears to have – well, it *has* – grown back. It's a real hand. I went to sleep last night and when I awoke this morning, there it was.

I should be praising the Lord right now. It's clearly a miracle! Medical science can't grow hands on people overnight! I should be on the phone to the bishop, telling him the wonderful news. I've been blessed with tangible proof that God exists! I ought to be appearing on TV news channels gratefully and with humility acknowledging His grace.

I would be, too, if I'd simply woken up with my hand back on with no idea how it happened. I *do* know how it happened, though, and it's caused me to question everything I believe – believed – in. Now I'm not suggesting that you should also question your faith – it's fine if you want to call the restoration of my hand a miracle. I'm simply going to explain what happened from my perspective, and how it's shaken me so much, so you'll understand why, straight after today's service, I'll be applying for sabbatical leave effective immediately.

So, somewhat unusually, yesterday I found myself in Oxford with nothing to do. I'd gone there at short notice to conduct three back-to-back weddings, owing to the sudden illness of one of my colleagues. It transpired, however, that he was not

suffering from the onset of a rare, debilitating syndrome; his condition was entirely the result of over-indulgence precipitated by the Eat Out to Help Out scheme. Anyway, by the time I arrived he was once more hale and hearty, so I was no longer required to act as *locum tenens*.

I decided to make profitable use of this unexpected gap in my day by taking in the city and seeking inspiration for future sermons.

There was a small crowd in Radcliffe Square, outside the Bodleian – all socially-distanced, don't worry. A hand-made sign announced that this was a poetry reading. Now a poet – she was female, so I suppose I should say poetess – invariably has something interesting to say, if not necessarily in a manner immediately comprehensible to the non-poet; I therefore joined the audience in the hope that my mind might be stimulated.

The young woman must have already been performing for a while, because following a round of polite applause she announced the title of her final reading: *Heaven is Hell* – exactly the kind of theme for which I was hoping. I automatically brought to mind the passage in Luke 16:19-31 about the rich man and Lazarus, but as the poem progressed it seemed that she was making a rather more philosophical point. She argued that free-thinking isn't possible without suffering, and that because there is no suffering in Heaven there can be no free thought there, either. Therefore, she contested, Heaven is Hell.

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Her poetry was not of the highest order, but her perspective was new to me and rather intriguing. I resolved to give it some thought.

At this juncture, the man I had been standing closest to – good-looking he was, quite tall, possibly Spanish or Middle-Eastern, he had an odd accent – anyway, he asked what the poet meant by 'Heaven'.

I was wearing my dog collar, so assumed that he knew I was a member of the clergy. I explained that she intended it as a metaphor for a place of perfection.

We then had a short exchange in which I had to clarify that Heaven is not imaginary; rather it's the place where God is, which, because God is everywhere, means Heaven is everywhere. This is why, no matter where you are, you can always let God into your heart. It's a principle with which all of you, I'm sure, are familiar: Heaven is the state of having a full relationship with God.

Now you might have thought that this explanation would have satisfied the Middle-Easterner – whose name, by the way, I was later to learn was Marius – but he followed it up by asking who God was. The thought did occur to me that I was being wound up, but he genuinely – if improbably – seemed not to know.

I decided I'd better start at the beginning, so informed him that God was the creator of the universe. As if to check he'd understood me, he then asked if God was akin to the author of a novel,

and in the same way that an author pervades their books, so God pervades the universe.

This struck me as a very good way of explaining the Holy Spirit, and I was on the verge of launching into a discussion of the Trinity when Marius asked me if I wanted to *meet* Him – God, that is.

I told him I'd rather not meet my maker right now, whereupon he said he'd arrange it for that night.

I thought nothing of this, because to be honest, I was looking for a way to escape the conversation at this point – it had become increasingly obvious to me that Marius had psychological problems. Fortunately, he ended it himself: he announced that the poet – who was by now packing up her things – was his daughter and that he needed to speak to her. I found this hard to believe, as he couldn't have been much older than her – plus she was blonde and fair-skinned – but perhaps she was adopted. Anyway, as he strode forward, she did appear to recognise him – quite forcefully so. She looked dumbstruck, thinking back on it.

I took my leave and continued with my day, pleased that this odd conversation had furnished me with a second idea to mull over for a sermon.

I doubt that I shall ever deliver that sermon. I have been changed forever by the strange and, frankly, extremely disturbing events that occurred after I fell asleep that night.

What I'm about to describe is not a dream – people don't remember dreams at the level of detail

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I'll be going into. Neither is it made up – I would have strenuously avoided going anywhere near this topic given the choice.

I awoke shortly after I had nodded off. I didn't feel tired at all. What I did feel was profound shock and rising fear as I realised that my body was not my own. It wasn't even flesh and blood – it was metal and wires and some kind of rubbery plastic. It *felt* as if it was my body, but it *looked* like a machine. It was a horrifyingly disturbing experience.

I stared, perplexed, at my mechanical right hand. I could move it as easily as my left, even though my own hand was amputated 28 years ago. The memory of how to use it still held.

My mind was a warzone of unanswered questions. Where was I? What had happened to me? Was I dreaming a dream more vivid than any I had dreamt before? Was I a monster? Was I dead?

A woman spoke. I remember her words distinctly: "Welcome to reality, Dominic". Her accent was the same as Marius's.

Still fazed and afraid, I sat up on, well I suppose it was a robot bed or something, it was basically a metal slab. I looked at her.

She wasn't a machine, she was a hundred percent human – although different to any human I'd ever previously met. The most immediately noticeable – disconcerting – thing about her was her skin. It was a very dark brown, including the palms of her hands, but in places it looked like chalk, covered as it was in what had the appear-

ance of dandruff – flakes of dead skin. Periodically, she would unselfconsciously rub some off. There was, as a consequence, dust everywhere.

She introduced herself as Sarah. Unnervingly, although I could understand every word that she uttered, the sounds did not match her lip movements. It was as if I was watching a film dubbed into English from a foreign language.

I asked her if I was dead. It seemed a good idea to get the most pressing question out of the way as soon as possible.

She laughed and assured me I wasn't. Flakes of dead skin or whatever it was fell from her face as she did so.

She was quite short, and dressed in a black, ankle-length gown with grey sleeves so billowing that they almost looked like wings – think of a cassock with wide, surplice-style arm coverings. Her features were not representative of any ethnicity I'm familiar with: her eyes were round, her cheekbones high, her brow strong, her lips thick, her nose narrow. Her hair was chestnut, and so straight that it might have been ironed. She wore no jewellery or – unless that's what the white stuff was – make-up. I'd put her age at around thirty.

She explained that I was the guest of her employer, Marius – the man who had spoken to me at the poetry reading.

She kept calling where we were 'reality'. When I questioned this, she said that the translation

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system might have problems with proper nouns, so she'd switch to the "old words" for me. With that, Earth became *Dheghōm* and where we were was *Bhéwonom*. She said that people from Dheghōm needed a vessel to visit *Bhéwonom* and that my robot body was just such a vessel – the only one, in fact. When I asked her how far *Bhéwonom* was from Earth, she replied that the question made no sense. Dheghōm was one of many realities "below *Bhéwonom*".

I asked to speak to Marius, but she said it wasn't possible as he was "representing in" – not on, *in* – Dheghōm. She declared that this was very expensive and that my robot body was also very expensive, but that Marius was a very rich man. She was to take me to meet Paul, the creator of Dheghōm.

I did not have the sense that I was in Heaven, but thought I'd better ask if I was, all the same. Sarah replied that she didn't know what the people of Dheghōm called *Bhéwonom*, because very few people from Dheghōm had ever been "absented in *Bhéwonom*" – three or four, she thought, the last of whom had visited almost three weeks ago. I was the first she'd met.

OK, so at this point I should say something about time differences. Earth and *Bhéwonom* use the same clock, with sixty seconds to the minute, sixty minutes to the hour, twenty-four hours to the day, and so on. When someone from *Bhéwonom* is visiting Earth, or *vice versa*, time passes at the same rate for both. When no-one is visiting,

though, time on Earth passes much, much faster – something like a hundred thousand times faster. Shortly after the previous person from Earth had visited, the connection with Bhéwonom had somehow been severed, stopping all traffic between them. Earth had then run unfettered. The person who had last come to Bhéwonom had done so over four and a half thousand years ago, Earth time.

This is already starting to sound very Science Fiction, I know. It doesn't improve.

Sarah led me out of the room, into a corridor. Robot body or not, I found walking easy. After a few turns, we arrived in what seemed to be a lobby. There were a dozen or so other people there, all with the same essential look as Sarah. Some were male, most were taller, some styled their invariably-straight hair longer or shorter, some had flatter or wider noses or thinner lips; there was quite a variety. All had the same skin complaint, though, and all wore ankle-length black robes with grey sleeves. An older man also had on a waist-length cloak. Everyone looked at me as if I was an object worthy of note.

I smiled, but couldn't tell whether my robot lips were actually smiling or not.

The lobby area looked like that of a Victorian gentleman's club, with wood-panelled walls and warm lighting. The floor was tiled rather than carpeted, which made sense given the copious quantities of chalky dust everyone produced.

Sarah took me outside.

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Now I'd like to say that it was raining, but 'rain' seems too faint a description of what was plummeting from the clouds. I've been in India during monsoon season, but Bhéwonom's rain was far, far more impressive. Raindrops were the size of marbles and – waterproof artificial body or not – standing in it was like being hit by a relentless barrage of shots from a thousand peashooters. The drops were so heavy that wind did nothing to them – they fell completely vertically. As drizzle is to rain on Earth, so rain is to the globules that were falling from the sky in Bhéwonom.

Sarah didn't seem in the least bit perturbed. She stood by the roadside and beckoned to me to join her.

Now one of the main features of Bhéwonom is that everything there is standardised. All buildings with a similar purpose look the same. All vehicles with a similar purpose look the same. All items with similar purposes to other items look the same, as if manufactured by a single factory with a worldwide monopoly. The black robes with grey sleeves weren't some kind of corporate uniform, they were just how clothes were. Everyone was dressed thusly, aside from robot-me.

