

The United Ghosts Of Gettysburg Present The Cobra's Ghost

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The Ghost's Notes...

Our Dad's last assignment before retiring from the Air Force was in Loring, Maine. Loring, which was closed in 1991, was a base for the Strategic Air Command, "SAC" to its friends. If you watch *Dr. Strangelove or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* carefully, you will see billboards with the SAC crest (an iron gloved fist gripping lightning bolts and olive branches) and its motto "Peace is Our Profession" in the background of several battle scenes. Anyway, Loring was the closest continental base to Eastern Europe and the USSR on the eastern half of the US, so that's where many of the US surveillance craft and bombers were housed and launched, and where the ever changing codes and orders were generated (like those documents the pilot, Maj. TJ "King" Kong, in *Dr. Strangelove* pulled out of the safe, and if you haven't seen the movie what's wrong with you? rent it tonight). Dad was stationed there at the dawn of the Reagan era, just as the President ratcheted up the Cold War but before there was any assurance that we would finally win it. So our family living in a prime target, one that was destroyed in movie after movie about the pending Third World War.

That never really bothered me. On the contrary, it was a source of civic pride, like seeing the palm trees and arid streets in *Bill & Ted's Excellent Adventure* and thinking, hey! that was filmed in Phoenix and Mesa. Anyway, Dad retired and we moved to Phoenix, then Mesa. The Cold War heated up and I began to hear more from my classmates and teachers about nuclear annihilation, also that song by Sting about Russians loving their children, too. And though it's not like I was brave, or *did* anything about it, I could never claim to worry about the threats, or ever feel moved to write to Ronald Reagan pleading with him not to blow up me or my fellow children like that one little girl did. What a drip.

You could make the case that I was just a feckless, insensitive youth, and I would be loath to fight it. However, the danger of Mutual Assured Destruction, "MAD" to its friends, never seemed very personal. Nobody in my circle could start or prevent it, and I certainly wasn't messing with anybody's purity of essence. Besides, there was some fatalistic comfort in the thought that, as the song said, "We'll All Go Together When We Go." So why fret?

But like I said, I was far from fearless, and could in fact work myself up into *quite* a state over demons and ghosts. After all, they invade bodies and homes, and mess with stuff. They were two of the few supernatural creatures that seemed plausible; I mean, vampires? come on. Beyond that, they're incorporeal so they're hard to find and to stop, their motives are obscure, and even the vengeful ones are pretty indiscriminate about doling out punishment. In short, not political—personal.

The Cold War ended, and instead of the looming Super Enemy we were warned of, and victim to, random nuts and fanatics. But even they adhered to a horrible decorum, attacking embassies, warships, federal buildings—political targets and familiar haunts to terrorists. After September 11 we are all haunted, by something corporeal but highly evasive, vicious and indiscriminate. Even though the chance of receiving an envelope full of anthrax spores is still somewhat less than a having a full on home invasion by poltergeists, the fact others indisputably have makes the whole ghost speculation biz seem to me...well, probably about as silly as it's seemed to most of you all along.

So let me apologize in advance if *The Second Annual Edition of The Cobra's Ghost* doesn't seem as scary as the first (I do not extend this apology to Eye of Fatima formerly Magi because he said the first one wasn't scary at all); but in these alarming times, ghosts seem pretty benign.



Still interesting, though. And Halloween is still a primo holiday, which I intend to mark by watching horror movies and eating candy (okay, by doing more of that than usual). The house is decorated, though against Partick's wishes. If it were up to him, our abode would look like the inside of a Chipotle's restaurant. When he complained about my amazing flashing ghost lights, I asked him, "Why are you such a curmudgeon?" "Why are you such a geek?" he shot back. I considered telling him it was no doubt a combination of genetic and environmental factors, especially birth order, etc, but didn't think it would advance my cause much. Also, if you work at Cosmodemonic with me, I think we should dress up, even if there aren't prizes this year (The Pill always wins anyway, so I won't miss them). We can tell our bosses that if we don't, the terrorists will have won—not that that would be, strictly speaking, true, but it might distract us from the real and pernicious ghost of fear.

