

## Matter 55

## Summary

Brunch at Bettys

Account by:	Duncan K. C. Bright, ~39. Security services officer.
Source:	Invitation card.
Location:	Boroughbridge, Yorkshire, England..
Event:	29 May 2024.
Report:	5 Jun 2024.

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## Report

Dear Mr & Dr Scott,

You are cordially invited to partake of brunch at Bettys Café Tea Rooms in York at 10:30am on Wednesday, 5<sup>th</sup> June, with a view to discussing how we might assist one another with regards to intelligence-gathering related to Dheghöm.

Yours sincerely,

Duncan K. C. Bright

### Notes

This card was hand-written with beautiful penmanship. It was contained in an envelope marked only "On His Majesty's Service", with no address or addressee. It was delivered by two uniformed police officers, who waited patiently but conspicuously on the drive until we confirmed our acceptance of the invitation – a tactic surely devised to ensure that we wouldn't spend too long deliberating the subject.

Although the form of words used by Mr Bright was coy about his role, the envelope and delivery method he employed suggested that he worked for either the Security Service, MI5, or the Secret Intelligence Service, MI6.

The time and date chosen for the meeting coincided with that of Northern Powergrid's scheduled maintenance work. Were we naïve, this would appear to be a happy coincidence: we'd be unable to do much work that day anyway, so a trip to York would represent a pleasant distraction.

Being not naïve, however, it was clear to us that this was a demonstration of the influence that Mr Bright's organisation commands. The fact that the

power was selected to be cut off, rather than the water or the gas, was no mere matter of convenience: Mr Bright wished to flourish the "power" he wields.

Aware that we were probably under surveillance, Melanie and I communicated by means of pen and paper. We agreed that we would pretend to take the invitation at face value and not appear to read anything sinister into it.

Nevertheless, that evening I took the precaution of removing all the Dheghōm-related documents from the safe and laying them one at a time on my desk under a good light. I then replaced them in the safe.

We also informed Martin Søndergaard and Lillian Bang that the security services had taken an interest in us and that in the short term their organisation should only contact us using secure, uninterceptable methods.

Come the 5<sup>th</sup>, Melanie and I drove to York for our brunch appointment at Bettys. Mr Bright introduced himself to us as we arrived then took us to a table downstairs where a colleague of his, Mr Lampros, awaited.

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Although both Melanie and I are aware that *lamprós* is Greek for 'bright', neither of us commented on the fact.

Mr Bright was an urbane, cultured man in his late thirties, his breezy confidence typical of the kind that one associates (perhaps unfairly) with a certain manufacture of Oxford undergraduate. Mr Lampros was quieter, but not unfriendly; probably a Cambridge man.

The conversation began with what was intended to give the impression of being small talk. A number of questions were innocently interjected that were transparently intended to test our honesty. "We came up on the train from London this morning; did you travel by public transport yourself or did you drive here?" "What time did you set off, half past nine, ten o'clock?" "York has six park-and-rides? Goodness gracious! Which is the most convenient for Bettys? Perhaps next time we'll drive up, save the tax-payer some money!".

If Messrs Bright and Lampros didn't already know the answers to these questions, they weren't very good spies. We were later to conclude that they were very, very good spies – but unfortunately not quite as good as they perhaps needed to be, to the detriment of us all.

After setting us at our ease, Mr Bright placed on the table a device resembling an upright gearstick. He apologised and hoped we wouldn't mind, but informed us that it was a short-range electronics suppressor. What he was about to reveal was highly confidential, so he would prefer it if he could be certain that no-one might be discreetly recording our conversation. By "no-one" he meant us, of course.

I asked him what he did when dealing with anyone who had pacemaker installed. He demurred, but seemed to find the question amusing.

Brunch arrived. Both Mr Bright and Mr Lampros had ordered the eggs Benedict, but Melanie and I declined to take that particular bait: I chose the rösti and Melanie went with the cinnamon toast. Bettys does an excellent eggs Benedict, but we weren't about to allow Mr Bright the opportunity to bring up the topic of Huevo Joe's restaurant in Austin, Texas.

