

Rocky Arredondo & My Mom Present...

THE COBRA'S GNOSIS

Vol. 19

The Truth is Not Out There—It Is In Here

23 June 2000

The Cobra's Gnotes...

June is here and the air is hot and full of love, specifically between birds. Everywhere I look I seem to see another amorous couple paused in the middle of a gawky courtship dance, and glaring at me for interrupting. I tell them to get a room.

Meanwhile, two gray trees with branches covered in rotting purple flowers are abuzz. You hear the sound from a few feet away, and it becomes unnerving as you approach—like the flies' noise that denotes "evil" in *The Amityville Horror*, except we'll call them "bees" and pretend that they are benign.

So birds and bees are doing what they do, but how do they know what to do? Go ahead and say "instinct." Do it. "Instinct," you say. But that doesn't explain the process or make it any less marvelous. Humans too act on sapience which they can't remember acquiring and don't know why they have. It's not the same, but I think in practical ways the comparison is not infelicitous. How much difference is there really between a bee interpreting a sun dance and you recognizing your native language? You may refine your abilities but the basics seem innate, whether a product of genes or of memes (and no, Tiger, this does not reopen our debate on the topic, and as for the rest of you the only detail that matters about that debate is *I was utterly correct in all of my assertions.*)

What I'm talking about is epistemology, but I'm going to call this issue "The Cobra's Gnosis" because I'm not above abusing the English language to make a pun (though I suppose a pun is an abuse in and of itself). I'll also admit up front that I'm going to apply the word "gnosis" rather liberally to any area of knowledge that strikes me as intuitive, revelatory, or otherwise unexplained. Those aspects of knowledge have always fascinated me, perhaps because I am about as prone to intuition, prophesy, and other paranormal phenomena as a pile of toenail clippings.

Magi, as befits his moniker, has a talent for such things. When he alluded to a mystical experience he had had with chocolate sprinkles, my interest was sparked immediately. I've been nagging him to recount his experiences ever since. So far, he just says cryptic things like, "You know, 'I smell dead people' just wouldn't have been nearly as scary," laughs and wanders back to his cube, but I hope he will succumb to the thrill of a byline in *The Nose* and get something written down for me.

I'm also hoping you all will start sharing your weird experiences with me for a spooky October edition. I know that Janet for one briefly co-habited with the Throbbelfoot Spectre, and that Jana had something even stranger in her apartment building than that neighbor who called



Cobra Cwiz: Name that Mysterious Creature

her salsa maker "the spinny whippy." Maybe I'll call it *The Cobra's Ghost*. Which reminds me, I had the freakiest dream last night in which I believed I was experiencing a rather typical hypnogogic ghost hallucination, but when I finally collected myself enough to say a word (which is supposed to be the sure fire way to break the spell), the ghosts just got mad and stampeded all over my bed which really shouldn't have happened so I asked Mom about it and she said the house we were living in (which wasn't a house we ever lived in) had a tragic history but before she could tell me what it was I was on a bus in San Francisco that took me all the way into wine country before I realized...but I'm getting off the subject a bit.

In the time it took me to write the above, at least two birds managed to create a clutch of infants in the tree next to which I take my short breaks, and all of the purple flowers have fallen from their branches and turned into dust. I don't know what happened to the bees. Nothing to send a much needed shiver down one's spine, alas, but perhaps an occasion to reflect on the durability of life, and how it, like much in education, tends to look like one darn thing after another. Though some of those things have unexpected kinks and chocolate sprinkles. I'm crossing my fingers and hoping you will find something like that within.

