

The Things that Go Bump in the Night Present...

THE COBRA'S GHOST

30 October 2002

"Where you gonna go? Where you gonna run? Where you gonna hide?
Nowhere--'cause there's noone like you left.

Volume 36

The Ghost's Notes...

A few weeks ago, my face was stand blasted then coated with three layers of acid. Though this procedure had elements of torture, I submitted to it voluntarily, even paying for the privilege (though at a drastically reduced rate, thanks to Partick's girlfriend Peggy—please see page 3). It had to do with a brown spot on my face.

I pointed to it and said, "Partick, what is this brown spot on my head? And if you say 'liverspot' I'll never speak to you again."

"Tempting as you make that sound," he replied, "it looks like an instance of hyperpigmentation." He handed me a small plastic vial. "Put a drop of this on it every morning."

There was acid in the vial, though I didn't know it at the time and wouldn't have cared if I had known. My only concern was to suppress the rebellion of a patch of skin.

A week or two after that, I got the whole dermabrasion treatment, as described above. Though my skin peeled for a week, I was disappointed to see that Andie MacDowell wasn't under there after all. Unfortunately, Lou Reed was.

Which was pretty scary, but what the heck, I'm used to it by now. Or maybe that's the scary thing.

But just about anything can be gotten used to, and what used to shock me every morning and several times during the night didn't so much. And still the mornings kept coming and coming. Sometimes with different shocks.

Believe me, I know there are scarier things than ghosts in this world, and graver bodily treacheries than faint brown spots--even if they are *right in the middle of my forehead*.

But the next few pages won't be about those kinds of scares. These scares, you enjoy over a cup of Greek coffee, and sleep soundly afterward (not during, *don't* listen to Partick), despite the caffeine. Though that might be good in conjuring a tulpa. Anyway, enjoy, and have the happiest of Halloweens.

Oh, and please see page six for a very important Cobra announcement.

Sharon C. McGovern

Editor/Publisher/Cobra-in-Chief



A moment from the Phillip Experiment

Philips and Egrigors and Tulpas, Oh My!

In 1972, the Toronto Society for Psychical Research (TSPR) decided to conjure a ghost.

The six men and women, with job descriptions as diverse as industrial designer, housewife, sociology student, and former chair of MENSA, had no particular psychic talent, only an interest in paranormal. Together, they invented Philip—a 17th century Scottish nobleman who killed himself after a love affair ended tragically. One of their number drew a picture of this character, and for a year they meditated upon it and his "history" in hopes that he would make an appearance. Except for a few vague sensations reported by individual members, the experiment seemed a failure.

That's when a psychologist, sympathetic to the group's efforts, suggested they employ 19th century Spiritualist methods. After all, he reasoned, since they were aiming for classic séance results, classic séance practices might be the way to achieve them. The TSPR pasted pictures of Philip's castle (a genuine location) on their meeting room walls, lowered the lights, and sat around a large wooden table with their fingertips resting lightly on its surface. Only then did a presence claiming to be Philip begin to rap upon and levitate the table. Once, he intelligently directed a breeze through the draft free basement room.

Philip would give correct responses to any question about himself or the time in which he lived, as long as the (cont. on page four)

See Signs and Wonder...

Why on Earth do People Take M. Night Shyamalan Seriously?

Signs director M. Night Shyamalan has managed to attain unprecedented critical and popular acceptance considering his three features all fall within the supernatural/horror category. Though he uses/abuses genre conventions, his work clearly aims to be profound, instructional. He handles his paranormal tropes so trivially, and paces his films so slowly, that viewers can hardly help but take note of the stories' messages—if only as a defense against drowsily drooping head first into a bucket of butter flavored popcorn. Otherwise, the audience has nothing to do but spend whole minutes wondering if Bruce Willis or Mel Gibson will...ever...make...it...across...the...room.