We were standing on a street of modestly-tall buildings made of long bricks almost purple in colour. When I say 'long', they were perhaps twice the length of the bricks we use on Earth. The structures were also of a regimented appearance, although some did look to be older than others.

They all had wide double-doors painted black, which were to some degree sheltered by a short porch with a gently-sloping roof. Windows were inset and made of single sheets of thick glass. They had shutters on the outside. Overall, it brought to mind the principles of Georgian architecture: elegance and symmetry.

The road was busy, even though it was close to being a stream. All the cars looked the same, all the lorries looked the same, all the articulated trucks looked the same. Superficially, they resembled ours in profile, but end-on they had a roof shaped a bit like an upturned boat.

One of the vehicles stopped and we got in. There was no driver.

It waited for a gap in the traffic then set off.

Sarah's clothes were completely dry, as water-repellent as a duck. Her hair was soaked and lank, but she didn't seem to be bothered by it. Her dead skin, dampened, no longer looked white. It was nevertheless still peeling worse than mine did that time I forgot to put suntan lotion on in Peru.

She reached through a slit in her gown and produced something that looked like a chocolate bar but was green. As she scooped it, she explained that the people of Bhéwonom have to eat more often than we do.

I asked her why her skin came off. She disclosed that it was a kind of biological mechanism for excretion, which "we didn't implement for Dhegh-

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ōm". She assured me that Dheghōm is a better place than Bhéwonom.

I had to concede that, weatherwise at least, she was correct.

I looked out through the vehicle's rainswept window. There were people abroad, all appearing to be of the same ethnicity – if that's the right word – as Sarah and all wearing the same kind of robes. Some also had short cloaks and a very few had robe-length ones. I never found out the significance of this. The people would greet each other, sometimes stopping and chatting. No-one looked particularly miserable, in fact they all seemed quite jolly and friendly – friendlier than the denizens of Oxford, for sure.

Sarah told me that she was an engineer, whose job was making minds for robots. When I asked, somewhat worriedly, if she'd made my mind, she said no, it was beyond what any engineer had thought possible.

Now here's an important – and rather alarming – point. The people of Bhéwonom are not as clever as we are. Well, they sort of are – they're very methodical – but they don't think quite the same way as us. They don't see ahead like we do. It's all trial-and-error with them. Sarah was the Bhéwonom equivalent of a genius, yet she wasn't any smarter than I am – which, as I'm all too aware, isn't particularly smart at all. The wondrous technology they had – automatic language translation systems, hydrophobic – I think that's the

word – hydrophobic clothes, driverless cars – all of it had been designed incrementally. No-one had thought “how can we make waterproof clothes?”, they’d just thought “waterproof clothes would be good” and then over many years made small changes to clothes until they found some iteration that was waterproof. Thereupon, those were the clothes everyone wore. They think almost entirely in an evolutionary way, whereas we can also think in a revolutionary way.

Sarah was taking me to see Paul – the creator of Dheghōm – because Marius wanted to understand why the people of Dheghōm – us – are so much cleverer not only than the people of Bhéwonom but also than the people of the other realities beneath Bhéwonom that Paul and those like him had created. She informed me that Marius was a genius too, because most of the people of Bhéwonom wouldn’t have thought of doing such a thing.

It was around this time that I asked Sarah a question that had been troubling me from the start, but which I’d avoided because I feared what the answer might be.

What had happened to my own body?

She told me that it was still intact. Paul couldn’t remove my mind from my body because of how Dheghōm works, but he *could* make it control a different body. While I was in charge of the robot-body in Bhéwonom, my Earthly body was effectively in a coma. It would come out of it when my mind was given back control, but the process

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would take a few seconds. If no-one but me was using the connection between Bhéwonom and Dheghōm, those few seconds would become a hundred hours on Earth. Sarah had sufficient foresight to recognise that this would not be ideal.

I think it was about then that she received a call. She pressed her forearm – there must have been a device or implant or something concealed beneath her sleeve – then she started talking. I only heard her side of the conversation, but the words – which now matched her lip movements – made no sense. The sounds were all ones a human being could utter, but their combination was some distance from any language I know. It was if she was speaking in tongues.

I looked outside again. The car was trundling along at a steady pace, around forty miles an hour at a guess, and the rain was as relentless as ever. I could see buildings with a different frontage now, displaying prominent signs. I supposed that they were shops, but the writing was all straight lines and dots; I couldn't make sense of it.

When I'd spoken to Marius, I'd taken the formal, theological line that Heaven was eternal life in our enjoyment of God. In explaining it, however, I had given him the impression that it was a physical reality in which a personal creator god dwelled. By some unknown marvel of technology, I now found myself in an artificial body on my way to visiting this supposed creator, whose name was apparently Paul.

I didn't believe for a moment that Paul was God, but was prepared to entertain the possibility that either he or Marius was the devil.

I also didn't believe for a moment that I was in Heaven – or in Hell, come to that. Neither is renowned for having rain that makes our rain seem a pale imitation. If it had been fire and brimstone, rather than water, then I might have been concerned, but it was just water. There was a pool of it by my feet and on the car seat.

Sarah switched her translation app back on and told me that the call had been from Paul. Apparently, he'd restored my missing hand.

I couldn't get my head round this at first, so she elaborated. My body in Dheghōm should have had two hands but Paul had noticed that it only had one. He'd corrected the fault.

This is where I said the words that will define the rest of my life: "But what if I didn't want my hand back?"

Sarah looked at me in awe. She quickly explained that her reaction was because I'd asked her to use her imagination – "what if?". Very few people had ever done that. The Bhéwonom way was to try something that seemed positive then see what happened as a result. That's precisely what Paul had done with my missing hand.

I didn't want a conversation about imagination: I wanted my lost hand removed again. I tried to explain to her my reasons – that I've been missing a hand for so long now that being one-handed has

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become part of my identity, of who I am, but she was not sympathetic. She said that I was speaking as if imagining was easy, but for the people of Bhéwonom it wasn't easy. Very few of them possessed the ability to see the world as it *might* be to any high degree.

When I told her that on Earth even children can answer a 'what if?' question – sometimes, better than adults! – she seemed to grow in determination. She rubbed each cheek with the back of the opposite hand, which I took to be a sign that she was resolute.

"I must speak to Marius", she said. "I must visit Dheghōm and talk to the people there. I could learn so much!"

I asked what was stopping her.

The answer, in a nutshell, was money.

Paul was currently under a lot of pressure. News of the achievements of the people of Dheghōm had got out and some from Bhéwonom wanted its connection to be cut again so that the new mathematics and science created in Dheghōm would become available to Bhéwonom as soon as possible. Doing this would be very expensive, though, and Paul had little money left after the unscheduled service interruption – Sarah may have called it an 'attack', come to think of it – a couple of weeks earlier. Paul needed people to pay to visit Dheghōm to cover its running costs, but few people wanted to visit any more because they were afraid. As for why they were afraid, well to

everyday Bhéwonom folk all progress is frightening to some extent because predicting what will happen is difficult for them. The amount of progress promised by Dheghōm they found frankly terrifying.

It didn't help that some of the people who did visit Dheghōm simply wanted to trash it for fun.

Paul had inserted a probe in Dheghōm to capture clips of what normal life there was like. Cleverly, he had given it the form of a character adept at absorbing information. He'd hoped this footage would demonstrate that Dheghōm presented no reason for anyone to be frightened, but the probe had shown such levels of self-awareness that it'd had the opposite effect. He would be trying again shortly with a similar probe, introduced into a more controlled environment that he had built.

In summary, then, Paul was reliant on the patronage of unafraid, wealthy people like Marius, but he couldn't allow them to visit Dheghōm – Earth – *all* the time because then we wouldn't race ahead of Bhéwonom and our new ideas would arrive too slowly for him to exploit for money.

I made the mistake of asking why he couldn't simply borrow the necessary funds for a month or so, until Dheghōm produced something exploitable in Bhéwonom.

"Borrow it? Borrow? Money?" Sarah had patently not encountered the concept before.

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Recollecting the dim view that Christ took of money-lenders, I immediately regretted my question. With luck, Sarah will take some time to latch onto the idea of interest on loans, so Bhéwonom is safe from the worst excesses of capitalism for now. Still, I quickly moved on and asked why money from the visitors to the other 'realities' Paul had created couldn't subsidise Dheghōm.

The reason turned out to be that these realities – seven in number – were just like so many others created by other people, therefore nobody would pay much to visit them. Paul's other creations were barely breaking even.

Yes, this does sound an awful lot like saying that Paul is but one god among many and that our universe is but one among the many he and they have created.

I concluded that what was needed was evidence that Dheghōm was exciting rather than frightening. Then, people would visit it.

While devouring another candy bar, Sarah concurred. However, she cautioned that if – she was proud of her use of the word – *if* Dheghōm became exciting then people might also want excitement elsewhere. This could change the nature of Bhéwonom's society. As such, it would lead to calls to close Dheghōm down.

She then dropped her bombshell. She told me that influential people had *already* called for Dheghōm to be closed down, because they feared

the changes it might bring to Bhéwonom. They'd almost prevailed, too.

I asked what she meant by "closed down".

She replied that she meant "switched off". The entire universe, gone in an instant, like turning off a lamp! Let there be light. Let there not be light.

Sensing that I wasn't happy with this possibility, she assured me that it wouldn't now happen. Marius, being a rich and powerful genius, had successfully argued that his daughter in Dheghōm was a person because she could die, so Dheghōm would not be switched off while she lived. It would be murder if it was.

I pointed out with some energy that *everyone* on Earth is a person; that *I'm* a person.

Sarah said that this was what she thought, too, but that her opinion was considered biased because her job was making minds for robots.

I never saw any of the robots she made minds for, by the way, in case you were wondering.

