

LEAVE ME THE WAY I WAS FOUND

Written by Christian A. Dumais

The date displayed at the lower right hand corner reads August 9, 2003, with a starting time of 20:03:17 and ending with 20:05:33: 2 minutes and 16 seconds in length. There is an enormous amount of speculation regarding the video's origins. A Google search for the [TITLE RETRACTED] video brings a staggering 4,274,256,985 entries and is the most Googled search string ever, surpassing "sex" in less than three days. There have been more message board threads and blog entries devoted to the video than any other topic online, and its Wikipedia entry has been confirmed to be the most active and heavily debated article on the site with an edit occurring every 1.3 seconds. The most problematic statistic, of course, is the video's emergence on YouTube. Since the video's appearance on March 22, 2009, it has been viewed 1.67 billion times (interestingly enough, it has never been favorited). To put this in perspective, the second most watched video stands at 124.4 million views. It is without a doubt the most successful and unfortunate meme in history.

The user responsible for uploading the video on YouTube was "albertfish", his/her only upload. According to YouTube, he/she has never signed into the site after the video's upload. All efforts to identify and find "albertfish" have been unsuccessful:

And does it matter who "albertfish" is? Isn't this like having Pandora's box opened and suddenly being interested in who Pandora was? We can learn all about her, sure, but at the end of the day, the box is still open and we have to deal with it . . . The video is still there and it will never go away. You have no idea how horrifying that is to me . . . I'm to the point where the thought of using the Internet gives me panic attacks . . . Even now, as I think about what I saw – the nine seconds that I endured – my eyes water. If you ask me, "albertfish" did himself in like the others. (Maher)

All things considered, Maher's side-effects are mild by comparison. Those who've witnessed the video in its entirety are said to suffer from continued high blood pressure, severe headaches, excessive itching in the areas of the ears and eyes, dizziness, loss of equilibrium, severe panic attacks, and intense ringing in the ears. Viewers, like Maher, who've seen only small portions of the video, complain of watering eyes, toothaches, dry mouth, and cold spells, among other things. Most disturbing are the alarming number of suicides. The most notable, of course, is the March 26, 2009 "WTF? Is this real?" video uploaded through YouTube showing an unsuspecting mother watching the video for the first time:

The change in [her] face seems impossible, like a cartoon. The baby on her lap begins to cry immediately. The person holding the camera is clearly startled

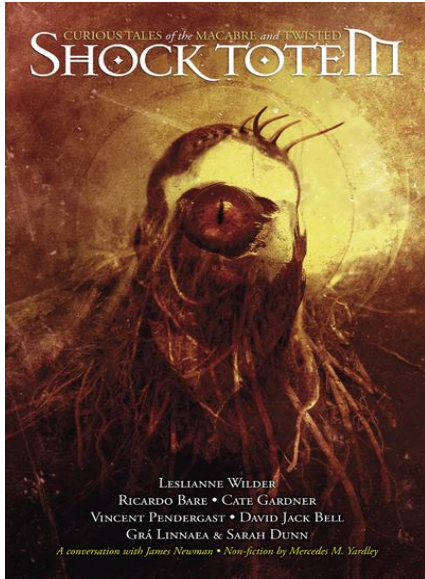
(unfortunately, not enough to stop filming). Off screen, you can hear someone say, “Paula, honey?” The baby’s cries suddenly stop. There is one second of silence. Someone shouts, “Turn it off!” before two distinct screams are heard. At this point, the camera is all over. One would have to slow the video down to make out what happens next, but thanks to the screenshots that were briefly available at *Drudge Report*, the rest of the story is clear. The baby is literally squeezed to death by her own mother before being thrown at the open laptop like a wet cloth. The last discerned image is that of the mother inserting her index finger into her right eye. (Morrison)

The unsuspecting viewer trend died as quickly as it started; however, a new video continues to appear online even today, as well as remixes of the video and the notorious [TITLE RETRACTED]-rolling. This begs the questions: if the video can cause so much damage in short bursts, who are these people who can tolerate it enough to remix it? Who can stomach the anomaly?

While the anomaly (I love how “safe” this word is) in the video is frightening, it’s the memetic nature of the video that’s truly problematic. We are talking about a video so ghastly, so horrifying that it’s rewriting our brains. We cannot process this creature – sure, *this anomaly*. Where did it come from? Who were these children? Why haven’t their parents come forward? My head hurts just trying to recall what I saw. And yet, the video persists. It will not die . . . when it’s dark and I’m in bed, I honestly believe that the 41,448 people (according to today’s Huffington Post) who killed themselves are lucky. They’re not stuck with these memories . . . not living with that sober off-camera voice that clearly states, “This is the beginning.” (Baldwin)

Most articles written on the subject have an unhealthy obsession with deciphering the anomaly, with the most notable research conducted by the late Dr. Andrew Hill. If the anomaly has revealed anything to academia, it is the stark reality that this anomaly is beyond words, beyond any language’s ability to adequately describe it. It is beyond our capacity of understanding. We have seen the anomaly and yet we do not know what we have seen. All we have are questions:

What is [TITLE RETRACTED]? Where did it come from? Why don’t the children at least scream? Why won’t my hands stop trembling? When will my heart slow down? Why do I want to watch it again? Will my family watch it with me? (Berezecki)



“Leave Me the Way I Was Found” was originally published in issue #2 of *Shock Totem*. For more information about *Shock Totem* and how to this issue and others, check out www.shocktotem.com.

“Leave Me the Way I Was Found” was one of those stories that came together fairly quickly. Before it was accepted by *Shock Totem*, the story was written to be included in *Cover Stories: A Euphictional Anthology*. *Euphiction* is when you take a song, use the song title or a song lyric as the title of your story, and then create a fictional “cover” in less than 1000 words. For the project, I chose ten (now eleven) songs from the Walkmen’s *You & Me*, and “Leave Me the Way I Was

Found” is a lyric from the song “Long Time Ahead of Us”. Speaking of, I’d like to take this opportunity to thank Gigantic Music for allowing me permission to use the Walkmen’s music for this project.

I’ve always had a fascination with H.P. Lovecraft, especially his more *unnamable* creations; the things the brain is simply unable to process without jeopardizing its very sanity. With that in mind, I considered the possibility of a Lovecraftian horror and how if such a thing existed today, it would inevitably go viral. And “Leave Me the Way I Was Found” considers what happens next. Writing the story as if it were an academic article was just another way to keep the reader distant from the horror, because as Lovecraft understood so clearly, there’s no way to do it justice unless you keep it just out of sight. This is one of those details I love about Lovecraft, where he’ll spend paragraphs describing walls and bookshelves, but when it comes to the creatures, he dismisses them with words like *indescribable*. Anyway, this is my attempt at telling a Lovecraft story by way of being inspired by a song lyric, a piece I’m extremely proud of.



This story is dedicated to my father, who was wonderful enough to read me Lovecraft stories for bedtime when I was a child.

Christian A. Dumais is an American writer and university lecturer living in Wrocław, Poland. He has published fiction, journalism, and academic articles in several magazines and journals, with recent pieces published in *GUD*, *Shock Totem* and *Ha!Art*. He has written a collection of short stories, [Empty Rooms Lonely Countries](#), and created, edited, and contributed to [Cover Stories](#), a euphictional anthology of 100 stories inspired by songs.

He is also the creator behind Twitter's [@DRUNKHULK](#), which has over 99,000 followers. Boing Boing wrote that Christian "is one of the three or four people who make it seem possible that Twitter can spawn something like art."

Christian is currently working on a novel.

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