Now, movies in these genres foreground their theses as a matter of course. For example, you don't spend a lot of time looking at the unusual though decidedly phallic protrusions in movies like *Rabid* or *From Beyond* wondering what the filmmakers had in mind. But where true horror movies grapple with difficult, insoluble problems (evil exists, death happens, sex is sometimes alarming), Shyamalan offers simple, comforting solutions (psychotherapy works, superheroes exist, faith is worthwhile) in defiance of some genuinely horrible stuff he builds into his stories. His movies' twist endings have led some to compare them to *Twilight Zone* episodes, but that does a grave injustice to the series. *The Twilight Zone* was a fiercely moral realm, where shockingly rough justice was dispensed to villain and schnook alike for even small ethical indiscretions. Shyamalan movies are more like pop-up Hallmark cards that say, "BOO!"

And while I can, in theory, appreciate the appeal of bland, timid, star-driven "horror" movies, and understand, in theory, why they make money hand over fist, *Signs* goes too far. It's just so bloody stupid.

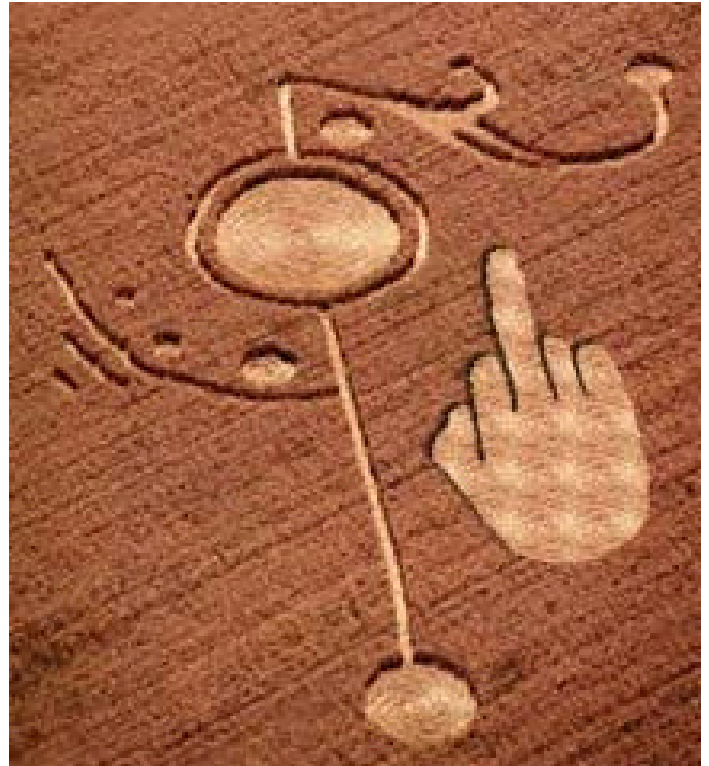
The central problem in *Signs* is not "will alien invaders conquer earth and devour its inhabitants," but "will former minister Graham Hess (Mel Gibson) reclaim his Christian faith?"

Matters of faith and redemption deserve serious consideration and are certainly worthy of big screen treatment. Considering the above scenario, however, you have to question the movie's priorities. Especially in light of how terribly fragile Hess's faith turns out to be.

The death of his wife, which led him to defrock himself and abandon his flock, is shown in stages throughout the movie, which gives it a built-in portentousness. But as unexpected deaths go, Mrs. Hess's is one of the mildest imaginable. Pinned to a tree by a truck, her lower half is essentially severed. Though gruesome, her death is painless, and so long in coming that the sheriff has time to arrive, call the ambulance, and call Graham. He has time to arrive, listen to an excruciatingly slow description of his wife's injuries, and rush (kind of) and to her side. She has time to murmur words of affection, advice, and (as it turns out) prophesy, all while looking pretty great for somebody who's been cut in half. The man who cut her in half (M. Night Shyamalan himself in a small role) was neighbor and friend, and truly sorry about falling asleep at the wheel.