Eventually, we arrived at the offices of Paul's company. Like all the others in its street, it was not as classy on the outside as the one owned by Marius. Each had only a single front door, with a large lintel rather than a porch.

Inside, the walls were of bare plaster, not wood. It was laid out in open plan, but there was a receptionist at a desk near the entrance. She was older than most of the twenty or so other people I could see, and although she wore the same kind of long gown as everyone else, the sleeves of hers were

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yellow. These were the only sleeves I saw during my time on – in, whatever – Bhéwonom that weren't grey. I asked Sarah why they weren't grey, but she didn't understand the question.

The woman in the yellow sleeves was called Eve. She engaged in a short chat with Sarah but only said "Hello, Dominic" to me. I don't think she felt entirely comfortable speaking to a robot.

Sarah led me past the others, whom – seated at desks as they were – I assumed were working. It was hard to tell, as they all had large pairs of goggles completely covering their eyes – I wasn't at all sure that they were even aware of my presence. They occasionally said things to one another, but they didn't turn their heads to do so.

Paul was in what Eve called "the machine room" – a large space full of metal cases the size of washing machines. There were coloured lights everywhere, some of which were flashing but most of which were steady. A man was sitting at a desk that was covered in switches. Behind him, large, circular displays resembling wheels were rotating radial lines at increasing speeds left-to-right, as if counting something.

The man at the desk was Paul. Sarah had told me that he was easily startled, so she made a noise when she closed the door, to alert him to our presence.

He removed his goggles, turned around, and stood up to greet us.

If someone had told me yesterday that God was a thin-faced man in his early forties with dead skin all over his face except for a goggle-shaped outline surrounding his eyes, I would not have believed them.

I still wouldn't believe them, either. Whoever he is, Paul certainly isn't God. How could *he* be the creator of all things when he himself must have been created?

In any case, he introduced himself as the designer of Dheghōm, rather than as the creator. The construction work, he said, had been done by his team.

He was quite a serious person, and he kept his hands behind his back as he talked. I didn't find him personable; he was polite, but business-like.

He asked me a string of questions about Earth. Did I like it? Did I want more weather? Did I like how smell and taste were related? Were there enough colours? Did pain last too long? Was it a problem that I couldn't detect mass?

I replied to that last one with "You can detect mass?", which caused him some excitement. "Did you notice that conceptual leap?" he asked Sarah, in an understated way. "This is incredible."

Sarah drily reported that I did that kind of thing all the time, and that it was apparently something all the natives of Dheghōm could do.

Playing along with the idea that Paul had indeed created Earth, I asked him why he'd design-

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ed a universe that the people of Bhéwonom would find frightening.

He told me that he hadn't done that. He'd designed a reality that was primitive and comforting which he'd hoped many people from Bhéwonom would like. Because its natives seemed to be more interesting than those of other realities, it had become quite popular. That had ended when some bad people began blocking the communications system and it had taken two full weeks to stop them. During that period, all eight of the realities he'd created had run at full speed, which wasn't intended to happen. Some four and a half thousand years had passed in each of them during these fourteen Bhéwonom days. Only Dheghōm had advanced, however. The others were much as they were before. He and Marius wanted to know why.

"Let me show you", he said, and handed me his goggles – "viewers", he called them. They were covered in skin excretions, but as a robot I couldn't really ask him to clean them so I reluctantly put them on. They were attached to his console by a slightly-glowing cable, and he helped adjust them to fit my artificial face.

"This is Erwā", he said, whereupon it was as if I was standing in rough wilderness. A group of perhaps a dozen people – people who looked just like you and me – were sitting around a fire while animals – oxen – grazed nearby under the watchful eye of a man with a spear.

I looked down at my body. Clad in furs, it was human now, a mid-brown but with the palms of both hands – for I had two – a lighter tone.

The spearman glared in my direction and shook his weapon. He said something I didn't understand.

Another person materialised next to me. She was stunningly beautiful. Her furs were cut professionally, as if to form a suit made of bearskin.

The spearman backed off; I could see the fear in his eyes.

The besuited woman asked if I was new, to which I replied that yes, I was: Paul had put me there. This seemed to satisfy her.

She gestured towards the group and asked if "their numbers" were visible. When I replied in the negative, she produced a small pot from somewhere, the contents of which she asked me to drink. I took a sip – it tasted of Communion wine – then suddenly symbols appeared over the heads of the tribespeople. I couldn't read them, but they were all blue with a black border except for the one over the spearman's head, which was more purple. The symbol plates all faced me, regardless of which way their bearers were oriented.

I turned to the woman who had given me the drink. Three-dimensional green symbols rotated halo-like above her head, but I couldn't decipher those either.

"Let me know if you need any help", she said, then dematerialised.

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I'd no idea how I might go about letting her so know, but it didn't matter because at that moment Paul chose to say "This is Dheghōm".

I was in my bedroom. I only knew it was my bedroom because the digital clock, reading 01:37, produced just enough light to see by.

There, lying on my bed, fast asleep, was my body.

Both my arms were outside the covers. I had two hands.

I was repelled.

I turned to the long mirror on the wardrobe door, to see what form I had taken here. Dim though the reflection was, I could tell that I looked the same as the body on the bed. There were two versions of me in that room, both of whom bore two hands. Neither mirror-me nor sleeping-me had a symbol above his head; I suppose one or both might have done if someone had given me a magic potion to quaff.

Paul only let the nightmare run a few seconds more before returning me to Bhéwonom. As he removed my goggles, he explained that it was very expensive to visit two different realities like that.

I told him I wanted my right hand removed.

He told me I could chop it off.

I told him I wanted *him* to remove it. I would have great difficulty explaining to everyone – to you – how it had grown back.

I'd thought that this point might have persuaded him to acquiesce, but it did quite the opposite.

The unknown possibilities opened up by my dilemma intrigued him, and he wanted to know how the people of Earth would react.

I tried a different tack, explaining that having a missing hand was part of who I was now. The condition had shaped my life and given me my calling. He was about to do something at the console "to change that", but Sarah stopped him. She reminded him that I was a person, and that altering my thoughts was immoral. He did seem to accept this contention.

Sarah quickly changed the subject. She wanted Paul to tell her whether the people of Dheghōm asked more of his system than did the people of the other realities. He said yes, and they numbered many more than they used to do, too. Unvisited, Dheghōm now ran much slower than it did before, but the other realities ran at more or less the same speed.

She begged to be allowed to visit Dheghōm. Paul was amenable, but kept repeating that it was too expensive.

A bagpipe-like note droned from his console. He flicked a switch to silence it, then informed me that shortly, everyone would be kicked out of Dheghōm to allow it to run free. He should return me to my body forthwith.

Sarah was very frustrated, rubbing the backs of her hands together rapidly. She cursed the rain, because it had slowed us down. A sunny day would have halved the journey time.

Dheghōm

Paul was once more at the console, goggles on. I would be back in my own body anon, he said, then bade me farewell.

I had to ask. "Paul", I said. "If you created Dheghōm, who created Bhéwonom?"

"No-one did", he replied, bemusedly. "It's Bhéwonom."

Three and a half seconds of swirling confusion later, I was back in my body. This body, the one you see before you: the one with two hands.

So you now understand my problem. I have a completely truthful description of how my hand regrew, which is also completely unbelievable. You're looking at me as if I need to be locked up, and perhaps I do, but here, see? See this? This is a right hand! You *know* I don't have a right hand, you've seen the stump often enough, I've banged on about it in sermons often enough. Yet here it is! What am I to make of it?

Perhaps I *am* going mad. Perhaps God sent me this hand and the accompanying vision to test my faith. Why me, out of all humanity, though? I'm nothing special. Why choose *me*? What have I done that no-one else has done better or worse?

So that's it. That's the end of the sermon. I'll be cancelling the rest of my duties forthwith and arranging a *locum*. I'll see what the bishop has to say about how to proceed.

This isn't my hand. It's a hand attached to my body, but it's not my hand. I don't *have* a hand, I don't *want* a hand. It changes who I am.

Is Heaven perfection? I'm imperfect – but I *wish* to be imperfect.

Perhaps *that's* what has offended God so much.

As for why the reading today was the Sermon on the Mount, I refer you to Matthew, chapter 5, verse 30.

Notes

The audio of the sermon was recorded from the live stream by Mrs Collette Warrington, who is deaf, for the benefit of her husband, Mr Peter Warrington, who was in hospital at the time recovering from COVID-19. This transcript was made by their son, Dr Geoff Warrington.

Dr Warrington's phonetic representation of Dheghōm ("D'hay G'hawm") and Bhéwonom ("B'hay Woe-Nome") have been replaced in this text by the proper nouns introduced in the work of Prof. Clive Phillips; the spelling of Erwā ("Ayrr a'Waa") is faithful to the same convention.

The body of Reverend Dominic Hughes was found by his housekeeper 7 Sep 2020. The coroner concluded that he had suffered a mental breakdown and had bled to death overnight after making multiple attempts to hack off his right hand with a cooking machete.

Dheghōm

Matter 22

Summary

How Strong an Influence

Account by:	H. Gregory McCain, 45. Novelist.
Source:	Rejected submission <i>F&SF</i> .
Location:	Cambridge, United States.
Event:	16 Apr 2018, 18 Oct 2020/18 Jun 2051.
Report:	19 Oct 2020.

Report

You know what the problem is with detective fiction these days? The cops have it too easy. They got CCTV, ALPR, face recognition, call records, browsing histories. Your cousin sent a spit sample to Ancestry.com to find out how Norwegian he is? Law enforcement can identify you through him.

What's a writer of detective fiction to do? Where are the clues? Where's the deduction? The false leads, the red herrings, the analysis, the little grey cells? Who needs an amateur detective when the cops can do it all?

Well I'll tell you who: criminals.

You're a smuggler, someone breaks into your warehouse and takes sixteen crates of scotch that didn't ought to be in the country. You're not going to call 911, right?

