

Brian Moriarty | Lectures & Presentations | Who Buried Paul?

Who Buried Paul? (1999)

Who Buried Paul? was first presented at the San Jose Convention Center on St. Patrick's Day 1999, as a featured lecture of the [Game Developers Conference](#).

I highly recommend watching the video of that presentation, as it nicely captures the drama and silliness of the topic. It can be downloaded from this link:

- [Who Buried Paul?](#) (177 MB .mov)

Total running time is about an hour.

The lecture was repeated by invitation a few weeks later at the corporate campus of [Microsoft](#) in Redmond, Washington.

I have attempted to provide a fully illustrated transcript below, with key audio content presented as .mp3 clips. Please allow time for all of the images to load into your browser.

The transcript silently corrects a couple of factual errors (mostly dates) that slipped into the original lecture.

Tiresome disclaimers

The opinions expressed in the interviews included in *Who Buried Paul?* are those of the participants.

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Prologue

How many people here are under the age of 35?

I was twelve years old when the events I am about to describe to you took place.

I'll be rattling off dates and places, and naming names.

In a few minutes, you'll see and hear everything you need to become a minor expert on this strange little episode in the history of mass communication.

But there is something else I want to communicate as well.

Something you can only learn from an eyewitness.

I want you to know what it felt like to be almost a teenager in late October of 1969.

I want you to know how it felt to be talking about this on the school bus, and in the cafeteria of my junior high.

Huddling with friends at night around our record players, poring over our album covers, wondering.

Staying up late with our parents to see what they would say on the 11 o'clock news.

One of our heroes was missing.

Some people were saying he was dead.

The world's most beloved band, ambassadors of truth and love in an age of endless war and assassinations, had been caught in a monstrous lie.

And their records, so full of joy and playfulness, had become the ever-present messengers of a creepy conspiracy.

It was Halloween, and we were *really scared*.

You may be wondering why anyone would make such a fuss over a bass player in a rock band.

Those of you who did *not* raise your hands a minute ago probably know the reason already.

For the rest of you, it isn't easy to explain.

You see, this wasn't just *any* bass player.

And this was no ordinary band.

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The Rumor

Nobody knows where or when the rumor began.

The earliest printed record of a Paul-is-dead story appears in the February 1967 issue of *Beatles Book Monthly*, the magazine of the official Beatles Fan Club.

It contains a one-paragraph article entitled "False Rumour."

"The seventh of January was very icy, with dangerous conditions on the M1 motorway linking London with the midlands, and towards the end of the day, a rumor swept London that Paul McCartney had been killed in a car crash on the M1. But of course, there was absolutely no truth in it at all, as the Beatles' press officer found out when he telephoned Paul's St. Johns Wood home, and was answered by Paul himself ... "

Speculation that Paul had been killed circulated around London during much of 1967.

McCartney himself alluded to the rumor during a Beatles

press conference held in May of that year.

And a subsequent article in the *New York Times* recounts an incident at a London party in fall of '67, at which the Paul-is-dead rumor was joked about in the presence of the reporter.

At this point the trail of documentation goes completely cold.

Then, two years later, the rumor surfaced again, this time in Des Moines, Iowa.

On Wednesday, September 17, 1969, the student newspaper at Drake University published an article by sophomore Tim Harper entitled "Is Beatle Paul McCartney Dead?"

Less than a week later, on the 23rd, the student paper at Northern Illinois University plagiarized Harper's article.

Then the rumor spread to Ohio Wesleyan University, where it came to the attention of an art student named John Summer.

John Summer

John became so intrigued, that he compiled a dossier of evidence substantiating Paul's death and offered it to United Press International.

They agreed to carry the story. But no one paid any attention ... at first.

For two more weeks, the rumor gained momentum on the college campuses of middle America.

Then, on the afternoon of October 12, the meme attained critical mass.

At this point I'm going to allow the actual participants to tell you their own story.

But before I do, I need to explain the source of the audio you are about to hear.

During the climax of the Paul-is-dead media frenzy, RKO produced a one-hour television special called *Paul McCartney: The Complete Story, Told For the First And Last Time*.

TV Guide listing for New York City

This program was videotaped on a set resembling a courtroom, in which various "witnesses" involved with the rumor were formally questioned by an attorney.

F. Lee Bailey

The attorney was none other than celebrity lawyer F. Lee Bailey, shown here holding a picture of his most infamous

client, Albert DeSalvo, also known as the Boston Strangler.

Bailey would later gain even more notoriety as a member of O.J. Simpson's "dream team."

RKO's Paul-is-dead TV special was syndicated on Thanksgiving weekend of 1969.

After the broadcast, all videotapes of the program appear to have vanished without a trace.

Fortunately, the soundtrack was preserved for posterity by an anonymous Beatle fan who taped it off his television set.

Bailey's first witness was this man ...

Russ Gibb, WKNR-FM

... the disc jockey whose call-in talk show introduced the Paul-is-dead rumor to the airwaves.

