PART ONE: DEFINITION

Chapter 1: Ethos & First Principle

How does a book work?

One either engages with a book or does not – if not, then move on to another book.

If one engages with the book, then there are results. One learns, fantasises, acts or reacts. There may be changes in attitude, demeanour or belief system – changes may be small or monumental.

These results take place irrespective of whether the book is fact or fiction.

Books are powerful, but only in equal measure to that of the impetus with which the reader engages and responds. Reading a book is a partnership, drawing upon both parties in order to fulfil a goal. An author may seek to entertain, enlighten, educate or unburden. A reader may seek the desired outcome, variations on these goals, or obtain completely different and unintended results.

Steampunking the Supernatural aims to engage your thought processes in relation to interacting with the supernatural world. It challenges your current or intended approaches to the subject matter and requests that you adopt and actively practice new principles.

In sharing my ideology, I am asking you not only to rethink what constitutes interacting with spirits but to question your understanding of what you qualify as a result and the true meaning of an experience.

A pretty big ask huh? Well at least you know what I am asking of you from the outset.

If you feel able and are willing to join me on this journey, I promise you a new perspective and fresh challenges in order to enhance and develop yourself and your understanding of the supramundane.

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The ethos:

Steampunking is the integration of the predominantly Victorian framework of spiritualistic values within a modern code of sensibilities. Creation of a culture promoting inclusivity, creativity, ecology, sustainability, empowerment, craftsmanship, etiquette. This philosophy incorporates that yearning for adventure, exploration and mystique which has been eroded by everyday omniscience.

Steampunking the Supernatural is the adoption and application of this approach within the context of spiritualism to be able to generate meaningful interactions and experiences.

Dissecting the five principles:

On knowing that of which I speak.

At the time of writing, my experiences of and in the realm of the paranormal spans a 37-year period.

A Peer of the Realm’s Country Estate, New Forest – 1980

Chris: Tim! Go grab the cassette recorder and a fresh tape – we’re going to the games room... and tell dad!

The cassette recorder in question was made by Philips. A blank cassette was placed into the only available slot on the machine other than the battery compartment. Thinking back, we actually wrote on the cassette labels with a pen – not something we can do today with cloud storage! This device was pretty cutting edge and way beyond my simple pocket money means, although this was of secondary interest to me then, due to that fact that my cousin Tim had mentioned the word ‘ghosts’, not 5 minutes ago.

While Tim dutifully dashed off to fetch the recorder, Chris – Tim’s older brother, herds me, Sharon, Liz, Peter, Penny and Debbie out of the main house without further ado. We are immediately enveloped in the cool and dank night air, already an excitement is building amongst us – although at this point I have no real idea why. I am simply caught up in childhood enthusiasm for anything which involves running around wildly and being in an exciting new environment with children of a similar age.

I could hear Tim’s voice in the near distance as the rest of us were led at a run around the front, then side of the house. I heard him saying something about recording in the barn, then his father, my uncle Gerald, exclaiming “The game’s afoot!” I have no idea what that means but I liked games, so all was well.

Uncle Gerald was an ex-RAF Officer, a natural raconteur cutting a dashing figure with his handlebar moustache. His booming Welsh voice, despite his diminutive stature, seemed to carry through the very fabric of the building to rattle my cold ears.
I was briefly aware of the flickering glow of firelight passing through the window of the warm and cosy front room we had just left, before my attention returned to the laughing and chattering of my cohorts. The gravel crunched underfoot as we hastened along the side drive, which is dimly-lit by the period coach lanterns that had been converted to electricity at some later stage of their working-life. The location was rural and incredibly atmospheric in its Gothic grandeur. I appreciated even then how lucky I was to be at a place like this on such a night.

The house lay close to the New Forest in Hampshire. My parents had driven there from our tiny flat the previous day for a family gathering in the lead up to Christmas. We had recently moved from Surbiton, where my parents had owned a Post Office and General Goods shop – to Winchmore Hill in North London.

My mother is an only child, as am I, so my only experience of being with other children was solely from my school-life. It was because of this that the time spent with my cousins was special – and since we weren’t all at a funeral (the only other times we had met up to my recollection) it was a memorable occasion.

My aunt, Anne, is my father’s younger sister and has two daughters, Sharon and Liz; and a son, Peter. Liz was the youngest of our group that night, with me at the age of 10 being the next youngest; Sharon was a year older and Peter was around 12 or 13. Auntie Joan was dad’s older sister and had four children, Chris who was 18, then Penny at 16; Tim’s around 15 and Debbie 13 or 14.