Mr Bright began the conversation in earnest by laying out his remit. Formally, his section was part of MI5 because it needed to work both on British soil and abroad, whereas MI6 is restricted to plying its trade outside the UK's borders. That said, his section has a somewhat wider scope than the MI5 norm of "protecting UK interests".

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Melanie immediately responded, "so, you're MI5.5 then". Mr Bright declared with some surprise that yes, MI5.5 was indeed the very nickname that his section had been given. Other possibilities had included MX5 (after the *X Files* TV show, not the Mazda sports car range) and MY5 to reference a sister organisation in the USA.

Hearing this, Melanie asked if there were co-operating agencies in the UK, USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, and if so were they called the Five Whys?

Mr Bright replied that there were such agencies, and although they weren't collectively called the Five Whys before, they probably would be anon.

He then proceeded by stating that now he had shown his hand, perhaps we would be good enough to apprise him of what we knew about matters Dheghōm.

This, in general terms, we did.

It was a great deal more than he knew himself. For example, he was aware of Ansnā but hadn't apparently heard of Bhéwonom, let alone of Paul or Sarah.

He wondered if we knew Love Ellis. We told him we knew of her, and that her father was an occasional visitor from Bhéwonom. He inquired as to her health, to which we replied that if he wanted to find out whether or not we knew she was indestructible, yes, we did.

Next, he probed us in some detail about NPCsoft and Eugene Nethercott. His grip of this material was extensive, but included nothing of relevance beyond that which we already knew ourselves.

He asked if we had any idea where Marjorie Laleek might be found. We told him. He was unable to disguise the fact that only now was it dawning on him just how profoundly disquieting the implications of our collective situation might be.

He enquired as to whether we knew of other groups or individuals researching this area. We said that yes, we did, but that we could not reveal anything about them beyond this fact. He pressed us as to why. We told him we rather liked being alive.

At this point, another person taking brunch at a different table came over with a concerned expression on her face. She whispered something in Mr Bright's ear, whereupon he excused himself and held a brief conversation with her in a corner.

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In the meantime, Mr Lampros asked us to clarify a number of the comments we'd made earlier, to ensure that he'd properly understood.

Mr Bright returned to us. He said something to the effect of "I believe I may have underestimated you", then asked how we had protected the contents of our safe.

I replied that we'd protected them by putting them in the safe.

He asked how we'd managed to erase the photographs that his colleague, Mr Kirkas, had taken of our documents and how we'd then contrived to erase the documents themselves.

I'm afraid I may have been rather loud when I verbally laid into him after hearing this, denouncing his vainglorious overconfidence, misdirected mistrust and brash incompetence to the entire lower floor of Bettys.

In the subsequent rather terse exchange, we learned that while we had been enjoying brunch at Bettys, one of Mr Bright's operatives had used some fancy James Bond kit to knock out our cameras and burglar alarm by causing them to overheat (easily blameable on a surge from the power cut). This done, he had gained access to our



property and to the safe using means that Mr Bright was resolutely unwilling to reveal.

The operative, Mr Kirkas, had carefully removed the safe's contents, photographed them with an over-specified Canon EOS R5 camera, then painstakingly replaced them so as to give the impression that they had not been disturbed. Only when he left the property and tried a secure upload of the fruits of his activity from the comfort of his vehicle did he discover that what previously had been crystal-clear 45-megapixel images of documents were now crystal-clear 45-megapixel randomised bits. Upon returning to the safe to repeat his business buttressed by two additional cameras, he discovered that all the documents (except, I assume, the ones from Sarah) were now blank.

Mr Bright wanted to know how this had happened, so I impatiently explained that Paul's daemon must have executed, and that if Mr Bright had let our conversation run its full course instead of using it as an pretext to steal information that we'd on the whole have been happy to share with him anyway, he would have learned this. As it was, he had destroyed the very evidence that he'd sought to steal. Years of research had been lost, simply because he had imperiously assumed that his superficial understanding of what he was facing

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was rather deeper than the reality. He was Dunning-Kruger in action.