- [Bailey examines Gibb](#) (mp3)

Q. Would you tell us your name, please, sir?

A. Russ Gibb.

Q. And where do you live, Mr. Gibbs [sic]?

A. Detroit, Michigan.

Q. And what is your occupation?

A. I'm a disk jockey on an underground radio station called WKNR-FM.

Q. Calling your attention to the 12th day of this year, 1969, Mr. Gibbs [sic], in the afternoon, were you on duty and on the air?

A. Yes, sir.

Q. And did you receive a phone call from a listener about Paul McCartney, the Beatles' singer?

A. Yes, sir. I did.

Q. I call your attention now to this reel of tape before me on the recorder, and ask you if you can identify it.

A. It looks like the tape that was taken off our log. We have to log all programming.

Q. Does it reproduce the conversation about McCartney?

A. Yes, sir.

[Bailey plays the tape.]

Russ: Yeah. Hello, Tom. What doing down?

Tom: Uh, well, I go to school at ...

Russ: Have you got your radio on?

Tom: Er, yeah. Somebody ...

Russ: Yeah, yeah. Turn it down, man, 'cause you're giving me feedback.

Tom: Um, I was gonna rap with your about McCartney being dead. What is this all about?

Fred LaBour

Twenty miles away, a sophomore at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor happened to be listening to Russ Gibb's talk show that afternoon.

- [Bailey meets LaBour](#) (mp3)

[From the TV special]

Q. May we have your name, sir?

A. My name's Fred LaBour.

Q. And where do you live?

A. Ann Arbor, Michigan.

Q. And what is your occupation, please?

A. I'm a student at the University.

Fred LaBour was scheduled to write a record review for the next issue of the University's student newspaper.

Instead, inspired by what he had just heard on the radio, he sat down at his typewriter and spent ninety minutes composing a masterpiece of *engineered mythology*.

Article from The Michigan Daily, 14 Oct 1969

- [Bailey examines LaBour](#) (mp3)

[From the TV special]

Q. Are you the same Fred LaBour who published, on October 14th, 1969, an article in the *Michigan Daily*, a newspaper published by the University, which begins as follows: "Paul McCartney was killed in an automobile accident in November, 1966 after leaving EMI recording studios tired, sad and dejected?"

A. Right. I wrote that story.

Q. Do you know for a fact that that's true?

A. No, I don't.

Q. Then why did you publish it?

A. Well, I was supposed to ... They asked me to review *Abbey Road*, which was the current Beatle album. So I decided I didn't wanna just, um, write a review about, you know, this is, Paul does this song and George does this song, etc, etc, like all reviews go. So I decided to make it

work symbolically, on a religious level.

Fred's article presented for the first time what was to become the definitive legend of Paul McCartney's death.

According to Fred, Paul had been decapitated in a car accident early in November 1966.

The Beatles, conspiring to conceal his death, held a look-alike contest and hired the winner, a Scotsman named William Campbell, to replace him.

The newspaper containing Fred's article appeared on the Ann Arbor campus early Tuesday morning.

By noon, every copy was gone. Two more press runs followed. The entire campus ground to a halt.

As the week progressed, Fred's story spread rapidly eastward, leaping from campus to campus, dormitory by dormitory.

Alex Bennett

And on Saturday night, a student named Lewis Yager at Hofstra University called Alex Bennett's popular talk show on WMCA and informed the City of New York that Paul McCartney was dead.

At first, the mainstream news organizations were reluctant to mention the rumor without more evidence.

A disc jockey on WABC in New York was fired for talking about it on the air.

And the publicity department at Apple Records was flooded with phone calls inquiring about Paul.

And where *was* Paul while all this was happening?

The missing Beatle

On vacation with his family, on a farm in a remote corner of Scotland.

When the Beatles' chief publicist, Derek Taylor, called him to beg him for a public appearance, or at least a statement to quell the rumor, Paul, who, you will recall, had been through this before two years earlier, instructed Mr. Taylor to ignore the press and *leave him alone*.

So the media, having no way to verify or dispel the rumor, had no choice but to acquiesce to the public demand for information and began, skeptically, to cover the story.

Within days, the Paul-is-dead rumor became an international sensation.

Articles appeared in every leading newspaper, including *The New York Times*, the *Times* of London, the *Chicago Sun-Times*, the *Los Angeles Times*, *Billboard*, *Variety* and the *Washington Post*.

Time magazine devoted a feature essay to the subject.

An instant cottage industry sprang up to support the hysteria.

Special Paul-is-dead magazines appeared on newsstands, and were snapped up by the hundreds of thousands.

- "[The Ballad of Paul](#)" by The Mystery Tour (1.8 MB .mp3)

At least *four* different Paul-is-dead novelty songs were rushed into production, with titles like "Brother Paul," "The Ballad of Paul," "We're All Paul-Bearers" ...

... and a number called "So Long, Paul," recorded under the pseudonym Werbley Finster by none other than Jose Feliciano.

Polydor records exploited the scandal by reissuing one of their early Beatle collections with a provocative new cover.

And, not surprisingly, sales of the Beatles own records and licensed merchandise, especially their new *Abbey Road* album, went through the roof, with frantic dealers selling the back catalog directly out of the shipping cartons.

Now, celebrity death rumors were nothing new in 1969.

Bob Dylan had been the subject of a similar rumor just a few years earlier.

What was it about this rumor that made it so persistent?