Sharon C McGovern
Editor/Publisher/Cobra-in-Chief

Why the Nine Inch Nails Concert was Like a Funeral— In a Good Way

*what have i become? my sweetest friend
everyone i know goes away in the end
you could have it all, my empire of dirt
i will let you down, i will make you hurt
if i could start again a million miles away
i would keep myself, i would find a way*

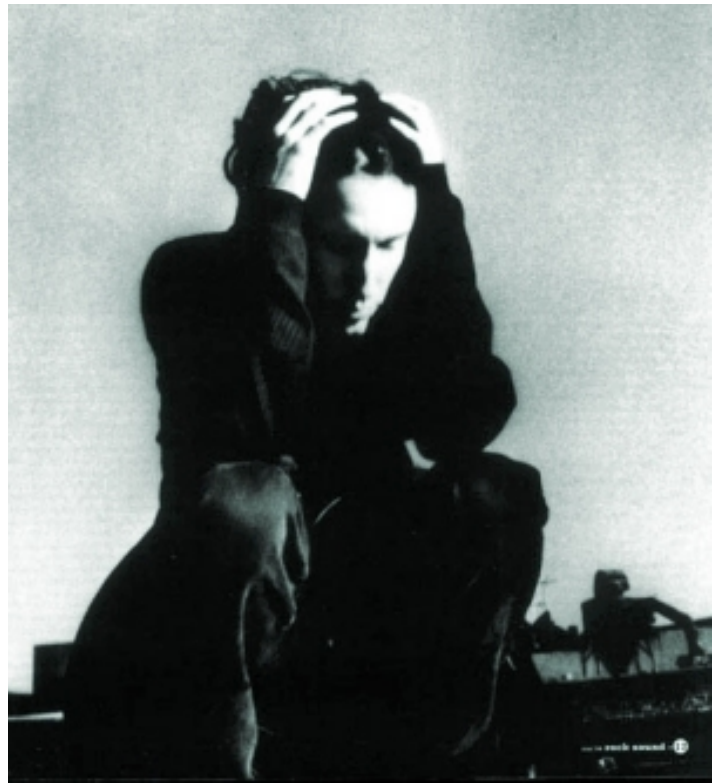
So ends “hurt,” Trent Reznor’s most mournful composition for Nine Inch Nails. You can tell from the lower-case “i”s (which he manages to enunciate) and from the overall tone that he’s in a bad way. But what you can’t see is how beginning just before the quoted lyrics, the spooky, brittle tune is invigorated by a deep thrum thrum thrum thrum on a guitar led by single notes on a synthesizer. Then starting with “you could have,” a louder, harsher tone on the guitar and pounding drum beat syncopate the words, at once maximizing the cynicism of the offer and the tunefulness of the heretofore whispered song. Both music and vocal back off suddenly for the next line and a half, then while his voice fades the music crescendos on “i would find a way,” and signs off with white noise and feedback—a sonic equivalent of aimless ambition and half-assed plans. In defiance of expectation the song leaves a happy, jazzy, if unfocused residue on the listener’s ear.

“hurt” was the last song NIN played at the America West Arena on the evening of June 4, and a fitting capstone to the day’s events. Which began with the funeral of my Great Uncle Max.

Uncle Max is inextricably connected to my fondest ideas of Arizona, the Arizona that is big and open and not too hot (yes, it happens). He was a natural born gentleman. Hospitality and generosity were so ingrained in him you forgot to notice how exceptional those qualities are—there was simply no other way he would have behaved. And I think he would have liked his funeral, even though he never struck me as the sort who would give his funeral a second thought.

For the record, I have given my funeral a good deal of thought, though the only idea I’ve ever stuck with has something to do with winged skulls. Exactly what changes, but I think it would make a nice motif. Once I told my siblings that I wanted to hear laughter from The Beyond. Pat asserted that would be no problem as people were already in the habit of laughing at me, and Lauren spoke fondly of the volumes of incriminating photographs she had stored that would set them off if they seemed at all bummed at my passing. But if it turned out like Uncle Max’s, I would be more than satisfied and not feel the need to haunt anybody (I’m looking at you, dear brother, dear sister). Any occasion that brings together our far flung family, and culminates in conversation and food has to be on this side of good.

