

# The Heavy Reverb of Devil's Trumpets

by Vernon Burn

*"If you don't want anyone to find out, don't do it." - Chinese Proverb*

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Those Chinese were on to something there.

I suppose the place to take up this particular tale would be a little after midday on Saturday, September the eighteenth:

"So, everything's sorted then?"

"Yeah. Pretty much," he said.

"Pretty much?"

"The acid hasn't come through yet."

"But it will, right?"

"He told me it should do."

"Good."

It was to be a day of setting our minds free, a day of audacious letting go. A time of psychedelic-chemical adventure and educational exploration — albeit down a path well-trodden and in the civilised setting of a friend's flat in the city centre. Yes, a day of altered perceptions and probably computer games. It was also, in a rather fortuitous coincidence, my birthday. I was thirty-three.

Now the average man on the street may look at what we set out to do as simply going and getting fucked up on drugs at lunchtime on a summery Saturday. And they would have been totally right. But, we were also entering into the whole venture with the aforementioned educational aim of self-discovery and, dare I say it, a spiritual outlook. It was with such a mindset that we arrived at the supermarket.

"We need to stock up to such an extent, that if it comes down to it, we need not leave the flat for two days."

"Jesus! It won't come to that will it?" he laughed, but I could tell he was nervous.

"I hope not, but we must be prepared."

Although we had a vague finish ahead, there were three of us due to set off from the start line. Me, a teacher; my brother, working in the aerospace industry; my friend whose flat was to be the arena, an accountant for a law firm. Bastions of society all three of us. The height of middle class respectability. All about to permeate the line of the law in numerous naughty ways.

We left the supermarket with a fuck-ton of pre-cooked, pre-prepared food and other snacks, several bottles of New Zealand pinot noir, some pear cider, several cartons of pear juice and some pears. Why all the pear related products? I really like pears.

"So when will we know on the acid?" I asked my brother.

"I'll give him a call later."

"Shit. We'll have to see how it goes."

I knew with the amount of substances we already had it would be touch and go whether we'd be able to make it out to collect, *if* the acid turned up.

Still, whatever happened, I was very glad to have the sanctuary of my friend's flat. A safe haven within which to get weird without judgement from the weighing eyes of society and its mores. His fiancée would be there, but she was basically cool with it. Or so I hoped.

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About twenty-five minutes later, we were greeted with hugs, a "Happy Birthday!" and, "Where the hell were you guys? I thought we were already meant to be deep into it by now."

Pear juice and other victuals made him understand why our arrival was about an hour late. An offering of peace and thanks (wine) was given to his fiancée, who would sit with us in our quest.

We clambered over the upturned sofa in the hallway. They had still not thrown it out. "I thought lawyers were meant to be respectable people and not have rotting furniture lying about in their hallways. It's a fire hazard that."

"I'm an accountant, not a lawyer," he said by way of explanation.

"And I really don't give a shit," said his fiancée, who worked as an actual lawyer at the same law firm.

I shook my head, "My God. How wrong I've been about you people."

Sitting down in the living room, we proceeded to eat some of the food and get drunk. On TV was an engineering show about war machines presented by a Dutchman.

"This is strange," I declared of the program, "Let's put on some Boards of Canada and take some drugs." Which we did. With gusto.

My friend's fiancée went upstairs for a time. When sober, she doesn't like to see people breaking the law or, in particular, putting things up their noses.

First we got a mirror and took out the MDMA crystals and ketamine we had. For some unknown reason my brother had a scalpel in his possession. It was perfect for our needs, so we didn't question it.

Some of the bigger, more intractable rocks of MDMA were put into cigarette paper and swallowed. Down the hatch, wait for twenty to thirty minutes, boom! The rest was crushed as finely as possible, mixed with a proportional amount of ketamine and snorted up good and proper.

As my head rose and I was still breathing in, I croaked, "Now that makes you feel a bit weird. I can tell you."

"It also stings," my brother quite rightly said, rubbing his nose.

Over the next few minutes, slowly but surely, a shift in consciousness; first the ketamine caused a gentle psychedelic sensorial effect and a mild dissociative feeling; then the MDMA caused a warmth and comfort and, as it intensified, energy waves causing eye shaking, general fidgetiness and a richness in tactile sensation. It was definitely time for Mario Kart.

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Only a little later Mario Kart was abandoned, as it turned out to be much harder in that state of mind than anticipated. Things got progressively further away from the norm as the day progressed. After another bout of drug taking, we felt we were neither able nor willing to go outside, but necessity struck when we realised that we had neglected to get any chewing gum. A pleasant friend at the best of times, but when the drugs are making you chew your own face off from the inside, it becomes a need.

