

James B Angell
8A Cherry Nook
07911 750895
Jim@jimangell.com

3,700
words

DEVIL MAY CARE

by James B Angell

PART ONE

DISCOVERY

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Richard Kimberly, renowned crypto-zoologist and expert of no small note on the legend of the infamous Jersey Devil, had spent the past hour slowly looking through piles of local history books in the small used book store hidden away on the Main street of Leeds Point, New Jersey. Even now, after all the years he had been researching the legend, and with all of the modern

resources he had at this disposal, Kimberly always found himself coming back here.

While others in his field considered such activity as a waste of time in the age of digital research, Kimberly had made some of his best discoveries in this little store.

“You never know what someone may have brought in since the last visit,” he had explained “that’s what keeps it interesting”

Still, they didn’t seem convinced by this. The truth was, that even in an area that was already considered as fringe science, he was thought of as an eccentric outsider. This didn’t really bother Kimberly. He didn’t feel the need to justify himself to anybody else. This was his Holy Grail, his quest for answers to a mystery. And after all, “isn’t that what science is supposed to be about?” he would say. This was usually the point people politely excused themselves. Long ago this would have bothered him, but these days he found that he actually took a kind of perverse pleasure in their discomfort.

He carefully put the book he had been looking through in to the ‘Buy These’ pile he had made. As he bent down he spotted a book with a tattered brown leather binding. There was something embossed in faded

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gold lettering on the spine: 1909. Intrigued, he took the book from its shelf. It was covered in a thin layer of dust on the outside and the pages had yellowed with age. Inside the cover was an inscription:

*To my darling Dorothy, with all my love –
George*

Then on the next page:

Journal of Dorothy Leeds

Kimberlys heart momentarily skipped a beat as he realized what he was holding in his hand. This Journal had belonged to a member of the Leeds family, the same family that had been forever linked with the legend of the Jersey Devil. But that was not what made this Journal special; there had been other diaries from members of that family found over the years. What made this find special was the year in which the Journal had been written: 1909, the year of the Phenomenal Week. That one week in mid January that had more recorded Devil

sightings than any other time in history.

“Dr Kimberly, are you still back there?”

The shops proprietor, Elise Borden, popped her head around the corner.

Kimberly jumped, startled out of the trance that this book had placed upon him.

“Sorry, didn’t mean to startle you Dr Kimberly,” she said in her normal cheerful voice “I’m going to be closing up soon, you just let me know if you need more time”

Kimberly looked at his watch and suddenly realized the time. He often became lost in his work when he came here.

“Thank you Miss Borden,” he replied, “I think I have everything I need for today.”

He picked up the stack of books he had gathered during his visit, making sure to put the Journal on top so it wouldn’t be out of his sight. Kimberly paid for his finds and after thanking Elise Borden, left the little store. The mild warmth of the day had already begun to give way to the damp chill of nighttime that struck these parts at this time of year. The gathering dark clouds and rising breeze brought with them a promise of a storm that night. Kimberly was secretly pleased about this. Despite his scientific training, his romantic side liked nothing

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more than reading during a storm.

He pulled his jacket tighter as he walked down the street towards the hotel he was staying at. Kimberly started to regret not bringing his rental car as the wind started to pick up around him. When he had left, the weather had been pleasant and warm, so he had decided to walk the five blocks to the bookstore.

After what felt like a lifetime, he found himself back at the Devils Inn. The first heavy drops of rain starting to fall just as he stepped through the door. It had felt as if the walk back had taken a lot longer than the walk out. Kimberly put this down to his growing excitement at getting to read the Journal of Dorothy Leeds. By the time he reached his room, cleaned up and ordered room service, the rain had begun to relentlessly pound against his window. He could hear the distant rumble of thunder getting ever closer.

Everything was ready. Kimberly settled down on the bed, got comfortable and slowly opened the Journal of Dorothy Leeds. He carefully skimmed through the first few pages, looking for that little hidden clue as to why the Devil chose that time to

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not only reappear, but also why there had been such a dramatic increase in sightings.