Even better was the gossip, which was refreshingly happy, and hot



enough that Uncle Max’s daughter Maryann stopped the procession from the coffin to drop hints about it. Of course, there was nothing really new about the news. The cat was already pretty much out of the bag and was just sitting around licking itself as cats will do, acting superior because it *knew*. Cats are a pain. But at last we had hard data to go with all the speculation we had been doing on the topic of What’s up with Carolyn and that Benny guy? Everybody knew they had been canoodling to beat the band. Now that they’re engaged we’ve got to put the newest family member (sorry Sydney, you’ve been displaced) in our sites, looking for sore spots to poke.

Speaking of sore spots, I’m going to skip ahead here, past all the pleasant chats and how nice everybody looked, because, forgive me, the Nails’ concert was much more interesting.

Because the morning was taken up by the funeral and the afternoon by more visiting at the Jensen home, I didn’t have time to assemble a look for the evening. If you’re wondering why my funeral attire wouldn’t do, you must be thinking of tons of black crepe and veils, and be living in a much cooler climate. Maybe my pioneer ancestors could have pulled off that ensemble, but they are all, tellingly, dead.

So as Pat and I raced home, I mentally rummaged through my drawers and closets trying to assemble an appropriate industrial/goth look. In my mind, I settled on a vintage Madonna wannabe via the Wreck of the *Hesperus*, but when I surveyed my actual stuff I realized I didn’t have the time or resources to pull it off. Besides, Pat was pounding on my bedroom door shouting HUSTLE, so I settled on what I like to call “Basic Goth Trollop,” strappy black T-shirt, short black skirt, flat shoes, but really tall hair. I accessorized with a simple aluminum chain, which I was ordered to surrender at the door. Although it has the weight and threat of a heavy piece of yarn, the authorities thought I might want to use it as a weapon. Instead of handing it over, I hid it behind a bench. The plaza outside America West stadium was a mess, like the site of an Earth (cont. on page 6)

Mystery Phrase of the Month

As admittedly nasty as women can be to one another, men have an unabashed streak of cruelty in which they glory and wallow. Even sporadic subscriber Mr. X, who is usually the kindest and gentlest of souls, points to his trash can when I offer him a **Cobra's Nose** and says, "Put it in my 'In' box." Perhaps Harvest said it best when from her position as Bell Captain she said of her staff, "My bellmen are so *mean*. You would not *believe* what they say to each other. And God how they eat!"

The greatest concentration of men at Cosmodemonic is in Tech Support, though percentage-wise the Warehouses now have them beat. Before certain Tech Managers/Social Engineers began tinkering with integration you could roam an entire quarter of the building without happening upon a picture of a flower. Bullying was rampant. Mr. Flintstone took special delight in silencing ninnies and shepherding Byron to his cube of origin whenever he was caught outside it.

In this environment, communication occurred on at least three different levels. The actual tally was certainly much higher, but I was not nearly astute enough to detect them all. One of these strata was that of computer sound bites that ran commentary on every event and conversation in the room, and belied any illusion of privacy you may have foolishly taken for granted. The individual samples became so familiar to the room's inhabitants that a single word or syllable carried the entire impact of the phrase—kind of like that joke about telling jokes in prison by their number—which rendered most of that level of communiqué unintelligible to the uninitiated, though I became really familiar with the "Jane, you ignorant slut" one thanks to Mr Enigma's tireless efforts.

Upon certain employees was bestowed the dubious distinction of having a particular sound bite played each time he popped up on the Tech Support radar. King James the Former Product Manager Amen, for example, got an earful of the Imperial Margarine fanfare every time he entered the room. Another employee so honored was this putty colored character named Steve Schaefer, who had a nasal voice, inflexible work habits, and vile, explosive temper. Mostly because of the first attribute, he was called duck related names and his every move was heralded with a din of quacking.

When he quit under circumstances I don't recall, he was utterly unlamented and unremembered until his resume rolled onto the Tech Support fax machine not long ago. Mr Enigma showed it to me, attributing it to "that guy who sounded

like a cartoon." The only remarkable thing about the resume, other than the speed with which Mr E destroyed it, is the following impenetrable sentence, "Very handy and able to fabricate and part or bracket not commercially available."

