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For information about the author please see the back page.

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AN ACCOUNT OF A CURIOUS ENCOUNTER

BEING A DESCRIPTION OF THE SEQUENCE OF EVENTS LEADING UP TO AND INCLUDING AN
ENCOUNTER WITH AN HERETOFORE UNKNOWN PHENOMENON OFF THE WHITBY COAST –
NOVEMBER, YEAR OF OUR LORD 1916

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DAVID BROOKES

FOREWORD

THIS ACCOUNT OF THE STRANGE EVENTS on the Whitby coast last November does not come first-hand, being instead related to me by a young man who claimed to know the Doctor who had attended the scene. At first I admit to being rather incredulous, for the young man was a beggarly sort and apparently not right about the head, and the tale was so bizarre that I fancied he was having me on for a jape. Eventually I did wrest the barest facts from him, but the truth of the matter is that his full (if somewhat spurious) account is far more entertaining than the likely reality.

To further support my desire to put this entire episode to print as he told it, many of even the most colourful details were substantiated by others who I have since interviewed, and some of these others of the highest standing indeed, including the Chief of Police at Whitby, who stood on the beach that same morning, the 16th November, Year of our Lord 1916.

I shall repeat the story here, in full, even under the fear of appearing quite mad:

PART ONE:
IN WHICH A POD OF WHALES VISITS THE WHITBY SEASIDE

THE CHIEF OF POLICE WAITED PATIENTLY at the foot of the cliff, his six officers standing by uselessly as they surveyed the scene before them. It was grey and windy above; the sea was choppy and frothed with purest white.

All across the beach, some twenty whales of indeterminate classification lay puffing, almost entirely motionless on the sand. They had swum ashore and become stranded. Now there was only the odd gust of moist air from their blowholes, and an occasional slap of a massive tail.

The Chief turned to the sound of approaching horses coming across the sand. Four animals were pulling a carriage around the base of the cliff. 'Here at last,' muttered the Chief, and strode to meet his appointment.

Once the carriage had come to a rest, the door opened and a long, pinstriped leg extended onto the step. This thin limb preceded the tall, gaunt frame of a moustachioed gentleman in a glossy top hat. The man held two large bags, much akin to the purselike bags carried by doctors.

'Professor Arnustace,' said the Chief, offering his hand to shake. 'Glad you could make it, sir.'

The Professor did not speak until the Chief understood that his hand would not be shaken; Arnustace carried a bag in each hand, as described. When the Chief grinned through his own embarrassment, Arnustace offered a quick apology and said, 'We were detained on the cliffside road. There were sheep crossing.'

We? thought the police Chief, as Arnustace proceeded to approach the other officers further down the beach. *But the carriage is otherwise empty – could he have meant his driver?*

The Professor struck the Chief in those first few moments as a very strange man indeed.

~

'*ORCINUS ORCA*,' SAID PROFESSOR ARNUSTACE, peering at the prone body of one of the stranded sea animals.

'What's what?' asked the Chief.

'It's Latin, sir. This magnificent dead beast is a fine specimen of *orcinus orca*, the blackfish.'

'Forgive me, Professor, but it looks like a whale to me.'

'That it is,' said the Professor patiently. He put one hand against the rubbery black hide of the beached animal. 'Orca, the "killer whale". This is a pod of one of the most energetic, sociable, sometimes violent whales in all the oceans. I've only ever heard of them up north, on the Scottish coast, and even then rarely. And yet here they are. Whitby is a lucky town, sir.'

'I wouldn't say that,' said the Chief, looking at the whales stranded all down the beach. 'We'll never shift this lot.'

'I'm afraid there's no rush. Those that have not already expired will be dead by dusk.'

'But how are we supposed to move them?'

'That is an easy conundrum to solve. In a few weeks the corpses will have rotted down to the skeleton and they'll be much lighter.'

The Professor stalked away again on his long legs, his two black bags hanging straight down from his long arms.