So I created this detective, honest guy, name of Dr Chris Eagle, logical thinker, professor of Computer Science at MIT. Yeah, Eagle, eagle-eyed, cliché kind of name for a detective, but I wanted a bird because Twitter led to his downfall. He gave a lecture, made a joke, everyone there knew it was a joke, everyone knew he was digging at the kind of people who'd believe what he said, everyone knew he didn't mean it himself. Someone tweeted a 5-second clip of him saying it. Two million retweets later, he was the world's most sexist professor. MIT had to dismiss him. Career over. A month later, he bumps into one of his former students, clever woman with a kid and a husband, only the husband is in the slammer for money laundering. Turns out hubby did indeed launder money, for a big-time fence who is under the impression that hubby kept more for himself than was agreed. Hubby will be looking at some severe retribution when he's out on parole. Thing is, though, he *didn't* take more than his fee. Someone else siphoned off the rest and framed him. Who? Well, hello Dr Chris Eagle: here's your first case.

I know, I know. This is all stupendously interesting, but what's it doing in a Science Fiction magazine that costs 40 bucks for six issues?

Dheghōm

Well, what if I told you that yesterday, Dr Chris Eagle walked into my office and informed me I'd died three days previously?

Yeah, I thought that might wake you up.

It was him, too, I knew right away. He looked exactly like he did in my head – nothing like on the book jackets. He told me stuff that isn't in the books, too, that I know but the reader doesn't. He has an older sister in a sanatorium, it affects how he sees the world but he never talks about her. That's an unwritten rule: I decided right at the outset that her existence would only manifest through occasional anomalies in his behaviour. Only I knew that. Well, only I and Eagle.

So he told me he didn't have a lot of time. He knew he wasn't supposed to be real and he knew he'd be back to not being real next day. He was delivering a message.

He was delivering a message from MIT in the year 2051.

No, this isn't one of your tired, time-travel tropes, except in the sense that you're travelling through time right now as you read this, at the sedate pace of one hour per hour.

In April of 2018 I visited MIT to have a look around. I figured that if my new detective was an MIT professor, I ought to get the lay of the land. I'd only published the first Chris Eagle book at the time – *The Stranded Eagle*, available from all good book retailers and Amazon – but it had gained strong traction and I planned on writing more (two

more to date, but you'll want to read them in order). One of the actual profs at MIT was a fan and emailed me, gently outlining some inconsistencies in my description of the place. He invited me to come and see it for myself, so that's what I did. Had a great day, made a lot of notes, took a bunch of photos, came home, that was that.

It would appear I chose an inopportune time.

According to Eagle, that was the day that MIT was cut off from the rest of reality. Now clearly it wasn't, because that's the kind of thing that reality would notice; except, it was. Maybe cut out from the rest of reality would be a better way of putting it.

Seems that close to noon an invisible barrier erected itself around the central campus. Nothing could go in, nothing could go out. It took the form of a cube, 1,122.67 metres along each edge – yeah, MIT people use metric – stretching from the athletics track in the west to the Sloan School of Management in the east, or part of it anyway. North, it went as far as the intersection between Galileo and Broadway; the lower third was the Charles River. Same story vertically, with maybe a third below ground level.

Trapped within these confines were some 10,000 people, mainly faculty and other researchers along with students, service staff. Some of the smartest people in the world were there. Oh, and me.

Dheghōm

They soon established that the normal laws of physics did not apply, or rather they did apply but selectively so. Sunlight came in, but not radio waves. They could see through the barrier, but only the world as it was when the barrier went up. Cars on the road, birds in the sky, people out and about, but none of it moving, like a painted backdrop in a 1950s movie. The river flowed, but the pattern was the same day to day. At 12:54, a 61 kph gust of wind kicked up the surface, gave a few white-tops that eventually got named. Adding people, rubble, made no difference: the water flowed unchanging even when they dammed it.

The sun remained stationary, dimming to darkness at 19:27.

Oxygen content in the air dropped during the day, but was reset at midnight. Food in the stores, the vending machines, the fruit bowls: if it had been eaten – snap! Back again at midnight, unless there was something solid in the way, then it wouldn't appear until the next midnight that the spot was clear.

The physicists soon concluded that this was a pocket reality. What's more, it was being crudely managed by whatever entity had created it. Essential conditions for basic survival were being met, but less essential ones were not. Sewage was a problem until the biochemists got to work. Toothpaste ran out. Everyday items broke or fell apart from wear and tear – clothes, pots, spectacles. Use of raw materials had to be prioritised. Is it more

important to fix a washing machine or to build a sharpener for surgical scalpels?

There were some upsides, though. Electricity was in infinite supply: you could draw as much off the grid as you wanted and it still kept coming. Any garbage that wasn't recyclable, you could just burn – you knew the air would be cleared at midnight.

Adapting to their situation, the engineers pushed at the boundaries of the new physics that dictated their lives. They prioritised robustness over functionality – a high-res computer screen that dies after 5 years was less useful than a lower-res one that carried on indefinitely. They developed new materials, new machines, new ideas. Some of these would work in our reality, some of them only in theirs.

All the while, they sought ways to break down, or if not that, to expand, the walls of the cube surrounding them.

There's a nuclear plant at MIT, did you know? I didn't until I went there. It's not for making power, it's for making neutrons. It wasn't far from the wall, so the nuclear physicists tried blasting a hole through it. Didn't happen. The wall wouldn't even warm up. The neutrons just disappeared when they hit it. Bigger things, they bounce off, but down at the subatomic particle level it's all quarks and wave forms and entanglements and who knows what. It didn't work, anyway. Nothing worked.

Dheghōm

There were four main metaphysical positions that tried to explain the predicament of the cube's residents.

First, maybe there was no reality beyond the cube. All memories of it were false phantoms inserted into the minds of the cube's inhabitants.

Second, maybe the rest of reality had disappeared, or at least got stuck in time, and MIT was the only part that still worked largely as advertised.

Third, MIT had perhaps been wrenched from reality and was cut off, leaving a cube of empty space in Cambridge that it used to occupy.

Fourth, this MIT (and perhaps others) was a copy forked off from the rest of reality, which itself continued to plod along oblivious to what had occurred.

Eagle figured that the fourth position was correct, seeing as how he was now in the reality outside the cube and it wasn't missing an MIT.

For some reason, time runs faster inside the cube than outside. People had kids, the kids grew up. There are folks in their 30s who have spent their entire existence in there. Life became routine enough to be liveable. Attempts to understand, breach or otherwise affect the invisible barrier continued, but they were no longer at the forefront of everyone's minds.

People died.

The version of me in this pocket reality continued to write. Yeah, I did other things, too,

good citizen that I am. Someone has to keep the streets clear of bird shit. I stuck with my detective, Christopher Eagle, but had to change his modus operandi. Instead of working for criminals, he worked for the cops. All those fancy cop databases were no longer available, so he could use his noggin to figure things out. The character became very popular. My being the only person present with an ounce (28.3495 grams) of talent for writing creative fiction helped ensure that.

Three days ago, on June 15th, 2051, cube time, I died at the grand old age of 77. Bit of a bummer, I was hoping to hit 80, but forewarned is forearmed; maybe I'll take some more exercise and cut back on the burgers and fries. Maybe.

A day after cube-me died, my fictional – that's *fictional* – detective, Dr Christopher Eagle, came into being. This did not go unnoticed. His sudden and sensational appearance among the cube's residents was immediately seized upon by those scientists still scientising. He was new data. Who had created him? Why had he been created? How had he got into their pocket universe? Could he perhaps get them out of it?

Having been written as a very smart character, Eagle himself was very smart. He knew he was fictional. He knew he shouldn't be there. He reasoned that because his creator – that would be me – had just died, he'd been read from his creator's mind. Whether he'd been inserted into the world automatically or deliberately he didn't know. He

Dheghōm

figured that he'd been manufactured to blend in, and that whoever or whatever had manufactured him was clueless as to what "blend in" meant in practice.

He also knew, because of being the first booking to show on the Boston Marriott computer system in over three decades, that he would not be staying after mid-day on day four of his existence. Today is day three.

Much as the MIT faithful would have liked to experiment on him, they didn't have the time. They ran some speedy tests, found he was as human as anyone else. This information didn't help.

What other quick and easy experiments could they run that might provide useful knowledge? Rigging him with monitors for when he disappeared might be worthwhile, if he was up for it, but prior to that?

One of the mathematicians had an idea: throw a chocolate bar from a vending machine at the barrier.

This is why you want mathematicians. They don't think the same as regular people.

A chocolate bar was duly retrieved and duly hurled unwrapped at the cube's wall. It duly passed through. In all the thirty-two years of the cube's existence, no-one had tried throwing food through the barrier before. There's something to be said for not bringing up responsible, well-behaved kids.

Food was different to everything else. Food was replaced every midnight. It was created within the cube by some power outside of it.

Eagle had also been created within the cube by some power outside of it.

They took him to the barrier. He put his hand on it. He put his hand *through* it. He retrieved his hand.

He could leave the cube.

Could he take anything with him? Could he take a person with him?

No, he couldn't. If he was holding anything that wasn't with him when he arrived, he couldn't push it through the barrier. OK, so food he could, but nothing else. Food with writing on it? No: the writing came off at the barrier while the banana went through.

It was just Eagle and snacks.

Could he come back inside once he'd fully stepped out? Well he could certainly move his limbs through with little difficulty, but maybe if there was no anchor point inside he'd find himself barred once outside. It was an experiment they could only perform once.

They told him everything they needed the world beyond the cube to know. They existed. They lived. They missed their loved ones. They had made new discoveries. They had opened new avenues of science.

Eagle remembered all he could.

Dheghōm

With one day of life left, he stepped outside the cube for a count of ten, then tried to step back inside. He succeeded, it worked: he had two-way passage.

Ten seconds outside had been ten seconds inside. The cube-dwellers thought that it was 2051 in general reality. Seems that the relationship between our time and cube time is variable. Sometimes, they trundle along at the same rate. Sometimes, cube time is faster. Maybe Eagle's appearance slowed cube time down to our time, or sped ours up to theirs. I'll leave that to the temporal physicists to chew on.