As a Zen meditation device, I think it leaves that "one hand clapping" deal eating dust. 🌀



Gnostune

Upon completing post-lunchtime pleasantries, Audrey paused by my desk said, "Do you know of anyone who might have the latest Red Hot Chili Pepper's release? I'd like to copy it for my personal collection."

I suppose I would have been more astounded if she had added, "By the way, I'm very into leather," but it's hard to say. As it was, I blinked at her for a few seconds before asking, "Do you mean it?" because I just happened to be in possession of Pat's promotional copy of *Californication*, and willingly handed it over to have its copyrights violated.

When I recovered and reflected on the content of the album rather than the rep of the notorious sock wearers, I understood why Audrey would seek it out. The relatively mellow tunes from *Californication* she'd heard on the radio are representative, and not immediately identifiable as having the same origin as, say, the boisterous "Suck my Kiss." This is not a shock, after all two of the more notable tracks on their previous album *BloodSugarSexMagic* were the lyrical "Breaking the Girl" and "Under the Bridge." On *Californication*, however, they spend more time in that mode, but without compromising their superabundant machismo. They are like champion soccer players demonstrating a natural ability for ballet, but on them it looks cool.

The lyrics on *Californication* demonstrate another change in RHCP's approach. Whereas their past lyrics were straightforward and tended toward the narrative, those on *Californication* are more fragmentary and evocative. "Otherside," for example, seems to catch the singer mid-crisis, without the inclination to fully account for his present circumstances. The song teeters on the brink of epiphany—almost post-knowledge ("Once you know you can never go back"), but still pre-gnosis in its absence of conclusions and broken phraseology. That liminal aspect is emphasized by surreal imagery—"I heard your voice though a photograph," "The cemetery where I marry the sea," etc, also exploited in its video (which can currently be found on the RHCP website www.redhotchilipeppers.com) which borrows heavily from '20's German Expressionism.

The title subject, "otherside," is specified by the absence of a space between the words "other" and "side," but generecised by the impossibility of detecting this detail aurally and by its uncapitalized status on the lyric sheet. Likewise, otherside is at once personalized as a part of the singer's being ("how long will I slide/separate my side"), objectified as a place where he deals with consequences ("I've got to take it on the otherside"), and personified as a Shiva-like entity perpetually destroying and restoring itself and the singer ("I yell and tell it that it's not my friend/I tear it down I tear it down and then it's born again").

Okay, okay, I know the article's gotten boring. But the point at which the Red Hot Chili Peppers and Audrey St. Clair connect has got to have its fascination, so check it out.



RED HOT CHILI PEPPERS

Otherside

Chorus:

How long how long will I slide
Separate my side I don't
I don't believe it's bad
Slit my throat
It's all I ever

I heard your voice
through a photograph
I thought it up
it bought up the past
Once you know
you can never go back
I've got to
take it on the otherside

Centuries are what it meant to me
A cemetery where I marry the sea
Stranger things could never change my mind
I've got to take it on the otherside
Take it on the otherside
Take it on, Take it on

Chorus

Pour my life into a paper cup
The ashtrays full and I'm spillin' my guts
She wants to know am I still a slut
I've got to take it on the otherside

Scarlet starlet and she's in my bed
A candidate for my soul mate bled
Push the trigger and pull the thread
I've got to take it on the otherside
Take it on the otherside
Take it on, Take it on

Chorus

Turn me on take me
for a hard ride
Burn me out leave me
on the otherside
I yell and tell it that
It's not my friend
I tear it down I tear it down
And then it's born again

Chorus

ONE CURRENT, ONE
FUTURE RED HOT CHILI
PEPPERS FAN—AUDREY
ST. CLAIR & CHILD



How long I don't
believe it's bad
Slit my throat
It's all I ever

(scan by Toe)

Of Men-In-Black

For those of you who have a taste for the strange—and if you have ever taped an episode of The X-Files, you're in—you might want to find and read a book by John A. Keel. I'm not saying you should believe everything he proposes, I don't think he would expect or even want you to himself; but he writes with wit and his subjects are spooky and cool. This is an excerpt from a 1973 interview with him which was published in The New UFO Sightings. It concerns men-in-black, who turn out to be even stranger than the movie of that name would suggest. Enjoy.