Richard took a deep breath as he found the first page that he had been looking for, and began to read.

PART TWO

THE DIARY

2

Saturday January 16th, 1909

The town is a buzz with talk of the trouble in Woodbury. A man leaving a hotel swears that he saw the infamous Jersey Devil. Apparently, he went running back into the hotel lobby screaming about glowing phosphorescent eyes that pierced into his soul and billows of smoke, and steam flowing from the creatures maw.

Naturally the proprietors of the hotel were more

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than a little displeased with this outburst and promptly had the man removed from the premises. The people of Woodbury are not quite as...forgiving... as we are when it comes to talk of the devil.

My brother, George, has not been quite as jovial about the situation as the rest of us. His obsession with "the family demon" can be quite disturbing at times. To be honest I am more than a little relieved that he has left on business to Pennsylvania. His strange behavior of late is starting to worry me.

Sunday January 17th, 1909

George returned today and is acting most strangely. He was very evasive when asked how his trip went, simply saying that all was in order and then locking himself in his study.

By the time he had arrived home, the stories of what had been happening in Burlington and across the state had become common knowledge.

There have been many more sightings. Several reliable sources have reported witnessing a creature that fits the description of our local legend.

A postmaster in Bristol reports seeing a mysterious glowing creature flying across the

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Delaware River; while a police officer swears that he came face to face with the beast while on patrol. He apparently spoke of the creatures voice being like the raucous squeal of a screeching Victrola. After the officer fired several shots from his revolver, the creature simply flew away, seemingly unharmed. Several more people have reported finding mysterious hoof-prints in their snow covered yards.

I tried to ask George if he had seen the Devil on his way home but he simply ignored me and continued to hide himself away. Normally if you ask him something about the Jersey Devil you can't get him to stop talking about it. I do hope he is not coming down with something. I think I will suggest he go see Dr Sanford in the morning

A knock on the door of his hotel room jolted Kimberly back into the modern world.

"Who is it?" he asked

"Room service sir" came the muffled reply.

Kimberly had almost forgotten how hungry he was. With a groan he pulled himself out of his comfortable spot and walked over to open the door, grabbing some cash for the customary tip on the way.

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With food in hand and bellboy tipped, he returned to the bed to pick up where he left off. While the Journal had so far been a little light on Devil details, Kimberly found himself more and more intrigued by the story of George and his sister.

Taking the tray containing his evening meal, which consisted of a bacon cheeseburger, a large helping of cheese fries, a double scotch, and a complete disregard for his doctors dietary advice; Kimberly returned to Dorothy's Journal.

Monday January 18th, 1909

George seemed to be feeling a lot better today and was almost back to his normal self at breakfast. He says that he was simply tired from his trip. I want to believe him, but I can't help feeling that there is something he is not telling me. We have never kept secrets from each other before. But I can't argue that he does, indeed, seem to be feeling better. He even expressed interest in the latest "Devil" reports.

Thinking about it he seemed to be more excited about the news than normal. There was an odd, impish joy about him when he learned of the fear that the residents of Burlington were feeling. The people are now too afraid to come out of

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their homes past sunset. I heard from Mrs. Henderson at the store, that not a single house could be found without those mysterious hoof-prints somewhere on the property. Some people were even packing up their belongings and leaving. When I mentioned this to George he said the strangest thing.

“Good on the family demon. Nice to see some traditions being kept alive”

At which point he left the table and locked himself back in his study, chuckling as he walked away. That was the last I saw of him today but not the last I heard. Odd noises had been coming from his study all afternoon. Terrible crashing sounds followed by sudden outbursts of laughter. I decided to call Dr Sanford.

When he arrived things seemed to have calmed down. George still refused to open his study door, claiming that his work was far too important to be interrupted. Just as the doctor was leaving we heard another loud crash, and the sound of breaking glass, followed by the scream of a creature from hell itself. The doctor immediately ran back to my brother’s study and after several attempts, was able to break the door down. What we found shall remain with me for the rest of my days.