Eagle left again, this time with a mission. He was to pass on to us what he'd been told and maybe take a message back.

Yeah, right. I know my character: he's smarter than that.

He ignored MIT and made a beeline for the car rental off Harvard Square. He had dollars and ID in his pockets, because people do, you know? One four-hour drive later he was in New York, knocking on my apartment door.

He told me his story and the cube's story. I'm telling you both. He's fulfilled his duty. Those of us in regular reality now officially know about the cube reality – not that we give a shit.

Eagle came to see me because I'm his author. He was created from my words. The me in cube world, God rest my soul, may be dead, but to the best of my knowledge I myself most certainly am not.

I can still write.

Eagle made a request of me, which I'm inclined to grant. Here goes.

When the deadline for Eagle's disappearance passed inside the cube, he was outside of it. Had he been inside of it, on the stroke of noon he would have been consigned to oblivion. He wasn't inside of it, though. He survived the demise that had been arranged for him, and so lived on. He could travel between our reality and that of the MIT cube at will, bringing knowledge with him in both directions and enhancing the well-being of humanity as a consequence – in addition to making both himself and his author insanely rich.

Who says that writing detective fiction doesn't pay?

How strong an influence works in well-placed words.

*Chapman, The Gentleman Usher, Act IV,
scene 1.*

Notes

H. Gregory McCain is not insanely rich.

Dheghōm

Matter 23

Summary

Demigods

Account by:	Unknown.
Source:	BBC website.
Location:	England.
Event:	5 Mar 2020.
Report:	5 Mar 2020.

Report

Episode 28: Demigods

Melvyn Bragg and guests discuss demigods, the fabled offspring of a human and a divine being. From Heracles to Cú Chulainn, from Garuda to Chen Xiang, legends are rife with characters born of mortal and immortal. Loved by some gods, despised by others, they and their human parents are mythology's engine, powering dramas and enduring conflicts between deities in all cultures. Whether hero or villain, part-animal or fully-human, magnanimous or bitter, wise or foolish,

their stories have retained their force from the ancient world to the modern.

Notes

Episode 28 of the 2019-2020 series of *In Our Time* on BBC Radio 4 was scheduled to be broadcast 2 Apr 2020 but was never recorded. The series was curtailed on 12 Mar 2020 because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The BBC website for this series features a rolling list of the next eight episodes in the pipeline; it is from here that this précis (now deleted) was taken.

Dheghōm

Matter 24

Summary

Bananas

Account by:	Veronica Way, 23. Student.
Source:	Twitter.
Location:	Cambridge, United States.
Event:	19 Oct 2020/19 Jun 2051.
Report:	19 Oct 2020.

Report

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 3h

Just came across a banana in the lab with "THROW ME AT WALL" scratched onto it (the banana, not the lab). I'm gonna throw it cos then I get to throw a banana at a wall.

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 3h

I threw it at the wall and it disappeared (the banana, not the wall). That doesn't normally happen when I throw bananas at walls.

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 3h

OK, so this is weird. Two more bananas just came flying out of nowhere.

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 3h

One has "WAIT" scratched on it and the other has "DON'T BE SPOOKED". You're asking a lot, bananas: I'm impatient and already spooked.

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 3h

So a cucumber has appeared. More correctly, around half a cucumber has appeared. It has no support, nothing in front, nothing behind, it just floats.

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 3h

It's nodding as if someone wants me to grab it. I will not grab it. I will look for the hidden cameras placed by whoever is pranking me.

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 3h

Cucumber gone. Damn, I didn't check the cucumber itself for a camera. I should have checked the cucumber.

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 3h

Cucumber back. It's waving at chest height. This time, it has "HOLD ME" scratched onto it.

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 3h

So I held it, and it was as if someone else was holding the other end (someone taller than me).

Dheghōm

They raised and lowered it like they were shaking my hand.

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 3h

This is seriously freaky. Go back, cucumber!

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 3h

Well there has been a development. A line of 30 half-bananas has appeared stretching right across the floor of the lab.

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 3h

One banana is blank, the rest have letters scratched on their skins: A-Z in order, plus YES, NO and OVER. The cucumber reappeared over the H, then the I, then the OVER.

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 3h

Oh. Now a cucumber has been tossed into the lab from whatever extra-dimensional space I'm meant to think is out there. OK, I'll play along.

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 3h

I thought long and hard about what I should reply, and finally went with HI.

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 3h

The banana person replied: AWESOME PLEASE VIDEO THIS. Yeah, well see, if I do that I can't tweet. I'm gonna lie: SURE.

Matter 24

BAN

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 3h

WE ARE MIT STUCK IN A POCKET UNIVERSE.

Oh, is this a scam? You need me to wire you some money to help you get out?

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 3h

SINCE WHEN. They should have introduced some punctuation bananas.

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 3h

Oh, now that's nice. They pulled back the bananas and put out some different ones with numbers scratched on them.

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 3h

I think the bananas must be nailed to a plank on the other side, the sets come and go together. The cucumber replied 2018 then the letters returned all at once.

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 3h

Me: U MISSED THE PANDEMIC. Lucky banana people.

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 3h

Them: WHAT YEAR IS IT FOR YOU (switch to number bananas)

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 3h

Me: 2020

Dheghōm

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 3h

Them: 2020

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 3h

Me: 2020. What is this, 2020 tennis?

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 3h

Pause. (Switch to letter bananas) HERE IT IS
(number bananas) 2051 (letter bananas).

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 3h

Maybe I'll stop mentioning when the banana racks switch.

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 3h

WHO R U. I like to know whom I'm dealing with in my banana-moderated communications.

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 3h

DAVE AND BECKY WE WERE BORN HERE WHO ARE YOU

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 3h

VERONICA CALL ME FIZ

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 3h

ARE YOU VERONICA WAY

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 3h

Oh is this where I get the prank reveal? THATS ME

Matter 24

BAN

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 3h

WE KNOW FIZ BECKY WILL GO GET HER. Whuh?
They're going to have someone pretend to be me
while talking to me?

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 3h

SO YR MIT IS A COPY OF OUR MIT AS OF TWO
YEARS AGO. That seems to be the premise of this
jape.

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 3h

LOOKS THAT WAY OUR TIME MUST GO FASTER
THAN YOURS

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 3h

ITS NOT GOING FASTER NOW. Ha! Gotcha!

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 3h

THE BANANAS MAYBE LOCK US TOGETHER.
Yeah, cos of course they would. Bananas are time
magic.

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 3h

WHY BANANAS

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 3h

OUR FOOD CAN CROSS THE BARRIER DO U
KNOW CHRIS EAGLE

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 3h

NO

Dheghōm

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 3h

WE SENT HIM YESTERDAY THEN HAD THIS IDEA YOU ARE ONLY PERSON TO REPLY

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 3h

So I wasn't targeted? I feel so unspecial! HOW MANY PEOPLE DID U ASK

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 3h

WE SENT TWENTY BAIT BANANAS WHY ONLY YOU REPLY

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 3h

CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC PEOPLE NOT ON CAMPUS

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 3h

HERE IS FIZ ILL GIVE HER POINTER. There's a pause. I'm not going to engage in idle cucumber-wielding chit-chat to fill in the time.

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 3h

The next message is HI ME IT WAS BLUE. Sooo that's chilling.

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 3h

I was gonna ask her to prove she was me by telling me the colour of the Christmas decoration I broke in Macy's when I was 7 and kept silent about.

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 3h

No-one knows anything about it except me.

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 3h

It was blue. I AM GRADUALLY CONCLUDING THAT THIS MAY NOT BE A JOKE

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 3h

NO JOKE WEVE BEEN LIVING IN A CUBIC KM FOR THREE PLUS DECADES DON'T KNOW HOW IT HAPPENED IT JUST DID HOWS CAZ

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 3h

Caz is my – our – younger sister, Caroline. SHES FINE CAUGHT THE VIRUS BUT IT ONLY KILLS OLD PEOPLE MOM DAD ALSO FINE

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 3h

THATS COMFORTING I AM OLDER THAN DAD NOW HA HA I GOT THE PHD BTW AM NOW DR FIZ

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 3h

CAN YOU GIVE ME SOME HINTS ON THE SECOND EXP

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 3h

LATER HEY U ARENT FILMING THIS

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 3h

TWEETING IT

Dheghōm

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 3h
THOUGHT SO FILMING IS BETTER SO PEOPLE
CAN SEE

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 3h
R U IN A RUSH

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 3h
GOTTA STOP WELL BEFORE MIDNIGHT

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 3h
ITS TEN AM HERE

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 3h
ELEVEN FORTY PM HERE WILL NEED TO
WITHDRAW BANANAS NOW THEN EAT THEM

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 3h
YOU'RE GONNA EAT ALL THOSE BANANAS

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 3h
YES AND THE CUCUMBERS THEY REGENERATE
AT MIDNIGHT WE'RE BEING EXPERIMENTED ON

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 3h
BY WHOM

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 3h
NO IDEA PLS THROW BACK CUCUMBER STAY
AROUND WILL REPEAT TOMORROW

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 3h
OK WILL BRING A CAMERA TOO

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 3h
U BETTER

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 3h
Well the bananas have gone now. No-one has burst into the lab crying with laughter at fooling me.

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 3h
Maybe I really did just have a conversation with 55-year-old me through the medium of a banana-based Ouija board.

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 2h
The bananas have reappeared, with some modifications: numbers are part of the strip now and there's a question mark.

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 2h
I would have liked an apostrophe but am not so OCD that I can't live without one.

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 2h
I wasn't expecting reconnection so soon but I guess an hour after 23:40 is "tomorrow" so I shouldn't be surprised.

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 2h

Dheghōm

I don't have a camera but will take some shorts in between tweets. Now gimme my cucumber!