Glenn McWane: Speaking of personal investigations wherein it appears that a mysterious, unidentified "someone" is keeping an eye on things. A few years ago I was involved in researching a case in which a particular UFO contactee claimed to have been given vast hordes of advanced scientific information. This man (I'll call him Salvatore) claims that he knows where terrestrial UFO bases are located.

John A. Keel: You must be aware that this very thing has been repeated fifty or a hundred times around the country, or around the world. Do you remember the famous Mel Noel of the 1960s? He claimed that a group of earthly scientists based in Brazil were building UFOS. He had a good following, and people came to believe in him—then he just disappeared into thin air. Someone did write to me about a year ago and said Mel Noel had turned up again. They had talked to him and heard him lecture.

Noel apparently had a lot of money behind him. He came to New York City, went to Life magazine, went to Mort Young, who was then with the Journal American. Noel was signing people up to go on a space flight. He collected photos of all these different reporters for their space passports.

Mel Noel was very good-looking, extremely well dressed. He was accompanied by not one, but two or three or more very attractive girls who looked like movie stars, from the descriptions I have. He traveled all around the country stirring people up. He had a story very similar to your Salvatore's.

A lot of people with such claims get in touch with me because they think I am going to believe their story, become enthusiastic about it, and write a glowing article about it. It is very difficult for me to tell them that I feel sorry for them; that I have heard it all before, and that I see them going down the road to ruin just as several others have done in the past.

McWane: Does this lead us into the sinister men-in-black kind of phenomena?

Keel: Perhaps. Not too long ago, a photographer showed me a lot of pictures he had taken of an outdoor rock festival in England. There was something very extraordinary about the picture. There was a large crowd, and scattered in the crowd were three men who looked like brothers. Their hair was quite short in contrast to the other people in the picture. They were dressed identically, and they all had this man-in-black look. Not an Oriental look, but a gaunt, evil look. They were widely separated in the crowd, and yet if you brought these three men together, they would have looked like triplets. This doesn't prove anything, except that the picture fascinated me.

In January 1969, during Nixon's first inauguration, I was very interested to notice three men in black suits looking very much like our classical men-in-black sitting together a few rows from the front, right behind Nixon when he gave his inaugural address. Every time the television cameras shot Nixon from a particular angle, I could see these three men. They seemed out of place. Of course they could have been ambassadors from Vietnam or something.

I wondered afterward if my imagination had been running away from me. I got a hold of all the magazines I could find with pictures of the inauguration; and I went over them with a magnifying glass; but I could not find those three guys. Yet I had seen them very clearly on television.



McWane: Have you ever run into a man-in-black type that is as skinny as you could ever imagine a living human to be?

Keel: The thin man is well known to me. I call him the Cadaver. Over the years I have had twenty-five different people describe the Cadaver to me. He is usually extremely pale, as if he were bloodless. He is so thin that he looks like he is going to fall apart at any moment. He is usually rather poorly dressed, but it isn't easy to look good in clothes when one is so thin....

There are several areas to this whole weird business. On one hand we have real UFO phenomena—strange lights passing over the earth, probably since time began. The UFO intelligences are aware that we are going to see these lights occasionally when conditions are just right so they have to give us an explanation. Different generations have been given different explanations.

These intelligences have staged whole events over a long period of time to support those explanations. We have the fairy faith in Middle Europe; we have the vampire and various other kinds of legends. We have the mysterious airships in 1897. Now we have spaceships. But all of these things are nothing but a cover for the real phenomenon—whatever it is.

On the ground, as well as in the air, there are real things happening that they don't want us to know about, so they give us lots of cover stories. The men-in-black support the cover stories in many of these instances.