Granted, the death of a loved one is sad and traumatic. But honestly, is the above the sort of thing that should cause a *minister* to lose his faith in God? In combination with Hess's admonition to his family to steer clear of a teenage girl so innocent she believes she might go to hell for calling her boyfriend a rude name, and his prissy refusal to shout bad words at a mysterious intruder, the viewer must conclude that Hess's sensibilities are so surpassingly dainty as to be unworthy of serious consideration.

The townspeople adore him, however, and persist in calling him "Father" even though he cringes every time they (cont. on page three)



Fake Crop Circle (thank you dribbleglass.com), Decent Film Criticism

So, What's the Story on Crop Circles, Anyway?

In the movie *Signs*, aliens use crop circles to coordinate their invasion of earth—kind of like the way electronic beacons were used in *Independence Day*, only much lamer.

In reality, crop circles are almost certainly have nothing to do with extraterrestrials, though that is a popular theory. Another is that all crop circles are hoaxes. In 1991, those folk heroes of crop circle fakery Doug Bower and Dave Chorley admitted to manufacturing hundreds of them in England. They demonstrated their string and boards technique for television cameras, and made a plausible crop circle within a few hours. For most casual observers, the case was closed.

And yet crop circles kept coming, internationally, and by the hundreds each year. Surely, a large number (crop circle researcher, or "cereologist" Colin Andrew estimates 80%) of those are fraudulent. Self-styled artists from around the globe spend their evenings smashing crops into interesting shapes. They admit as much, but don't get too specific because their medium is essentially vandalism, and quite annoying to farmers who would be eager to press charges. (cont. on page six)

Coffee Futures

by Peggy Xenos

In my wonderful (most of the time) Greek mother's last attempt to convince me that "That American boy Partick" is not the man for me, she suggested I go see an Arabic woman who reads coffee cups.

"She's really good," Mom said. "She told your aunt about your uncle's death, and she told Mrs. Papas that her daughter-in-law Soula was cheating on her son Angelo, and *it came true*." Her eyes were wide, and telling me DO IT.

So, I did it.

Mom prepared me before I went.

"Take your shoes off at the door. Don't stare at her. Don't let your eyes wander around the house. Don't be aggressive or show a glimpse that you may think she's a hoax. Did I tell you to take your shoes off?"

So, there I was in Dearborn, Michigan, a suburb of Detroit with a large Arabic population. Outside the house of a fortuneteller named Sara. Reminding myself of my mother's instructions. Afraid I'd be cursed if I did anything wrong.

Upon arrival, I found her at the front door, yelling, really yelling at her four kids (with a fifth was on the way) in Arabic. Think lots of guttural "hl," "kl," and "rl" sounds. I thought she was cursing me, and started saying my prayers. She told me to identify myself, and when I did, she told me she had no appointments that day.

I convinced her to look at her calendar, and when she realized she had an appointment, and it was me, she waved me in and said, "SIT."

I started to remove my shoes.

"YOU DON'T HAVE TO DO THAT," she said.

So I sat, staring at my feet, or out the window, trying not to insult her in any way. She went on with her business, but I felt her watching my every move. After she washed the dishes, yelled at her kids, mopped the kitchen floor, and yelled at her kids some more, she made me some coffee.

For God knows how long, women from Greek, Slavic, and Middle

(cont. from pagetwo) do. While it's nice that they still hold him in high regard, months after his abdication you'd think they would have found a replacement. The town itself doesn't seem particularly cut off from the mainstream. They have all the modern conveniences: cable television (even in remote farmhouses), a well stocked pharmacy, a military recruiting office on the pretty main street area, etc. The town veterinarian (Shyamalan) is of conspicuously Middle Eastern or Indian origin, though his relatively exotic appearance is never remarked upon and any practical difference apparently too mundane to mention. All of the characters dress and speak in absolutely middle class American style, with the bizarre exception of the bookstore owners who are unkempt, slackjawed, hayseeds. When Graham's little boy Morgan asks if they have any books on the paranormal, the proprietress says, "Wall, I thank we got wun wunse for the city pee-puhl."