PART TWO:
IN WHICH THE PROF MEETS A DOC; AND A PLAN OF ACTION IS FORMED

BEHIND THE NEAREST DEAD WHALE, the Professor stooped out of sight and opened the front of one of his bags. The flap came down, and from the cool shade within stirred a small shape. A furred feline figure stretched and then came out blinking into the weak morning light.

‘Verne,’ said the Professor to the cat, ‘How was the journey?’

The little tabby mewled and butted Arnustace’s hand with his head. Arnustace was careful not to dislodge the metal device screwed into the young cat’s skull. It looked a little like a metal fruit bowl turned upside down, with fastening devices around the brass rim, and small bulbs foggy with internal dust near the apex of the dome. Allowance had been made for the cat’s big pointed ears, though not much could be done about the small patches of shaved puffy skin around the screws, where they were fixed into the bone.

Arnustace flipped a switch on the wiry contraption. Another long, thin wire connected the headset to a narrow box about the size of a cigar case. This case had a glass front, and within it were close to two hundred tiny bulbs of Arnustace’s own design.

With the switch flipped, the tiny bulbs in the box illuminated in a specific sequence. Together, they formed a sequence of words:

TELE-LUMINOUS COMMS. DEVICE: ON.

With the caution of a man testing a complicated device for the first time, the Professor said, ‘Verne – how are you?’

The message on the box disappeared as the bulbs deactivated. Then another sequence lit up, describing the following words:

I M FYNE THNX.

The words disappeared a moment later, and Arnustace tickled Verne behind his ear.

‘Good! Did you hear my conversation with the Chief? There has arrived on this shore an entire pod of *orcinus orcas!*’

O RLY?

‘Really, Verne. And as expected, I have been summoned to attempt to divine the cause of this, so that it does not happen again. Whitby is said to be growing into a resort town, of all things! But I shall need to speak with the others here to collect some more facts.’

OK. HNGRY. FUD PLZ.

The words stayed lit on the box for a few seconds, then faded. The filaments of the bulbs glowed a faint yellow for a little while as Arnustace dug in his pockets for some dried meat he had cut into small cubes. He watched Verne gobble these up out of his gloved hand, deep in thought.

‘An interesting animal,’ said a voice behind him. Startled half out his wits, the Professor bundled the cat, the box with the wire and the treats all into the bag, and slapped the sides closed. His shaky fingers turned the catch that kept it shut, and then he whirled around to face the speaker.

‘Madam! It is not polite to—’

‘Did I see that cat wearing a metal hat made of wire? And why on earth have you brought him with you to this place – don’t you know that cats hate water? That poor little kitten!’

The woman who spoke thus was wearing a greatcoat buttoned up to the waist. A blouse with a buttoned-down collar concealed all else but her face, which was flushed with the cold wind. Her chestnut-brown hair was pulled loosely back and tied with a black ribbon. She wore gloves that, at first glance, appeared to be exactly the same gloves that the Professor was wearing.

Although he was evidently a little taken aback, Arnustace managed to regain his composure and smooth down his suit and coat. He could not however quite smother his own indignation and irritation.

‘Madam, Verne is a year old. He no longer could rightfully be referred to as a “kitten” – you would only offend him and reveal your own ignorance. With regards to the apparatus you saw, I would kindly ask you to mind your own business.’

‘Well!’ exclaimed the woman. ‘I had heard the great Professor Arnustace was a little eccentric, but—’

‘I am not eccentric. I am, according to my mental health doctor, actually certifiably insane. However I happen to be of use in unusual situations such as this, and so the Whitby constabulary keeps me away from locks and keys of any sort.’

‘It is said that you are a genius.’

‘Verne would agree with you,’ said Arnustace.

‘That device allows you to talk with him?’

‘After a fashion. His simple feline thoughts do not translate well into perfect King’s English, however he is quite understandable. But you have not yet introduced yourself.’

‘Annabeth Ross,’ said she, extending her hand. ‘I’m a doctor of veterinary medicine in the village. The chief thought I might be of use here today.’

‘A doctor! Well, I never—!’

‘A woman is quite capable of delivering a calf in spring, or fixing a splint to a sheepdog’s leg, Professor,’ Anna said tartly.

‘Well, yes...’

‘And your own profession?’