The accountant's missus kindly offered to go down to the shop for us, while we were left to watch amusing videos on YouTube of people embarrassing themselves or others. Our attention spans, such as they were, could only attend to things for a very short time, so that seemed perfect.

The fiancée soon returned with some serious goodies; cigarettes for the others (disgustingly unhealthy habit), even more vino, blessed chewing gum and, *lord almightily be praised!* — plasticine, paper and colouring pens from The Early Learning Centre.

"Aren't I a good mother?"

"You most certainly are!" we agreed.

The plasticine gave just the perfect feeling for our heightened sensitivity to texture. After the perfunctory penises were made somebody made a hippo, another a bear, quite a good tractor

appeared also, whereas I was simply addicted to massaging the stuff in my hands. Unfortunately, I sat on some and stained my shorts and underwear with its bright pink colour. Still, I did manage to draw a rather splendid energy-crab with the pens and paper. It was very colourful.

For the rest of the afternoon things settled into a regular pattern of fleeting moments of attention, computer games taken up and quickly dropped, fidgetiness that resulted at one point in an outbreak of dancing, lethargy mixed with pulsating energy.

At around half-seven the fiancée went out on the town and we were left to our own devices. We soon realized we had ripped through all the chemicals and the hold they had on us went slack.

I forget who verbalised it, but someone said, "We need more drugs." It may even have been me.

At any rate, we were all in agreement. Any sensible group of people would have realised we had already had quite enough and we were just condemning ourselves to a longer, harder journey downwards.

Not us. We were made of denser stuff.

"OK. I'll make the call," announced my brother. And so he did.

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Two hours later, after heading out to meet my brother's old, crusty dealer-hippy, hanging around for the obligatory friendly pint down the pub and then the obligatory social spliff round the back, we finally returned with the substances. We had procured some more MDMA powder, some skunk, plus something else offered to us for free. As it was my birthday and the acid had sadly not come through, the guy's ancient hands proffered a bag of something he guaranteed would fuck us up more than anything else ever could. He called it Devil's Trumpets.

"Be real careful with this stuff, man. Real careful. This fucked me up for two days last weekend. Two full days, man." There was reverence in his tone. "Good for asthma, though, apparently."

And so there we were with a dried bag of trumpet flowers, leaves and some half crushed, spiny seedpods. We were meant to smoke it in a bong with some cannabis.

"I don't know, guys. I don't know if I want two days of being high," said my brother.

"Well, we couldn't get the acid and we did enter into this to plumb the depths and scale the heights of our souls," I said. Then added, "But, I do see your point."

"Fuck it. We don't have to get into it now. Let's enjoy some of the other stuff and see how we feel about it in a bit," said the law firm man judiciously.

And so we did leave it. Until what seemed only a few moments later, when he suggested, "Well, I'm going to have a bong, so we might as well have a taste. Fuck it, why not?"

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Tuesday morning. Three days later. Growling myriad beasts were blasting on Trumpets of Hell. Awakening, I found it to be just my taxi driver punching on the horn and swearing blind at someone.

He turned to me contrite, "Sorry guv. It's a wonder they let some of them drive. I wouldn't."

"Who?"

"Women drivers. Them Saudi's have got the right idea."

I didn't have the energy to reply. I was too busy shitting myself. Not so much because of the fact that I was almost late, nor because I had to take the Monday off school due to still being wrecked, but more on account of still having disconcerting auditory moments and seeing things out the corner of my blurry eyes that disappeared when I tried to look at them directly. Not to mention the splitting headache and cotton mouth, which were now only just receding. But yes, no asthma.

I was also not a hundred percent sure if my calling in sick worked yesterday, as at that stage it was still actually quite difficult to tell if I was genuinely speaking to someone on the phone or not. I think it was alright. Hopefully they just dismissed my eccentricities as me being delirious with some kind of summer fever.

At least I could remember such things again! The night we smoked that devil's stuff and the day after were filled with vast blank patches interspersed with flashes of memory: I remember when we had decided to go for it, we committed fully and went to the trouble of crushing it up all nice and fine with a pestle and mortar. The lawyer smoked up the first bong and, to be honest, I felt a bit strange just from the secondary, green smelling smoke. We each had one. No idea if we had any more after that or not. It's entirely possible we ate the rest.

Strange visions of Shiva and Shakti dancing came next. Heart pounding. Panic. Then the fiancée came home with people dressed as clowns. Frantic wine bottles, Guinness, crazy laughter. Then, with no transition, it was just us three again.

Outside. Night walking through the Cathedral grounds, laughing and falling over. Dizziness. We see an old school friend, who takes us home. She had died last year.