Sharon C McGovern
Editor/ Publisher/ Future Ghost

The Handprint

The most courageous and troublesome of the early labor unionist in the United States sprung from the coal mines, and wherever you stand on unions generally these days, in those days conditions were hellish and in desperate need of reform. For one thing, one of the few “benefits” the widow of a worker killed in a mine was guaranteed was if her husband were killed during the workday, his body would be unceremoniously dumped on her porch that evening, and that she would be expected to move out of the company owned house immediately thereafter. Such a widow might have been named Molly Maguire, and those men who swore to protect her from the cruelty of the mine owners took her name for their underground...shall we say, “activism.” Or, these Molly Maguires may have been transported from Ireland under the guise of The Ancient Order of the Hibernians to continue in their informal war against England (and liberally directed at others) in the US. To what extent the Molly Maguires were principled unionists fighting corrupt and grossly unfair corporate interests, or whether they were terrorist thugs flaunting lawful authority, will probably never be known. In the end, the Mollies were dismantled but unions were established, and blood flowed freely in eastern Pennsylvania in the 1860s and 70s.

Indisputably, on June 21, 1877, four men allegedly associated with the Molly Maguires were hung in the Carbon County Prison (in the contemporary town of Jim Thorpe, PA) having been found guilty of murdering two mine operatives. The problem was that the investigation and prosecution, even the arrests, were carried out by representatives of the mine owners. The Pinkerton Agency, the same organization that hunted Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid, was employed to infiltrate and destroy the Molly Maguires and other pro-union groups. Their most successful agent spent 44 months undercover with the Mollies, and due largely to his efforts, 20 of their number were eventually charged and executed under Pennsylvania law.

Whether or not the four men were guilty of the murders, their trial was grossly unfair. Not only was *all* the evidence collected and presented by the Pinkerton Agency, the judge had a pronounced anti-Molly bias, and the jury—while excluding Irish Catholics—included non-English speaking, Protestant, German immigrants, and Welsh immigrants who had notorious distain for their Irish-American neighbors.


On his way to the gallows, Alexander Campbell, a bodymaster or recruiter for the Molly Maguires, said, “I am innocent, I was



Alexander Campbell

nowhere near the scene of the crime.” Then he slapped his hand against the wall of his cell, and continued, “There is proof of my words. That mark of mine will never be wiped out. It will remain forever to shame the county for hanging an innocent man.”

And it has remained, though it has been repeatedly scrubbed and painted over. In 1930, a local sheriff named Biegler got so exasperated with the handprint and its attendant notoriety that he had the entire wall knocked out and replaced. The handprint reappeared on the new wall in the same place the very next day. In recent years, a forensic scientist from George Washington University named James Starrs and a police chemist from Maryland named Jeff Kercheval performed a professional analysis of the phenomenon. Though they did “everything short of painting over the print or literally taking it off the wall,” according to Starrs, they found no paints or pigments or oils that would explain why the handprint exists, much less why it persists to this day.

The jail was closed in 1995, then reopened as a museum on the 120th anniversary of the hangings with a memorial mass dedicated to the memory of the four men. The handprint in cell 17 is a chief attraction. 



The Legend of Spring Heeled Jack

One of the most curious and persistent of all paranormal creatures is Spring Heeled Jack. Reports of his existence date back to the early 19th century in Sheffield, England, and he has been reported on and off in England and the US as recently as 1995. A similar apparition, called “La Viuda,” or “the widow” was reported in Chile in the 1940s and 50s, though he seemed to have been motivated by theft as much as mischief. And while a decent case can be made that the legend of Spring Heeled Jack is nothing more than a series of cruel hoaxes, it would represent a conspiracy of impressive scope and durability. And while his story changes from source to source, it goes something like this...

In 1808, a letter to the editor of the Sheffield Times recounted how “Years ago a famous Ghost walked and played many pranks in this historic neighbourhood.” The writer went on to identify this entity as the “Park Ghost or Spring Heeled Jack,” and briefly described its ability to take enormous leaps and frighten random passers-by, but concluded, “he was a human ghost as he ceased to appear when a certain number of men went with guns and sticks to test his skin.”