We paid for our own brunch, which was not a pleasant duty because Bettys is quite pricey, then stood up to leave. He made no effort to prevent us. We declared that we had no intention of working with someone who would so casually betray us, then bade him goodbye.

We spoke little on the way back, knowing that our car would be bugged, although Melanie did openly suggest that we should conduct a thorough search for surveillance devices upon our arrival back home. We found seven in total, which was all of them: I used the Van Alst device to look back in time to the moment when each was planted. We also found two on the car by manual inspection.

The same device revealed how Mr Bright-in-Finnish effected entry to our property and to the safe without opening either: he shimmied through the front door then shimmied his hand into the safe. Stepping closer to the image location, I was able to discern that he was wearing an impressive gold ring – likely the one seized from the magician Denis Marvell in 2014. It seems that MI5.5 has been in the works for some time.

We heard later in the day from Eugene Nethercott. Those of his documents that were copies of my masters had also been erased.

It would be astonishing if Mr Bright had no access to remote listening devices, so we can assume that whatever we say about matters Dheghōm in future will appear as a transcript on his desk shortly afterwards, to be shared in turn with his counterparts in the Five Whys shortly after that. Visual images will be more difficult for him to capture, but not impossible. However, I doubt that our own CCTV cameras have been hacked, because if they had been then Mr Bright would by now have wished to take a closer look at the Van Alst device that we used to root out his audio bugs.

It's a little ironic that all the ephemera I have collected over the years – the newspaper articles, the obscure books and papers, the essays, the maps, the testimonies, the drawings – some of which are related to matters Dheghōm but most of which are merely suspected to be so, currently sit undisturbed in boxes in the attic.

Perhaps I should secrete this report there, too, rather than in the safe where a thief might actually care to look for it.

## Matter 56

### Summary

The Crack'd Mirror

Account by:	David Scott, 55. Independent researcher.
Source:	Transcript of telephone call.
Location:	Boroughbridge, Yorkshire, England.
Event:	8 Jun 2024.
Report:	8 Jun 2024.

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### Report

Caller: Jane Marple (JM).

Callee: David Scott (DS).

DS: Hello, David Scott.

JM: Ah, good morning, I was hoping you'd be able to answer. Now, we *have* spoken before, but it was rather a long time ago – you wouldn't by any chance happen to recall as a boy having encountered an elderly lady in Harrogate's Valley Gardens, would you? January, 1976? I'm afraid it's –

DS: Miss *Marple*?

JM: Oh! You do recall me! What a stroke a luck.

DS: Of course I recall you!

JM: It's *also* a little puzzling, as I don't believe I revealed to you my name at the time.

DS: I found out who you were some years later. Your ruse with the carbon paper worked.

JM: Oh, now that is gratifying! I was –

DS: Wait, wait, before you say any more, we can't speak over the phone. We'll need to meet in person somewhere. My calls are almost certainly being monitored.

JM: Ah, now you needn't worry about that, my dear boy: we're not actually speaking by telephone.

DS: Er, then how are we speaking?

JM: I'm not *entirely* sure, but in the period since I came back into circulation I've made some helpful new acquaintances, and it is they who arranged our call. You can hang up if you wish; the telephone was only used as a conceit, to establish the connection.

DS: Will audio recording still work? With your permission, I'd like to be able to share our conversation with my wife when she returns from town.

JM: Yes, I expect so. Sound remains sound, however it's transmitted. You might care to take notes, all the same.

DS: (hangs up) You can still hear me?

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JM: Yes, yes. Now, I'm going to have to rush things along a little as I don't know how long I have before I disappear again.

DS: I understand. I came across a couple of newspaper articles that suggested you might be back with us, but in short bursts.

JM: Quite. From my own perspective, there are no gaps in my experience; rather, the world itself instantaneously changes about me. People disappear, day becomes night, furniture I'm using moves, solid objects suddenly fly away to make room for me. I digress. The reason I've approached you is that my new acquaintances and I need advice, yet very few people sprang to mind to whom we could turn for it.