Arnustace sniffed and rebuttoned his suit jacket. ‘I am qualified in the fields of modern medicine, psychology, zoology, cryptozoology and history.’

‘Good Lord! They must have kept you at Oxford for twenty years!’

‘Nonsense. I took all five degrees at the same time – and passed with flying colours, I might add. But Oxford has never truly held the title of best establishment of learning, madam. I studied at Cambridge.’

‘Well.’

‘Quite.’

She said, ‘Did you notice we have exactly the same gloves?’

‘I’m quite thrilled to say that I did! But to the matter at hand: the reason for this scene of misery and death we find ourselves in.’

Anna Ross nodded. Arnustace picked up his bags and followed her further still down the shore, to where a whale not long for the early stages of decomposition waited like a sack of potatoes fifty metres up from the water.

‘His side is split,’ said the Professor.

‘It is not an injury. The haemorrhage seems to have occurred spontaneously. But look at his blood: frothy. And there are clots of fat swimming about in it.’

‘I do not think he would have enjoyed a fried breakfast every morning,’ said Arnustace flatly. He knelt and dipped his finger in the dark whale’s blood. ‘It is frothy because there are air bubbles in it. Come here.’

Anna knelt by his side. Arnustace scooped up the froth and vigorously rubbed it between his palms under Anna’s nose.

‘Professor!’

‘Do you smell it?’

‘I do not, sir!’ she exclaimed, aghast.

‘That is because nitrogen has no smell. These are nitrogen bubbles in the blood. And the subcutaneous fat is another symptom.’

‘A symptom of what?’

‘Decompression sickness.’

‘Ridiculous. Animals do not get decompression sickness. That only happens in humans, who are out of their element. They rise to the surface too fast and become grievously ill. But whales and other marine animals have their own warnings to prevent this – they never rise to the surface quick enough for blood nitrogen to reach toxic levels.’

‘Not *usually*,’ corrected the Professor. ‘Not unless they are startled. Not unless they are *driven* to rise too quickly to the surface. And it may be postulated that, in their confusion, they find themselves pushed up a slope under the water that becomes a beach, and all at once they realise that they are stranded! Trapped on the dry sand to dehydrate and die, or burst open from decompression.’

‘A fine theory. But what would drive these huge creatures up to the surface like that?’

Arnustace stood and brushed the sand from his knees. He had already wiped his gloves on his handkerchief, which he folded and left by the dead whale.

He said, ‘To produce this many deceased cetaceans? It must be external factor quite terrifying. I propose that, based on the trajectory of the tracks coming out of the water, that the orcas had been swimming around that cliff there as they rose to the surface. If we are to look for a cause, we should first look there.’

~

PART THREE:
IN WHICH THREE BRAVE SOULS DESCEND INTO DARKNESS

‘ARE YOU QUITE COMFORTABLE THERE, Professor?’ asked Anna, leaning against the pulley ropes.

Arnustace’s voice emanated, muffled, from within the diving helmet. ‘Kindly refrain from grasping that suspension cable, Doctor Ross. It is currently the only thing preventing me from falling a hundred feet into the North Sea.’

‘Oh. So sorry.’

A small rig had been set up on the edge of the cliff. The derrick creaked on its stanchions as Anna stepped away from the steel cables. Arnustace hung, quite ungainly, from the straps under his armpits. His booted feet dangled out over the ocean. He was entirely enclosed in a brass diving bell.

Unbeknownst to those who prepared to lower him over the cliff and into the water, Arnustace was also carrying a passenger inside his sealed suit. The box of electronic magickry had been wedged to the inside of the helmet, and the wire connecting it to the Professor’s invention lodged on the head of Verne trailed down past his shoulder. The cat sat curled in the crook of Arnustace’s elbow, holding on with his pin-prick claws.

‘Might you be alright, Verne?’ the Professor asked softly.

ME OK

‘You don’t need to think about what the good Doctor said about cats and water. You, my friend, remain fearless. Do you not?’

I’M IN UR SUIT...

‘Yes?’

...NOT AFRAYED OV WATR.