Spring Heeled Jack would often go underground when the going got too rough, and he often unchivalrously pitted himself against women. In 1837, SHJ appeared to Polly Adams and two other women outside Blackheath Fair. With iron tipped fingers, he tore the blouse off of Adams and scratched her stomach before bounding into the darkness. According to some accounts, Adams described her assailant as (cont. on page three)



The Mad Gasser of Mattoon

“Hysteria” being a derivative of the Greek work for “womb” is common knowledge, and to make a big deal of it these days usually indicates that you’ve been taking Women’s Studies classes at the community college or have been watching too many of those silly documentaries on Discovery Health. Still, when considering the coverage of the Mad Gasser of Mattoon the protestation is worth keeping in mind.

The first of the attacks in Mattoon, IL occurred in the early morning hours of September 1, 1944. A Mattoon man awoke feeling nauseous and awoke his wife to ask if she had left the gas on. She meant to check the pilot light on the stove, but found she could not move her legs. Elsewhere in the town, a woman heard her little daughter coughing, but could not check on her because her legs seemed to be paralyzed.

The next evening, another woman detected a “sickening sweet odor in the bedroom” and as the smell grew stronger, she, like the other women, realized she could not move her lower body. Police and neighbors responded to her calls for help, but found nothing unusual. About an hour and a half later though, her husband returned from work and saw a tall man who wore a tight fitting black cap standing outside their bedroom window. He gave chase, but the man got away. This was the first incident reported in the local newspaper, which dubbed the intruder the “Phantom Anesthetist.”

In the days that followed, more attacks were reported, including some where the “Phantom” left footprints and ripped window screens. One of the most notable involved a couple who came home late and discovered a piece of white cloth on the porch. The woman picked it up, and noticing a strange smell, put it close to her face. Almost immediately, she suffered an allergic reaction which included swelling in her face and lips, and bleeding from her mouth. The police took the cloth into evidence, and noticed a tube of lipstick and a skeleton key were also left on the porch.

The last attack in Mattoon took place on the thirteenth of September, when a woman and her son described a woman dressed in man’s clothing who sprayed gas through a bedroom window. The next morning, footprints made by high-heeled shoes were discovered outside the house.

By 1945, the attacks were dismissed in *The Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* as a study of mass hysteria, perpetrated by undereducated women whose men folk had gone to war. To this day, it is a popular theory, but several factors its (male) author did not take into account were, a) most of the married women’s husbands were at home and in not in the service, b) while a good number of men (husbands and visiting newsmen) reported symptoms they believed were related to the gasser, he did not include them in his statistics due to their gender, c) he ignored or discounted all physical evidence, such as the damaged screens, footprints, etc., and d) he portrayed the events as unprecedented, even though the same basic scenario described above had occurred eleven years earlier to men and women in the town of Botetourt, VA. ☠

(cont. from page two) “Devil-like,” and according to others, she described him as a “pop-eyed” nobleman—perhaps Henry de la Poer Beresford, Marquis of Waterford. When in 1838, the Lord Mayor, Sir John Cowan publicized this and other assaults, he was besieged by letters by citizens who had suffered similar incidents but were too sheepish to make them public. Vigilante groups were formed to apprehend Jack, but he was quick, could leap over hedgerows and walls, and evaded them easily. After a while, the countryside attacked ended, the matter was dropped, and nobody was prosecuted.

But later that year as Lucy Scales (or “Squires”) and her sister walked home on a London street, Jack jumped out of the shadows and spat blue flames in her face, temporarily blinding her, then retreated into the darkness. This attack and others were widely reported by the press, so when Jane Alsop heard a knock at the door and the words, “I’m a police officer—for God’s sake, bring me a light, for we have caught Spring Heeled Jack in the lane!” she ran outside eager to assist. She handed a candle to the tall, thin man standing at the gate, but though he wore a helmet and cloak like a police officer, when he took the light and drew it toward himself, Alsop could see he was wearing tight white oilskin clothing and had glowing red eyes. He spat blue and white flames at her, then pinning her head under one arm, began to tear at her face, neck, and clothing with his icy claws.