DS: What kind of advice?

JM: Well it all hinges on whether or not you know of any stone-age sites to which you might have free access.

DS: The Devil's Arrows. They're three late-neolithic standing stones in a field close to my house.

JM: Oh, now I *am* aware of those, that's pleasing. My knowledge of the world hasn't been updated since 1976, but history rarely alters. So you live in Boroughbridge?

DS: Yes, Roecliffe Lane.

JM: Good, good, then allow me to explain the situation. It's a little complicated, but please bear with me. So, I shouldn't in fact be reappearing at

all, but my new acquaintances – they're friendly, by the way – have devised a means to cause it to happen. When I, well I suppose 'manifest' is the word, they can enter our world from theirs, a feat which is not supposed to be achievable.

DS: I see.

JM: You see? I was expecting to have to do a great deal more explaining.

DS: If I understand the situation correctly, our world, known to your acquaintances as Dheghōm, is a sub-world of their world, known as Bhéwonom.

JM: A sub-world? I'm afraid you've lost me.

DS: Well as an analogy, in the same way that you were a fictional character in our world, so we are fictional characters in Bhéwonom. People from Bhéwonom have recently been forbidden from coming to Dheghōm, in the same way that in some jurisdictions law-makers have prohibited the reading of certain books. Indeed, it should be impossible for anyone from Bhéwonom to enter Dheghōm. If your acquaintances are able to do so then they're very accomplished individuals.

JM: Pardon me, but does *everyone* know this in whatever the current year is?

DS: 2024. No, there are probably fewer than one or two hundred people in the whole world who are aware of even fragments of it.

JM: Yet you happen to be one of them?

DS: Indeed I do, my interest in the unusual having been sparked by a conversation I had as a boy with a mysterious lady in Valley Gardens.

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JM: Oh, well that's a satisfying turn of events. To continue, then: my new acquaintances are kind and thoughtful young things. They're very apologetic about having to bring me into being every time they wish to visit our world, especially as they have no control over how long each of my sojourns will last. They were hoping to arrange somewhere conducive for me to lodge on a permanent basis, so that I don't continue to alarm the good citizens of Harrogate – or indeed myself – by popping into and out of existence at unexpected moments.

DS: You're welcome to stay at ours, we have a spare room. You'd have to get here first, though, which could be tricky. If you were to disappear while in a moving vehicle, I don't know what would happen when you next reappeared.

JM: Indeed: I shall certainly avoid travelling by air. Fortunately, safe transport can be arranged for me. My acquaintances are able to, I suppose one would call it *teleport*, between a good many ancient sites; they assure me that I could hitch a lift with them should I wish to do so.

DS: That would make it a good deal easier.

JM: Quite. Things are never as simple as they seem, though, I'm afraid. Although it's very gracious of you to offer to put me up, there's an additional factor that rather complicates matters. You see, when my acquaintances appear in our



world, they do so not entirely – well, not at all, in fact – clothed.

DS: Now that rings a bell. Would these acquaintances of yours be young women?

JM: Well they certainly look like young women, yes, but they insist that in reality they're all young men – and judging by their ways, I'm inclined to believe them. They're a little embarrassed about it, as well they might be. It seems that their bodies were created at random when they first snuck into our world, and they're unable to change them to something more, well, appropriate.

DS: They wouldn't call themselves the Muses, would they? There are three of them.

JM: There *are* three of them, yes, but I haven't heard them refer to themselves as Muses, or indeed as any other name. Besides, classically, there are nine Muses, not three.

DS: Have they told you why they snuck into our world in the first place?

JM: That's not something we've really discussed, but they do give the impression of being honest souls, trying to do the right thing for some higher purpose. The point is, they appear in our world naked, which makes it hard for them to blend in, as it were.

DS: Can't they conjure clothes for themselves?

JM: Is that something they ought to be able to do?

DS: Some of the people who came before them could. Oh, but I see what the problem is: the bug

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that brings you into being is to do with object creation – sorry to imply you're an object –

JM: That's quite alright, I shan't take offence.

