

## Source B - Why Do We Insist on Believing in Ghosts?

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October is a month of two halves. At the month's beginning, there's still the chance of glorious Indian summer days kidding us there's time for one more barbecue. By the end, with the clocks turned back and the nights drawing in, it's a time for staying home. For putting on the heating and making hot chocolate. For turning down the lights and telling each other ghost stories by the fire.

- 5 Of course, October ends with the spookiest day of the year: Halloween. The night when, tradition has it, the spirits of the restless dead will roam the earth. As will the local teens, demanding confectionery with menaces. Personally I think I'd rather tangle with a thousand tortured souls stuck in purgatory than half a dozen 15-year-olds in Scream masks.

- 10 But do you believe in ghosts? A 2017 study by BMG Research suggests that as many as a third of Britons do, with some 40 per cent of believers claiming to have experienced actual paranormal activity. Our folklore is full of tales of ghostly encounters. Highwaymen haunt the scene of their executions. Suicides wander the places they loved in life. Betrayed women looking for revenge drift around landings wearing white and wailing.

- 15 Investigative journalist Carrie Poppy had a [...] frightening ending to her own ghost story. Poppy told the audience for her TedXVienna talk how, in her early twenties, she'd lived through what she thought was a haunting. She described how she experienced a variety of sensations that led her to believe she was sharing her home with an evil spirit. Her fear manifested itself in a feeling of heaviness in her chest and a growing sense of unease. At last, she spoke to a friend, who suggested she might need an exorcism.

- 20 Fortunately, she also spoke to someone who recognised the physical symptoms of Poppy's haunting as something more sinister. They suggested she might need to have a carbon monoxide specialist examine her home. Poppy duly booked an emergency appointment and the engineer who attended confirmed that a carbon monoxide leak was the problem. Had Poppy continued to try to solve the issue with sage smudging and prayer, she would have been dead within days.

- 25 Inspired by her experience, Poppy became an investigative journalist specialising in the paranormal. She explains that our ghost stories come from the brain's need to find rational explanations. "We use these things as stopgaps for things we can't explain. We don't believe them because of evidence, we believe them because of a lack of evidence."

- 30 And if we look hard enough, there will be evidence to prove that 100 per cent of our paranormal experiences have disappointingly normal explanations. It's certainly easier than ever to fake a ghost sighting on film, with a nifty bit of editing. Light bouncing off reflective surfaces can cause visual abnormalities too. As might electrical appliances emitting a low-frequency hum, which can sometimes be enough to actually vibrate the eyeballs of someone standing close enough, causing them to see things that just aren't there.

- 35 Our brains are predisposed to make meaning of random images. A flicker of light quickly becomes a figure dressed in white. Shadows on a wall become a face. Often, those people who report ghostly sightings have been made suggestible by something as simple as watching too many freaky films or seeing too many teenagers in Scream masks.

40 And yet, and yet... which of us doesn't secretly wish that at least one ghost story might turn out to be true. Which of us hasn't experienced something we don't really want to explain away as a trick of the light or too much cheese after dinner?

Sometimes, the thought that the dead might still walk among us can be a comfort. Which of us wouldn't like to think that our departed loved ones might still be around in some way to help us in times of sadness or need? For as many times as people tell ghosts stories to make your hair stand on  
45 end, there are stories in which ghosts appear to save the day, such as the ghost Nascar champion Dale Earnhardt Jr claims pulled him from a burning car during the 2004 American Le Mans Series race in Sonoma, California. Earnhardt Jr says he felt someone physically pulling him from the wreck, only to be told by the team that he climbed from the flaming vehicle unaided.

Referring to the incident as "paranoia activity" (which he quickly corrected), Earnhardt Jr said on his  
50 podcast, "We're so much more than blood vessels and bones and muscle... and I feel it's quite possible that when our bodies die, maybe there's a spirit capable of continuing on, in certain situations..."

It's a heartening thought. That said, on Halloween, I shall be making sure I don't spend the evening alone. Not because of the ghosts. Because of the local teens. #realparanoiaactivity