

Foreword

Masonry and the Downardian Nightmare

By Adam Parfrey

“Because the dead and deadening scenery of the American city of dreadful night is so utterly devoid of mystery, so thoroughly flat-footed, sterile and infantile, so burdened with the illusory gloss of ‘baseball-hot dogs-apple pie-and Chevrolet’ that it is somehow outside the psycho-sexual domain. The eternal pagan psychodrama is escalated under these ‘modern’ conditions precisely because sorcery is not what twentieth century man can accept as real.”

—James Shelby Downard, ‘King-Kill 33°’

James Shelby Downard died before he could finish writing his life story. *The Carnivals of Life and Death* is only Part One, ending in 1935 when Shelby reached the age of 26.

Like the Wizard of Oz, Downard is a guru and a mystic and perhaps a bit of a mountebank, too. He inspired me to see beyond the deadening scenery of modern America and appreciate the magic of words, geography, and the secret underpinnings of American life in the twentieth century. I started to wonder, is it really all that organized and sophisticated, even in subconscious orbits? Who’s behind the curtain, got his thumb on the scale? What if Downard was wrong, that it’s all chaos and coincidence, and no one, but no one, is in charge? Would our situation be even more terrifying?

The establishment housekeepers of what we call reality would be fast to call Downard a kook. In fact, Downard possessed the typical characteristics of kookdom—frequent mailings of correspondence airing previously suppressed, mind-controlled memories in envelopes rubber-stamped with a quote from Ambrose Bierce: “My Country ‘Tis of Thee/Sweet Land of Felony.”

Among his advocates, James Shelby Downard is an almost mythic figure. Over the years, dozens of devoted fans wrote and emailed Feral House for yet more Downard. An Atlanta punk band called itself “King-Kill 33°” and Marilyn Manson wrote a song of the same name. Feral House published his work in the first printed edition of *Apocalypse Culture*, another essay in the revised *Apocalypse Culture*, a piece for Jim Keith’s *Secret and Suppressed*, more strange thoughtforms in *Apocalypse Culture II* and a variant of this Introduction in my now out-of-print collection, *Cult Rapture*.

For the *Cult Rapture* piece “Riding the Downardian Nightmare,” I flew to Memphis in the summer of 1994 to finally meet Mr. Downard in person. There were two failed attempts to film Shelby at Trinity Site, location of the first atomic bomb blast. What Downard has to say about the mystical meanings of the atomic bomb can be accessed today in the current in-print edition of *Apocalypse Culture*.

Memphis seemed the perfect place to find Shelby Downard, home to the occult temple Graceland, reflecting the King of Rock’s quest for eternal life. The Memphis Convention Center is a huge pyramid (Masonry is obsessed with pyramidology), where developer Isaac Tigrett hangs photographs of Hindu Godman Sai Baba, and is said to possess a Mayan crystal skull situated in the pyramid center’s power point.

Downard lived with his sister in an upper-middle-class brick two-story affair located near a man-made lake in an exclusive part of town. Shelby’s sister, an elderly, D.A.R.-type woman, greets me at the front door with Southern hospitality, inviting me into the living room for a whiskey sour or mint julep—my choice. Downard, an octogenarian full of tics, wattles, and liver spots, comes down from his upstairs bedroom, eyes dancing with excitement.

After sis hands me a whiskey, Downard takes me aside and whispers into my ear: “She thinks she’s my sister, you know. But she’s not.”

Around Shelby Downard, things are never what they seem. Having read a number of his essays full of recondite factoids, I expect his library to be filled with thousands of obscure books. Instead there’s an old set of World Book encyclopedias, a dictionary, an abused set of *Man, Myth and Magic*, and a couple dozen tomes that could probably be found in any large used book-

store. Downard does not rely on many secondary materials for his research, but instead upon topographic and city maps to prepare for personal visits to sites of arcane and personal significance. Downard had a batlike intuition for navigating dark and hidden terrain that sometimes amazed experts.



