

Imaginary Advice, Episode 33

# EXORCIST DAVE STEWART (PART 1)

Episode written & produced by Ross Sutherland

Voice: Ross Sutherland

Transcribed by Sathya Honey Victoria

[glitchy dark music, tape hiss]

[sinister, elegant voice:] “In those days radio was a power and a light in the land. People in their homes at night gathered by the radio and heard the crackling, stilted reports of a world they had only read about and now imagined more intensely. Radio fixes the person but frees the imagination. And the people most affected by it were those who lived and listened alone.”

[music cuts out]

[Imaginary Advice]

[gentle vocal music]

[Exorcist Dave Stewart:] Somewhere in Birmingham, England there is a haunting. The Neil family residence has found itself under supernatural assault.

According to the report, Mrs. Neil contacted her local priest, father Abernathy. Abernathy followed procedure, scheduling a visit to the house. Eight minutes after entering the residence, Abernathy reappeared, “buck nude,” according to the report and screaming incomprehensibly.

[music grows more tense, more dissonant]

Abernathy renounced the church later that night, immediately forming a heavy metal band with some local students. Abernathy has now reportedly changed his name to “Oink.” Though now a de facto disciple of Satan he is reportedly “pretty good” on the drums. The church has lost not only a great priest but worse, a grade-three percussionist.

[rainstorm]

Two days later, I am brass rubbing in a crypt in Salzburg when a text comes through from the Vatican: [notification sound echoing wetly in the crypt] *How soon can you be in Birmingham UK?* [dark piano note] *Ghost emoji, ghost emoji.*

[piano gains speed, like a train] I cancel my lectures and take the red-eye to England. Rain falls upon this country in endless ugly swords.

My taxi driver mumbles asthmatic parables in what sounds like a made-up accent. Birmingham, England, you harbour a sickness. Satan is hacking the server banks of your souls. And only I have the tools to prosecute. I, Father David Stewart. [music remains dark but more playful]

Highest ranking Exorcist in Northern Europe, voted Best Dressed Exorcist 2007 and 2010, editor of the 2015 Boswell Spirit Guide and author of several prominent papers on ecto-herbology, not to mention the erotic novella series Demon Seed (published under a pseudonym).

I check my suitcase: Bible, handcuffs, night-vision glasses, flare-gun (blessed by His Holiness), nun's teeth, noise-reduction headphones, small bottle of CK-One (blessed by His Holiness), backup Bible, a pouch of special exorcist coffee that no one can have but me.

The taxi hisses through the suburbs: endless greyscale terraces. I turn up my collar—call it a little treat for my silhouette.

[music fades, a door opens]

The Neils greet me at the door. The house reeks of broccoli—or ghost urine, as we exorcists have come to know it.

Crossing the threshold, I spritz the Neils with CK-One. [exciting, mysterious music begins] “Let the cleansing begin,” I say, scanning the ceiling, eyeing a suspicious hatstand beside me.

Mrs. Neil shows me her daughter's bedroom. It is...hideous in every way possible. “Did the ghost decorate this room?” I ask. But no.

“Look!” says the mum, “Look. It *liquefied* her Barbies.” “Yes,” I say. “Ghosts are extremely progressive. We should never put ghosts into a situation where to say nothing would be ethically dubious.”

The hallway has been clawed to pieces as if a million grand pianos had been dragged end to end.

I make a note of the excellent simile, then send some photos [shutter sound on digital camera] to a gallery owner I know in Brooklyn [whooshing sound of an email being sent].

“The texture is very unconventional,” I tell the father. “It’s too early to say for certain but the ghost may come from a background in sculpture. This is...incredibly powerful stuff.”

[music continues]

“You don’t understand,” says Mr. Neil. “No, Neil, *you* don’t understand! You think *you* could make art like this?!” I say, “What, you think just because you’re alive that makes you somehow smarter than the dead? You don’t know the dead, Neil. Don’t presume to talk for them.”

[guitar breakdown, then music continues]

“My dining table,” interrupts the mother. “It flew right across the room!”

“Ohhhh, wake up, Neil!” I say. “Don’t you see? The only reason it moved your furniture is because it knew the perfect way to free up your lounge.”

I light a new cigarette from the end of my last one.

“Ghosts,” I exhale, “typically have terrible spatial awareness, hence all the walking-through-walls business, but this one? This one just Feng Shui’d your lounge, Neil.”

“It took your all your plastic Argos bullshit and it built you a temple of productivity and balance. Go look again! Go look again, go on! Don’t tell me the energy in that room isn’t *perfect*. There isn’t a living designer that could improve upon it.”

“Living,” I repeat. “Only Satan, the architect of eternal damnation, could arrange your furniture with such a keen eye for its potential.”

“Yes, Neil. The Devil. The Corbusier of wickedness himself.”

[music cuts out, door slams]

My speech is interrupted by the daughter arriving home from school.

She hands me a folder of grotesque finger paintings. [music returns] Images of mother, father, daughter, and a grey figure with twelve arms, blood-red eyes, its mouth an endless black lake. Sky burning with forked lightning.