Why were Beatle fans so *convinced* that something awful had happened to Paul?

The answer to that question is what makes this topic interesting to game designers.

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The Death Clues

Beatle fans believed that clues signifying the fact of Paul's death had been concealed on the album covers and in the songs released by the surviving Beatles.

This is a defining feature of the Paul-is-dead phenomenon.

Many lists of these so-called "death clues" have been compiled over the years.

Some of these lists contain hundreds of entries.

For the purposes of this lecture, I have concentrated on the classic suite of death clues, the ones most often cited by the press at the time of the scandal.

Clue hunters initially concentrated their attention on four albums:

Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band, released in June of '67;

the soundtrack for the Beatles' TV special, *Magical Mystery Tour*, released in December of '67;

the double so-called "White Album," released in November of '68;

and the soundtrack to the Beatles' animated feature film *Yellow Submarine*, released in January of '69.

The list of suspects quickly expanded to include *Abbey Road* ...

... released just as the scandal was erupting in late September of '69.

The tools we have for analyzing the images and sounds on these records were unimaginable in 1969.

Nevertheless, in one important respect, those dormitory detectives were better off than we are.

They didn't have to squint at four-inch booklets crammed

into skinny plastic cases.

We had *albums* then.

Although I am no fan of vinyl as an audio carrier, it is hard not to miss the days when records were a rich *visual* experience.

And no album in the history of popular music exemplifies this experience better than Exhibit A.

Exhibit A: *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*

This is not the time or place to reflect on the enormous impact this record made when it was released.

Suffice it to say that nobody had ever *heard*, or *seen*, anything like it.

Someday, perhaps even in our industry, something like this will happen again.

Every inch of *Sgt. Pepper's* front cover was crowded with allusive imagery.

Among the faces appearing in the background collage were past and present heroes of the '60s counterculture.

Aldous Huxley. Mae West. Edgar Allen Poe. Brando. Dylan. Jung. Einstein.

And there in the middle, impeccably costumed in the

regalia of a turn-of-the-century brass band, stood the Fab Four.

Now, this scene was probably intended to suggest a nostalgic village square or a quaint English garden.

But in late 1969, Beatle fans looked at this image, with its proliferation of flowers, its freshly turned pile of dirt, the four wax Beatles dressed in black, and Cassius Clay dressed as priest on the side, and saw something different.

They saw a *burial*.

A burial that seemed to insistently single out a particular member of Sgt. Pepper's Band.

A close look at the image shows one of the background figures, the British comedian Issy Bonn, raising his open palm directly over Paul's head.

This gesture, according to the clue hunters, is an Eastern symbol of the presence of evil.

They also noticed that Paul is the only Beatle holding a *black* musical instrument, a cor anglais.

The others are holding sparkling *gold* instruments.

Another curiosity was discovered in this group of

hyacinths in the lower half of the image.

They appear to be arranged in the shape of a guitar.

The three or four long sticks, resembling guitar strings, reinforce this impression.

But this guitar is a little bit unusual.

It's *left-handed*, like the ones played by Paul McCartney, the only left-handed Beatle.

Some investigators went even further.

They claimed that the guitar flowers had been laid out in such a way as to suggest the outlines of a *word*.

By squinting at it a bit, you can, without too much of a stretch, make out the characters P-A-U-L, question mark.

This is one of those things that's almost impossible to *stop* seeing once somebody points it out to you.

Creative cluehunters also found something odd about the bass drum in the middle of the scene.

They discovered that if you hold a mirror horizontally across the center of the drum, a mysterious message appears: I ONE I X HE DIE, the characters to the left of HE DIE being variously interpreted as three ones,

representing the three surviving Beatles, or a one and a one followed by the Roman numeral nine, combining to indicate November 9th, the day in 1966 on which Paul supposedly died.

Underneath the song lyrics, the first ever published on the outside of an album, is another photograph in which Paul again appears to be singled out in a rather unpromising manner.

- [LaBour on Sgt. Pepper's back cover](#) (mp3)

[From the TV special]

Q. You're examining now the rear of the album *Sgt. Pepper's*.

A. That's right. There are four Beatles on the back, and one's back is facing us. The others are facing us, face-on. One's back is turned. That's Paul.

The group shot on the inside of the gatefold album was less obviously alarming. But no detail was too small for Fred LaBour.

- [LaBour on Sgt. Pepper's gatefold](#) (mp3)

[From the TV special]

Q. I notice that on the photographs [sic] on the inside of

this album, all of the Beatles appear in some sort of costume. But a sleeve patch on the left arm of Paul McCartney, whom you say is left-handed, has the initials O.P.D. on it. Have you found any significance to those initials?

A. Yeah. In England, that supposed to be, that's supposed to mean, it's the equivalent of our D.O.A., "Dead On Arrival", and it means "Officially Pronounced Dead."

The songs on the *Sgt. Pepper* album also contains disturbing references to an untimely death.

One number in particular seems to allude to the car crash which supposedly took Paul's life.

