

Larry and the Paranormal

Larry was an avid watcher of Ghosthunters and other programs about the paranormal. He was also a computer geek and was a great help in setting up equipment for his local Paranormal Society when they visited sites which were claimed to be haunted or the scene of paranormal activity.

The society met each Friday evening in the Green Man. They were a mixed bunch and mainly interested in what might be termed “traditional” paranormal activity, i.e. ghostly hauntings and possible communication with the dead or with spirits; but two of its members were keen on ufology. Some believed in the possibility that disturbed souls of the dead haunted places, others rejected the idea that the dead could communicate with the living but did believe there were evil minded spirits or demons. Some believed both and yet others were skeptical and claimed all apparent paranormal activity ultimately had rational, scientific explanations.

Once a month a visit was arranged to a property or site of where they could carry out what they considered as scientific investigations of the paranormal. Sound recording equipment was installed and cameras set up. The latter was watched by keen observers on computer monitors. All the video and audio data were collected and written up and discussed by the Society. There were always data that could be interpreted as supernatural or preternatural: but nothing that could either convince the skeptics to believe or the believers to doubt.

As well as setting up the audio and video recording equipment, Larry was also responsible for the digital storage of the sounds and images and analyses of their data. He enjoyed doing this and took great pride in setting everything up correctly and in the thoroughness both of collecting the data and of their analyses. The Society had no lack of evidence and charts and interpretation of data and so forth.

But Larry was not satisfied. He was a firm believer that the spirit or soul survived death and also that there were spiritual beings, such as demons and angels. He reasoned that just as it was possible to record images of material things from all sorts of different angles, to store the data obtained in numeric form, i.e. digitally, and then use the same stored numbers to recreate “virtual reality”, so it should be possible to store data of spirits digitally and then use these data to recreate the spirit in virtual reality.

Larry had become obsessed with this idea and whenever possible worked on this project. He practised Avicenna's “Floating Man” thought experiment and hoped thus to abstract his soul from his body. The problem was that in this thought experiment the soul is imagined to be isolated from all sensations, including no sensory contact with even their own bodies. He could set up recording equipment to be timed so that it would work independently of his being sensible of it. But how does one capture the data of an *abstracted* soul? If such data are abstracted and stored digitally, how does one reinterpret these numbers as an abstracted soul in virtual reality?

But Larry was not one to be put off by difficulties. In fact the more difficult a problem was, the more he relished it.

He tried to interest the other members of his local society. But those who believed they had souls or thought they might have souls were a bit wary. If getting hold of someone's personal data could lead to identity theft, wouldn't it be even more dangerous to have data about one's soul stolen? Those who were skeptical about the whole notion of a soul looked on Larry as a bit odd. One or two were willing to go along with his experiments, but Larry soon realized that if you are skeptical about the soul you are probably not going to be serious about Avicenna's “Floating Man” thought experiment and you will cause more problems than you will help to solve. So in the end, Larry did most of the experimentation himself and people tended to forget about his project or assumed he had seen sense and given up.

But they should have known better. Larry did not give up. Once Larry undertook a project he became monomaniac about it.

I do not know the details of his experimentation since any records of it have been lost. But we

can be sure that he persisted doggedly through many months. At last he started to achieve some results. He thought he would try it out in the local cemetery. He realized that possibly all the souls of the dead there had long gone to rest in their proper place; but he hoped there might be the odd disturbed souls still earthbound there or he might even find an odd demon lurking about the place. He set up his equipment.

At the end of the night he examined his various recorders and was very excited to see he had picked up a few spirit entities of some sort. The data were stored and he was very excited when he got some results after processing them on his virtual image headset. But the images were not as clear as he would have wished. Was he looking at a soul or some other spiritual entity? Clearly he still had more work to do.

He did tell his paranormal society that he had started to get results. Some were interested and others a bit dubious; but they all wished him luck. Whatever they might have thought about his ideas, they did not want to offend him as he was so good with the information technology. It would have been difficult to replace him.

