

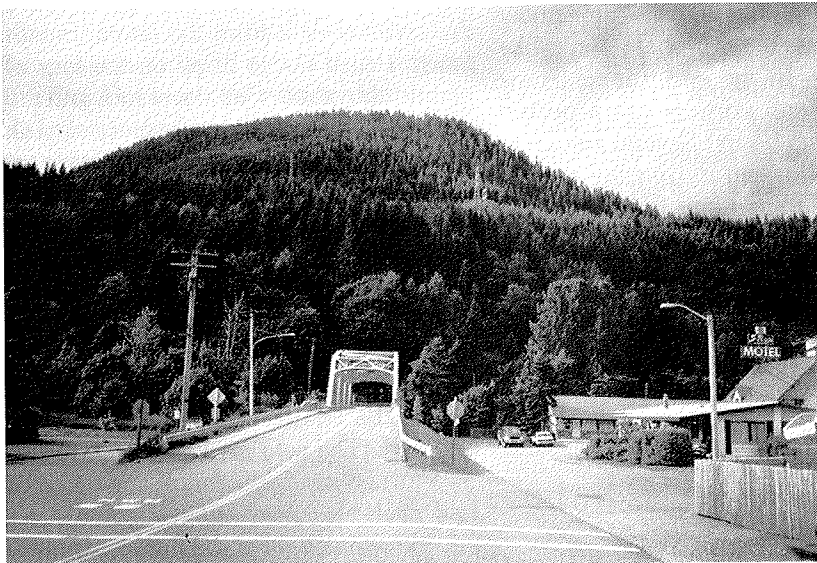
# Hunting Ghosts

Dana Fredsti

I attended a Western Ghost Conference put on by the International Ghost Hunters Society. The 1998 event was held in the little mountain town of Skykomish, Washington. Once a bustling railroad station, Skykomish boasts not only a haunted hotel, but also a warehouse that served as temporary morgue when two passenger trains and the nearby town of Wellington were wiped out by an avalanche on March 1, 1910. I hoped the weekend's adventures would provide ideas, inspiration, and firsthand ex-

perience for a screenplay. camera, taking turns viewing footage through the monitor. We watched playback of a luminescent orb buzzing over the warehouse that once housed avalanche victims.

An orb is a ball of light, sometimes opaque, sometimes translucent. When it moved in the videotape, it maintained its shape. There was no fuzziness around its edges. The footage had been shot not ten minutes earlier. Pay dirt. It looked like the weekend would be everything I hoped.



Photograph of Skykomish by Dana Fredsti.

I glanced at one young man who stood away from the rest, staring intently up at the sky through infrared night vision goggles. All it needed were the words "The Truth is Out There" scrolling across the sky to make it perfect. Subsequent conversation revealed that the guy was indeed a UFO watcher and an abductee as well. I resisted the impulse to ask, "How was that anal probe?" and asked to try on the goggles instead.

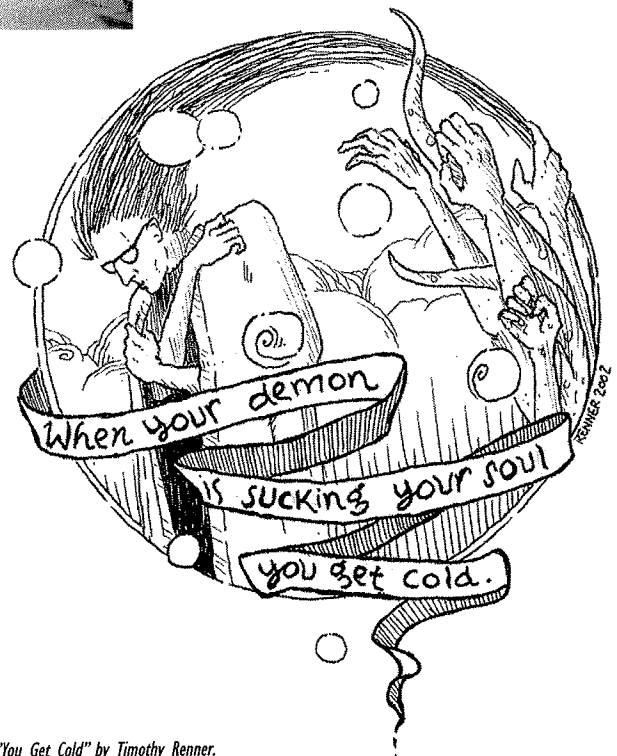
Another guy that I privately nicknamed Linus had a blanket wrapped around him. I asked why he had a blanket instead of a coat. His response was, "When your demon is sucking your soul,

perience for a screenplay.