Books on UFOs and abduction phenomenon have been in the mainstream for over a decade, and the store seemed clean, open and well stocked; less a grimy rural bookmobile than a Barnes &

Eastern countries have been reading the future in coffee cups. When a person's lips touch the coffee, the coffee is imprinted with that person's character. If another person takes even a sip from that cup, the coffee becomes confused, and that ruins the foretelling. The drinker leaves a sips worth of coffee in the bottom with the grounds. The mixture is swirled around the cup, which is then flipped over onto the saucer. The grounds dry into patterns which the fortune teller reads.

I drank it and she flipped my cup.

"You will become very rich," she said with her heavily accent. "Yes, rich. Soon--no problem, you and money. You have skill in your hands. I see you talking, talking. You will teach some day."

For the record, I work as a massage therapist and recently began teaching at the Greek school. I am still awaiting riches.



A genuine cup of Greek coffee, later read by Peggy herself for photographer Rebecca Petersen.

"You have a lot of confusion and chaos in your home. Your parent, they donna wanna to tell people that their daughter is dating an...AMERICAN!"

She described the American.

"There is a man. A handsome man in your life, standing with you. And in between you, holding your hands, is a little girl. She is his daughter. She is eight."

She described my mother.

"Your mother, she's the dominant figure. She says something, that's it!" She slapped her hands together. "She have voice for everything. Your *baba* [father] does what mama says--he no wanna worry her. They will accept your relationship after a while. Well, after a long while."

"Is it going to be in this lifetime?" I asked.

"PATIENCE!" She looked at the cup, and at me. "Money, money. You will do so well."

And I was dismissed.

Even now, I'm not sure what I got out of the experience. She didn't tell me anything I didn't know, except about becoming rich and I don't know about that. Still, it's strange that *she* knew, all the way down to the age of Partick's daughter.

Check back with me when I'm rich.

Noble in miniature. They might at least have a dusty copy of *Communion* lying around. Especially since the owner's husband seems to have a taste for weird conspiracy theories (he thinks the crop circles are a plot to sell sody-pop, and as evidence the points to the antique Shasta commercial that repeatedly runs during circle coverage). In this movie, the bookstore is the intellectual nadir of the community, which becomes more cosmopolitan the further away from the city center one travels.

Fortunately, the one book on UFOs the bookstore has is a doozy. Against all odds, it describes the alien invasion in minute detail. There's even a picture in it of a UFO attacking a house that bears an uncanny resemblance to the Hess place. It's a variation on the B- movie convention of the small town's elderly scientist (or virile high school science teacher) who always seems to have a slideshow at hand explaining the strange phenomena, yet far less plausible.

But that's in keeping with the aliens themselves. Ah, the aliens! Where to begin? The best thing Shyamalan does (cont. on page five)

(cont. from page one) information was already known to at least one member of the group, or had been agreed upon beforehand. If questions strayed out of his limited area of expertise, his answers seemed hesitant, or were not forthcoming.

After a few months of meeting with Philip in the dark, the TSPR turned up the lights and invited in an audience. Philip continued to rap the table, and even drag it around the shag carpeted room. When the peculiar quality of the rapping was analyzed, the sound print showed a buildup to the to the sound's peak rather than the other way around, as is normal. Philip also rapped on a metal plate specially wired to record vibrations and discourage fraud. He lifted his table about an inch and a half above the ground in front of the group and a film crew, which was caught by surprise and failed to record the event.

The methodology used to create Philip has been replicated a number of times with a variety of dramatically backstoried characters. These entities have been cited as evidence of psychokinesis (PK), and related to poltergeist phenomena. In fact, some of the TSPR members reported instances of poltergeist-like activity in their post-Philip private lives. Poltergeist phenomena are usually associated with troubled individuals (often children and teenagers), unlike hauntings, which are associated with locations. If the PK theory is correct, Philip type entities and poltergeists are less supernatural and more a relatively rare and little understood function of the human brain.