Larry carried on with his project and at last got results that pleased him. As he looked at recordings from a different cemetery, he was convinced he clearly saw two earthbound souls and could see why they were disturbed and unable to go to rest. He was also certain that one image was that of a demon and that he could read the degree of malevolence exercised by the demon.

He took his laptop along to the next Friday meeting of the group. Obviously this would not be the same as seeing the images with a VR headset, but it would give at least some idea of what he had obtained. Some of the group were very interested in what they saw. One even claimed to know who one of the souls was and said he was not surprised that it was still earthbound; others remained skeptic but were polite.

Although Larry insisted that conventional cameras would not have captured these images, many still remained skeptical, especially but as his language got more and more technical and they were not able to follow what he was saying. They thought it was just technical gobbledygook. They all agreed, however, that he could set up his own “spirit recorders” as well the conventional audio and video equipment at future investigations.

When some persisted in saying that Larry's images were not so different from images obtained by conventional cameras, Larry replied: “Oh, but you should see them with a VR headset.”

“But, Larry,” replied a member of the group, “with a virtual reality headset, you see just *virtual* reality. It does not have to bear any resemblance to the world we live in.”

“No indeed,” said another, “you could be inhabiting a planet where plants speak and little green men are the order of the day.”

“So,” joined in another, “you could show us anything on a VR headset, not just souls of the dead – you could take us right through Hell and up Mount Purgatory!”

Larry was a bit taken aback, but had to admit they had a point. No more was said about it that evening.

Back at his house, Larry started thinking. 'We have virtual reality,' he thought, 'because although I have all the data about a chair stored, I can use those data only to recreate a three-dimensional *image* of the chair. I cannot recreate an actual chair, because, of course, we are dealing with *matter* and can only store information about its size, weight, colour etc. We cannot recreate the matter of which the object is made. But spiritual things are not material; they are spirit.'

'Would it not be possible to use the data to conjure up the actual spirit whose data is stored?'

The words 'conjure up' should have acted as a warning; but Larry did not think of the implication of this or of actually *cloning* the spirit, because that is what he would be doing. Instead he now began experimenting how to recreate the spiritual entities stored

Meanwhile he continued to help the group out on their monthly investigations. He set up the audio and video recording equipment as well as his own “spirit recorders.” The day came when they visited a site with a particularly sinister reputation. Larry was quite excited by this and set up

all the equipment with very great care.

The visit did not disappoint even the most skeptical paranormal researcher. They had plenty of strange images and noises recorded and looked forward to Larry's analyses of the data. Some even joked – behind Larry's back, of course, - about Larry's “spirit recorders” and what they would make of the unquestionably strange phenomena.

When they met the following Friday they were looking forward to hearing what Larry had to say. But as the evening grew on, there was no sign of Larry. They began to get worried; some thought perhaps he was ill but wondered why he had not let anyone know. Someone rang him but got no reply. They tried several times but to no avail.

Eventually two of them, Jennifer and Tom, offered to drive over to Larry's place and find out why Larry was not with them. They arrived there and found no sign of life; there were no lights on and they could not make anyone hear.

“I guess he's gone away,” said Tom.

“No,” said Jennifer, “he would have told us. There's something not right here; I can feel it. I don't like it.”

As she peered in through a window in the back of the house, she thought she could make out a human figure lying on the floor.

“Look there, Tom,” she said.

Tom looked and called the police on his mobile phone.

Eventually police arrived and one of them forced an entry.

“I can feel evil here, Sarge,” said one young policeman as he threw on the light switch.

The others felt it also but said nothing.

When they entered Larry's studio at the back of the house they all were aghast at what they saw. There was Larry's computer tower, split apart and strangely twisted, and Larry was lying dead on the floor. Jennifer and Tom were horrified when they saw his once black mop of hair had turned completely white; and none of them would ever forget the look of abject terror on his face.