‘Nor should you be, my friend. We will descend, then we will assess the situation a few hundred feet below the waves – no problem at all. And then we shall return triumphant with the solution to this enigma.’

HNGRY. FUD PLZ.

‘You shall have to wait, Verne. We’re about to go down.’

LADEE CUM 2?

‘I believe they are loading her into another diving bell as we speak. The three of us shall go down together and you, Verne, shall be the first example of a true cat-fish.’

NOT RLY FUNEE.

The Professor harrumphed. ‘I must try harder, then.’

Confident that the derrick and winch were safe, Anna was then herself made cumbersome in a complete brass suit of her own. Arnustace could just about see her through the thick curved window of his helmet, being lowered down beside him. He couldn’t help but chuckle as her arms and legs windmilled as she tried to keep herself steady on the cable.

‘That woman,’ he said softly to Verne, ‘will never, ever treat you. For any ailment, minor or otherwise.’

THNK U. M GRATEFULL.

‘I know, Verne, I know.’

SCAREDED?

‘Of course not. Well ... Perhaps a little, Verne. Perhaps a little.’

There was no way for the Police Chief and his men to communicate with the two submariners other than with visual signs. Arnustace felt his stomach turn. Verne tightened around his bicep like a stoat.

NOT FERELESS NOMORE! SCARDED SCARDED SCARDED

‘Be brave, young Verne,’ whispered Arnustace. ‘We descend into darkness, but are enlightened with the blessing of rational minds. There is nothing to fear. There is nothing to fear...’

The diving bell jerked on its cable. The Professor spun around and around on it, seeing first bare cliff, then the sky and open ocean, then cliff again.

The cable jerked.

They plummeted a hundred feet and hit the waves with a jolt hard enough to wake the dead.

~

A FEW MOMENTS LATER it became clear that they were still attached to the guide cable, and that Anna Ross was descending alongside them.

‘Thank the Lord for that.’

He was pleased, but still he kept wishing he could see the tube that connected to the helmet, supplying his oxygen. But he would have to remove his eyes from their sockets to see it: it was above his head. He just had to be satisfied to know that it was still there.

They were lowered, inch by inch, under the surface of the Sea. He knew that the ocean floor was quite far down, immediately next to the cliff, curving up only a little later to meet the shore on the other side. Here the whales would have swum past without problem. It would take the Professor a while longer to discover the source of the pod’s disturbance, however.

To ease his nerves a little, he said, ‘Shall we test the ECRT, Verne?’

NO!

‘Oh, don’t panic. It’s perfectly safe.’

NO PLZ.

‘I’m testing it anyway.’ He flexed his hand, where inside the glove he held a small device. He spoke into a tiny microphone transceiver near his mouth. ‘Anna Ross.’

There was a faint crackling sound, like static electricity on the end of a malfunctioning telephone. Then there was a startled yelp, and some very crackly words transmitted from Anna’s helmet through several metres of water.

‘What on Earth...!?’

‘Do not fear, Doctor.’

‘Is this ... God?’

‘Much better. It is I, Professor Arnustace. I am communicating to you through my ECRT.’

‘Professor? Good Lord!’

‘It is a type of radio, Doctor Ross. An Electric Current Radio Transceiver. It transmits radio waves through the conductive materials of the suit, through the water on ionically-propelled electrons, and into the metal of your own suit, where I have secreted a small receiver-transceiver for your own use. At least, I *think* that’s how it works. I can’t say I can remember clearly the day I invented it, but I’m confident now that it operates correctly.’

‘I must admit to being quite surprised it works at all, Professor!’

‘Feel lucky. Had it not functioned correctly, I may well have electrocuted all three of us.’

'Three?'

'I have Verne with me.'

'And he isn't petrified? The poor thing!'

'No, he is quite alright.'

U LYER, came Verne's response on the array of tiny bulbs in Arnustace's helmet.

'Since you are my captive audience, Professor,' said Anna via the ECRT, *"perhaps you might answer me one question?"*

'And what might that be?'

'I noticed the pendant around your neck. It appeared to be made of tiny gears and mechanical pieces. May I ask what it is? It is quite unusual.'