- ["A Day in the Life" / LaBour on Mystery Tour](#) (mp3)

*He blew his mind out in a car
He didn't notice that the lights had changed
A crowd of people stood and stared
They'd seen his face before ...*

"A Day in the Life" (Lennon/McCartney)

Exhibit B: *Magical Mystery Tour*

[From the TV special]

Q. I hand you another album which has been published by

the Beatles, I think less than a year ago, called *Magical Mystery Tour*, and ask you if there is anything about it that you think backs up your position.

A. Yeah, there are a lot of clues. On the front cover, the four Beatles are dressed up in animal costumes with masks on, and it's said that the front Beatle is Paul, dressed as a walrus, in black, in a crucifixion pose, with his arms out like this. Now, there's a lot of speculation that the walrus is a symbol of death in Roman mythology, in Dutch mythology and Eskimoan mythology.

Above the costumed figures on the *Mystery Tour* cover is the word *Beatles* spelled out in a pattern of yellow stars of various sizes.

Clue hunters somehow determined that a *telephone number* had been concealed in this pattern, which could be revealed by connecting the larger stars.

Depending on which way you hold the album cover, whether you read forward or backward, and whether or not you use a mirror, it is possible, with a bit of imagination, to see several different phone numbers.

The most common candidates were 537-1438 ...

... and, reading backwards, 834-7132.

Unfortunate indeed were the customers assigned to these telephone numbers in the latter weeks of October 1969, especially those in London's area code.

Literally thousands of calls, at all hours of the day and night, were placed to these numbers by Beatle fans desperate for information about Paul.

London's *Guardian* ran a front-page article about one of the victims, who had to have his number changed after his phone rang continuously for a week with callers asking to speak to Sgt. Pepper, Billy Shears, or asking for directions to the Land of Submarines.

Most of these phone calls were collect.

Those of you who only know the *Magical Mystery Tour* album in its current compact disc incarnation are being viciously shortchanged.

The original LP edition included a 24-page color booklet with photographs taken from the TV special.

This booklet was a gold mine for Paul-is-dead clue hunters.

Beginning on the inside cover, we find a list of the songs

on the album, including the classic psychedelic anthem "I Am The Walrus," composed and sung by John Lennon.

However, underneath the title "I Am The Walrus" appears the parenthetical phrase "*No you're not!*" said *Little Nicola*.

The phrase appears again beneath a cartoon on page 3.

Turning to page 2, we find a picture of Paul McCartney sitting behind a desk.

In front of him is a rather curious sign that reads, "I Was".

Another shot from the same scene, on page 14, shows Paul from a slightly different angle.

It just so happens that there is a pointing *hand* in the recruiting poster just above his head.

A hand also appears over Paul's head in this cartoon from page 15 ...

... again, in this photo on page 18 ...

... and yet again in this photo on page 24.

I should note here that no other Beatle is ever shown with a hand over his head anywhere in *Magical Mystery Tour* or, for that matter, on any other Beatles album.

This 2-page spread shows the band performing the song "I Am The Walrus."

Clue hunters noticed that Paul isn't wearing any shoes.

This was supposed to be symbolic of the fact that corpses in England are buried that way.

Paul's shoes are visible off to the side, positioned directly above the page number, 13.

- [LaBour on the shoes](#) (mp3)

[From the TV special]

Q. Is there anything unusual about the shoes that you can see?

A. It appears as though they're red stained.

For many fans, however, the photograph on page 23 of the *Mystery Tour* booklet was the one that really convinced them that something funny was going on.

- [LaBour on the black flower](#) (mp3)

[From the TV special]

Q. Would you examine this photograph of the four Beatles dressed in white, each with a flower, and tell me if there's anything unusual which you found about it?

A. Yeah. Paul is wearing a black rose, and the other Beatles are wearing red roses.

Q. And what significance do you attach to that?

A. The black rose obviously symbolizes death.

The music on the *Magical Mystery Tour* album contains several additional clues.

One of the most famous occurs on side 2, track 2, described here by DJ Russ Gibb.

- [Russ Gibb on "Strawberry Fields Forever"](#) (mp3)

[From the TV special]

Q. What other examples, if any, did you find of curious doings on these albums and recordings?

A. Well, at that point, the switchboard at the station started to light up like crazy, and kids started to call in. But I still had this fellow on the air. And he said to get the *Magical Mystery Tour* album.

Q. Is this that album?

A. Yes, sir. It is.

Q. What, with reference to that album, did you do?

A. Well, I got out "Strawberry Fields", which is a cut on here. And right at the very end, he said, "Play it." And he said, "See if you can hear something in there." And so I played the album. And you hear very distinctly at the end, somebody saying "I buried Paul."

Another death reference was discovered in the song "I Am the Walrus."

During the fade-out at the end, voices can be heard performing the final lines of Act IV, Scene VI of Shakespeare's play *King Lear* ... the death of Oswald.

- [End of "I Am The Walrus"](#) (mp3)

OSWALD

... O, untimely death, death! [Dies]

EDGAR

*I know thee well: a serviceable villain;
As duteous to the vices of thy mistress
As badness would desire.*

GLOUCESTER

What, is he dead?

Sit you down, father; rest you ...

But what sounds like a much more specific reference to Paul can be heard by playing this section of "I Am The Walrus" *backwards*.