Alsop’s sister, hearing screams, ran outside and dragged Jane into the house. Spring Heeled Jack waited at the door, and knocked several times, then fled when the help the girls called for finally arrived. He easily eluded them, but dropped his cape. It was picked up by an accomplice who also got away. Witnesses reported seeing Jack leaping from rooftop to rooftop, and even climbing a church steeple, throughout the rest of the year. He also tried the same trick he pulled on Jane Alsop, but the servant boy on the other side of the door called out for help and Jack left.

Then there were no Spring Heeled Jack sightings for an entire year; and for a while after that, they were sporadic and occurred mostly in the country. In 1842, prime suspect Marquis of Waterford married, settled in Ireland, and reportedly led and exemplary life. However, starting in 1843, a wave of Jack attacks occurred all over England, the most serious being the 1845 murder of thirteen year old prostitute Maria Davis.

Waterford died in 1859 when he was well into his sixties, but the attacks themselves did not abate. If anything, Jack became bolder. All through the 1870s, he slapped the faces of army sentinels with his clammy hand, jumped onto their sentry boxes, then bounced into the countryside. Townspeople shot at him and set traps, but SHJ laughed demoniacally and escaped every time. In pulp fiction, Jack was transformed from the villain to the hero who emerges from the darkness just in time to save the defenseless young maiden, or whatever. His popularity was such that the market was flooded with penny dreadfuls which exaggerated and distorted what facts were available to the writers, who fabricated many others. His story was even conflated into that of Jack the Ripper.

Spring Heeled Jack was seen leaping up and down the streets and rooftops of Liverpool in 1904, then disappeared from England for close to seventy years. By that time, however, he had become notorious in the US. Jack’s American visits were first reported in Louisville, KY in July of 1880. There, he was described as tall, having pointed ears, long nose and fingers, and was clad in a cape, helmet, and shiny uniform. He accosted women, tore at their clothing, and emitted flames from a blue light on his chest.

Between 1938-1945, he made dozens of appearances in the Cape Cod area of Massachusetts, though there he reportedly belched flames rather than ejecting them from his chest. In Provincetown, which I gather has seen no end of strange things, his leaping forced pedestrians off the pavement of a busy street. When a dog cornered him, the animal’s owner blasted Jack with a shotgun, but “the darned thing just laughed and (cont. on page six)

The End of "The Innocents"



Among the genre pictures, horror movies have the least consensus when it comes to what the good ones are and even what qualities a good one should have. They nearly all have low budgets and often all the difficulties that implies: cheesy sets and costumes, poor lighting and camera work, amateurish acting, writing, and directing. To partisans, those limitations test the creators' innovation and the strength of their ideas. To detractors, they make the films infinitely risible. Furthermore, horror movies are personal in a way that *film noir* or musicals, etc. are not, and the particular set of neuroses a horror movie exploits must match those the viewer already has or else it will not be effective. Thus, while western fans agree that John Ford is an exemplary director of westerns, if you praise John Carpenter to a David Cronenberg fan you could be asking for a fight. (I'm one of those Cronenberg fans, by the way, so don't even *talk* to me about how much you liked *Halloween* or any other movie made by that ridiculous hippie.)

Further than that, horror movies can be divided into numerous sub-genres (zombie, vampire, werewolf, anti-Catholic propaganda, and so on) which appeal to different segments for different reasons. One of the trickiest to pull off is the ghost movie. The special effects in ghost movies are frequently limited to lame-o double exposures and stuff attached to monofilaments yanked around a set, interactions between the living and the dead tend to be trite and easily resolved, and too many filmmakers succumb to the temptation to use ghosts as a metaphor for something or other rather than dealing with them in their own right. And while ghost movies literally deal with conflicts between life and death, they too often turn into therapeutic exercises which not only diminish the differences

between the two states of being, they become positively death affirming. But don't be fooled—ghosts are trouble and don't you forget it.

A recent offender against sense and the living is 1999's *The Sixth Sense*, which betrayed its initial spookiness with a ludicrous plot point that trivialized the murder of a child, and ended by suggested that the tortured spirits of those who had murdered or been murdered, or executed, or committed suicide could be assuaged by a chat with a little boy. In fact, counseling the dead becomes the boy's calling. *Stir of Echoes*, which came out the same year and had a similar plot, but honored the plights of the children—both living and dead.