DS: Well basically, if they did call forth clothes out of nowhere, that act of object-creation could well have knock-on effects. I don't know how said effects might play out, but it's easy to imagine that they could put a permanent end to your existence.

JM: I see. Well for whatever reason, as a result of their sartorial difficulties my acquaintances are seeking a discreet base of operations where they can store garments and other useful items between visits. It has to be near an ancient site, however, so they can whisk themselves there from wherever they appear when they re-enter our world.

DS: Ah. Well our house is only a short walk from the Devil's Arrows, but your acquaintances would still have to cross an open field in full view of passers-by and then take the footpath down Roecliffe Lane. The number 21 bus goes right past.

JM: Is there nowhere closer, perhaps?

DS: Er, well a new housing development has just been completed in the field adjacent to the arrows: Riverside Mills. Reaching it would still expose your acquaintances to public view, though.

JM: Perhaps not. As I recall, the Devil's Arrows stand two or three hundred feet apart, and originally there would have been more of them. The site itself may therefore be larger than it

presents, which would give my acquaintances options regarding where to land.

DS: Can you check with them that this is in fact the case? I wouldn't want to commit to renting a property only for it to turn out to be unsuitable.

JM: Yes, of course. I'm not certain that renting is ideal, however. Rent, you see, comes with landlords, and landlords come with nosiness and keys. Might it be possible to buy a house there outright?

DS: Buy one? Well for those who have the money, yes, but a house represents a substantial expense. I'm not sure that –

JM: Oh, I'll see if my friends can arrange the necessary finance. They visit ancient sites all over the world, and it's remarkable what archaeologists have yet to unearth. I'm sure they could acquire a few nice untraceable precious stones for you to sell.

DS: Er, well I've never tried to sell precious stones before; I imagine it's somewhat more complicated than one might think. Still, I suppose it wouldn't hurt simply to check if any unsold houses remain that back onto the arrows field.

JM: Splendid! I in turn shall –

...

DS: Miss Marple?

...

Hello? Miss Marple?

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## Notes

The notes I was taking of my conversation with Miss Marple were erased the moment she disappeared. The audio recording, however, was not. I can only assume that this is somehow related to the communication's unusual implementation, which I suspect passed through Bhéwonom. The Muses could have instructed Miss Marple to tell me not to record her message, but they did not; therefore, it seems likely that for some reason they wished the message to be recorded, and chose to send it via Bhéwonom to ensure that it would not be deleted.

After listening to the recording, Melanie agreed that we should at least investigate the possibility of investing in a property on the Riverside Mills estate, drawing initially on the funds that Eugene Nethercott disposed in our favour. Undertaking an actual purchase would not be an endeavour that either of us would wish to take lightly, though.

If Miss Marple can be used as a key to unlock access to our world, it seems reasonable to suppose that the other fictional detective that Paul brought to life, Dr Chris Eagle, might have similar utility. Alas, all my attempts to contact his author, H. Gregory McCain, have to date been rebuffed (including those going through his agent, who is

also somewhat exasperated by the man). It remains, therefore, a possibility, if not necessarily a probability, that Dr Eagle also periodically walks among us again.

## Coda

Our current situation is good in one overwhelming respect but disturbing in most others. On the positive side, we know that our reality will not be closed down for at least a year and probably far longer, which is something of a relief. However, we remain ruled by an uncaring god who continues to run experiments on us and who may well fork multiple copies of our universe so as to run some more.

Our physics is buggy, at least where matter-creation is involved. In addition to the quantum computer developed by Eugene Nethercott, we can expect trouble from particle accelerators, fusion reactors and probably solar flares. Left-over Bhéwonomese artefacts that can create matter may also exist to throw further spanners in our works (is the Cornucopia merely be the stuff of legend?). Additionally, there could well be new bugs introduced by Paul's daemon that have yet to make their effects felt.