Or they could be related to egrigors. Egrigors, or "thought forms," are beings brought into existence through the power of intense group or individual thought. An example, cited by John A. Keel in his book *The Mothman Prophecies*, is a specter which fits the description of the fictional character The Shadow. It has been sighted by a substantial number of disinterested parties over the years in the vicinity of Shadow creator William Gibson's home, but only after Gibson lived there.

If that shade is an example of an egrigor, it is a relatively mild one. Some traditions claim egrigors have been created to serve as sexual surrogates, and a few of those developed into full fledged doppelgangers who murder their creators and take their place. Egrigors have also been equated with elementals (though of a degraded kind) and Tibetan *tulpas*. Advocates for *tulpas* contest this association, as egrigors have such a bad reputation, but that doesn't necessarily make *tulpas* good.

For example, explorer and Orientalist Alexandra David-Neel decided to conjure the *tulpa* of "a fat little monk." After months of directed meditation, it materialized, not only to her, but to other residents of her camp. After a while, the *tulpa* graduated from her control. It slimmed down and took on a decidedly sinister aspect. At that point, David-Neel decided to pull the plug on her *tulpa*, and with the help of some Buddhist monks of her acquaintance, re-absorbed his energy.

If Philip-type entities, egrigors, *tulpas*, and poltergeists are projections of human thought, it would explain why so many places that seem as if they ought to be haunted are. This theory also differentiates them from pre-existing, opportunistic beings looking for an entry into the physical world, via ouija boards and the like. Those entities will no doubt be featured in a future *Cobra's Ghost*, but will only get the following aside here.

In 1994, group of students from Franklin Pierce College attempted to replicate the Philip phenomena. They met with little success, most likely due to the short duration of the exper-

iment, and their laughably slapdash methodology. One night, having again failed to contact their creation Robert, they decided to try reaching him using a ouija board. Several beings (or one masquerading as several, whatever) communicated with them, but sniffily denied any knowledge of Robert.

Be that as it may, the different varieties of supernatural entity described above do behave in distinctly different ways, and have specific limitations not necessarily shared by pre-existing or demonic beings. No Philip type entity has yet materialized (though materialization was the primary goal of the TSPR), whereas that is the signature feature of egrigors and *tulpas*. Egrigors and *tulpas* individuate, unlike Philip types and poltergeists, who remain connected to individuals. Poltergeist or PK phenomena are not associated with egrigors or *tulpas*.

Differences in the behavior of different supernatural beings are not without precedent. In the Mormon tradition, for example, there is a prescribed method for discerning what kind of (non-human) being might claim to be delivering messages from God. The Doctrine & Covenants advises you offer to shake the messenger's hand. An angel, being resurrected and therefore having a body of flesh and bone, will take it. The spirit of a "just man made perfect," who is not resurrected but still covered in God's glory, will ignore your hand and proceed with the message. The devil, being compulsively deceptive, will try to shake it, but being without a body, will fail (and with any luck, become frustrated and go away).

In the realm of PK or thought form creation, however, a little human deception seems to go a long way. The darkened environment that facilitated Philip's appearance set the scene for all sorts of pseudo-Spiritualist chicanery (see "Whatever Happened to Ectoplasm?" from last October's *Cobra's Ghost*). British psychologist Kenneth Batchelder, who by all accounts has had great success relating to Philip style PK activity, suggests a "designated cheater" is helpful in the early stages of the process. That person produces an initial rap or table tilt in order to relieve group members from the uneasy thought that they are personally responsible for the occurrences to follow ("ownership resistance"), or to get the group past the first, semi-dreaded spooky event ("witness resistance"). Most researchers in this field agree that anybody who hopes to successfully generate the sort of phenomena described above has really to want it to happen, and really believe it will. In any case, the dubious settings and methodologies of the experiments by necessarily biased researchers inevitably shadow the results, however impressive.