“My God. The terrifying genius of this demon,” I say, “is clearly not rubbing off on the rest of you. These are C+ at best.”

[music fades]

--

The evening unfolds like a school bus slowly exhumed from a swamp.

The ghost leaves discouraging messages in blood, teleports a Victorian doll around, etc., etc. Ghost stuff, but the spread is impressive. [ominous drone begins quietly]

I tell the Neils to think of me as a bomb disposal expert, “except the bomb is wired to your souls,” I tell them. “Cutting the wrong wire, as it were, would open a gate to Hell right under our feet. [drone progressively getting louder] And all that is good would be pulled through it in an instant like nuns sucked through the hole in the side of an aeroplane.” [sound of the sucking void; drone cuts out]

When Mr. Neil regains consciousness, I continue, [ominous drone returns] “We will almost certainly all die here tonight. But if I have anything to do with it, our ends will not be in vain.”

This is a standard exorcist verbal contract, although I have punched it up a bit over the years. I charge Mrs. Neil with the job of collecting Mr. Neil’s tears and exit to lay the rest of the preliminaries.

[pulsing music] I unbox the Neils’ edition of Connect 4, set up a game, burn some larkspur, mumble a small prayer then place the device on the second-to-top step of the basement stairs.

Next, I go room to room writing little art reviews on postcards and burning them. I review the bleeding clock in the hallway, the text-art burnt into the Neils’ bedroom wall, the gravity-defying towers of kitchen furniture.

I give each artwork...three stars out of five, although [he admits] the reviews themselves read more like four stars. Trust me. I know what I am doing. [music gains momentum and excitement]

Whenever Mr. or Mrs. Neil try to engage me in conversation I slowly raise my eye-line and stare pensively at the space above their heads until they leave me alone.

Later I check back in on the game of Connect 4. The demon has filled every space with a red counter. Technically, it has won the game but really, this is cheating. I award myself the moral victory.

[music cuts out]

Nine p.m. [door closing, swallowing liquid] During my investigations I find Mr. Neil’s vast collection of sleeping tablets. I take a handful then retire to the master bedroom

whilst the Neils watch something godawful on the television downstairs. [vague sounds of a tv show drifting in]

[Exorcist Dave + demonic voice:] I dream of an eyeball on fire floating over a black forest. [terrifying music begins] On the horizon, a hand the size of a cathedral, fingers breaking the cloud cover. I watch from the tree canopy, the branches slick and black.

[music stops, demonic voice disappears:] On the wind a voice chanting in an ancient language. A language known only to triple-A Vatican staffers like myself. Being three-dimensional, the language cannot be rendered on the page. Needless to say, it has nothing nice to say about anyone.

[music returns, chilling demonic voice chanting unintelligibly]

[beeping] My alarm wakes me up after 15 minutes. I move to another room and repeat the process, collating all my dreams into my special exorcist dream diary.

Highlights include: [music box over dark droning chord] a theatre littered with corpses; levitating monkey skeleton; talking dogs following me around calling me a virgin, etc.; moon with a penis; blood volcano; goat waterfall; various box-set spoilers. But nothing that I didn't already see coming.

In one dream the ghost appears in front of me, wearing my clothes and my face. It lights one of my cigarettes.

[exhales] "Walter Benjamin said that the ghosts of each failed revolution are reincarnated into the next."

"Not literal ghosts," I say.

""[mocking sing-song] Not literal ghosts,"" says the ghost. "That's you. That's what you sound like."

[music cuts, whooshes into the new scene]

I wake up on the guest toilet, drenched in sweat.

--

[kettle whistle]

Soon after we convene at the kitchen table. Mrs. Neil shakily lowers cup to saucer. [the wind whipping around outside] "Father," she says dryly, "have you ever encountered a spirit like this before?"

I narrow my eyes and suck my cigarette. Wind whistles through the masonry at exactly the same time so my cigarette sounds a bit like a tin whistle. [whistle, wind] They wait for me to speak. [clock ticking quietly]

[draws long breath, considering:] “The ghost is incredibly raw, incredibly. Fiercely original.”

“I would very much like to enter this ghost into a competition, run internationally by the Exorcist Guild where we compete annually to discover who has found the scariest ghost.”

“Oh,” says Mrs. Neil.

“But such a competition does not exist,” I continue, flicking my ash into Mrs. Neil’s teacup. [long breath] “A pity, really.”

I notice how haggard the Neils are looking. This demon has really done a number on them.

“Yes,” I say, unclipping my briefcase. “With a ghost of this size and intelligence, the chances of banishing it are incredibly slim. Almost impossible. Nevertheless, I have made my diagnosis. I believe this ghost should be sent to a museum.”

“Oh,” says Mrs. Neil.

“A museum in Hell!” I say quickly, slamming a crucifix onto the table.