Masonic Grand Lodge of Arizona meeting in a cave in the mine of the Copper Queen Consolidated Mining Company in Bisbee, Arizona, Nov. 12, 1897.

Just before I visited, Shelby convinced his niece to drive him to Kansas City to explore underground caves. (As seen in this book, Downard believes caves are fundamental to Masonic beliefs and ritualism, part of the secret history of the United States.) Upon their arrival in Kansas City, the local spelunking society informs Downard and niece that there was no such thing as a cave or caves beneath Kansas City. Then he makes friends with a helpful librarian who spends many hours leafing through maps and consulting with city employees. The librarian discovers to her surprise that many caves do

indeed exist beneath the city. I ask Shelby if he's seen recent commemorative postage stamps celebrating sign language.

"Maybe it's my imagination," I tell Shelby, "or the U.S. has issued a couple stamps celebrating the devil's horns."

"Is that right?" says Downard, a bit dubiously. I flash him the symbol on the stamp and suddenly he's excited. "Cuckold, the sign of the horns! You sure now? This I've got to see!"

We enter a standard-issue post office. Clerks work in slow motion, patrons silently stand in line next to a shade duct-taped to thick greenish glass.

By contrast, the excited and chatty Downard seems the epitome of life.

A growling clerk barks us ahead to his window, and Downard requests the "devil stamps."

"Don't know what you mean," says the clerk.

"The hell you don't," says Downard.

"He means the deaf stamps," I intervene.

The clerk tears out a pair for our inspection. Downard lets out a war whoop, a gutbucket howl of recognition.

"You're right, you're right, by golly! The sign of the horns, the cuckold, the devil," he shouts triumphantly. "And it's printed there that it means 'I love you.' I love you! I love you! That's the way they love you all right." He laughs again, stomps and snorts.



We stop for lunch and read aloud an afternoon newspaper wire story about the National Reconnaissance Office (NRO), an intelligence agency that remained secret until 1992. Apparently a few members of Congress were

upset that no one would tell them why and for whom a half-billion-dollar, million square-foot “Taj Mahal” was being constructed near Dulles Airport. NRO was forced to admit that their huge complex, half the size of the Pentagon itself, will store and analyze information gleaned from satellites and phone wiretaps.

Welcome to the dead and deadening world of spookland. With \$50 billion spent yearly on intelligence agencies and the dissemination of misinformation, shall we curtly dismiss James Shelby Downard as a complete kook?

Like many others, I first became interested in the writings of James Shelby Downard because he seemed so delightfully insane. On closer inspection I noticed that his “madness” had its own undeniable logic.

In Downard’s writings, the products of his subconscious bubble to the surface and catalyze painstaking research. The collision of the poetic against the logical remains the freshest approach to the field of conspiracy.

In 1986, when I was putting together the first edition of *Apocalypse Culture*, I first came across the writings of James Shelby Downard when they were brought to my attention by the controversial anti-Zionist writer Michael A. Hoffman II. It was remarkable to me that JFK’s assassination, by 1987 a seemingly tired and over-examined subject, could receive such an astonishingly fresh treatment. Who but Downard could think of examining the symbolism behind Jack Ruby (né Jacob Rubenstein)? To paraphrase Downard: the gem business calls a fake ruby passing itself off as the real thing a “jack ruby.” A ruby is a blood-red gemstone and is sometimes referred to as a bloodstone. Since the facts behind JFK’s assassination must be concealed from the public, it makes sense that the man whose job it is to silence the patsy by spilling his blood would change his name to “Jack Ruby.”

Why does Downard pick on the Masons? Aren’t they merely a clownish fraternity of small businessmen who wear corny outfits? Downard says he isn’t interested in tenderfoot recruits or the window dressing of Masonic philanthropy. He’s interested in the government, business, and military leaders that are part of the inner elite.