An eerie chorus of voices can be heard chanting something that sounds very much like "Paul is dead! Ha ha! Paul is dead! Ha ha!"

This death clue was actually demonstrated in prime time on ABC's *Evening News* by reporter Peter Jennings.

- ["I Am The Walrus" played backwards](#) (mp3)

Exhibit C: *The Beatles*

There weren't many places to hide *visual* clues on the featureless cover of the "White Album."

But the *music* contained plenty of fuel for the controversy.

One of the songs on side two contains yet another reference to a serious car accident.

Ringo Starr's first composition for the Beatles, "Don't Pass Me By," includes a lyric which immediately caught the attention of distraught Beatle fans.

- [Verse from "Don't Pass Me By"](#) (mp3)

*I'm sorry that I doubted you
I was so unfair
You were in a car crash
And you lost your hair*

"Don't Pass Me By" (Starkey)

Another oddity on side two is found in the John Lennon song "I'm So Tired."

A few seconds of obscure muttering can be heard between the end of this song and the beginning of the next song, "Blackbird."

- [End of "Blackbird"](#) (mp3)

This muttering doesn't seem to form any recognizable English sentence.

But clue hunters who played this groove *backwards* heard something considerably more distinct: the voice of John Lennon, intoning the words "Paul is a dead man. Miss him. Miss him. Miss him."

- [End of "Blackbird" played backwards](#) (mp3)

And on side four of the White Album, we come to the longest and strangest track ever included on a Beatle record.

"Revolution No. 9" is probably the only song in history that has been listened to backwards more often than forwards.

I'll let the composer himself describe it for you.

- [Lennon on "Revolution No. 9"](#) (mp3)

[Lennon] "I had a lot of loops, tape loops, which is just a circle of tape, if people don't understand it, that repeats itself over and over. Had about ten of them on different mono machines, all spinning at once, with pencils and things holding them."

For Paul-is-dead aficionados, "Revolution 9" was the mother lode.

An entire afternoon could be spent dissecting the clues they claimed to find buried inside this track.

But one tape loop in particular captured the imagination of the public and the press in 1969.

Today, it stands as the most famous example of backwards speech in the history of recorded sound.

- [Gibb on "Revolution No. 9"](#) (mp3)

[From the TV special]

Q. Mr. Gibbs [sic], as the result of the suggestion of your listener that Paul McCartney was dead, what, if anything, did you do?

A. Well, the youngster said, would you play one cut for me on the air, forward? And he said, take the album

Revolution, what we call the White Album. Play a cut called "Revolution No. 9," and play it forward.

[Voice on album] Number nine ... number nine ... number nine ...

A. He repeats it. And at that point the kid said, "Now play that backwards." And I played it backwards. And man, I freaked! I went crazy, because of the fact that it says, "Turn me on, dead man."

This final White Album clue was used by Paul-is-dead advocates to silence the skeptics.

It's from the John Lennon song "Glass Onion" on side one.

- [Verse from "Glass Onion"](#) (mp3)

*I told you 'bout the walrus and me, man
You know that we're as close as can be, man
Well here's another clue for you all
The walrus was Paul*

"Glass Onion" (Lennon/McCartney)

Exhibit D: *Yellow Submarine*

A few months after the appearance of the White Album, Apple records released the *Yellow Submarine* soundtrack.

Clue hunters didn't have to look very hard to notice the

continuation of an all-too-familiar method of singling out Paul.

And it happened *again* on this color photograph that was included in the *Yellow Submarine* press kit, and which was widely reproduced by the media.

Exhibit E: *Abbey Road*

As I mentioned, the Paul-is-dead rumor had already begun to circulate when the Beatles released *Abbey Road* in late September of 1969.

Fred LaBour appears to have personally invented many of the death clues traditionally attributed to this album.

- [LaBour on *Abbey Road*](#) (mp3)

[From the TV special]

Q. I hand you a copy of the album published by the Beatles called *Abbey Road*, and ask you to explain what it was there that made you suspect that Paul was, in fact, dead.

A. The four Beatles are crossing a street called Abbey Road. And they are leaving what appears to be a cemetery on the left-hand side of the album cover.

A. The first Beatle, John Lennon, is dressed in white, and

with long hair looks either like a doctor or a minister, or even a Christ-like figure or a God-like figure. The next man walking across the street is Ringo, who's dressed as an undertaker.

The next man is Paul, who's wearing an outdated suit. And he's barefoot, which is, would suggest a corpse. And George Harrison has, is wearing denim clothes, like he's the gravedigger.

Q. What significance, if any, do you attach to the parked Volkswagen with a registration plate on the back?

A. Well, the license plate says 28 IF, and if Paul McCartney were alive today, he would be in his 28th year of existence.

Q. In other words, he would be 27, looking toward his 28th birthday?

A. That's correct. That's correct.

Q. I ask you to reverse the album and tell me whether or not you find anything on the rear of the album that, to you, is suspicious or appears to be deliberate.

A. Well, there are three dots in the wall up near the top that appear, if drawn ... If a line was drawn between them,

it appears to make the number 3, so it would read "3 Beatles."