[dramatic organ music]

--

The exorcism rite is scheduled for 4 a.m. [unsettling synth organ] It used to be midnight for exorcisms, but 4 am has very much become the new midnight. We assemble in the front room of the house. I plug my iPod into the Neils’ stereo and turn off the lights.

I select a special beat on my iPod, one blessed by His Holiness himself.

Mr. and Mrs. Neil put on the special crucifix hats that I have crafted for them. They stand either side of the room, incense sticks *en garde*.

I pour lighter fluid onto the Neils’ favourite armchair then drop my cigarette end onto the stain. The centre of the room explodes into fire.

“Listen up Neils,” I shout. “This ghost thinks that it’s a hundred times smarter than you are. And worst of all? It is. I mean, the ghost has really got you bang to rights on that one, I’m afraid. I mean, look at your bookshelf: *all* the wrong Haruki Murakami novels, you fucking imbeciles.”

“Point is: if we can’t out-smart this thing...we’re going to have to out-stupid it. If we are going to stand any chance of victory, this needs to be a race to the bottom. We have to infuriate this monster into making a mistake.”

I hand Mr. and Mrs. Neil the lyric sheet for Mambo Number 5 by Lou Bega and tell them to chant “slightly out of time with each other, if you can.”

Few outside the Vatican know that Lou Bega is in fact one of the foremost scholars on acoustic demonology. That fact that ‘mambo’ is the Haitian creole word for Voodoo priestess is no coincidence. Bega’s songs are compound summoning spells designed to neutralise spirits that break hierarchy.

Mambos 1 to 3 were designed to combat low-level poltergeists, animal ghosts, door spirits.

Mambo Number 4 was specifically designed for powerful vengeful ghosts but had to be mothballed after the spell was discovered to have negative side-effects: night terrors, weeping statues, some chickens started speaking Latin, if I remember correctly.

Hence the creation of Mambo Number 5. The most sophisticated piece of sonic weaponry to be developed this side of Armageddon. No infernal creature can bear to listen to this demented, insipid, mind-clawing, libido-crushing nightmare.

The Neils chant in tandem, reading by light of the fire. [music continues]

[overlapping voices in background reading lyrics out of time, seriously:  
“A little bit of Monica...” “A little bit of Tina is what I see...” “A little bit of Mary all  
night long...”]

Lightning scores the ceiling. The flame begins to accelerate.

I open my journal and begin my summoning spell: a scathing review of *The Tree of Life* during which I persistently refer to Terrence Malick as “Joseph Merrick.”

“Watching *The Tree of Life* is like flicking through the Instagram account of the dullest man in the world,” I shout. “Someone who just posts sunsets and hashtags it “memories,” and then just, I don’t know, throws in a photo of Sean Penn looking depressed occasionally. Would it kill Joseph Merrick to think of a plot? By the end I was ready to chop down that tree of life, carve it into a canoe, take Joseph Merrick

out to the middle of a lake and shoot him in the back of the head, Godfather 3-style, which is easily the best of the Godfather trilogy in my opinion—” [BANG]

I duck a flying picture frame.

“Also, if Joseph Merrick is such a genius,” I yell into the flames, “why does he wear that stupid towel over his face? Is he even looking at the monitors? Disgraceful!”

[music is replaced by weird sonar sounds; flames crackling]

The burning chair begins to levitate, walls wailing in forgotten tongues. My teeth vibrate. Shadows unhook themselves, drop to the carpet like dying insects. Somewhere in the hallway, the Roomba explodes.

[buzzing static] “Prepare yourself,” I yell to the Neils. “Prepare yourself. [voice becomes distorted and static-y] The demon—it manifests! Steel your nerve—Get ready!” [buzzing sound becomes progressively louder and overwhelms his voice]

[terrifying sound suddenly cuts to a ballad about a heartbroken shadow]

--

[Ross:] So that’s the end of the first part of this story. Um, I’ve never had to split a story before but, trust me, it makes sense to split this one in two. So, second part is gonna be up in about three weeks’ time.

Also, if you support the Imaginary Advice podcast through Patreon and donate over five dollars per month, then you should’ve received a secret bonus episode of the podcast from me last week. It’s a horror story set inside an improv class. Look, if you haven’t received it and you feel like you should have, drop me an email at [rossgordonsutherland@gmail.com](mailto:rossgordonsutherland@gmail.com). If you were thinking about donating to the podcast and you haven’t yet, then I recommend signing up before the end of February this year, 2017, cos if you do that then you’ll get this bonus episode as well. There’s gonna be a new one of those every year, basically.

Um, I’ve got a new website: [ImaginaryAdvice.com](http://ImaginaryAdvice.com). It’s got lots of films I’ve made on it and you can buy books of mine and find out more about the podcast. There’s a huge amount of music which I’ve sampled in this story, and I’ll endeavour to add all the uh, all the songs I’ve sampled to the Imaginary Advice Spotify playlist, and you can also find that via the Imaginary Advice website.

Uh, ok. Thanks so much for listening. My name is Ross Sutherland. I’ll-I’ll be back soon. You have been listening to Imaginary Advice.

[music continues then fades]