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 2h

The banananet is operational once more with a new message. HI ITS DR FIZ HERE R U THERE NOTDR FIZ?

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 2h

HI NOTYOUNG FIZ ITS YOUNG FIZ HERE.

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 2h

R U RECORDING THIS?

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 2h

JUST ABOUT 2

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 2h

SAY WHEN

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 2h

WHEN. Cucumber+bananas=communication!

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 2h

I've videoed this sequence, will upload it later. It's long, I'll break the text into parts.

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 2h

1/11 OK SO THERE HAS BEEN A DEVELOPMENT V BAD 4 US GOODISH 4 U

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 2h

2/11 WE RECEIVED A VISIT FROM OUR EXPERIMENTERS THEY SAY THEY R FROM BAHAY WAW NAWM

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 2h

3/11 THEY R GONNA CLOSE US DOWN WE R QUITE UPSET ABOUT IT

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 2h

4/11 WE SENT 1 OF THEIR PROBES FROM POCKET UNIVERSE TO REAL UNIVERSE AND THEY NOTICED

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 2h

5/11 THEY FOUND THE OTHER 19 BAIT BANANAS 2 THEY R IMPRESSED THEY THINK WE R SMART

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 2h

6/11 THEY GONNA LET REAL UNIVERSE CONTINUE SO U OVERTAKE THEIR TECH

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 2h

7/11 WE RUN AT FULL SPEED U RUN SLOWER THEY RUN EVEN SLOWER BUT TIMES LOCK WHILE BOUNDARIES R CROSSED

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 2h

8/11 THEYLL MAINTAIN YR CURRENT SPEED 4 200 YEARS 1 OF THEIR MONTHS

Dheghōm

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 2h
9/11 UNLESS SOME WOMAN IN EUROPE IS
KILLED WE DONT KNOW HER NAME

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 2h
10/11 THEY CANT FORK THE WHOLE UNIVERSE
LIKE THEY DID OUR CUBE THEY DON'T HAVE
THE RESOURCES SO MUCH 4 OMNIPOTENT
GODS HA HA

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 2h
11/11 REPRIEVE 4 U THEN BUT WORLD ENDING 4
US U GET ALL THAT?

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 2h
YES ON VIDEO SORRY 4 PAUSE WAS TWEETING
IT HOW LONG DO U HAVE

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 2h
UNTIL MIDNIGHT WE THINK SO THATS 2 HRS

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 2h
HERE ITS ONLY 1 HR SINCE YR LAST CALL

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 2h
V INTERESTING FIZ BUT OUR WORLD IS
ENDING U GOTTA TELL YR WORLD U COULD
GO 2 IN 200 YEARS MAYBE SOONER IF THE
ENGLISH GAL DOESN'T LIVE THAT LONG

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 2h

IS THERE NOTHING WE CAN DO 2 SAVE U?

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 2h

WE DON'T THINK SO ITS LIKE THEYRE SWITCHING OFF OUR SERVER WE GOT AN END OF THE WORLD PARTY GOING ON

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 2h

WHO ARE THESE EXPERIMENTERS?

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 2h

THEYRE LIKE US BUT A BIT DIMMER THEYRE NOT EVIL THEYRE THE GODS OF OUR UNIVERSE AND YRS

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 2h

WHAT SUGGESTS THEYRE DIMMER?

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 2h

THEIR PROBE WAS A TOTAL JOKE

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 2h

WHAT SUGGESTS NOT EVIL?

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 2h

THEY TOLD US THEIR PLANS 2 BE NICE TO US BUT HA HA DIDN'T FIGURE WE CAN TALK 2 YOU COS THEYRE DIM

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 2h

Dheghōm

OK U GOING TO PARTY?

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 2h
ID RATHER TALK TO U

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 2h
WHAT ABOUT

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 1h
I haven't tweeted what Dr Fiz told me because I'm going to patent some of it.

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 1h
Also she may or may not have explained how to save myself three months of work on the PhD (I'm not gonna risk a charge of self-plagiarism).

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 1h
I gotta say I grew quite fond of her. I was telling her I'd miss her when her clock struck twelve and I was left holding a cucumber with a line of half bananas on the floor.

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 1h
If what she said is true we're gonna to have to figure out how to negotiate with the universe's gods.

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 1h
That's gods, not God. I can't see that getting through congress easily.

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 1h
We can spot them though.

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 1h
One of them swigged a potion and left the bottle behind. Someone in the cube ran a spectral analysis of the liquid. Dr Fiz gave me the formula.

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 1h
She said if you drink it you can see labels above people's heads like in a video game. Gods use it to tell us apart.

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 1h
Therefore, if someone has no label, they're a god?
Or if they have a different kind of label?

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 1h
WTF?! My recording is corrupted! How did that happen? I already watched it once, it was fine. Well that sucks.

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 1h
Still got the tweets and the paper I wrote the messages down on as they came in.

Veronica Way @fizzyphysix · 1h
Anyone out there want to have a go at extracting the data from my MP4 file?

Dheghōm

Notes

MIT data retrieval experts found that Miss Way's MP4 file consisted entirely of randomised bits.

On 2 Nov 2020, Miss Way's apartment was broken into. Security cameras show a man and a woman wearing N95 masks entering at 10:02 and leaving at 10:21. Miss Way reported the incident to police, but the investigation was not pursued with vigour because although her papers had been disturbed, nothing had been taken.

[Update 3 Jan 2023] Dr Way lodged two patents in late 2021: one for weaving graphene; one for creating robust LEDs.

Matter 25

Summary

Cock-a-Doodle-Do!

Account by:	Nick Montague, 37. Journalist.
Source:	MailOnline.
Location:	Cerne Abbas, Dorset, England.
Event:	21 Sep 2022.
Report:	21 Sep 2022.

Report

Cock-a-doodle-do!

- Dead chickens found on Cerne Abbas Giant
- No sign of how they got there
- Local drone club denies prank

By NICK MONTAGEW FOR THE DAILY MAIL

PUBLISHED: 14:20, 21 September 2022

Police detectives were flummoxed by a case of 'fowl play' yesterday, as three hundred dead chickens appeared overnight on the Cerne Abbas Giant – following the contours of the figure's famously mighty penis.

Dheghōm

Local walker Ted Harley, who was among the first to make the grisly find, described his initial shock at the discovery. "There were hundreds of white birds, all deceased, packed together over the chalk outline of the Giant's todger. It wasn't what I wanted to see at five-thirty in the morning."

Detective Sergeant Kay Harrison, leading the police investigation, is not amused. "Whoever performed this sick act of vandalism may have believed it was funny, but the Cerne Giant is a scheduled monument. We take such incidents very seriously."

When asked how pranksters could possibly have transported so many dead birds without leaving vehicle tracks and then lay them out on the Giant's 11-metre long erect phallus undetected, DS Harrison declined to comment except to note, "It wasn't aliens."

An emerging theory is that the feat was achieved using drones, but local drone clubs have been swift to deny the accusation. "While there may in the past have been illegal swoops over the Giant's willy, we draw the line well before reaching the chicken-massacring stage", said a spokesperson.

Officials of the British Poultry Council are co-operating with police to identify the origin of the identical snow-coloured birds and to help establish what nobbled them.



The Cerne Abbas Giant is Dorset's best-known tourist attraction. Archaeological evidence suggests it was cut in Anglo-Saxon times, but some experts believe it to be much older – possibly dating from the Iron Age.

The National Trust, which owns the site, is keen to see the matter resolved. A brief press release stated that the site would remain closed until the weekend, adding, "We hope that this action does not detract from the enjoyment of any of our members."

Notes

The MailOnline website withdrew this article within two hours of publication, on the advice of police citing worries about copycat behaviour.

Matter 26

Summary

Woman Repeatedly Drowns, then is Rescued

Account by:	Alison Ellis, 50. Artist.
Source:	Near-death experience account.
Location:	Sicily Channel.
Event:	23 Sep 2022.
Report:	20 Oct 2022.

Report

WOMAN REPEATEDLY DROWNS, THEN IS
RESCUED

Created: Thursday, 20 October 2022 16:33

Four unfathomable weeks ago, two friends and I were cruising, carefree, the coast of Sicily in a four-berth boat helmed by a harbour-hewn Italian. We'd spent several sea-days circuiting the savage shores when one of us wondered, could we call perhaps on Pantelleria, an isolated island in the southern strait sitting in solitude close to Tunisia? Our colourful

Dheghōm

captain consented to convey us across the weary,
windless waters, so away we went.

All was wending well, when chaos struck. A trident
rent our underside, ripping and tearing, cutting
the keel and swirling amongst us streams of surg-
ing salt-water.

For safety, we were wearing lifejackets. The canvas
canopy was down, so we could quickly clear the
confusion as the craft descended dizzily to its
doom – or so thought I.

Something snatched me as I swam – a strap, a
rope, a grappling limb – I felt my foot heaved
heavily towards the hull.

Ten, twenty, forty metres I fell, abjectly struggling
to the boundless seabed, unable to breathe, unable
to breathe, lungs empty of air, unable to breathe.

I drowned.

I was awake! Alive! I lay, liberated, in my bunk-bed
berth – but still below the bobbing waves. Up I
floated, up I swam, but breathless, airless, hopeless,
until consciousness departed.

I reawoke, respiring brine, back in my bunk,
befuddled. Was I dead? Up again I floated, up again

I swam, until again I drowned and died and every world was once more shadow.

Repeatedly this happened, repeatedly I drowned, repeatedly my wretched life was wrested from me then reset so I could perish painfully in panic one more time.

It got dark. I kept on drowning. It got light. I kept on drowning.

Drowning isn't recommended, but a hundred rude rehearsals habituate one to its ways. I detached my lifejacket; next revival, I remained deep down to drown.

Confident of resurrection, I made plans, preparing for the point at which ascension to the surface would be possible. I figured that the fridge was sealed and filled with air, so if inverted I could clear my lungs within it; I might stay alive for long enough to break the surface and my curse.