'It is not,' said the Professor, *'a topic for discussion. My sincere apologies.'*

'Hmph.'

Then:

'Professor, how far beneath the surface do you estimate we are now?' asked Anna.

'Perhaps five hundred feet now, Doctor. And descending still.'

'...And do you see that strange light emanating from the seabed below us?'

The Professor leaned forward in the sinking diving bell, and nearly broke his nose against the helmet's window straining to get a clearer look. *'Great Scott! I've never seen anything like it!'*

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PART FOUR:
IN WHICH A MYSTERY IS ALMOST SOLVED

THEY HAD, IT APPEARED, DESCENDED into an unknown kingdom beneath the waves. Where there should only by dark and murky water there was an array of brightly coloured lights, at first appearing in pink and purple spots, then a complex pattern of multicoloured lines and curlicues.

‘What are we seeing, Professor?’ asked Anna. *‘It almost looks like the display of deep sea creatures. They’re capable of producing vivid colours like these...’*

‘You may be on to something, my dear,’ Arnustace muttered.

CANT SEE.

‘It’s beautiful, Verne. If only you could climb out and swim.’

HATE WATR ALREDDE. HNGRY.

‘I’ll feed you when we get back to the surface.’

Still they were descending. The lights got closer. A certain pressure was building inside Arnustace’s suit. His breath was fogging up the glass, which was quite alarming.

‘Doctor Ross...?’

‘It’s no wonder the whales were so startled, Professor! If you introduce something unexpected into an animal’s usual environment, the animal will either attack it or quickly move on. It must be entirely possible that whatever is causing these lights managed to startle our poor orca friends.’

‘Doctor, I must interrupt you, there. Is your suit’s visor collecting water vapour?’

‘Uhh ... Yes. Why?’

‘Because that isn’t normal. We may have to go back.’

‘But we’re almost there!’

‘I’m also concerned about what lies below us. We mustn’t turn tail in the face of adversity, my dear, but I fear we may be descending into the depths of hell itself.’

‘Don’t be so dramatic!’

‘I have learned to trust my feelings, Doctor. Besides, I forgot to feed the cat.’

‘Kitty can wait. I’m going down, even if you are chicken, sir.’

‘Chicken? I never!’

It imminently became apparent what the source of the otherworldly illumination was: the two diving bells slowly sank through a cloud of tiny animals, glutinous and adorned with numerous strands of translucent flesh – each one exuding a faint glow of blue or pink or green.

‘The tiniest jellyfish I’ve ever seen!’ said Anna, excitedly.

‘These aren’t jellyfish, Doctor. My first observation is that these animals have faces, and jellyfish do not. My second observation is that these strand-like stingers are in fact legs, due to the fact that they appear to have joints. My third observation is that jellyfish have only extremely rudimentary sensory apparatus – if at all – and these creatures are beginning to swarm in our direction...!’

These last few words came out as a faint squeak, making the Professor feel faintly ridiculous. But he did not care. He was beginning to feel the crushing grip of claustrophobia and, yes, terror. These were not animals of God's Earth. They were something else.

'Below us...' said Anna quietly. She too had a sense of the petrified about her voice.

More lights. But these harder, clearer ... and larger.

'God, save my soul!'

'Stay calm, Doctor Ross.'

'It's gargantuan! The size of a manor house!'

'For God's sake, stay calm, woman!'

SCAREDED! said Verne. O NO!

Arnustace found his movement impeded within the suit. Initially this was Verne, scared senseless, scrambling from his seat in the Professor's elbow down to the boot of the diving bell. Then it became clear that the swarming, jellyfish-like creatures were now so thick in the water around them that they were clogging up the suits' joints.

'There's a smell!' called Anna. *'Saline ... but burning – like acid!'*

Arnustace didn't ask the woman to be calm this time. He had detected the odour also, and he didn't like it. The horrible flashing animals seemed to be exuding a caustic substance of some kind – something that could erode the rubber seals around the joints of the suits.