There are people in Bhéwonom who are able to exploit these bugs independently. The Muses are an unknown quantity: they seem to be benevolent, but are feared by the likes of Blue and Bear. It was they who initiated the denial of service attack on Dheghōm; furthermore, they had a high purpose

for doing so, it wasn't merely for fun. Unhappily, we have no idea what their short-term goals are other than to find a base of operations; their ultimate aim is a mystery. It's entirely possible that they aren't the only illegal guests from Bhéwonom, too, as Dr Chris Eagle offers a second vector for accessing Dheghōm.

The wider repercussions of pre-verdict visits from the people of Bhéwonom are still with us. Several problematic objects from the distant past remain, such as the Holy Grail, the Mallan bowl, the Marvell ring and the Van Alst device. Others, hailing from the more recent past, include numerous vials of healing fluid that were casually distributed earlier this year. Who knows what other unnatural objects might exist, with what exotic properties imbued within them?

There are also individuals who have singular powers granted them by the Bhéwonomese. Love Ellis can defy death, as (I suspect) can a boy from Wilsall, Montana. It's probable that Phillipa Jackard can still speak and understand every language on Earth. Eugene Nethercott has a perfect, unerasable memory of an hour or two spent in Bhéwonom. Given how incompetent many of Ansnā's team and Paul's programmers seem to be, it's almost certain that there will be other human beings in possession of uncanny abilities who have yet to come to our attention.

The general situation is known to the security services of at least five nations. The specific situation is known to a secretive and patient organisation thousands of years old, which has relationships with other ancient groups that may also understand to a greater or lesser extent the present state of affairs. Strange cults of uncertain origin further seem to be aware of aspects of the tale.

Fragments of information are known first-hand by individuals, only some of whom have gone public with their experiences. Doubtless many will find each other in time, together to form hypotheses as to what is going on. I expect that most of these speculations will suffer from a lack of substance and be too outlandish even for conspiracy theorists to latch onto, although all will have at least a granule of truth to them and so survive. Other groups may take a more rational approach, systematically searching for further evidence. I am almost certain, for example, that the Waking Dead group reformed on WhatsApp after it was closed down on Facebook and is pursuing such a course.

Finally, in addition to all these individuals, groups, communities and organisations, there are the independent researchers. I only know of two: Melanie and I.



Because of the overbearing actions of MI5.5, almost all of the documents that we stored in the safe are now irrevocably lost. Only those few provided by Sarah of Bhéwonom were spared the effects of Paul's daemon. Nevertheless, we still have access to the contents of the erased texts.

By means of the Van Alst device, we can look back in time to the evening when I laid out the documents from the safe one at a time on my desk under a good light. Paul's daemon scours Dheghōm in all directions, but the records the Van Alst device accesses are not in Dheghōm: they're in Bhéwonom.

Furthermore, I have discovered that the device has pause/unpause functionality. Tapping it while it's streaming will stop it at the image currently showing; tapping it again will resume the streaming from the point at which it was stopped. This means that while seated at my desk we can read recordings of all the documents that MI5.5 destroyed.

Fresh unerasable copies will have to be written by hand. This promises to be a tiresome exercise so Melanie has refused to participate, but I may attempt it myself. I believe that the way forward is to put alternate letters (or perhaps words) on

separate pieces of tracing paper such that, when overlaid, they form a whole.

I have informed Martin Søndergaard and Lillian Bang of the loss of our documents and of the cause. I have not, however, informed them of the existence of the Van Alst device. Knowing that Mr Søndergaard can read nameplates, and could therefore key it to someone else, prudence dictates that we should perhaps keep quiet about it.

Perhaps Melanie and I are not the only dogged researchers into matters Dheghōm. Perhaps there are other Davids and Melanies out there who have a far better understanding of the way things are than the rest of us do. It would be very pleasing if this were indeed the case, but I suspect that it isn't. They'd have to be exceptionally good at covering their tracks for us not to have noticed them. I suppose it is possible that they could limit their investigations to a significant part of the world to which we have scant access (China or Russia, perhaps?). Realistically, though, Melanie and I are probably on our own.

Let us hope that when the judges of Bhéwonom revisit their verdict a year hence (their time), they decide to get in touch.

**End**