The first thing I saw when I took the turn into town across a picturesque bridge was the four-story Skykomish B&B. A sign on the building's façade said, "Welcome Ghost Hunters!"

The B&B used to be a bordello that provided an overnight stop and entertainment for train passengers and locals. The current owners had converted the bottom floor into a restaurant/lounge, the two middle floors into guest rooms, and the top story to their living quarters. It is supposedly haunted by the Blue Lady (so named because she wears a blue dress), the ghost of a prostitute murdered by her jealous lover, who then killed himself. You'd think someone with jealousy issues would think twice before dating a hooker. At any rate, she was supposedly murdered in what became a bathroom. I sincerely hoped she didn't put in an appearance while I used the john. So to speak.

The ghost hunters gathered out front of the B&B. The majority of the group clustered around a man with a video



"You Get Cold" by Timothy Renner.

## Orbs & Vortices

Dana Fredsti

What are orbs? According to the International Ghost Hunters Society, they are the "basic energy pattern of the spirit world," the transformed shape of the life force after a living thing dies and its energy is no longer contained by its earthly shell. Numerous ghost photographs show one orb; others upwards of 100 floating orbs of all shapes and sizes, sometimes even in different colors. Cameras from 35mm to digital to camcorder have photographed these balls of light.

Skeptics chalk up photographic orb phenomena and other anomalies to various causes: lens flare, caused by the direct sunlight refracting inside the camera lens; dust particle patterns caused by driving on dusty roads and aiming your camera through the window; raindrops or moisture patterns; and flaws in the film.

While it is true that all of the above can cause interesting anomalies on the developed photos similar to orbs and vortices (a group of orbs moving together, rather like passengers moving from one location to another), it is not possible to explain away the hundreds of photos taken in various conditions. For instance, photographs of globes taken at night cannot be caused by lens flare, since there is no bright source of light to cause this event. If the weather conditions were warm and dry when the photo was snapped, moisture on the lens or raindrops wouldn't be a possibility. Many of the photos posted by IGHS members on their website resulted from multiple photographers taking pictures of the same spot with dif-

you get cold." This is probably true.



Next morning, the festivities began with opening comments by Dave Oester, who – along with his wife Sharon – heads up IGHS. The day's events included lectures and a special investigation workshop held at the Lost City of Wellington – the main event as far as I was concerned.

The lectures were of varying degrees of interest. The two ghost photography sessions, while initially quite interesting, became repetitive. In the beginning, the vortex photos were great. A vortex is a funnel-shaped mass with the same milky appearance as the orbs, but it looks like it's moving. In the end, though, how many orbs and vortices can a person look at in two hours? Several attendees actually fell asleep during the second session, including Linus in his blanket.

The Understanding Electronic Voice Phenomena (voices recorded in graveyards and other haunted sites) lecture was fascinating. Several examples were truly eerie and disturbing. Some were low and whispery, others almost plaintive. One mournful voice said a single word – "Afraid" – that raised the hair on the back of my neck.



While it was still light, we caravanned a 20-minute drive up to Wellington. The scenery was gorgeous. Mist shrouded the

*"Afraid" by Timothy Renner.*

very tops of the mountains. The caravan turned down a winding, bumpy road until we reached a road fit only for four-wheel drives. Luckily, two were provided.

The first exploration was the Old Cascade Railway Tunnel, now stripped of its track. The mouth of the

tunnel could only be reached by wading through a small stream. The tunnel ran two and a half miles under the mountain. Dave said that, earlier in the week when he and Sharon checked out the sites, he'd seen two yellow eyes in the depths of the tunnel. When the eyes moved toward him, he experienced what he described as "overwhelming fear" and got the hell out of there.

