

“Sit down. Your generosity is becoming overwhelming as it gets closer to ten o'clock. You're staying with me, Karswell. You've sold your bill of goods too well, because I believe you now. I believe that in five minutes something monstrous and horrible is going to happen. And when it does, you're going to be here so that whatever happens to me will happen to you.”

- Dr. John Holden (Dana Andrews) in *Night of the Demon*, directed by Jacques Tourneur, 1957.

“In the north of England, the superstition lingers to an almost inconceivable extent. Lancashire abounds with witch-doctors, a set of quacks, who pretend to cure diseases inflicted by the devil. The practices of these worthies may be judged of by the following case, reported in the "Hertford Reformer," of the 23rd of June, 1838. The witch-doctor alluded to is better known by the name of the cunning man, and has a large practice in the counties of Lincoln and Nottingham. According to the writer in "The Reformer," the dupe, whose name is not mentioned, had been for about two years afflicted with a painful abscess and had been prescribed for without relief by more than one medical gentleman. He was urged by some of his friends, not only in his own village but in neighbouring ones, to consult the witch-doctor, as they were convinced he was under some evil influence. He agreed and sent his wife to the cunning man, who lived in New Saint Swithin's, in Lincoln. She was informed by this ignorant impostor that her husband's disorder was an infliction of the devil, occasioned by his next-door neighbours, who had made use of certain charms for that purpose. From the description he gave of the process, it appears to be the same as that employed by Dr. Fian and Gellie Duncan, to work woe upon King James. He stated that the neighbours, instigated by a witch, whom he pointed out, took some wax, and moulded it before the fire into the form of her husband, as near as they could represent him; they then pierced the image with pins on all sides – repeated the Lord's Prayer backwards, and offered prayers to the devil that he would fix his stings into the person whom that figure represented, in like manner as they pierced it with pins. To counteract the effects of this diabolical process, the witch-doctor prescribed a certain medicine, and a charm to be worn next to the body, on that part where the disease principally lay. The patient was to repeat the 109th and 119th Psalms every day, or the cure would not be effectual. The fee which he claimed for this advice was a guinea.”

- Charles Mackay, *Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds*, 1841.

“Some of you have done NOTHING with your life and you’re mad. You have a college degree & a smart phone with access to virtually *anything* and you can barely get out of bed in the morning while you spit on people who built a whole world with nothing but a horse, map, & axe.”

- Tweet by Lu (@luinalaska), 14th June 2000.

“Another 3,000 Coronavirus cases today. The Government must now admit it has got this wrong. Its rush to pretend everything is normal again is harming public health and the economy. It must change track and go for 'zero Covid'. Otherwise it's going to risk a deadly second wave.”

- World class tweet from Labour MP Richard Burgon (@RichardBurgon), 7th September 2020, who has clearly never heard of the common cold.

M.R. James' *Casting the Runes* also casts a long shadow. A short story written by one of the finest practitioners of the ghost story in English, it deals with a scientist (named Dunning in the original), investigating an occultist, Julian Karswell. Karswell's book, *The Truth of Alchemy*, has been scathingly reviewed by one of Dunning's colleagues, who dies in mysterious circumstances shortly afterwards. The scientist begins to suspect that Karswell's powers might be real, and that he himself has become the victim of a curse. Once the victim is unwittingly passed some runic symbols by Karswell in person, it would appear that his days are numbered.. In addition to Tourneur's (quite brilliant) 1957 film, *Casting the Runes* would also go on to be adapted several times for television and radio, and more recently it has inspired or influenced films including the Japanese (and US) horror franchise *Ring* and the 2014 horror film *It Follows*. It draws its fundamental strength from a slow and uncanny sense of psychological disintegration: *is the world going mad, or is it just me ?*

There is certainly no shortage of crazy out there. After a global pandemic of still uncertain virulence and indeterminate origin, 2020's four horsemen of the apocalypse (Big Government; the police; the mainstream media; social media) have conspired to try and turn everybody mad. Big Government, in the cause of “following the science” has been busily introducing capricious and arbitrary diktats, and the police have been only too keen to vigorously enforce them. Most of the mainstream media have been only too happy to ghoulishly amplify the perceived threat (an Order of the Yellow Mattress is hereby awarded *en passant* to the Covid bedwetters at the BBC), while social media has been only too happy to reignite a culture war à la Brexit and Trump, where assorted mask-holes and Karens can duke it out online with anti-vaxxers and the few libertarians still staggering across the battlefield. The fifth horseman, in the form of the central banks, has ensured that whatever happens to the economy, the financial markets will end up drowning in liquidity whether they want to or not. So the likes of the FAANGs stocks are on the verge of exploding, while the rest of the economy, along with some of the world's major cities, burns.

Perhaps a future iteration of government will feature politicians who aren't as thick as pigs**. Well, a man can dream. Ignorance of any real science is sort of excusable on the part of the Cabinet, but ignorance of even the most basic economics is unforgivable, given their propensity to spend money that doesn't belong to them. On this point, as the late David Graeber [pointed out](#),

There are plenty of magic money trees in Britain, as there are in any developed economy. They are called "banks." Since modern money is simply credit, banks can and do create money literally out of nothing, simply by making loans. Almost all of the money circulating in Britain at the moment is bank-created in this way. Not only is the public largely unaware of this, but a recent survey by the British research group Positive Money discovered that an astounding 85 percent of members of Parliament had no idea where money really came from (most appeared to be under the impression that it was produced by the Royal Mint).

At least the government's 'Nudge Unit' (the Behavioural Insights Team) has had a good war. A little too good, in fact, given that it has managed to nudge the economy off a cliff. (In a turn of events too ironic to be invented, it has now been privatised.) But not before honing the government's Covid propaganda message to an efficiency of which Adolf Hitler would have been proud. Tim Wu in *The Attention Merchants*:

Hitler also intuited a few other basic truths about how we process information: since everything can be ignored, imprinting information in the memory requires a constant repetition of simple ideas. "The great masses' receptive ability is only very limited, their understanding is small, but their forgetfulness is great. As a consequence of these facts, all effective propaganda has to limit itself only to a very few points and to use them like slogans until even the very last man is able to imagine what is intended by such a word."

Remind you of anything ?



In *Night of the Demon*, Dr. John Holden starts out steadfast in his commitment to science:

Joanna, let me tell you something about myself. When I was a kid, I used to walk down the street with the other kids and when we came to a ladder they'd all walk around it. I'd walk under it, just to see if anything would happen. Nothing ever did. When they'd see a black cat they'd run the other way to keep it from crossing their path. But I didn't. And all this ever did for me is make me wonder why, why people get so panicky about absolutely nothing at all. I've made a career studying it. Maybe just to prove one thing. That I'm not a superstitious sucker like ninety per cent of humanity.

His experiences leave him to end up being more circumspect. Perhaps the last word should go to Julian Karswell himself:

Some things are more easily started than stopped.

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