The room looked like it had been torn apart by

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some enraged madman. Bookshelves were overturned, papers scattered about the place. And perhaps the most terrifying of all, three large scratch marks across George's desk. They were dug deep into the oak desktop, like some wild creature had lashed out in rage.

In the shock of our discovery, neither of us had noticed the cold winter breeze that was coming in through the smashed window at the back of the study. There was something flapping on one of the broken panes of glass. A piece of tattered cloth that desperately clung to a jagged shard.

My heart sank when I realized what it was; it was a piece torn from George's shirt.

Something, some wild animal, had broken in, attacked my brother and taken him away. The local constable believes it may be a bear that woke early from hibernation an in search of food. I am, however, not so sure. Was George right to be worried all those days ago? Has our family demon come back to exact it's revenge on us?

The good doctor assures me that such things are impossible. He has told me to get some rest.

The local police will be sending out a search party in the morning to track down and kill the bear. And to bring back my poor Georges remains. Although I know they think it is futile, I still can't help but feel that George is alive out

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there somewhere. I overheard Dr Sanford telling one of the police officers that this is just shock and he has given me something to help me sleep. I just hope that it helps this headache as well.

God speed my brother, wherever you are tonight.

Tuesday January 19th, 1909

The search parties spent all day in the barrens but found no sign of George, not even a single scrap of clothing. No sign of any bear, wildcat or any other kind of large predator. Before they left from the house early this morning I overheard one of the trackers mention that it looked like my brothers' window had been smashed from the inside. They quickly stopped talking when they spotted me. I'm sure the conversation picked up again once they were clear of the house. I wonder if they even tried to look for George.

Despite Dr Sanford's medication I found myself unable to sleep. Strange images and sounds kept filling my head whenever I would close my eyes. At one point I thought I could hear someone calling my name from outside.

The voice, although strange, had a familiarity to

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it. At first I thought maybe George had manage to find his way home. But when I went to my window and looked out, there was nobody there. Still I felt as if I was being watched. No, more than that, I felt as if I was being called.

Kimberly looked up from the diary. There was something wrong with this latest entry. While he could understand concern about her brother's whereabouts, he felt there was something else he couldn't put his finger on. The more he thought about it, the more it seemed to him that she was starting to slip into a state of paranoia. Why would she think that the search party wouldn't have been looking for George?

He could understand Dorothy's frustration, however she seemed to have contempt for those who were trying to help her.

"I guess I'd be a little unhinged in those circumstances too," he muttered to himself.

Still, he couldn't shake that feeling that he was witnessing a turning point in her life.

That something far greater than he could imagine was starting to take place.

Kimberly looked at the clock; 11:30 PM.

He knew that he should put the book down

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and try and get some sleep. He also knew that the likelihood of him actually doing that was pretty slim. His stubborn perseverance when it came to doing his research had led to many a sleepless night.

“Okay, one more entry,” he lied to himself.

PART THREE

REVELATIONS

3

Wednesday January 20th, 1909

Word of my brothers' disappearance has become the talk of the town. Naturally the "good" folks of this narrow minded, pathetic little town are already condemning my brother and our entire family behind our backs. Oh no one says it out loud, but I know what is being said behind closed doors. I could feel the looks as I walked down Main Street. Their hate filled

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words suddenly ceasing whenever I walked into a store. They believe I don't know what they all think. But they are very mistaken. I am on to them, all of them.

It seems perfectly clear to me now that the good Dr Sorenson's prescription to "help me sleep" was nothing of the sort. Instead it was meant to drive me insane, maybe even to poison me. I am sure there was something in that wicked concoction of his that is making my skin burn like it is.

Damn them all, I wish we did have a family demon. One that I could summon and have take revenge on all those who have ever mocked us. It was no wild animal that dragged my beloved George away; it was them.

A crack of thunder brought Richard back to the present. He sat for a moment before realizing his jaw was hanging. The change in the tone of the entries over such a short time was staggering. Even accounting for her brothers loss, there seemed no real explanation for the sudden change in Dorothy Leeds. For a moment, Richard considered the possibility of her having a psychotic break. Glancing back at the diary he ruled this theory out. It was more like a

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new personality was starting to come through. Some hidden side of Dorothy that had laid dormant within her, which had been brought to the surface by her brothers disappearance. The sudden increased paranoia didn't seem to fit any psychological pattern he was aware of either. It was almost...animalistic. The sweet girl who had been concerned for her brother was gone. The new person, filled with hate and anger, was all that was left. Taking a deep breath, Kimberly returned to the journal.

