

Andrew Paris mystery:

Karen Yu answers your questions

Having spent years as a journalist reporting stories, it's a little unnerving to find myself in one. Especially when, as is the case with the mysterious events surrounding Andrew Paris, that story becomes something of a national talking point. Never has our magazine been inundated with so much post, and my editor has been kind enough to fax me the many, many questions and comments *Witness* has received from intrigued readers and arm-chair detectives (the letters published in this week's Postbag are but a small sampling).

The Problem of the Panelled Room seems to have particularly excited the interest of locked room mystery aficionados. Not familiar with the genre myself, I confess that some of the enquiries from these quarters have perplexed me. Would it really help matters if Andrew Paris was revealed to have an identical twin squirreled away somewhere like Bertha Mason? Or if Jared Gardner had secretly made a living as an acrobat before working in sales? I hope my fellow White Gate guests won't be offended when I say there's nothing too fantastical about any of us. Dr Woolham may be taller than average (and some of us are, ahem, shorter than average); Lisa is certainly bendier than average. But on the whole there's nothing so unusual as to arouse suspicion. All of us have our own legs.

Speaking of fantasy, let's turn to some of the proposed solutions that have been sent in to *Witness*. As exercises in lateral thinking many of them are things of arabesque beauty. There are solutions involving magnets and lasers, fishing lines and tripwires, secret panels and secret agents and countless other ingenious machi-

nations.

Let me say first off that it has cheered me up considerably these past few days to know that *Witness* has such a creative and imaginative readership.

Pragmatic? Not so much.

As George Perry astutely points out in his letter, all these theories are lacking a key element: why?

Where's the motive for Andrew Paris to shoot himself remotely with a tripwire, or hire a double to lie in a hospital bed for weeks with a bullet wound? It could be, as Roy Planer suggests, that Andrew deliberately set up an impossible scenario simply to play a diabolical trick on all of us. I can't rule that out, but, having met him twice, I'm not convinced he's the type of guy who would shoot himself (or someone else) for the sake of a good laugh.

By the way, if anyone was expecting me to unveil my own solution at this point, I'm afraid I'm going to disappoint you. Despite being there that night, I'm still at a loss to explain how those events took place. What I can do, however, is go over what we *do*

know. First of all, the study. Despite Graham Marston's optimism, I can confirm that there are no concealed entrances of any kind in the walls of the panelled room. Behind that oak panelling is a foot or so of solid brick, and I defy Houdini himself to slip through them without the help of a pneumatic drill. A few readers have suggested that the culprit must have instead escaped through the floor or ceiling. Alas, there's no cellar below the study into which our shooter could have slipped, and Lisa and Jared Gardner, sleeping in the room directly above, reported no phantom gunmen rising up through the floorboards that night. The fireplace?



Does the Hungry Corpse have evil powers? Probably not.

It's a good thought, but the flue is far too small for even the most boneless contortionist to wriggle through. At the risk of sounding repetitive, the only way in or out of that room is through the door or windows, all of which – as everyone has heard a thousand times by now – were locked from the inside on Saturday 1st June. That room was a sealed box.

One thing this experience has taught me is the incredible speed at which baseless rumours spread and multiply. Having the entirely unwanted privilege of having been at the scene of the crime, I am at least able to dispel a few of these elaborations. First, Andrew Paris wasn't wearing the Hungry Corpse mask when we found him. Nor were the mask's eyes glowing with unnatural brightness, as I overheard one person on the Northern Line insist yesterday. Second, no one heard a guttural scream coming from the panelled room in the minutes before Andrew was shot. Indeed, the thing that surprises me – given the chaotic state of the study – is that none of us heard any noise in that room until the shots were fired. Who messes up a room quietly? Third, Andrew's final utterance before falling unconscious wasn't 'beware the mask,' or 'destroy that mask,' or anything mask-related. It was, quite simply: 'The pain. The pain.' I can't help feeling he'll be disappointed with the banality of those words when he comes to.

Quite a few rumours have focussed on the apparent similarities between the attack on Andrew and his brother John's suicide almost eighteen years earlier. Now, I'm the first to admit that I find the two events curious, not to say suspicious – two unexpected shootings in the same room? – but years of journalism has cautioned me against connecting two dots without the necessary evidence, no matter how compelling a picture it makes. Yes, both John and Andrew were in the panelled room at night. Yes, the doors and windows were locked and latched from within. And yes,

both were shot. But there the similarities end. John's shot was fatal; Andrew will almost certainly pull through. John was found sitting at his desk, the gun in his hand; Andrew was found lying on the floor with the gun beside him. Perhaps most striking, however, was the state of the room itself. In 1973 the study was, with the grim exception of a corpse, in perfect order; last Saturday, on the other hand, it looked like it had been ransacked by the Stasi. What can we conclude from this? I haven't the faintest idea, except to be wary of those insisting that both men must have succumbed to the same fate. In fact, when viewed like this it's difficult to think how both events could possibly have had the same cause or culprit, whether natural or supernatural.

Lastly, there have also been a few letters accusing me of making the whole thing up for the sake of a good story. To these people I can only say that a good story – at least in the eyes of a reporter – must answer the who, what, when, where, why and how; the events at White Gate can't even tell us who did what and how or why they did it. That isn't my idea of a good story.

However, it's not a story I have to trouble myself with it any longer. With the police now investigating the incident as a possible assault, it is with little to no regret that I announce my retirement from the world of amateur sleuthing. My lifelong inability to solve cryptic crosswords should have warned me that I lack the wiring for the sort of lateral deduction required to crack a case like this, and I'm pretty sure I'll sustain permanent damage if I continue to bang my head against a brick wall for much longer. I'll continue to report on the case as and when developments occur, but from now on I graciously leave the sleuthing to Thames Valley Police. And, of course, to you, the armchair detective. Good luck. ■

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