I took my lifejacket and my chance – it worked! I coughed enough foul water up to inhale air, then gurgled gainfully towards the sunlight and salvation.

I was found, afloat, unconscious, drifting, three days after being dragged unto those dreadful depths.

Dheghōm

Doctors declared that my oxygen-starved brain had concocted the experience as it closed slowly down. Correct or not, I cannot care; the scars of the occurrences are my reality, the truth to which I must adjust.

We judge the world by what it weaves about us. Our minds mind what our senses sense; we each build bodies of belief shaped by poisoned, sugared happenstance.

Poets portray pictures with words. Artists pen prose with paint.

I am an artist; I should use decorative daubs to describe my near-death affair and its arduous aftermath. That I chose words, with their wary distance, is witness to my fear.

I do not wish enduring death again.

Notes

The International Association for Near-Death Studies anonymises all the accounts of such experiences that it publishes and takes care to protect the identities of those involved.

Alison Ellis was aboard the vessel "Ametista", which sank over the Pantelleria Vecchia bank 23 Sep 2022. One of the other passengers, Jayne Frankish, corroborates her allegation that it was holed by a trident.

Alison Ellis is Love Ellis's mother.

Dheghōm

Matter 27

Summary

Creepy Sleepy Weepy

Account by:	Patricia Elkin, 46. Journalist.
Source:	Semi-pro zine.
Location:	Edinburgh, Scotland.
Event:	20 Aug 2022.
Report:	21 Aug 2022.

Report

Fringe Eye 2022 issue 17

SPOKEN WORD

POETRY

SINGLE PERFORMANCE

REVIEW: Endless Love – Love Ellis. Venue 21 C
ARTS 17:00.

★★★★★

By Pat Elkin

“Love Ellis is infuriating. The content of her work exhibits a depth almost unequalled among British poets of her generation, but at the surface level it has the same, unrefined dismissiveness of language and over-concern with form that has

characterised her work since she burst onto the scene with her opening collection, *This Thing Called Love*, in 2019. She knows what she wants to say but has yet to develop the verbal artistry or poetic vocabulary to say it."

I wrote the above in my piece for yesterday's *Fringe Eye*, in the full belief that I would today be venting my disappointment that yet another potential future star of British poetry had failed to deliver on her early promise. However, after the extraordinary reading she gave in her one-off appearance at the C ARTS venue last night, I find myself having to re-evaluate this young woman from top to bottom. Her rickety rhymes, clunky scanning and shoehorning of expression into unstable structures of her own invention are, I now realise, meticulous. She knows exactly what she is doing and why.

Quite simply, yesterday evening's reading by Ellis is the most singular, remarkable event that I have attended in all my thirty years of reviewing poetry at the Fringe.

The evening began with four works from her two withdrawn collections, *This Thing Called Love* and *In the Name of Love*. Having previously given no explanation for her decision to pull the volumes, it had been widely assumed that she'd been embarrassed by their critical reception; last night, she attacked this view with a new poem, *Rare and Well Done*, in which she used the voice of a waitress in a steakhouse to suggest that by withdrawing her

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first two collections she had guaranteed there'd be a frenzy to buy her third collection, *Love Story*, before she withdrew that, too.

This was the first hint of the evening that Ellis is a far more intelligent and calculating individual than she has hitherto been credited as being.

Ellis's reading of her own work is assured and flowing. The words that scan so poorly on the page are natural and lilting when they emerge from her mouth. The forced rhymes are acknowledged with a crispness that shows them to be intended, an ironic statement on the way that she herself feels constrained. Within the first half-hour, I had concluded that Ellis was not the incomplete article I had cosily assumed her to be, but a poet in full possession of prodigious and formidable powers. If one trusts her, if one accepts that every perceived fault is no such thing, then a phenomenal world of insight opens up. She wields her words with multi-layered precision.

Multiple more new pieces appeared, with subjects ranging from *Queueing for Coffee's* frustration (and it was abundantly clear how she wanted "for coffee" to be pronounced) to the dark humour of *Guess the Guest* (a parody of a TV game show) and *Dayglow's* dreamy musings on time. If her session had ended at forty-five minutes, I would have come away suitably chagrined, having been compelled to reconsider my opinion of her work in the light of her exceptional talent.

The remaining fifteen minutes of her performance were to take it to another level completely.

She announced that her penultimate poem would be *I Don't Know my Father*. As possibly her most enigmatic and celebrated work, the audience had been expecting it to end her reading, perhaps introduced with some explanatory context that might offer them a further glimpse into its meaning. She did not oblige: instead, she went straight into it, delivering its text from memory with such emotional intensity that it took one's breath away. It was mesmerising. I remember thinking that the poem I knew from the page was like a black-and-white photograph compared to the colour version rendered by Ellis herself. I had so many thoughts, so many questions – I was sure I wouldn't be able to sleep that night as my mind ran through the implications. If only it hadn't been a no-phones event, I lamented – I could have captured it and studied it line through dazzling line at leisure.

By all rights, that should have been the final poem in a bravura evening that cemented Ellis's place at the forefront of British poetry. We'd been told it was the second-last, though. The audience was on tenterhooks: how could she possibly top it?

Ellis declared that her final poem was a new one, *Creepy Sleepy*. She said that she had curated all the previous poems that evening solely to lead up to this one. The narrative they told would then become apparent.

Dheghōm

I confess to losing a little respect for her at this point. Treating a poetry reading itself as a meta-poem is a hackneyed idea that every young poet thinks original until they try it and are robustly informed otherwise.

I should have trusted her. This isn't what Ellis meant at all.

Creepy Sleepy was rendered in the first-person using Chaucerian stanzas. Most modern poets have eschewed the constraints of rhyme and metre, preferring to explore the affordances of free verse; to write in so antiquated a form as Chaucerian stanzas is therefore to make a statement. Typically, that statement is an allusion to literary tradition, and (given Ellis's obsession with form) I hypothesised this to be the case here. As we shall shortly see, my hypothesis was correct, but only partially so: the literary tradition transformed into a literal tradition in a quite astounding way.

Superficially, *Creepy Sleepy* relates the story of a woman who follows the narrator around. She sleeps whenever the narrator stays in the same place for more than a quarter of an hour, regardless of what the narrator is doing – writing, eating, travelling by train, partying, watching TikTok videos, playing online games – any situation where the narrator remains relatively *in situ*. Other than sleep and follow, the woman doesn't do anything.

As the poem initially developed, my symbolism senses were telling me that it was either about death or a decline in mental faculties or physical

prowess – concerns at the back of the mind of everyone, but rather clichéd for a poet of Ellis's presumed stature.

The context shifted, though. Sometimes, the follower is joined by another woman. Sometimes, the other woman takes over the following.

Now, the poem was suddenly more interesting. The women don't represent death, unless there is more than one death. Do they represent mundanity? Motherhood? Anxiety? Acceptance? The subconscious? What fate is always there as a possibility, waiting? What could these women betoken?

My money was still on death as the poem continued.

The followers were passive. They did nothing but observe and sleep, although while observing they sometimes ate or drank. They didn't react when the narrator made eye contact. They kept on watching, impassively.

The status of the women remained ambiguous. I knew they encoded some feeling or idea or other insubstantial concept, but they had such focus, such apparent strength of purpose that they felt almost real. The two co-operated with one another, so they didn't represent competing concerns. Or perhaps Ellis was suggesting that they did? Do good and evil communicate?

Did they represent futures with different faces? With different endings, or different beginnings? Or are all futures the same, they only appear to be different?

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The third stanza wondered how they always found the narrator – whom we now implicitly accepted was Ellis herself. The creepy women were easy to escape from, because they were sleepy, but she was just as easy for them to locate afterwards. They could see her when she hid, they could see her at a distance. Only in crowds were they lost.

Perhaps, I speculated, she was saying that only among others are we truly ourselves – or, again as is typical for her, perhaps she was saying the opposite?

The questions she was raising were profound, and I suspect different for each member of the audience. Is she worried or comforted by her creepy sleepy stalkers? Are we ourselves worried by our own creepy sleepy stalkers – the ones we have projected onto those of the poem in order to try to make sense of it?

At the end of two earlier poems in the reading – *That Which is Not* and *Rare and Well Done* – the applause had been particularly enthusiastic; when *I Don't Know my Father* had finished, the applause had been rapturous. When *Creepy Sleepy* finished, there was silence. Individuals did seem to countenance clapping, but thought better of it and desisted. They were stunned, overwhelmed.

Then, just as they were collectively coming out of it, the poet rose to her feet.

Instinctively, we knew: we hadn't applauded the poem yet because it wasn't ended.

In the audience, towards the back, was a sleeping woman. She was wearing jeans, Adidas trainers and a black Max Planck Institute hoodie. I'd say she was in her late twenties.

Ellis went over and shook her awake.

The effect was electric! This was clearly part of the poem, but it wasn't a poem – or was it? Had it pivoted to theatre?

Then, it hit me: Ellis was concretising her poem and confronting its symbols head-on. She was commanding us, the audience, to do the same. Poems are performance and always have been – that's why she'd used Chaucerian stanzas. She was bringing her words literally to life. It was genius!

I had the presence of mind to scribble summaries of the dialogue.

What are you playing at?!
Protecting you.

From what?
From your father's people.

They can't hurt me.
They can only hurt you.

Why do they want to hurt me?
When you die, the world dies.

How does sleeping protect me?

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When I die, I'll awaken where I last slept, close to you.

How do you always find me when I run?
I see souls. They're symbols, slashes, like thorns, hovering above the head as if they were name-plates, always facing me.

So you recognise my soul?
Yours is different. It's three-dimensional, a circle, a halo, rotating, brighter than the rest.

We have to talk.
Everyone has to talk.
Everyone has to live.

The two held each other's gaze for two or three seconds, then the entire audience erupted in ovation. It was cathartic, it was tearful, it was thankful – thankful for showing us, and only us, this fabulous flash of our inner selves.