Thursday 21st, 1909

My brother is alive. He came to see me last night while I slept. I didn't see him, but I could hear him whispering to me from outside. He was talking in an odd, foreign tongue which I had never heard; yet I could understand him perfectly. His voice was in the trees. He told me to look outside by the steps and to take what I found there. When I looked, I found a silver ring with curious hieroglyphs engraved on the outside. I picked it up and could hear my brother whispering "Put it on my dearest Dorothy. Put on the ring so we can play".

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I felt no fear. Quite the opposite in fact; I felt excitement. I placed the ring on my finger; a perfect fit, as if it had been made just for me. Suddenly the world came alive in ways I had not seen before. I could see more, hear more and feel more than I had ever done before. The trees of the barrens glowed before me with a new unearthly brilliance. I could see the wispy, floating things that swim and dance around us. And something else. I could feel the change in me growing stronger. I have been feeling it for several days, but now I think it will happen sooner than I thought.

Friday 22nd. 1909

I finally understand. My brother has always known and now I do as well. The family curse is no such thing; It is a gift. Soon I shall join my beloved brother and all the others who have gone before us. I will be a part of my true family. And we shall fly and play and live forever. Calcatagh, neoch chu falash.

That was the final entry in the journal of Dorothy Leeds. Kimberly sat alone in his hotel room, the thunder now rumbling in the far off distance. His mind should have

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been filled with questions but instead there was only an odd calm. The realization of what he had just read changed everything he thought he knew about the legend. At face value, the journal was nothing more than the ravings of a mad woman, driven to despair by the loss of her brother. But those words; the final words of Dorothy Leeds. They simply could not have been there. He knew them the instant he saw them. He knew how impossibly old they were and why Dorothy could not have known them. They were from a language, older than Babylon itself, that only recently been discovered. It was impossible for anyone within the last twenty years to have seen them let alone someone from 1909. It was all too much to take in. The journal still in his hand, Richard Kimberly closed his eyes and fell into a deep and haunted sleep.

PART FOUR

EPILOGUE

4

The night had brought no rest for Kimberly. The morning had come all too soon and his mind was still haunted by what he had read. After checking out of his hotel a day early, he had found himself on the road that led to the old home of Dorothy Leeds. Pulling up the small dirt track that led to the property, he felt as if numerous pairs of eyes were watching him. The sky

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was gray with heavy, rain filled clouds. Another storm threatening to engulf the region. Kimberly could see the old house as he drove up the road. It stood, ominous against the dark skies. A decaying shell, overgrown and ravaged by time and nature.

He pulled up, got out of his car and slowly walked up to the porch. The wooden shell of the Leeds house creaked and groaned in the wind. As he approached the front door, Kimberly hesitated. His hand hovered over the rusted door handle. He thought back to the diary, a thousand images of what might lay waiting behind that door bombarding his imagination. He lowered his hand, turned around and started back towards his car. In that moment he had decided that some demons were best left undisturbed.

Kimberly reached into his pocket and pulled out his keys. Fumbling, he managed to drop them before he could fit them in the cars lock. As he bent down to retrieve them he though he heard a sound from the nearby trees. He quickly looked up; a feeling of being watched, of being surrounded suddenly filling his very soul. There, again; a whispering sound. He couldn't quite

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make out what it was saying. Suddenly something caught his eye. Something shiny, glinting in the trees directly in front of him. In another instant it was gone. But in that moment he thought he saw a shape. A claw like hand with a shiny silver ring on one bony finger. As quickly as it appeared, it was gone. Richard Kimberly, the world's foremost expert on the Jersey Devil, stood for a moment and smiled. He had his answers.

“Run along Miss Leeds,” he quietly said
“run along and play.”