Also released in 1999 was the remake of *The Haunting*. Like *The Sixth Sense*, it proposes a living character should spend her life succoring the dead. In this case, a lonely spinster who spent her life nursing an ungrateful parent sacrifices it to become nanny to hundreds of dead children. This is a far cry from 1963 version and Shirley Jackson's source novella in which she is flattered by the attention the conniving ghosts of Hill House give her, then cruelly betrayed by them moments before her painful death.

Perhaps most troubling of the pro-ghost, and therefore, pro-death, movies are "romances" like *The Ghost and Mrs. Muir* and *Ghost*. In these, widows pledge their eternal love to ghosts and await their own demises with patient celibacy. These are Poe-like compacts that condemn the living and inhibit life, directly by frustrating procreation, and indirectly by transforming death from an event to an ever present component of life. The heroines may live in nice houses, but they are sepulchers all the same. To take ghosts seriously in a narrative they must be granted motives and agendas not shared by the living, and that should be equally true of the scary looking ones and those that look like they got a really super skin peel at Burke-Williams. "Remember, you're still my girl," says the departed lover in *Always* (a remake of 1943's *A Guy Named Joe*, which can be glimpsed on TV in *Poltergeist*), which would be a sweet thought except as the movie progresses it becomes increasingly obvious that that possessiveness (she is in a real way possessed by him) is damaging to her mind, health, and future. He is hurt, too. "Anything you do for yourself now is a waste of spirit," his guide tells him. They must be rid of one another for either to thrive. (*Truly, Madly, Deeply* shares many of these qualities, but is more a parable of divorce—in death, the husband becomes an infertile lay about with dubious friends—than a genuine ghost movie.)

Even well meaning ghosts do not necessarily act in the best interests of living humans. In *The Frighteners*, a conman has ghosts as partners in an exorcism scam he runs. The problem, as in most of Peter Jackson's movies, is that over involvement with un-reality (zombies in *Dead Alive*, "the fourth world" in *Heavenly Creatures*) leads to a badly neglected and unstable private life. The king of Halloween tries to annex Christmas in Tim Burton's *the Nightmare Before Christmas* and ends up giving toddlers severed heads as gifts. In the Tim Burton directed *Beetlejuice*, the living and the departed only learn to co-exist after the ghosts take over most of the house they share, dictate the décor, and raise the human daughter whom they nearly inadvertently affianced to an otherworldly pervert. Speaking of otherworldly pervers, the ghost in *The Legend of Hell House* was allowed to do something unspeakable because it persuaded a young woman it was sweet and nice. For more in that vein, you could rent the sleazy *The Entity*, but it's quite graphic and has a silly ending.

While *Ghost* is certainly horrible, if you are looking for ghost films that are also top notch horror movies I've got a short list for you to consider. Still in theaters is *The Others*. While it might be too early to call it a classic, it's got the right bones and an outstanding performance from Nicole Kidman (because it's so new I don't want to ruin anybody's fun by writing about it here, just check it out). Second is *Poltergeist*. *Poltergeist* is nearly twenty years old, so I checked it out on dvd last weekend to see how the (cont. on page six)



Whatever Happened to Ectoplasm?

'At the Third Beograd Tribunal, Mr. Klein was doubting the powers of the New World Order and look how he was taught a lesson ! The young man fainting in the middle of the picture, is an American student of whom The Great Leader has said 'Mr. Oswald will fire the first shot of a new era for us'" Yeah, okay. I got this quote and the two leftmost pictures from a Danish website manned by Balder Olrik. In a chapter called "The Incident," Olrik claims these and other photos came from a book he bought in Berlin, a book which was stolen from his house three days after he returned home. Fortunately, he had already reproduced these photos. What does it mean? "Nothing" is the safe bet, as he seems to be a graphic designer by trade and additionally has written, "Just don't mistake them for reality" in reference to the pictures in an update on his site. Still, even as fakes they are quite well made, and quite an improvement on the ectoplasm (ectoplasm being a substance drawn out of the physical medium's body by spirits or ghosts, and which could form into hands, talking voice boxes, all sorts of things) photos of yore. For example, the third photo above is of a medium who apparently has the ghost of Arthur Conan Doyle (creator of Sherlock Holmes and a devoted Spiritualist) coming out of her nose. Seriously, that was the claim.