I woke up sweating. Pissing was very difficult. Somehow I cut my hand badly. Making an absolutely disgraceful scene down the pub Sunday lunchtime. A stagger back. Where are the others? Waking up in my own bed, hearing a gorilla's laughter and a busy train station. Head pounding, swimming in agony, my hand throbbing.

It was in amongst the suffering, despite all the things I had going against me, that I had managed to work out I was at Monday morning and called in sick. The rest of that day was spent drifting in and out of restless sleep full of disturbing dreams.

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Out the taxi, walking toward the school gates, I was, to say the least, reticent. I saw students and tried to act normal.

"Morning Sir!"

"Morning Jenkins."

I avoided conversation and kept eye contact to a minimum. Slipping into the staff room smooth and easy, I went about my normal routine of making a cup of tea before retreating to my classroom. No chit-chat for anyone and *thank Christ* there was no Monday morning meeting to deal with. All I needed to do was keep my head down, keep my outbursts low-key and then slink off to the relative safety of my room and a sweet, free first two periods.

I heard a short laugh behind me and then, "So, did you get her to take them down?"

For a brief moment a cold shot of fear pierced me. Had I gone totally insane? Was I still hallucinating? What on earth did that mean anyway? Wait! I recognised the voice. I turned around, "Oh thank fuck, it's you!"

Frowning and smiling, she said, "Yes, I'm pleased to see you too." She looked at my bandaged hand, "Feeling better?"

It was an ally, a friend, a biology teacher.

"Yes. Yes. Sorry," I muttered. "I'm...still a little lightheaded," but it was neither the time nor place for a full exposition, "I took some medicine this morning, but feel much better."

"Right."

Something told me I should ask, "What was that first question?"

"Did she take them down?" I gave a blank look in response. "The pictures. On Facebook."

"What pictures?"

"Oh God. Don't tell me you haven't seen them," she said. I shook my head. "You might want to have a look on your Facebook. I hope it's not too late." The bell rang, "I've got to go. I'll speak

to you later, but really, have a look.”

Before I could verbalise any of my further questions, she gave me one of those commiserating looks that someone would give you if they'd heard that you'd been simultaneously diagnosed with prostate cancer and AIDS, squeezed my arm and then left to go to her form room. Utter fear descended.

Walking with my tea, I took out my phone. By the time I got to my classroom I was sweating and my stomach was churning.

On the fiancée's Facebook page there was a new photo album entitled, Look Wot My Husband To Be And Friends Got Up To. Many pictures showing me in a messy state; one showing me with an almighty spliff hanging out my chops; another showing me with my trousers down, sat on the toilet with sunglasses, red lipstick and a clown's wig on; but the real damning ones were the ones where I have a mirror on my lap covered in white lines, am bent over it with a rolled up twenty quid in my hand and a demonic look under those darkened lenses.

“Shit.”

It was alright for her as she had two accounts, one for professional contacts and family and such, the other under a different name for friends and honesty. Not so for the rest of us idiots. A frantic call to the accountant, who was not on Facebook, so would have no idea that he was a present, active participant in a photo shoot, plus phone messages and Facebook messages to the fiancée herself and toward the end of the first period the album had been removed. I had noticed several likes and a few comments on it prior to it being taken down, but they had been from 'safe' people — allies, friends, compadres.

“Oh God! Mum!”

She's on Facebook. Hardly ever on it, though and doesn't understand it, so it might be OK, but if it wasn't... That bridge would have to be crossed, if and when it ever came up. The important thing was that nobody else from work had seen them — especially my head of department. Or anyone above him for that matter. They're all *professional*. Career types. Still, I was sure that if they had, there would have already been some communication from them and I would have earlier been drawn aside 'for a chat'.

Jesus, I might have nipped it in the bud just in time. I was probably still set for about a week of paranoia at that stage, but that would dissipate as each day passed.

It was as that thought came to mind that I clocked a student staring at me from the door of the classroom. Who should be there but Liv Trumpsteed. The bell had gone and the students were shuffling along to second class. What did she find so funny, though?

A tsunami of burst sewerage pipe realizations overcame me in an instant; she is Facebook friends with the fiancée through family connections and on both accounts. My rapport with her was good, but she was a popular girl and had a hell of a mouth on her. I could just imagine how quickly the news was spreading and had spread through the ecosystem, how many of them knew, how many would have seen the pictures, how the rumours would expand and mutate and then work their way up to the top of the food chain.

But, maybe I was just being stupid. The after-effects were making me paranoid.

Then, my first class, the students started to roll up bits of paper and make snorting sounds when my back was turned. My shoulders sagged. I wilted by the blackboard. What could I do?

That bugging Chinese proverb was turning over and over, whipping the inside of my head. I was fucked.