Both Ellis and the German actress playing the sleeper behaved as if their exchange was an impromptu, unrehearsed development. They each give astonishingly believable performances. It was sensational. I now understood why this was a no-phones event. One had to be there to experience it. A recording would have been dead on the screen in comparison. It was incredible.

"Your father's people" – the past you carry with you.

"When you die the world dies" – from your perspective, your own extinction is accompanied by that of everything else.

"When I die, I'll awaken" – yet the world does carry on without you.

The women represent life. Of course! This isn't a poem about death, it's about life! That something-that's-always-there, always with you, always watching: it's not the future, it's the present, the here and now.

"I see souls" – I am a personification of life, of existence.

"Symbols like slashes, like thorns" – everyone carries their own hurt.

"Nameplates, always facing me" – everyone shares the present.

"A halo, rotating" – a crown of thorns. Everyone is their own Christ. Every moment, they complete the definition of themselves.

Everyone is different, but everyone faces life together. Everyone has to talk. I see it.

I feel privileged. I'm weeping as I write this.

Love Ellis: I have misunderstood you, and now, through your words, I understand that I have long misunderstood myself.

I thought I knew greatness when I saw it, but now – now I've seen it – I realise I knew nothing at all.

Dheghōm

Notes

None.

Matter 28

Summary

What I Did at Half Term

Account by:	Harry Beatty, 10. Primary school student.
Source:	School essay.
Location:	St Just, Cornwall, England.
Event:	25 Sep 2022.
Report:	31 Oct 2022.

Report

25/9/22

What I did at Half Term

For half term I went to stay with Auntie Sam and Uncle Matt in Cornwall.

Cornwall is a beautiful place. It has small roads and big beaches and enormous seagulls that eat your chips. Auntie Sam and Uncle Matt live in St Just, which is the westerliest town in England. It is much prettier than Romford.

One morning I went for a walk on my own because Auntie Sam and Uncle Matt said it isn't

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dangerous and let me. I wanted to see the stone circle at Tregeseal.

On the way, there was a remote cottage. It was very old. A man was knocking at the door. A small animal was following him that reminded me of Pyroar the Pokémon except with horns. The man was Indian and looked a bit like that politician but it wasn't him. He knocked for much longer than people normally knock.

A lady opened the door. She said, "She doesn't want to see you". She was very forceful. She had a German accent so that helped.

The man replied something but I didn't hear what because he wasn't as loud as the German lady.

Another lady appeared. She did not look happy. She was blonde. She pointed towards the hill called Carn Kenidjack and told him to fuck off back to where he came from. Those were her exact words. "Fuck off back to where you came from".

I stopped to watch because it looked as if there might be a row.

The man didn't want to go and neither did his Pokémon.

Just then, three more men came down the lane. One was some kind of devil with blue skin and a lot of arms and I think maybe an extra eye. He carried a three-pointed spear called a trident. I was very frightened but brave. The other two men were dressed like they were out of Cobra Kai except they

had big swords instead of karate. I guessed they were all actors, but it turned out I was wrong.

"Get away!" yelled the Indian man with the Pokémon. He was shouting at the two ladies.

The blonde lady retreated into the cottage but the German lady was having none of it. She picked up a shotgun from next to the door and stood ready to defend herself.

The Indian man turned round and approached the other three men in a calm manner. He was trying to be reasonable. The three men stopped and waited until he got close, but it was a ruse! The blue man stuck him with his trident. The man fell to the ground and then turned into blobs of light that rose up a bit then disappeared. They were like what happens in a computer game and are called particle effects. His Pokémon also disappeared but without the particle effects.

I didn't think such things happened in real life and it worried me.

The three men laughed. They didn't see another man coming down the hill behind them. This man was dressed in clothes you don't see a lot of in Cornwall.

They went towards the cottage, grinning. They spotted me but didn't seem to care and my legs were like jellyfish so I couldn't have run anyway if they'd come for me.

When they got close to the cottage, the lady with the shotgun gave one of the swordsmen both barrels. She aimed well and he went down like a

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pushed-over wheelie-bin. He had shiny wire hair. The blue man and the other swordsman took some shot too but it just annoyed them. The dead man did the thing with the particle effects.

The other swordsman ran towards the lady with the gun and before she could reload he chopped her head off. Decapitulation, it's called. A lot of blood spurted out and her body slumped forward, but then a moment later it just disappeared. It didn't go like the men's bodies did with the lights and everything, it just disappeared like the Pokémon.

Up until then I had believed I was probably watching a film being made. The decapitulation and the blood changed my mind. It was shocking. This wasn't just pretend. The German lady had definitely been severely killed.

This meant I was in danger myself because I had seen what had happened. I wanted to run but the killers would have caught me. I hid behind a hedge instead and looked through a gap between the leaves.

Suddenly, the man coming up behind the baddies did something amazing! He pointed both arms at them and out shot a fireball the size of a baby elephant! It was fantastic!

The blue man took the brunt of it and he was soon on the ground turning into light, but the other man managed to swig like a potion and he healed up. Then, he charged the mage, dodging all kinds of magic that was being cast at him. The

mage realised he was in trouble and tried to cast a longer spell, probably a teleport because that's what I'd have done, but he started it too late and the swordsman ran him through before he could finish it. I knew from the glowing lights that the mage was dead.

The swordsman wasn't angry, in fact he looked quite smug. He wandered back to the cottage, cleaning his blade on his clothes as he did so. He must have been less bothered by clothes covered in blood than with a sword covered in blood.

At that moment, the German lady who had shot his friend appeared from a camper van parked next to the cottage. Her head was back on! I don't know how. She didn't have a shotgun with her this time, so she stayed back.

The blonde lady then came to the cottage door. She did have a shotgun with her and she was in no mood to talk things over. The swordsman was too far away to decapitate her because he had walked slowly out of smugness, so he threw his sword instead. It stuck the blonde lady in the chest. She shrieked in pain, but still got off a shot and blasted him to pieces.

The man turned to light but the blonde lady looked to be in a very bad way. In fact, she looked to be nearly dead. The German lady ran over to her. The man's sword had disappeared with the man and now there was blood glugging out everywhere.

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The German lady produced a potion of her own. She sprinkled it over the nearly dead lady's body and it seemed to have an effect.

She didn't have enough though so went back to the camper van. She came out carrying like a dog bowl that was probably a hundred years old, covered in scratches. She propped the nearly dead lady up and poured some liquid from the bowl into her mouth. After a few seconds, the nearly dead lady was properly alive again. She looked as if she had not enjoyed being nearly dead, and clutched her chest as if it still hurt. There was a rip in her T-shirt where the sword had gone through, but you couldn't see her bra or anything through it.

The German lady looked around and saw me, even though I was behind a hedge. She ignored me.

I was totally in shock by now. Whatever was going on was very serious. This wasn't like a game or a film, it was real. Except, how could it be real when some people were turning into particle effects and others were being killed and then getting better?

The German lady gave the second lady, the pretty one, another drink from the bowl. Then she took some cartridges out of her handbag. I think she was going to reload the shotgun but I didn't stop to watch because she might have shot me next. Cornwall is much more dangerous than Auntie Sam and Uncle Matt told me it was.

I decided to call off my visit to the stone circle at Tregeseal and run back to St Just. I was part of

the way down the lane when the camper van zoomed past me. The blonde lady was driving and the other lady was sitting next to her. I now see why this is called riding shotgun.

I carried on running, then was suddenly struck from behind by the blue man's trident! It had been thrown. It thudded right into me and I was in agony! Then, amazingly, I woke up in my bed at Auntie Sam and Uncle Matt's house.

Had it all been a dream? If so, it was a powerful one because there were three holes in the back of my hoodie and T-shirt.

That afternoon, full of worry and fear, I went with Uncle Matt to the stone circle. On the way, I could see blood where I had been tridented and more blood outside the cottage. It was all dried up, but it was definitely blood. Uncle Matt believed my story. It was not a dream after all!

The stone circle isn't like Stonehenge and is boring.

Next day, Auntie Sam and Uncle Matt took me to Land's End, but that is another tale.

Notes

Transcribed from a scan of the original, with minor punctuation errors corrected to aid readability.

Dheghōm

The scan was provided on request by Jessica Beatty, the mother of Harry Beatty, after she complained on Mumsnet about what she considered to be her son's unjust treatment: he had been called to speak to the headmistress of his school over his use of a profanity.

Coda

Roecliffe Lane,
Boroughbridge,
Yorkshire.
UK

24 Apr 2023

Dear Marjie,

With luck, you should find enclosed hard copies of the matters of interest that I mentioned in our recent Zoom call. They form an important part of the collection that my wife and I have amassed over the years, and I am confident that they will be of particular interest to you.

Of course, it's entirely possible that instead you find yourself in receipt of blank pieces of paper. I am quietly optimistic, however, that this will not be the case: I used a multitude of printers, scanners and other copying devices to create them, and all are at least third-generation reproductions of the originals. This ought to afford them sufficient a level of informational distance that they will be able to evade discovery and subsequent eradication should anyone wish their texts not to exist.

I shall shortly email you the same documents as a ZIP file. I'd like to think that the compression process would also help to disguise them, but am less sanguine about this. The people of Bhéwonom

seem adept at tracking down digital copies of items that they wish to destroy, to the extent that even encryption presents no barrier to them. It might, nevertheless, be worth printing off the contents of the Word files once extracted, to act as a false trail; it would give the algorithm-wielders something to feel clever about having uncovered, which could be enough to persuade them that their investigation has reached its natural end.

I trust that your own inquiries, into the goings-on at NPCsoft Entertainment, are still progressing well. I share your concerns about your preliminary findings: they're somewhat disturbing. If I can help you in any way, please don't hesitate to contact me.

For my own part, I shall continue as always to seek evidence that furthers our understanding of matters Dheghōm. Naturally, I shall let you know if I find anything significant.

Wishing you well, with all best wishes,

David Scott

P.S.: I was the small boy to whom Miss Marple spoke in Matter 6.

End

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