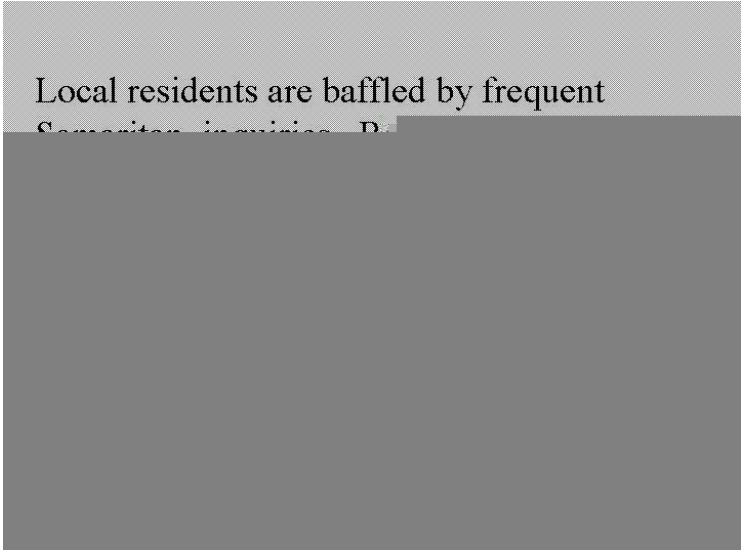


Local Boy Makes God

- Jonathan Earl Hamblin

Yeh, I thought it was a misprint, too. When I picked up the Sun Gazette and looked at the weekly headlines, I was sure that some editor had just a little too much coffee racing through them. In a local paper, you frequently find rah-rah articles of the “does good” ilk, or “makes the grade”, even a strangely phrased title or caption here and there. But there it was in 36 pica bold. Seems some hillbilly had moved into town years ago and went about his business as if it didn’t mean a thing, and then it happened. No one was quite sure when it occurred but there it was, kind of hard to describe. I decided to do some research and talk to the source, seemed like a reasonable thing to do.

Contacting the paper’s staff, I found that Daniel Ian Phenrig resided in a quiet neighborhood, was quite personable, and very easy to get in touch with. So I called to arrange an interview for the coming weekend, agreeable, and went back over the original article.



Local residents are baffled by frequent
Samaritan inquiries. D

By the time next weekend rolled around, the whole thing had been picked up by the national media. Reporters from all the news services, had regurgitated the story and attempted to contact the unassuming focus of this apparent aberration. So much so that I was unable to reach Daniel by phone to confirm that our appointment was still in place. With cautious abandon, I packed up a tape recorder, made sure film was in the camera, and grabbed a pad of paper. Driving through the slightly rolling streets, I became aware of a seemingly overabundance of vehicles. Deciding that a walk would be nice, I parked the car at the next available space and threw the backpack over my shoulder. I rounded the street corner and was confronted by a most confounding circus that I never could have imagined.

There were boom trucks parked all over with cherry pickers extended, some with cameramen, some with microwave antenna dishes trained toward some tower or satellite source, some just waiting to give rides for a couple of bucks to anyone who was curious enough. Actually,

I thought this was a good time to get a look at what chaotic occurrence was in act. Shelling out a five for ten minutes extended didn't seem too bad. I extracted the camera while the platform rose, and started to get some inkling of the extent of the madness. Military vehicles, men in black, hippie chicks and dicks running around. Viewing through the telephoto, I was able to locate the locus, and of course it was the address to which I had dispatched myself. I guess the presence of the Pope-mobile was a little unsettling, but the stranger sight was that of newscasters interviewing squirrels. And birds. And any other neighborhood creature they could get the attention or interest of.

And trees. People are talking to trees. What kind of conversation is that? Are the tree's responses on leaves dropped out like so many fax pages? So I'm furiously snapping away, rolls of film centering on a quaint little brick house painted white. I hear this advice, "hold on to something solid," when the hydraulic arm jars and my open cage descends to the street level. I thank the operator of the pneumatic lift and make my way towards the melee. I'm getting the thrice over by sunglassesed brusques who look like they're ready to rough and tumble. Now I've never really considered myself unattractive, but these bruisers look like they prefer some Ivy League socialite that's just not my type. I guess a smile and a nod will have to suffice and they're parting to allow my passage. When if I'm not already wide eyed in anticipation of bulling through the china shop of people before me, the thing that stops me in my tracks is hearing the little voice of some transmission emanating from an ear receiver, "target acquired, no search, target acquired, actual female legion." It's kind of like if you were walking alone at night and you hear someone say, "think we can jump 'em?" from behind.



I was a flesh statue when I felt a tugging on my pants leg. I looked down to find a patchwork orange and black cat seated on the sidewalk by my left foot. It had one paw extended in supplication and seemed to be nodding in the direction of the house on Wakefield Street that was my destination. I smiled when the cat propelled into a trot and then stopped, looking back, and urging me forward with a tilt of its head. Walking to the small porch and front door, I seemed to evanesce with soothing calm. I knocked on the door and waited for a response. After a few moments:

“Hello? Who’s there?”

“Mr. Phenrig, hi. This is Ms. McCloud. I talked to you on the phone...”

The door opened, “yes, please come in. Sorry about the mess. Please call me Dan.” Holding the door open. “Thanks, Kharma.” The kitten “yeh’s” and canters off.

I walked through. “There does seem to be a bit of riff raff about.” I nod towards the street and he smiles. I feel completely comfortable, but I am totally unprepared for what I see as the door closes. Maybe this is not the best time for me to introduce myself but I’ve done a fair amount of research into paranormal manifestations as well as the more natural phenomenon that account for quite an amount of observational interpretations. I write scientific articles for a museum foundation and occasionally contribute to small press literary magazines. Nothing, and I do mean nothing, can explain what I see.

