

The TOP HAT MAN

by Meghan Burrows

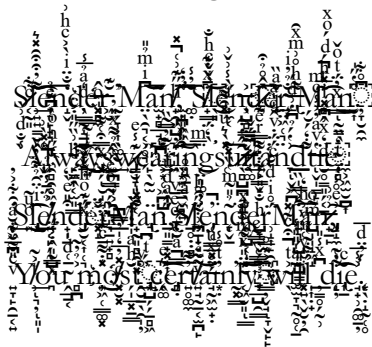
According to several articles published to the Hollow Hill ghost hunting website, Colby-Sawyer College in New London is the most haunted campus in New Hampshire. It is the second most haunted school in the state when compared to East Derry Memorial College (supposedly haunted by the ghosts of twenty-three students killed in the 1967 Burroughs Hall fire). Colby-Sawyer is also ranked on the TAPS website as the seventh most haunted school in the entire United States. There have a grand total of eleven identified ghosts who haunt certain academic buildings and dormitories as of 2011, one of which is a phantom cat confirmed in 2007 by demonologist John Zaffis. One of the most well-known and recognized ghosts, however, is the Top Hat Man.

The Top Hat Man is known to regularly haunt “the Quad,” which is the large area behind Colgate Hall in the center of upper campus. The Top Hat Man has been seen most often by students and his description is usually constant: a man dressed in a stylish black suit and a tall-brimmed hat. The only thing that no one can agree on, however, is the appearance of his face. He is frequently described as missing certain facial features such as his mouth, nose, or eyes. Occasionally, those who see him claim that his eyes and mouth are nothing more than dark holes in his skull. His first known appearance on the Quad was in 1969 when Colby-Sawyer was still all girls’ school. A sophomore, Kara Evelyn Brochure, reported seeing him in broad daylight on September 14th. No one else saw him, but the most prominent detail of her description of him was that he had no face at all. Four days after the sighting, Kara went missing.

With the strange exception of the 1969 incident, the Top Hat Man was seen as a harmless haunt, although this overall nature of his behavior was called into serious question by students in the winter of 1998. A transfer student, Francis Demur, claimed to have seen a faceless man in a tall hat and black suit following him as he was walking back to his dorm on the evening of December 4th. Francis later told his roommates about the incident, telling them that the man looked like he “floated” on top of the ground rather than walking. Francis contacted campus security later that same night when he reported seeing the Top Hat Man again, this time

outside his dorm room window. He lived in Burpee Hall. The Top Hat Man had never been reported as traveling so far away from the Quad before. Unlike the first time, Francis described the Top Hat Man as having unusually elongated arms. Campus security searched for the man and found nothing. The following morning, Demur's roommates reported him as missing. He was never found. A formal investigation was held but no progress was ever made, and the case was finally declared "cold" in the summer of 2000.

It wasn't until early August of 2011 that an actual image of the Top Hat Man appeared on the Something Awful website in their primary image forums. The original poster was anonymous. The photograph showed the Top Hat Man standing in front of what appeared to be Colgate Hall and his arms were shown as unusually elongated. The quality of the photograph was described as too blurry to determine what his face looked like. The image was deleted approximately seven minutes after the original upload. Whether or not a copy of the photograph still exists is unknown, but the text in the post description was eventually recovered by users and contained the following:



The warped text, copied and reposted on other Something Awful threads and on 4Chan's /x/ board, was immediately identified as from the Zalgo text generator. Zalgo is an entity Internet legend that is associated with insanity and death, similar to the creature Cthulhu created by H.P. Lovecraft in the 1920s. Deconstructing the Zalgo text translated the post into what appeared to be English lyrics to a poem:

*Slender Man, Slender Man,
Always wearing suit and tie.
Slender Man, Slender Man,
You most certainly will die.*

In April of 2011, the Colby-Sawyer creative writing club was allowed by campus activity directors to write poems with chalk all around the Quad as part of National Poetry Month. The very next morning, several students complained to the campus activities office that an obscene poem was written directly outside of Colgate Hall. This was discovered to be the same poem as what was posted on the Something Awful forums. No one on campus claimed responsibility and the creative writing club dismissed it as the work of someone from outside the group. The poem was washed away but reappeared several months later in September. The student who discovered the poem was Samantha Hodges. She killed herself of aspirin overdose during winter break at her home in California. It is unknown whether or not she saw the Top Hat Man before her death or at the time she rediscovered the poem.

Before the image of the Top Hat Man in the Something Awful forums was deleted, a comment made by username *sins_13darkness* identified him as an alternate form of another entity, called Slender Man: a mythical creature often depicted as being tall and thin, wearing a black suit with a white shirt and necktie, and having a blank face. People who claim to have seen Slender Man say that his face differs person to person. He can stretch out or shorten his arms at will and has tentacle-like appendages protruding from his back. Slender Man is seen as a highly dangerous demon that primarily preys on children, although he has allegedly gone after adults as well. Those who legitimately claim to encounter him usually go missing. Whether or not he kills his victims or transports them to an alternate dimension is unknown. His existence has been denounced by many demonologists and many refuse to speak about him.

TAPS conducted a brief investigation of Colby-Sawyer College for their show “Ghost Hunters” in 2005, but the episode was never aired. The show’s manager, Jane Darby, released a statement claiming that the episode had been put on hold due to budgeting reasons and “unforeseen circumstances” regarding some of the captured footage. When questioned about the nature of the ghosts and the potential that the Top Hat Man had been recorded, Jane Darby refused comment. One popular belief as to why the episode was never aired was because TAPS only does episodes about ghosts: *not* demonic hauntings.

And especially not dangerous ones.