Uncertainty, or unknowability, seems to be a constant in paranormal studies. Following the death of prominent psychic researcher FWH Myers in 1901, practitioners of automatic writing worldwide received messages attributed to him which were supposedly prearranged to fall into an order that could only have been orchestrated from the Beyond. After thirty years and more than 2,000 messages, the results were inconclusive. Decades later, in 1972, an English psychic named Matthew Manning received an automatic script signed F. Myers. It read in part:

You should not really indulge in this unless you know what you are doing. I did a lot of work on automatic writing when I was alive and I could never work it out...Carry on trying though because you could soon be close to the secret [of life after death]. If you find it, nobody will believe you.

(cont. from page three) is keep them out of sight most of the time. In a monster movie, which for all its pretensions *Signs* is, a less is more strategy is often wise—but in this case, less is just really, really less. When they are finally revealed, the aliens are dead ringers for Swamp Thing. Perhaps its perversely admirable for Shyamalan to have taken such a low tech approach, but things have come to a pretty pass when Disney movie sinks to stealing props from Troma Films.

The internationally broadcast video of an alien mincing around the perimeter of a child's birthday party in Brazil is so cheesy and amateurish it would give the producers of *Sightings* pause, and yet is taken as evidence of a grave threat by the world's media in *Signs*. If the videotape had gone on to show something frightening, like children being harmed or threatened in some way, maybe some panic would be in order. If the

newscast had even reported that children had been harmed or threatened, maybe some panic would be in order. But it's hard to get into a sweat over a scrawny humanoid in a moss green body suit that doesn't take out even *one* eight-year-old.

This is not to say all movie aliens must be scary, or scary in the same way. But if you have a movie alien and it's supposed to be scary, how about giving it a little muscle? Or barring that, logic? This is a species that travels to earth in legion to eat humans, but



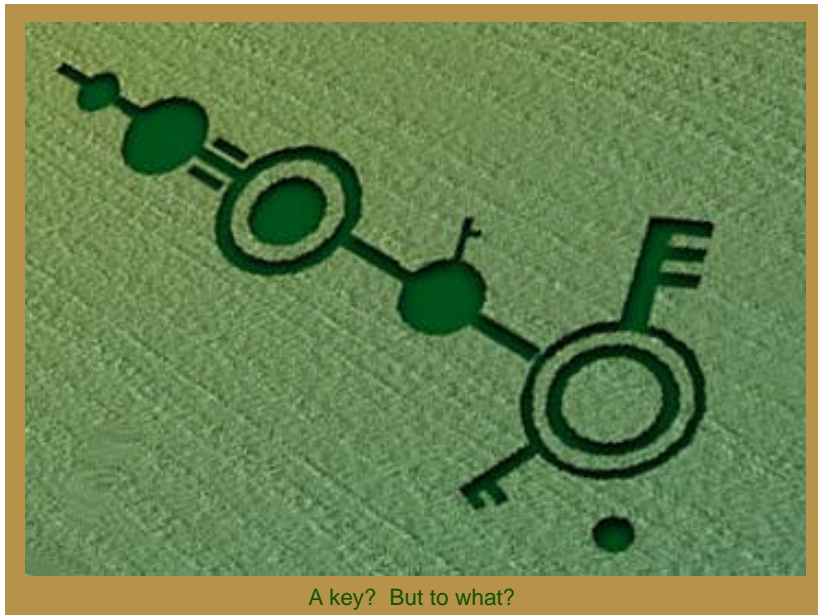
A gripping scene from *Signs* in which Graham and his family watch television

Perhaps the greatest outrage to common sense (in this movie, there are a lot of contenders) is in the way in which the aliens are ultimately defeated. After several days of terror, a news report indicates some primitive Middle Eastern tribesmen have devised a way to kill the aliens. When Graham Hess and his brother Merrill happen upon the solution, we learn it is—brace yourself—pouring water on them and hitting them with a bat. As it turns out, water

burns them like acid, and they react to a good pummeling just like any other fleshy creature. By the time the invasion reaches a crisis at the Hess home, Graham had already cut the fingers off the alien trapped in the vet's pantry with an ordinary kitchen knife (oddly, even though little was known about the aliens at that time, Graham did not think to call the police, or the news, or the ASPCA about the captive). That should have put any fears of the creatures' invincibility into question, but when his house comes under attack, he doesn't think to round up cutlery of any sort. Besides, I can't help but think hitting aliens with sticks would be well within the American can-do, don't-tread-on-

me, make-my-day-punk ethos and not exclusive to Middle Easterners.