The Spiritualist Movement was begun in large part in 1848 with the Fox sisters, who produced rapping sounds and other noises which they claimed had a supernatural origin. Four decades later, they confessed to creating the noises themselves by snapping their toes and other joints, but this confession was rejected by their followers so after a while they took it back. By that time, the movement was in full swing and featured showmanship that has in large part been lost to contemporary practitioners. Mediums conjured spirits which spoke through aluminum trumpets, drew on chalkboards, painted portraits, and appeared in photographs. All of these phenomena were debunked by the likes of PT Barnum—who, though no stranger to fakery, drew a line at the exploitation of peoples' sorrow. Harry Houdini was another renowned critic of physical mediums, though at least one of his debunkings was later debunked. Pictured below is "Margery" Crandon, a Boston blueblood, wife of a Harvard professor, and the most famous medium of the 1920s. When Houdini locked her in a safe during a séance no spirits manifested themselves, but when she was released, out they came. Houdini produced a collapsible ruler on the spot and claimed it belonged to Crandon, a charge she vigorously denied. Years after Houdini's death, an assistant of his told a reporter that he had planted the ruler for his boss to find. Although that is impossible to verify at this late date, Crandon was professionally compromised when one of the wax gloves left by the ectoplasmic hand of her dead brother Walter was found to have been imprinted by the thumb of a local dentist.



Perhaps the best argument against the authenticity of the era of physical mediums is that they just don't seem to exist any more. True, there are occasional displays of photographs of dead people mysteriously appearing on bits of cloth (which have been surreptitiously exposed to photo developing solution), followed by the perpetrators getting booked for fraud by the local police department, but the enormous crowds and fame formerly attracted by mediums has been copped by magicians.

And what do we have in its place? Snapshots with orbs that look like water spots or specks of dust, and ectoplasm that looks like camera straps. *Boring.* Also, EVP, or Electronic Voice Phenomena. *Interesting.* EVP are strange sounds, some like spooky or even familiar voices, caught on audiotape but unheard at the time of recording. The first recorded instance was from Sweden in 1958 when a man named Friedrich Jurgenson said he taped his late mother's voice when all he meant to record were bird songs. A subset of these phenomena is Reverse Speech, in which language spoken extemporaneously is said to reveal deeper meaning (or the truth if it was Bill Clinton being recorded—that's not just a random slam, but an actual allegation by RS practitioners) when played backwards. While it is possible that supernatural entities may possibly be reaching out using a previously unknown technology—and what the heck, the tapes are fun—we would do well to remember that contemporary critics of the first spirit photographs. They noted the ghosts depended upon glass plates and paper printing, but shunned earlier photographic forms like daguerreotypes, ambrotypes, and tintypes, so perhaps the technology had to evolve sufficiently to accommodate hoaxers rather than



The woman above is Mina "Margery" Crandon, who specialized in conjuring ectoplasmic hands which would dip themselves in hot wax and leave hollow gloves like the ones above (if you look carefully, you can see a "third" hand reaching for the wax in the lower photo whilst the medium's hand are "controlled" by other sitters. I don't know what that thing in the corner is.

(cont. from page four) special effects were holding up. Some better than others, as it turns out, but whether you are convinced by the guy scratching the flesh off his face (and you won't be) is secondary to its strength of writer-producer Steven Spielberg's thesis: unregulated material, whether violence on television or drugs in the bedroom, is dangerous to the family ("Don't watch that, honey, it's bad for you," the mother says and carelessly turns the channel from static to a war movie) but the family is strong and resilient and can be reborn in the face of adversity (the whole graveyard thing is just a ruse). Plus, it was the first ghost movie I ever saw that gave a convincing explanation as to why the family didn't just leave.