What they are trying to hide may be frightening, even incomprehensible to us, but it does seem that they are using us in some fashion. 🕶

(cont. from page 2) Day celebration, and I thought my necklace would be safe amidst the litter. Once inside, I bought a tasteful **NIN** bondage bracelet so I wouldn't look so *nude*. Pat's outfit was inspired. Bucking convention, he was adorned in faded jeans, a kelly green T-shirt, low-key chain around the neck (which he got to keep—unfair), and a butterfly ring next to the skull ring. Sort of a Dangerous Hippie kind of look, but not filthy as hippies tend to be. And the shirt made him really conspicuous in a crowd, particularly that one.

The opening band was A Perfect Circle, whom I first saw in a primordial stage at Pat's Grunge Gone Glam show several months ago. They looked and sounded much better this time, having the benefit of more practice, a tighter line-up of musicians, an acclaimed album to support, and not performing in a barn.

Their performance clocked in at an efficient 42 minutes, then a curtain was drawn around the stage so NIN's crew could prepare it in secret. Unveiled, it was a model of stark, industrial glamour. Every bit of it was functional, and it all glittered. The band itself, looking fashionably decayed, was the visual counterpoint to the set design, and emblemized the music they played—songs about rot accompanied on impermeable electronic instruments, songs about lethargy and helplessness executed with many gigawatts of energy. I may have been born too late to see The Who wreak havoc on stage, but NIN manages to destroy at least one synthesizer per performance. But their shows are not all about violence. As in any good drama, they also plumb depths of despair, loveliness, and grace, and the final effect is cathartic. And it's the only music I've ever felt comfortable moving to.

I know for a fact that up to and probably over ninety percent of Cobra readers would never consider attending a Nine Inch Nails concert, and that anything I say or write would more likely reinforce that conviction than diminish it. Will you believe me when I say that the net effect is euphoric? So much so that when the concert goers left the arena, the street musicians who were belching out "Mr. Tambourine Man" and "The Candy Man" on their respective corners were tolerated rather than given the beatings they richly deserved, and that I hardly minded when I discovered my necklace had been swept away with the trash?

Note to self re funeral: banner reading "fresh blood through tired skin/ new sweat to drown me in/ dress up this rotten carcass just to make it look alive." Replace "Nearer My God to Thee" in hymnal with "Closer to God." Winged skulls—somewhere. Dancing. **NM**



Cobra Cwiz Answers

Page One: El Chupacabra

Page Two: Trent Reznor

Page Three (Top): Spring Heel Jack

Page Three (Bottom): Starchild skull (second from left)

Page Four: As Noted

Page Five: Bigfoot (from the Patterson film; warning, this one could be fraudulent)

Page Six: Trent Reznor (middle) as a band geek

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Use them.

End Gnosis... June is drawing to a disappointing close, at least in paranormal and gnostic terms. Magi proved to be remarkably nag-proof. At one point when I asked what would become of page five, which I had reserved for his words, he said, "Maybe you could present it as the ghost of Magi's article. That would be scary." Then he went off to smell dead people or something. Sister Melanie Calkins promised to fax an original drawing of your beloved Cobra with multiple breasts (do you remember that part of *The Last Temptation of Christ* when the cobra told Christ, "Look at my breasts"? That took me *right* out of the movie, let me tell you what, *breasts* indeed on the only creature less endowed than I) and a colander...somewhere, but she didn't. The only mystery I've contemplated concerns the moron gardeners Cosmodemonic's landlords employ. Every couple of weeks they come with their stinky, noisy leaf blowers, which they use to first blow all the debris from the bushes around the building onto the sidewalks, next they blow the debris from the parking lot onto the side walks, finally they blow the debris from the sidewalks into the bushes around the building. When I complained about the state of the grounds to our General Manager, he nodded gravely and said, "The wind." Serves me right, I suppose.

The Monsoons rolled in early (they do so exist, Janet—I'm watching one now), and the longest day of the year has come and gone without incident. I didn't do anything to mark the occasion except to thank God the nights would be getting longer, but I understand the Celts celebrated by engaging in soccer riots. To all their own, I'm sure Bel didn't mind. July promises to be a lively month. I'll let you know.