As I splashed through the stream and entered the tunnel, I thought about Dave's experience. What had seemed like a story told by a camp counselor to scare kids took on a new dimension when surrounded by dank darkness. A few people went in 10 feet and came right back out. After 20 feet, the ambient light from the tunnel mouth faded. I tried not to dwell on the tons of granite above me. Chunks of rock and the occasional old railroad tie or piece of track made the footing tricky. At several junctures of the tunnel were little alcoves. I wondered what their original purpose had been. From the graffiti, beer bottles, and more personal debris, the locals seemed to have found the damp, creepy ambiance romantic.

The tunnel sort of smelled like the inside of the Pirates of the Caribbean, wet and dark. The cold made my nose run.

I turned my flashlight off and was cast into pitch-blackness. While I could see a small circle of light at the tunnel's mouth, nothing between it and me was visible. A feeling of total isolation overwhelmed me, as though there were no past, no future, only a strange sense of being out of time and out of space. I felt a deep and real need to be outside in the light with other people. I hurriedly picked up a small piece of ceramic insulation as a souvenir and started back.

Some of the group had already gone into the Lost Town of Wellington, so I wandered down the path by myself. The town had been pretty much obliterated by the avalanche. All that remained were ruins of a shack, a boiler room (which I viewed from a distance), and a snow shed. The twisted railroad trestle stood as mute testimony to the disaster.

I tried to imagine being in one of the trains. They'd been stranded because of slides on either side of the track and couldn't back up to the safety of the snow shed. The two men who left the trains for



help were the only survivors of either the trains or the town. I snapped some pictures and walked through the snow shed. Its floor was all gravel and water. Several people said the snow shed made them very uncomfortable, but it didn't bother me other than when I misstepped and soaked my feet in icy water.

When it started getting dark, most of the group congregated in a clearing to look at more videos of lots of orbs buzzing merrily around.

The general consensus was that the boiler room was a hotbed of orb activity. Don, one of the more experienced ghost hunters, said he'd show us the area. We went down a short path to a space right above a small valley, thick with trees. The temperature dropped a good 15-20 degrees in a five-foot drop of elevation. Absolutely no noise came from the valley. The vibes, as they say, were definitely weird. Don warned us not to walk to our right, where there was a sinkhole. "Step in that, you'll just keep going."

At that moment, it got even colder. Don thought we'd better leave.



When we got back to the hotel, the owners Adam and Jane invited us to check out their living quarters on the penthouse floor, supposedly the site of a lot of weird happenings. Adam had been in there alone when an inner door kept opening and closing on its own. A cold breeze emanated from its little window. This had happened during the winter, but no outside windows were open. When he'd stepped into the room, there was no draft.

Most of the ghost hunters tromped up the stairs after Adam, who started opening doors, telling us to wander where we wanted. Most people went to check out the room where the phantom breeze had occurred. I, base creature that I am, checked out their wine rack. Adam diverted my attention by opening a door in the corner, which led to an eaves attic.

A large roof beam passed diagonally across the top of the doorframe. The room beyond was

completely dark. I took one step across the threshold and stopped. I had to literally force myself to put my foot down in that room. I felt as though there was a tangible barrier, not quite solid but enough to physically resist my body, like trying to wade through water. I stepped back out, then decided to try again. Same effect. I forced myself to go all the way in and stood there, trying not to bolt right back out again. I have never felt so uncomfortable or unwanted in any space in my life.

I lasted about a minute, said out loud, "Nope, I don't like it here," and left. I tried the same test with two other women without telling them why. Both had the same reaction. Don went in. It didn't really bother him much. It didn't bother Linus either, which led me to wonder if this, in fact, was where the jealous lover had offed himself.

I wanted a drink, but first I wanted a picture of the room. Unwilling to go in again, I stuck my camera in, snapped a random shot, then hit the bar for a much-needed glass of wine and a rousing session of karaoke.



My pictures, while memorable, were free of ghostly images except for the shot of the attic room. Up in the corner, against a ceiling beam, nestled a very clear image of a luminous orb.



ferent cameras. The odds of every roll of film being flawed so that the orb is caught in the same place in all photos are slim. Additionally, orbs can be seen floating about on the playback of camcorders. They have been seen through night vision/infrared goggles, then photographed, and the developed photos or playback monitor showed the same orbs as viewed through the goggles.

Examples of all of the above are available at [www.ghostweb.com](http://www.ghostweb.com), along with detailed articles about their continuing research and exploration in the field of ghost hunting.

Arrow indicates orb photographed by Dana Fredsti.