Now, we are being ushered along the side of the house by an overenthusiastic Chris, clearly caught up in the notion of what is about to take place. Despite being the adult figure amongst us, complete with a ginger beard to prove it, he giggles childishly as he explains to Penny and Sharon what tonight’s adventure may bring. I can’t make out what he is saying exactly as my attention is caught by the play of turquoise through the windows I now pass. We have reached the extension which contains the indoor pool and sauna, this add-on is sympathetic to the main building, yet obvious in the lack of age or intricacy afforded to the 18th Century manor house. It is at this point that I smile in the excitement and sheer exhilaration of being in this place with my (infrequently met) family.

An important note - I have learnt that emotion is key to embedding the clarity of a memory, it is the thing which marks a position in time for later recollection in far greater detail than other events.

Like most children at that age, my understanding of the world was based upon what I saw and heard. Due to this fact, I had assumed that Joan and Gerald must be extremely rich to own a house such as this. It was only later that I was told that they were in fact custodians and carers. Aunt Joan had previously been a nurse and had obtained the position of live-in carer, with uncle Gerald providing part-time maintenance and upkeep of the estate whilst studying and establishing himself as a solicitor.

And so it was that we were now approaching a large barn to the rear of the Viscount’s main house. We ground to a halt as Chris opened a simple latch and threw the huge
wooden doors aside. I was expecting hay on the floor and a high beamed roof but was met instead by plush carpet and floor to ceiling fitted storage and shelves heaving with books. The ceiling was low, suggesting either a mezzanine level or it may have been simply to hide whatever nastiness remained of the existing roof space. The floor was dotted with beanbags, a table-tennis table and not a lot else. I remember it being cold but not uninviting in any way.

Tim then caught up with us and handed the cassette recorder to Chris before turning to shut the doors. We pulled the beanbags into a rough circle and spent a short time jumping up and down on them, for no good reason.

I looked on as Chris placed the cassette recorder down on the carpet in the middle of the circle. Despite the recorder having an in-built microphone, which could be discerned as a small perforated circle above the function buttons, Chris plugged an external silver microphone into the side of the machine, I was transfixed by the sight of such modern gadgetry.

The giggles and laughter began to die down now as we anticipated the start of a new form of entertainment.

**Chris:** *You know, this barn is haunted.*

It was a simple statement, which had an amazing impact upon us. For myself, it created a shiver which started on my arms and legs before painfully slowly creeping its way up to the back of my neck. I locked eyes with Peter and imagined that he had experienced the same thing as his lips quivered and face grew taut. Next to him, Liz let out a little whimper and jumped off her beanbag and onto her sister Sharon’s, where she immediately pushed herself into comforting arms.

**Sharon:** *Don’t worry Lizzie! It’s only a game – it’s not really haunted!*

This did nothing to remove Liz’s head from Sharon’s armpit however and Tim’s next comment helped even less.

**Tim:** *It really is, isn’t it Pen?*

**Penny:** *Yup*

**Chris:** *So, what we are going to do is be very quiet and start recording to see what happens, see if we can hear anything.*

I think I was too busy pulling faces at Peter for this to really sink in, I too was seeking comfort but was unable to draw any from Peter’s rigid grimace. I took a breath and glanced around at my cousins in turn. Despite the odd looks of apprehension previously described, everyone else seemed calm and enthralled. So, I consciously made the decision that this activity would be comparable to watching the film Peter Pan. That exciting mix of becoming lost in a fantasy and the suspension of disbelief. I would not see a ghost as a
thing to fear, rather a thing of exciting mystery and it would certainly not be anything scary.

Chris: Shush now, I’m going to start recording!

A hushed silence fell as we watched Chris push down the red record and play buttons simultaneously (a tricky procedure as I recall, similar to pressing alt/ctrl/del on a keyboard today). Dutifully, the tiny spindles began to rotate as the tape ribbon of the cassette began to spool across the head.

Liz giggled.

Tim: SHUSHH!

We sat in silence, painfully trying to breathe soundlessly despite our excitement. I wondered how beans could be so comfortable when placed in a huge bag, it was like sitting on air.

Chris: Is anybody here with us?

I was about to answer him but a glance at Tim confirmed that I shouldn’t.

Chris looked around the room, we all copied his actions, unsure of what we were looking for.

Chris: Can you speak to us? We know you are here – we’ve heard you before.

Silence. The longest minute passed. I got cramp in my calf.

Tim: Let’s just leave it running and come back to it later.