Q. Would you connect them up as you suggest?

A. [Drawing the lines with a marker] "3 Beatles."

Q. And you say that that was intended to be a message that there are now alive only three Beatles?

A. Oh, I don't know if it was intended to be that at all.

Q. But it's evidence that you find persuasive?

A. Yeah. It's a coincidence, in a series of hundreds of coincidences in the albums.

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The Climax

As the hysteria reached its peak in the last week of October, the editors of the world's most respected newsweekly decided to get to the bottom of it.

And so *Life* magazine sent a team of London correspondents and a crack photographer on an unannounced visit to the remote reaches of Scotland.

Hoping to avoid detection, the *Life* team hiked four and a half miles across cold moors and muddy fields until they approached the farmhouse of the missing Beatle.

Alerted by the barking of his sheepdog Martha, Paul ran out of his barn and starting screaming at the reporters for trespassing, threatening them with arrest and physical violence.

The photographer, Robert Graham, began taking pictures of Paul's temper tantrum, and got soaked with a bucket of water.

The *Life* team then retreated by running away down the road.

Sitting in his kitchen a few minutes later, Paul recognized the likely consequences of what he had just done.

He jumped into his Land Rover, caught up with the soggy reporters, and invited them in for a warm cup of tea.

After a bit of discussion, they cut a deal.

Paul agreed to give the *Life* correspondents a worldwide exclusive interview.

In return, Robert Graham agreed to give Paul the film in his camera.

Life Magazine, 7 Nov 1969

A few days later, the Paul-is-dead affair reached its climax when a remarkably lifelike Paul appeared with his family on the cover of *Life*, in one of the biggest-selling issues in

the magazine's history.

The accompanying article presented a cynical analysis of the death clues, along with a statement from Paul in which he summarily dismissed the clues and declared that the whole matter was "bloody stupid."

You might think that this authoritative appearance by McCartney would be enough to make the Paul-is-dead issue dry up and blow away.

It wasn't.

The *Life* article was indeed enough to convince most people that Paul was still alive.

But what about those death clues?

Who put all those creepy artifacts on the album covers and in the songs?

Why was that stuff in there?

Maybe it wasn't really in there at all.

Maybe we were just deluding ourselves.

Or maybe somebody was having a bit of fun, and making a bit of money, at our expense.

And so the focus of the controversy shifted from a

concern for Paul's well-being to a debate about the origin and significance of the clues, a debate that continues to this very day.

The fact is, we clue hunters were, *and are*, enjoying ourselves too much to allow the bothersome fact of Paul's healthy existence to discourage us.

Not even that spoilsport *Life* article was exempt from our tireless scrutiny.

Was it a coincidence that the final photograph in the *Life* article showed Paul with yet *another* hand over his head?

And what about this advertisement for the 1970 Ford Marquis on the inside of the front cover?

Observe, if you will, that when you hold the cover up to a light, the image of the car runs through Paul's body, and the top of his head gets cut off!

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The Evidence

The Beatles have consistently denied any deliberate attempt to include secret messages of any kind on or in their albums.

(And we have John Lennon's personal assurance that

“Lucy In The Sky With Diamonds” does *not* stand for LSD.)

The mountain of documentary material that has become available to Beatle scholars in the past thirty years generally supports these denials.

This material includes detailed accounts and outtakes of the photo sessions used to create the album covers, as well as rehearsal tapes and alternative mixes of many of the relevant songs.

Armed with this evidence, most of which had not been made public during the time of the scandal, it is possible to plausibly dismiss many of the so-called death clues.

Let’s look at just a few examples.

We now know that this was not the only version of the *Sgt. Pepper* cover photograph.

These samples demonstrate a few of the many different poses that were considered.

If anyone at this photo shoot was conspiring to position Paul’s head underneath the raised hand in the background, they weren’t doing a very good job of it.

To be fair, however, it should be pointed out that, despite the existence of these alternate poses, the original intention of the album designer, as indicated on this early sketch, was to have the Beatles neatly lined up behind the bass drum as they appeared on the final version.

The back cover photo, showing Paul facing away from the camera, was also photographed in several different poses.

This villainous arrangement of flowers looks like a guitar for a very good reason: It was supposed to.

This is the voice of Peter Blake, designer of the *Sgt. Pepper* album cover:

- [Blake on Sgt. Pepper](#) (mp3)

[Blake] "Things happened like, there was a young boy who was helping who said, could I do a guitar in hyacinths? And it was such a nice sort of gentle, sweet idea that we said yes, certainly. So this sort of white shape at the front is actually a guitar. One of the myths that rose was that you can read that as P-A-U-L-? When the stories of Paul's death were rife, this was a sign that Paul had indeed died. But of course, it was never intended to be P-A-U-L-? It's simply a guitar."

The fevered brain of Fred LaBour invented the arm patch with the initials O.P.D.

Alternate poses of this photograph prove that the initials on this arm patch are actually O.P.P., an abbreviation for Ontario Provincial Police, the organization that presented the patch to Paul during the Beatles' 1965 tour of Canada.

It looks like O.P.D. because a fold in Paul's jacket sleeve has distorted the final character.

The bit about the walrus in *Magical Mystery Tour* is easily disposed of.

An embarrassment of evidence, both on the album cover and in the TV movie, proves beyond a shadow of a doubt that John Lennon played the walrus, not Paul.