They were buffeted on underwater currents. The Professor was spinning – Anna was screaming through the ECRT; Verne dug in tightly with his claws, projecting O NO O NO O NO – and the bell turned to just the right angle to see the massive shape propelling itself through the water towards them, a surface as vast and smooth as the surface of the moon, but projecting a tremendous light to rival that of angels in Heaven, or the fires of Hades.

It came right at them, and there was nothing but blinding pinkish-blue light, and a terrific collision. The Professor banged his skull against the back of the bell's helmet as he was bashed aside by the enormous creature. Then he seemed to be rolling, rolling down a long domed slope, end over end, and then—

A forest of tendrils followed the domed creature's body. An awe-inspiring collection of long, cartilaginous limbs, maybe a thousand in total. They seemed too spindly to ever support any creature made for moving about on land. They too glowed brightly, and rippled past the tumbling Professor like streamers or bolts of lightning.

Then there was murky brownness, and – if he angled himself just right – an ascending ball of light, racing like a comet to the surface of the ocean above.

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AFTERWORD

IT BECAME KNOWN TO ME, through my interviews with the Chief's men, that from the clifftop the events described herein seemed to occur all at once, mere minutes upon lowering the two supposed experts into the water.

From above they first noticed a faint phosphorescence in the choppy water, but dismissed it as a trick of reflected sunlight. But the clouds had drawn in suddenly, and it was evident that the light was coming from below the surface. It was growing rapidly, first as big as a sailing boat, then bigger than the Chief of Police's own house. This was a silent development, until—

An eruption of water so big that the spray reached the constabulary and engineers stationed on the cliff, a full one hundred feet above the surface of the ocean. It was reported in several newspapers that a massive ball of light had exploded out of the North Sea that afternoon, not quite spherical and looking somewhat like an enormous crab, or jellyfish; with freakish limbs fluttering out behind it.

Frightfully bright, it did not breach and then dive back down into the water, as a dolphin or jumping fish will. It simply kept going, at terrific speed. A cloud of tiny lights spluttered after it like the tail of a comet. Up and up the celestial gathering went, up into the gathering storm, where the clouds appeared filled with lightning; and was then gone.

Of the unique Professor Arnustace and the good Doctor Anna Ross, I was told this: that they emerged a short time later a little shaken, but otherwise unharmed. Nobody I interviewed referred to the Professor's cat, Verne, and I am inclined to believe this curious character an invention of my young storyteller, who as I have said, was a beggarly sort, and who happened to be on the cliff that day.

However, I confess that the whole incident is somewhat bizarre, and although nothing was referred to in any publication since, I must conclude that at the very least it is all over with now. I shall never know for sure, because I was told upon my arrival in Whitby last week that Professor Arnustace had skipped out on his usual debriefing with the Chief of Police and has not been seen since, forgoing also his regular attendances at the hospital where he is treated for mild delusionary insanity and a number of other psychological quirks, about which I am not qualified to comment.

I am pleased to report however that Doctor Ross remains well, and informs me of a few certain facts she considers pertinent to the story:

First, that although the enormous creature was never seen from again, local townspeople still report occasional bursts of pinkish-purple light shining iridescently from far below the cliffs;

Second, that storms about the region of Whitby have become disturbingly frequent;

And third but by no means least, that in the last four weeks there have been no less than six publicised cases of whales washing up on English beaches, in large numbers, with no explanation forthcoming.

As I can here only describe what I have been told, I must regrettably leave the good reader to draw his own conclusions from these scattered facts and stories. Good luck to all, and long live the King.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

David Brookes is a writer and editor currently living in the UK, from where he runs his editing firm [The St. Paul's Literary Service](#).

He has stories published in many magazines including Electric Spec, Pantechicon, Bewildering Stories, Whispering Spirits, Morpheus Tales, The Cynic and Aphelion.

His fiction has appeared in printed anthologies, most recently 'Skull & Crossbones' from Bedazzled Inc.

His first novel, 'Half Discovered Wings', was published internationally by Libros International in 2009.

Read more about his work at his website, [mrbrookesabroad.wordpress.com](http://mrbrookesabroad.wordpress.com), or [send an e-mail](#) to sign up for updates and offers.