Chris looked around at us all in turn, recognizing our inner struggles to remain quiet and still.

Chris: OK, we are going to leave you now but if you could make some noises or talk to us that would be great.

A general hubbub commenced in which we ungracefully dismounted from our bags of beans, mostly rolling onto the floor to do so, and vacated the games room in search of warmth and something new to play with.

Thus it was that I had participated in my first paranormal investigation, though at the time it was no more than an activity which had been brief, slightly cold and a little disappointing. It was not until the tape was later played back that the event would have more of an impact on me.
I cannot recall much of the intervening half-hour or so. We would have, no doubt, returned to the cosy front room and described to our parents what had occurred in the barn. Joan and Gerald were, by nature, gregarious characters whom would have kept us entertained in fireside chatter whilst filling us with hot drinks and sweet snacks. I do vaguely recollect Uncle Gerald telling a great joke, something about a donkey and sweat running down the walls.

As the night drew on, Chris and Tim returned to the barn to collect the recorder. There was no huge anticipation on my part as my understanding of the whole exercise was limited and now detached. A while later they returned and began babbling at their father, evidently they had listened to part of the recording in the barn without our presence – very unsporting.

The gist of their conversation was lost on me until the recorder, now being carried by Chris like some Holy relic, was placed on a table beside one of the numerous sofas – many of which were interspersed with King Charles Spaniels, of which Joan and Gerald had many.

I squeezed myself onto a sofa between my parents, eager to share in whatever was creating such excitement from Chris and Tim. It was a laborious process waiting for the tape to rewind again and there was skilled guesswork required in order to actually find the place on the tape where something was audible. Luckily, the clever people at Philips had included a little rotating counter on this machine – a marvel of modern technology.

**Chris:** It’s at about 25 that it starts Tim.

Tim dutifully rewound and stopped the tape before pressing play and checking that the rotary volume dial on the side was turned up to maximum. Sound from the machine came through a single internal speaker on top, which was masked by ridges in the plastic that were inexplicably coated in vinyl to look like oak. All of us, even the adults I noted, sat forward and became hushed as the quiet hiss from the tape and sound made by the rotating spindles began to fill the room.

Slowly the hiss was replaced by a clear and definite ticking. The ticking became louder; it was undisputedly the ticking I would associate with a wristwatch rather than a large clock. I heard an intake of breath from one of the children in the room but couldn’t say whom, as I was staring intently at the cassette recorder. Despite the warmth in the front room, I felt the temperature around me drop a little. The ticking continued but now something new accompanied it, it was what sounded like a heartbeat. I recognized it from TV programs I had seen, a slow rhythmic ‘bud-ump, bud-ump, bud-ump’. Another intake of breath from next to me, I couldn’t believe it but it was my mother – this changed the atmosphere instantly, this was serious.

**Gerald:** (Chuckling) Chris, are you sure nobody was in there? Next to the recorder maybe, you and Tim monkeying around?

**Chris:** Dad, I swear, there was nobody in there when we left until after the tape had run out.
We all looked at each other, shaking our heads vigorously in agreement – whilst searching for answers and comfort in each other’s eyes. Then we heard it, quiet at first but raising in volume. A piano clearly playing a simple tune as if the melody were composed by a child. The sound of this mingled with intermittent spits and bursting embers from the fire within our room, somehow bringing the two separate timeframes into one. It became as if whatever it was that we were listening to on the tape had now traversed into this very room, it was here with us now.

Joan: Now that’s impossible! We haven’t even got a piano!

The melody faded almost as quickly as it had arrived, replaced by the heartbeat and in turn by the ticking, which in turn then faded to leave nothing more than the hiss of tape.

I remember nothing more of the event, I imagine that as a group we all discussed the recording and that at some point our parents would have turned the conversation into more mundane banter in the lead up to the youngest of us having to go to bed. With such a number of children, we would have had to share bedrooms and I’m sure that our après tuck-down discussions would have gone on well after our expected sleeping deadline. However, I recall none of this, nor of any subsequent talk of the night’s activities in the years between then and now. In fact, it is only now that I recollect with amazing clarity the night in question and realize that it was the start of what would become a driving force in my later years.

There are many stories told about things happening in one’s childhood, the majority of which are obviously of the tall-tale variety. However, there are stories which, when described by someone you have known and trusted over many years, are equivalent to a statement of fact.

As in the episode above, the following anecdotal event is of a childhood experience and due to the attachment of emotion to the event, is as clear to the persons involved today as it was when it occurred 35 years ago.