But what about that "I buried Paul" business at the end of "Strawberry Fields Forever?"

Thanks to an alternative mix of the song included on the second volume of the *Beatles Anthology*, we now possess conclusive evidence that what John always *claimed* he was saying is actually true.

- [Lennon on "Strawberry Fields Forever"](#) (mp3)

[Reporter] Like that line in "Strawberry Fields" at the end, "I buried Paul," which they ...

[Lennon] It doesn't say that! It says "cranberry sauce." And it's me, going "cranberry sauce, cranberry sauce." So

that's what I said.

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Other death clues are not so easily dismissed.

It strains credibility to suggest that a hand could accidentally appear over Paul's head seven times in barely a year and a half.

It seems likely to me that some person or persons in the Beatles organization was going to a bit of trouble to get these poses published.

Why it happened, or whether it was intended to mean anything, is impossible to say.

It may simply be that somebody noticed the hand that ended up over Paul's head on Sgt. Pepper and thought it might be fun to turn the accident into a running gag.

Whatever the reason, there can be little doubt that this aspect of the controversy may, in fact, have been deliberately engineered.

Also difficult to explain away are the Beatles' repeated suggestions that John was *not* the walrus, despite all the evidence to the contrary.

First there's that odd "No you're not!" line that crops up,

twice, in the *Mystery Tour* booklet.

No corresponding dialog occurs in the *Mystery Tour* TV movie, and no explanation for its inclusion, twice, is offered anywhere.

Why is this phrase being emphasized?

And then there's that lyric in the song "Glass Onion:"

*I told you 'bout the walrus and me, man
You know that we're as close as can be, man
Well here's another clue for you all
The walrus was Paul*

Lennon never offered a clear explanation for this oddity.

When specifically asked about it, in a *Playboy* interview conducted a few weeks before his death, he replied, "Well, that was a joke. The line was put in partly because I was feeling guilty because I was with Yoko and I was leaving Paul."

Then there's the black flower on this *Magical Mystery Tour* photo.

Paul offered a curt explanation for this oddity in the *Life* magazine article.

He told the reporters, "I was wearing a black flower because they ran out of red ones."

At the time of the scandal, the *Mystery Tour* film had been unavailable for nearly two years.

It was out of public release until 1974.

If it had been accessible, clue hunters might have wondered why Paul believed they had run out of red flowers, when the movie clearly shows him being handed *a substantial bouquet of red flowers*, and then *dancing around the room with them*, during the same scene in which he alone stubbornly continues to wear a *black* one.

Are we really supposed to believe that Paul McCartney, the director of the movie, could not have obtained a matching flower to wear in this scene ... if he really wanted to?

Unless one of the surviving Beatles changes their story, we will probably never know the extent to which the Paul-is-dead rumor was deliberately instigated.

The controversy appears to have resulted from a chance combination of old gossip, mischievous in-joking on the part of one or more Beatles, and the fevered imagination of overzealous fans.

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You may be wondering why I showed you all this.

Why I spent so much time putting together this little

history lesson.

The reason is very simple.

This silly event, which happened way back when I was a kid, made a really big impression on me.

It was so eerie, so deliciously creepy.

And so ... *consuming!*

Clue hunting occupied me and my friends constantly for nearly six weeks!

It was all we ever talked about!

We spent every school night and entire weekends going over *every square millimeter* of these five records.

We destroyed every copy we had, spinning them backwards on our cheap record players.

It drove our parents nuts!

"Turn me on, dead man! Turn me on, dead man!"

And they hated it *even more* when they heard it again on the evening news!

I can't remember the last time I had so much fun.

And, although I didn't appreciate it at the time, something

wonderful happened as we scoured these records, backwards and forwards, line by line.

We memorized them.

Who Buried Paul? is one of the best games I ever played.

This ridiculous rumor sucked my entire generation into a massively multiplayer adventure.

A morbid treasure hunt in which accomplices were connected by word-of-mouth, college newspapers, the alternative press and underground radio.

We can only wonder what would happen if something like this were to happen today, in the age of the World Wide Web.

Imagine how such a thing might get started, by accident ...

The Paul-is-dead rumor is an example of a powerful design principle that we can use to make our computer games more fun.

If you walk away from this lecture remembering only *one word*, let that word be this:

Contellation. It's usually used as a noun, referring to pictures in the the sky created by stars.

But I use it as a verb to describe one of the basic functions of human intelligence.

Constellation is pattern recognition.

To constellate is to apply order to chaos.

When faced with any kind of new experience, be it images or sounds or even just a strange idea, we marshall our personal knowledge and experience and *project it into the novelty* to imbue it with meaning and significance.

And what kinds of meaning and significance are we most likely to project?

The meanings we *expect* to recognize.

The significance we *want* to see.

Constellation is, in fact, a form of self-recognition.

So what kinds of experiences are most likely to invoke the principle of constellation?

The ones with the most novelty.

Rich experiences. *Complex* experiences.

Experiences that encourage you to discover relationships, to synthesize juxtapositions.

A record jacket like this one isn't going to excite much

constellation.

But put something like *this* in front of people, and all kinds of evocative coincidences become likely.