But okay, fine. Graham and Merrill cower like little girls until Graham remembers his wife's deathbed message that Merrill should swing his bat really hard. It's not a movie about heroics (by any stretch of the imagination), and who knows what I would have done in similar circumstances, etc. The thing about the water, though, is insane. These aliens hunt and eat humans, which are composed of about 98% water, on a planet where water covers over two thirds of the surface. Even if they could manage the environment, how can they survive their diet? And supposing they figured that out, why would they risk visiting a wet place like Pennsylvania where a rain shower or heavy dew could be lethal? Especially when they could go to a nice dry place like Zimbabwe or North Korea, eat to their hearts' content, and save the respective dictators the bother of starving their people to death. Why leave signs in nice juicy crops when there are millions of acres of desert to play with?



A key? But to what?

they hunt as individuals. They are strong enough to leap onto a second story farmhouse roof, but captured by a mild mannered veterinarian who suffers nary a scratch in the process. They can batter down wooden doors, and effortlessly discover coal shoots even the homeowners had forgotten about, but don't think to escape from a pantry by breaking a window. They approach earth completely undetected, but upon arrival their communications are picked up by baby monitors.

Well, it all goes back to Hess's faith, and recovery of same. The reason primitive Middle Eastern tribesmen figure out the big whoop secret to surviving the alien attack (the water part seems especially dubious coming from such an arid region) is because that is the origin of three great world religions—including the one to which Graham until recently subscribed. The reason they shrink from water like vampires from holy water is because they abhor a baptism. And the reason Graham regains his faith is because his son just happens to have had a severe asthma attack which closed his lungs to the poison gas the alien sprayed in his face, and that somehow cancels out his wife's bad luck. This is the only movie I can think of that would have been *less* pathetic if the protagonist had awoken and realized it was all a dream.

Signs isn't just preposterous, it's an insult. Nothing but nothing in it rings true either emotionally or intellectually, and human sensibility takes a beating. Because M. Night Shyamalan's (cont. on page six)

(cont. from page five) movies are relatively gore free, he is given credit for a humanitarianism denied to virtually every other director who works in the horror/ supernatural genre. And while it's true there are some indefensible bloodbaths sitting on the shelves of any Blockbuster franchise, Shyamalan's prim hiding of the bodies exanguinates the horror and the morality from horror movies. The reason *The Sixth Sense* worked to the extent it did was because the ghosts were shown as plainly as the boy saw them, often broken and bloody. The frankness of the ghosts' appearance give the viewer a glimpse of the boy's grim reality. But in the unwatchable *Unbreakable*, a character commits hundreds of murders, but the extent of the carnage is glimpsed only in news reports throughout the movie. To show even a fraction of the dead may have been brutal to some tender eyes, but to casually allude to such tragic statistics without putting them into some context of grief and suffering beyond Bruce Willis's somnambulant survivor is far more obscene.

In *Signs*, an alien invasion occurs and people are killed—but that has no impact whatsoever on Graham Hess's beliefs since he didn't know any of them. The aliens, as silly as they were, didn't move him to question the order of the universe (what role in God's plan do flesh eating aliens play? in whose image were they created? etc.) the way a couple twists of fate that claimed his wife and spared his son did. Shyamalan exploits and burlesques faith, but doesn't seem to have a clue what it is.

In short, *Signs* is a tale told by an idiot, signifying nothing.