For many years Downard moved slyly about the country in an Airstream trailer to avoid becoming a Masonic “Pharmakos” or scapegoat. Masonry enjoins the oath-taker that death will greet those who spill secrets. The costumes

of the Knights Templar and the other elite Masonic factions are littered with skulls and bones and knives. Talk about mysteries: Death, the greatest one of all.

Back in his house, Downard hands me a file of old newspaper clippings with photographs of presidents and cabinet members decked out in ritual attire. So what? Isn't Masonry as American as apple pie? Didn't Masonry pull off the American revolution? Didn't G-Man (Grand Architect of the Universe Man) J. Edgar Hoover boast of being a 33° Mason? What about Yale's Skull and Bones Society with all those Bush family members? The All-Seeing-Eye (adopted as a symbol of Sarnoff's CBS network as well as for the Pinkerton security operation) is secured within the Masonic pyramid on the back of every dollar bill. The eye here represents the monitoring and control of society, and according to Shelby Downard, the pyramid represents the building of monuments to honor the Pharoahnic elite.

However benign Masonry might be, when I visited Shelby Downard, he was armed at all times and had an extra loaded Colt .45 by his bedside. He didn't want to be caught unawares by sadistic fraternal hijinks, a strange leitmotif in this book.

The skeptic, with his dust-dry religion of old-style scientific rationalism, will dismiss Downard's revelations as cherry-picking from the garden of fact in order to confirm preconceptions. The skeptic will likewise argue that once a scientist buys into a thesis, his data can be tilted to prove his theory. This sympathetic transformation of data occurs even in the physical sciences. If the scientist is not merely fudging data, this principle supports a magical conception of reality. If a belief is strong enough, can it make reality conform?

Downard's life story, the early years found within this book, was confided to me in person, on the phone, in the mail, and through several autobiographical epics published at Kinko's. The typed manuscript of one of these was word-processed by Elana Freedland, a British-based writer interested in abuses by governments worldwide.

So, what is this autobiography? An adventure story as told by Walter Mitty? After all, many of the events seem improbable at the very minimum. For a start, how could such a young boy become capable of taking down entire contingents of nasty, murderous Ku Klux Klanners? Did Shelby Downard really get called into the White House to meet with Franklin

Delano Roosevelt to discuss weird prophetic books he found with his name engraved on their covers? What about the escapades in Cuba that go beyond any movie starring Errol Flynn? Mix them all together and the rational mind rebels.

But then what about Downard family patents and Million Dollar Gold Certificates that check out on a Google search? Secret truths hang over this fascinating book like ectoplasm photographs from the late nineteenth century. What's true? What's not? The joy of reading this book is that it bitch-slaps your belief system to kingdom come.

On my visit, Downard accompanied me on a drive through the back roads of north Mississippi where he was going to show me hot spots used by secret societies for occult charades, which Shelby pronounced as "shah-raid," emphasizing the first syllable in his definitive Memphis inflection. "Their entire program is an ah-cult shah-raid." Shelby and I hit dead ends on what became something of a goose chase. But on our return to Memphis, Shelby fished out some intimate photographs, about a dozen of them seemingly from the '30s and '40s, of a beautiful woman he referred to as "The Great Whore." The photos make clear that Downard once owned the allegiance of this woman and later lost her. The intensity of this loss seemed to inform his worldview. In a moody voice, Downard tells me about the Great Whore drugging him with "abulic" and "amnesiac" drugs while she ran off to perform "sex rites" with famous and infamous men.

"I don't blame her for her nymphomania," says Shelby. "They had her wired up. One day I found a wire sticking out of her ass. I pulled it out. It's a long, thin wire and connected to the end of it is some microelectronic contraption. This was to get her in a constant state of sexual excitation. They implanted me, too."

James Shelby Downard died in 1996 at the age of 87, two years following my visit. There is no one else like him. I owe him thanks for inspiring me to investigate the details and fantastic convergences of life. Is paranoia another form of awareness, or just another form of mental illness? After reading *The Carnivals of Life and Death* I feel less capable of answering that question definitively.