The all time champion of ghost movies is the 1962 film *The Innocents*, produced and directed by Jack Clayton, starring Deborah Kerr, and adapted by William Archibald and Truman Capote from *The Turn of the Screw* by Henry James. Frankly, when you get a group of such notables working on a horror movie you end up with a mess like 1963 *The Haunting* (I said it was better than the remake, but it's still pretty boring overall), *The Exorcist*, *Wolf*, or more recently, *From Hell* (they got that title right). But *The Innocents* contains all of the best elements of a ghost movie and none of the idiocies. It tells the story of a sheltered woman who is put in sole charge of two orphans because their only living relative is too selfish to care for them, or even to see them. She finds that in their pampered neglect, the children have become strange—attractive and charming to be sure, but also afflicted early with aristocratic decadence. They are unnaturally attached to one another, and also to something in the house which the woman comes to believe are meddling spirits. She believes this not because she hears a spooky noise or detects some unexplained movement, but because she *sees* them—and though they seem to be as concrete as any living human they are much more disturbing than anything in *Poltergeist*'s arsenal of spooks not because of how they look, but because of the corruption they represent in the woman and her charges. The little boy's goodnight kiss is a little too...affectionate, for example, and the woman lets it go on a bit too long. And though the case for an actual infestation of ghosts is largely circumstantial, they are part of a force field of perversion that encompasses the house and lays waste to the best intentions, and their effect upon the residents are irreducible, and haunting in every sense. ☞



When I called out last month for jokes to combat terror, I would never have guessed the very best one would come from Middle Eastern protesters who apparently scooped a joke picture of Bert the Muppet off the internet for inclusion in their poster. Not only is his image the only unexpected aspect of a saccharine display that you'd expect more from a Selena tribute than one to a ruthless and evil demagogue, but also shows how little his followers understand the United States and its people. Let's see that war face, Bert!



Slates like these were used by physical mediums to contact the dead through automatic writing. If you feel like contacting your living cobra friend, please use one of the means provided below.

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Use them.

(cont. from page three) jumped my eight foot fence in one leap," the man told police.

A shadow was seen crossing a Houston lawn in 1953 by three people, who looked up to see a man bounce into a pecan tree. They described the man as either having wings or wearing tight clothes and a cape, being tall, and "encased in light." A moment later, he "just melted" into the darkness. Then a swooshing noise was heard over the rooftops, apparently made by a bright, torpedo like object.

During the 1970s, Jack returned in both England and the US. In 1973 family in Sydney, NC reported a gaunt, long haired man with pointed ears and glowing red eyes, taking leaps they estimated at 50 or 60 feet. In 1979, more than a dozen residents of Plano, TX saw a creature, described as ten feet tall with pointed ears, cross a football field with just a few strides—like those taken by an astronaut on the moon.

Back in Sheffield, residents of Attercliffe began to complain about a red eyed "prowler" who grabbed women and punched men. Other witnesses saw him bounding between rooftops, and walking down the sides of walls. As in the old days, a group of armed men (police this time) chased and nearly trapped him, but he vanished into thin air and disappeared from the area.

Years later, in 1986, a former British army officer named Marshall was in South Herefordshire riding (presumably on a bicycle) on a quiet country road near the Welsh border. Motion in the fields to his left drew his attention, and he was astonished to see a man leaping over hedgerows in a single bound. The man reached the road and slapped Marshall hard enough to knock him to the ground and leave a red handprint on his face for hours.

The most recent record of a Spring Heeled Jack type creature comes from an elementary school in West Surry. Children only see him there, but they describe him as "all black, with red eyes and had a funny all in one white suit with badges on it." They also said he could run as fast as a car, and would approach dark haired children and tell them, "I want you."

Of course, none of this means Spring Heeled Jack is supernatural, or extra-terrestrial, or anything other than the invention of a few generations of adroit, and lucky, pranksters. Some have claimed that the phenomenon is merely an exaggeration of the activities of an old religious zealot who used to dance on rooftops. Others have identified possible Jacks: Waterford, a law student named Henry Hawkins, and somebody well connected enough to have a descendant bar the use of his name in connection with the attacks. I'd settle for knowing where he got his boots. ☞