“Yeh well, what can you do?” He shrugs. Stretching in front of me is a vista of untarnished meadow. Towards the back is a bubbling brook that feeds into a serene pond. It looks like a highly polished, and large, slab of obsidian. Where I walked in is a wooded expanse that another meadow can almost be seen through the other side. I am amazed. I knew that projection systems were quite advanced, but never had I thought that suspension of disbelief of this calibre could be achieved.

“May I?” He nods as I walk towards where the wall should be from my judgment of the house from the outside. I reach out and almost topple over when there is nothing to stop my hand. “Woops. Pardon Me.” I steady myself and turn towards Dan. “What is this?” My inquiry is met by a shrug and a playful smirk.

“Ms. McCloud, I’m not sure how to explain that your time would probably be better spent researching or writing some other issues.”

“Please call me Lori. Well, my parents named me Elorraine, but that can be awkward sometimes. And I think you’re wrong; this is very interesting, and I would like to know more.” I walk towards him and reach for my recorder. “Is this okay?”

“Sure.” He shrugs. I punch the record button and gaze in his direction.

“Could you please tell me, just exactly what it is that you think is happening here.”

“Lori, there’s nothing to say that you want to hear.”

“Please, in your own words, explain what is going on.”

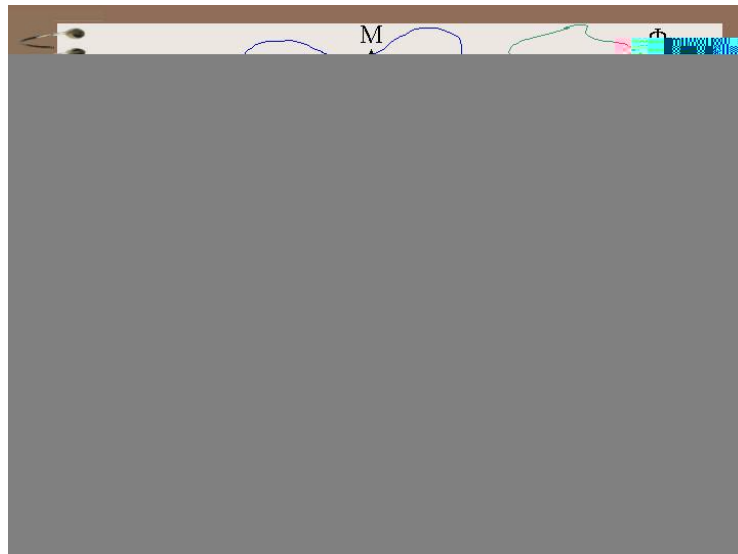
“Well, with certainty, there are many things going on, but with respect to a first order modeling representation, an organic Gaussian field of the first freznel resonance propogated by quantum state actualization instantiates a continuum defining multiverse.” Okay, he’s not blinking, or smirking. Just a slight tilt to the head like when you say something to a dog and it tilts its head as if to say “huh?” A butterfly flits past some bramble by the side of the pond. A bass jumps a few feet in the air to pick some buzzing, surfing insect from its flight. “It’s really quite simple, here, do you have paper?” I shake my head, then remembering the pad in my pack begin to reach for it. Some squirrel runs up next to Dan and he bends down as it stands on its hind legs and looks like it’s whispering something. “Hey, I’ve got to attend to some errands, but I enjoyed your company, could you call again sometime?” And with that he is dashing across the brook and loping up into the trees using each branch as a leveraging point, sort of like a gymnast on uneven bars. I turn and find myself walking from the porch down the sidewalk to my car. The accumulated menagerie tittering around me.

“Hey Miss, hey miss, can you tell us anything about...” I dazedly ignore them as the key slides into the lock. Someone else. “Hey Mam, give a fellow journalist a break.” Their words a blur, I open the auto door. “C’mon Babe, throw me a bone!” Their voices are an annoying din,

buzzing sounds like swarms of flies. I start the car. “Oh Dollface...” I drive. After what seems like a week, I finally arrive at the parking spot outside of my apartment, two and a half miles away. I make it inside and then remember the film. The local drugstore is only a mile away so I pull my bike out the door and pedal over. Fill out the film receipts and am reassuringly told that the pictures will be ready tomorrow; which is kind of lucky. The film pickup is tonight, so if I had, say, brought in pictures to be developed or printed yesterday, it would still be tomorrow before I would have them back.

I seem to have come to my senses when I get back home, so I rewind the tape, looks like a good fifteen minutes had run off, and press play. Silence, well, tape hiss, but nothing recorded. I rewind it again and press record. “Check, check. Testing, this is a test.” Stop, rewind, play: “Check, check. Testing, this is a test.” Ok, this is kind of freaky. I know I know how to operate this thing. Anyway, maybe a few beers with Suzi will make me feel human.

She meets me at a local hangout and we sit in the café by the front window laughing and joking and talking about things. I go home and get a good night’s rest, unfettered except for a quick dream where I answer a knock at my door, and there is Dan holding my notebook. “Here, you forgot this.” I take it and he leaves. There is something scribbled on the page.



Well, a good night’s rest is a fine respite. When the pictures are due, I grab my backpack and ride over to the store to retrieve them. They’re empty. Well, to say that there was nothing on them would be incorrect. Everything I took a picture of is there, except for that house. There’s not even a lot. There’s a brick house to the left, and a white sided panel house next to it on the corner. There are people running around, and animals. And trees. This...I don’t know.... I jump on the bike and hump it over to the address and find that, yes, it’s not there. This has been a strange year. Two months ago, at Easter, I thought that I could be in love, but that person disappeared. Got a job out west and moved away to be accurate. And now this. I guess I could just write it down and publish it as fiction. Stranger things have happened.

I take out my notebook.