“It was quite late, we must have been about 15 or 16 and were trying to get home before we got into trouble with our parents. ‘D’ and I were on our bikes, haring down Old Park Ridings towards the top of the Chine. As we approached the turn, we noticed a load of bin-bags on the corner and suddenly this disgusting-looking old tramp jumped up from behind them. I’m saying he was a tramp, but ‘Christ’ his face was like a fucking demon! Anyway, ‘D’ nearly fell off his bike.

We both screamed like girls and managed to stay on as we accelerated passed the guy and peddled like fucking maniacs down the steep slope to home. God knows how we stayed on, we were going so fast. We got to my house (at the bottom), dumped the bikes on the front and I managed to get the key in the door and we jumped inside to safety, our hearts pounding.
We knew we’d left the guy, thing, whatever he was, a long way behind but we still didn’t feel safe. ‘D’ was staying over and we were kipping in the front room facing out onto the street. We ran inside and shut the door, the room only lit by the street light. I didn’t want to wake my mum and dad so I sort of shout-whispered to ‘D’ to shut the curtains.

‘D’ went straight over to the window – now this was about 10 seconds after we’d got in the front door and we’d left the guy about ¼ mile away and we’d been on bikes pedalling like bastards. So ‘D’ reaches up to pull the curtains and he screams! This guy was outside, his face against the window. I swear to god! I’ll never forget it.”

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First principle:

Supernatural events come in two forms – the interactive and the automatic.

- Interactive supernatural events affect and influence and can be affected and influenced.

- Automatic supernatural events, often repetitive or cyclical, which are observed but cannot be affected or influenced.

What are supernatural events?

The Oxford dictionary defines the word supernatural as:

(of a manifestation or event) attributed to some force beyond scientific understanding or the laws of nature.
‘a supernatural being’

the supernatural

Manifestations or events considered to be of supernatural origin, such as ghosts.
‘a frightening manifestation of the supernatural’

The key phrases here are the qualifying of the supernatural as ‘some force’ and the fact that, in the twenty-first century, we are still stating that it is a subject ‘beyond scientific understanding’.

I am also interested in the fact that the definition does not mention the word ‘belief’ and that the supernatural is stated as being ‘beyond the laws of nature’. One would assume that, given the fact that there has been no worldwide common consensus that the supernatural exists, any definition should be stated as a matter of personal belief. Or, have we now lived with spiritualistic references for so long that it is now part of the human psyche to accept that there is something, somewhere, beyond the realms of our everyday existence? And if so, why should this be above the laws of nature, rather than a natural if relatively rare demonstration of the afterlife?

I am not a scientist, unwaveringly searching for answers to prove and define a given subject. I base my take on reality on that which I see and feel within the world I inhabit.

My belief system draws parallels with some elements of existing religious doctrines, whilst directly opposing many others. I do not feel there is any one scripture defining an absolute path through this life, by which all choices and decisions are made. If we believe that life and nature are miraculous, then why is a spirit world so unbelievable? Is it purely because it cannot be observed and recorded on a daily basis by every individual? If so, are dreams real? Have any been recorded so that we can watch them back like a home movie?
Once something has occupied a place on this earth it never disappears, when something dies, its cells break down into molecules and then atoms – which are then utilised in the creation of new life. Following this process, the ultimate definition of biodegradability and recycling, is it not probable that the memories, physical attributes and attached emotions are recovered across time? If something is burned, it does not vanish but is changed in form. We no longer observe the nature of it as it was but we do see some elements of its new nature in the shape of smoke, we can smell the gases produced, see the ash as it drifts on the wind.

When theorising about past life experiences and re-incarnation, stone tape speculation, haunted objects, mediumship and clairvoyance – is it not possible that people and inert objects are constantly absorbing the memories and emotions of those who have gone before us, only to be revealed when conditions, timing or our own abilities trigger them?

If we accept this possibility and absorb it as a part of our understanding, we have already given ourselves the potential to greatly increase the likelihood and our openness to experience more and more events – without having to do anything else.

Following on from this thought process, which would account for automatic supernatural events, is it not then equally probable that intelligence would also be attached to some of these memories and emotions? We all interrelate with our environment and each other throughout our lives, we share experiences, memories and emotions, we build and establish things which then take their own place in the world. We establish a network of people and things, operating on both a physical and mental/emotional levels. This network does not fail when one or more element is no longer present. More than this, sometimes the influence of that one element becomes even stronger when it is no longer present.

Once this becomes acceptable to our rationale, can we not then actively seek interaction with this intelligence?

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