(cont. from page two) The hoax circles are often spectacular, and serve to make those who take cereology seriously look silly, but they cannot be used to dismiss the entire phenomenon. Over the years, crop circle enthusiasts have gathered some impressive evidence that has yet to be explained away (heck, it usually isn't even addressed) by skeptics.

Crop circles predate any admitted hoaxers by many years. They were recorded as early as 1678 in Hertfordshire, England, though modern circle creation is said to have begun in 1966 in Tully, England. Outside of Adelaide, Australia in 1973, a rash of circular formations, called "saucer nests" by the sensationalist press, were discovered in a wheat field. Amused and irritated by the commotion was none other than a tourist named Dave Chorley, who took to recreating it in England when he returned home—but he disavowed any connection to the Australian circles. In addition to the historical scope of crop circles, there is the question of sheer numbers. Thousands of circles have been created in over 30 countries, including the above mentioned as well as Canada, the United States, the former Soviet Union, and Japan. If there is a (human) conspiracy at work, it has a truly impressive scope.

And some mysterious means. The plants found within crop circles judged genuine have some distinctive physical characteristics not shared by their neighbors. They are said to have a woven appearance, for example, and some plants that simply do not bend, like canola (rape seed), are found bent. The plants' nodes are often found bent or blown (see illustration right), and the stems are of increased size, as if subjected to intense heat. The ground under the crop circles often seems to be dehydrated, even after heavy rainfall. Crops grown from seeds taken from within crop circles grow abnormally, and the seeds themselves are frequently noticeably smaller than the average. On the other hand, some fields in which the circles appear have an increased yield—up 30 to 40% in one instance.

Researchers have measured higher (up to ten times the normal) electromagnetic readings within circles. Plant and soil samples have been found to be two to three times as radioactive as those taken from surrounding areas are. The DNA of affected plants tested in the same study (conducted in 1991 by nuclear physicists Michael Chorost and Marshal Dudley) was found to be more degraded than that of its neighbors. Researchers and other observers who encountered crop circles have reported feeling ill and hearing "trilling" sounds. Animals have become ill or agitated upon nearing or entering crop circles.

Claims are often made about the mathematics of crop circle design, and subtitles that would elude the so called ordinary hoaxer, but as some of the "artists" have admitted using computers to plan their designs (including such faddish images as fractals), I'm dubious about this course of reasoning. Furthermore, there are suspicious coincidences in crop circle design, such as articles noting that straight lines did not seem to occur in crop circles...followed almost immediately by straight lines occurring in crop circles. Tempting as it is to say that the simpler the crop circle, the more likely it is to be genuine, I have to note that the field with the dramatic increase in production mentioned above had a crop circle in the shape of a double helix.

So, if there are "genuine" crop circles, what causes them? There are no satisfactory answers, though the one about electrified air that creates mini-tornadoes and strange lights (Terence Meaden's "Plasma Vortex Theory") is pretty good. My personal favorite relates to

the Foo Fighters mentioned by both Allied and Axis pilots during World War II. These were bright balls of light, which were, by all appearances, intelligently controlled. Seemingly purposeful balls of light and a mysterious glow above the fields have been witnessed many times over fields where crop circles were discovered the following day. There is a famous (for what it is) videotape of balls of light which seem to create a crop circle as the tape rolls, and another which purports to show British military helicopters in pursuit of such balls. For the record, the first videotape is of dubious origin and the British military unequivocally states the aircraft were out on maneuvers and the lights were mere reflections. But Foo Fighters are my favorite candidate because they, like crop circles, were strange and fascinating, but basically harmless. They just seem to go together.



Top: normal nodes of wheat
Middle: wheat taken from a crop circle in Arcadia, Canada
Bottom: within the crop circle itself



VERY IMPORTANT COBRA ANNOUNCEMENT

Cobra Headquarters has moved one half mile to the east.
Please visit or write:

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Scottsdale, AZ 85251

The phone number is as always 480 GAY KATS
The Cobra's e-mail address is thecobrasnose@yahoo.com

See you in a month or so. Boo.