Why is this useful for us as entertainers?

Because that moment when you peer into the mirror of chaos and discover yourself is *satisfying* in a uniquely personal sense.

You get a little *oomph* when you make a connection that way.

Those little *oomphs* are what make good stories and puzzles and movies so compelling.

And those little *oomphs* are what made the Paul-is-dead rumor so much fun.

Allow me to demonstrate *oomph*.

Many people believed that the mischievous John Lennon was the Beatle responsible for planting the death clues about Paul.

If he did, the joke was on him.

This is one of the pages in the *Magical Mystery Tour* booklet.

And this is John, wearing a phony mustache.

Beside him is a sign which reads, "The best way to go is by M D & C."

Thirteen years *to the day* after this album was released in England, John learned that the best way to go was indeed by M D & C ... the initials of his assassin, Mark David Chapman.

That's *oomph*.

How can we use this principle of constellation to make our games better?

I don't have to tell you that today's games are beginning to look pretty amazing.

Every year, the bar gets raised.

Higher frame rates. Smoother rendering. More plausible use of lighting and sound.

More realism.

And as processor speeds accelerate, and storage capacity expands, our ability to improve the virisimilitude of our world models will get better and better.

Unfortunately, there are limits.

There are limits to how much time we can invest in

constructing our worlds.

There are limits to how much money we can spend.

And there are limits to how many times we can borrow technologies and aesthetics from established games in order to reduce the risk of creating new ones.

But even if these limits were to magically disappear, we could never hope to approach the subtlety, the nuance, the fine detail that characterizes the phenomenon we call reality.

Because the detail in reality is infinite.

This is where constellation can help us.

If you want your artificial characters to exhibit a wide spectrum of intelligent-looking behaviors, don't try to program them all yourself, one case statement at a time.

You've written enough bugs already.

Instead, try what Peter Blake did on the *Sgt. Pepper* cover.

Throw in some *useless particulars*.

Take a couple of those robot tanks, pick a random direction and send them rolling off across the playing field, for absolutely no reason at all.

Sometimes it'll look like an attack, or a feint, or even a

suicide.

Whatever happens, it's bound to be more interesting than having them just sit there, circling.

And who knows? Maybe some reviewer will rave about your brilliant AI.

If you want your virtual worlds to appear deep and rich, don't try to define everything explicitly.

You'll never ship anything before Christmas that way.

Instead, try what John did in "Strawberry Fields."

Mix in a little *cranberry sauce*.

Select a random game event, something harmless, like a distant sound effect, and make it occur according to a regular pattern, also chosen randomly; and watch your players assign their own dramatic significance and tie it all together.

We didn't know why a hand kept popping up over over Paul's head.

But it had to mean *something*, didn't it?

And look how far we took that simple, *>meaningless* pattern.

Let your players employ their own imaginative intelligence

to fill in the gaps in your worlds you can't afford to close.

Chances are, they'll paint the chaos in exactly the colors they want to see.

What's more, they'll enjoy themselves doing it.

But the credit will be yours.

§

A Final Clue

In conclusion, I'd like to leave you with one final death clue.

This is one you won't find in any of the published lists. It may even be original.

During the height of the Paul-is-dead scare, my friends and I spent many a solemn evening poring over our Beatle records in hopes of discovering some hitherto unrecognized nugget.

We were a fairly precocious gang of nerds.

And we were fortunate enough to have access to a cheap little tape recorder.

One of our strategies for identifying clues in the songs was rather ingenious.

We drew up a list of the suggestive things you might

expect the Beatles to say if they were trying to conceal hints about Paul's death.

Ominous phrases like "Paul is a corpse." "Six feet under." "We know how he died." You get the idea.

We recorded these phrases on our tape recorder.

"Paul is a corpse. Paul is a corpse".

Then we spun the tape backward with our finger to see if the resulting sounds matched anything that we were hearing on our Beatle records.

You might say it was a form of reverse engineering.

At the time, our little experiment didn't reveal any new clues, and after the excitement about Paul died down, we pretty much forgot about it.

But few months later, on the evening of February 15, 1970, our experiments bore unexpected fruit.

I was at my grandfather's house watching the official premiere of a new Beatles song on *The Ed Sullivan Show*.

At the time of this broadcast, the Beatles had already broken up.

But this was a filmed performance, an excerpt from a Beatles documentary that was about to be released to movie theaters.

A chill went up my spine as Paul began to sing the soon-to-be-famous chorus of this new song.

- [Chorus of "Let It Be"](#) (mp3)

And why was the chorus of "Let It Be" so shocking?

Because one of the potential death clues that we had experimented with on our tape recorder was the simple, obvious phrase, "He is dead."

- [Chorus of "Let It Be" backwards](#) (mp3)

At the time, I believed that Paul must have chosen the title "Let It Be" for this song as a way of making fun of the silly old death rumor.

It just *couldn't* be an accident!

What I didn't know at the time was that Paul's performance of "Let It Be" was filmed in January of 1969, nine months *before* the scandal broke.

And have you noticed that on the cover of the *Let It Be* album, all of the Beatles are photographed against a *white* background ...

... except one, which is **blood red**?

...