

FOREWORD, by Bryan Ellershaw

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It's traditional to start these introductions with a glowing report of the author's skills, and even a jolly little anecdote about how you first came across their work. Well, here's a break from tradition: I'd never heard of Dale Smith before this work landed on my doorstep, and – to be honest with you – I barely noticed his writing as I ripped through the words. Which I suppose could be taken as some kind of compliment, although it isn't really intended to be. But still this novella gripped me from the moment I opened the manila package it arrived in. Not for the author, I assure you, but for another name on that lurid cover.

Honoré Lechasseur.

Another break from tradition: if I can't tell you anything about my relationship with the author, let me instead tell you about the first time I came across the name Honoré Lechasseur.

I was about 11 years old, a precocious child who thought that reading ten years above my age made me somehow more mature than my contemporaries. I devoured any book I could get my hands on, so long as I could find it shelved in the adult section of the library. Many times, I had to get my father to check the books out for me, as they were unable to let me borrow them on a child's ticket meant for Meg and Mog and little more. When I was on my own, it was generally easiest to restrict my selection to books that the librarian considered classics, and feign that I was studying them in school. George Orwell, HG Wells, Conan-Doyle and Jules Verne – between them, they led me slowly to the work of one man: Erik Clevedon.

Clevedon was a romanticist, a disciple of Wells and a firm believer in the science of eugenics, as it was then known. He had a firm belief that the future of humanity could only be assured by the careful control of the populous so that only the fittest (for this read “most intelligent”) were allowed to reproduce. Luckily, Clevedon was never the most famous writer of his age, otherwise the librarian might have heard of his theories and had the book burned as Nazi propaganda.

But Clevedon was no Nazi – instead he was just a little man frightened by a great war and fearing for the future of humanity. And, unlike some of his contemporaries of the same school (Olaf Stapledon, for example), Clevedon changed his opinion: not in the face of Nazi atrocities committed in the name of eugenics, but after a supposed encounter with a black American ex-soldier. A soldier by the name of Honoré Lechasseur.

At the time, you understand, the name didn't leap out at me: like many of his contemporaries, Clevedon used that familiar writer's tactic of writing his

fictions as if they were real (nowadays we're all too post-post-modern to even consider that trick clever), and often used to drop into his narrative little disclaimers along the lines of the names having been changed to protect the unusual. There have been modern theories that certain characters in this particular Clevedon novel, *Peculiar Lives*, might be based on real-life figures well-known to both the audience and the writer (Clevedon's acquaintance George Bernard Shaw is said to lurk pseudonymously within its pages, for example) but let's make no mistake here: the Honoré Lechasseur in *Peculiar Lives* is a man who can see into the future, and even travel there if he connects with the right kind of person – at the age of 11, I wasn't particularly considering that the gentleman in question might be real.

Not at the age of 11.

However, the name stuck in my mind for some reason. So much so, that it was still in some corner of my mind when – at the more mature age of 18 – I was reading a biography of Eric Blair (better known as the author George Orwell). The biography turned to the most famous of Orwell's works, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, and more importantly the history of its creation. It is generally accepted that the earliest that Orwell began work on the novel was 1945, however the biography's author had uncovered that Orwell had once professed a much earlier inspiration for the story.

It was, apparently, during Blair's time fighting in the Spanish Civil War that he met an American who told him an extraordinary story of a future where the world would be run by a fascist dictatorship so strict it had changed the very concept of language to aid its continued dominance. Orwell later joked (or so the author interpreted it) that the American was so convinced by his

vision of the future that he claimed to have seen it with his own eyes.

The American's name, I'm sure you won't be surprised to learn, was Honoré Lechasseur.

At first I assumed it must be coincidence – Clevedon and Orwell were, after all, contemporaries, so that it wasn't beyond the realms of possibility that they might have met and discussed this strange character. Certainly, it would seem far more sensible that Orwell should have told his tale of the American Lechasseur who claimed to be able to see and travel through time to Clevedon, who had been so taken with the tale that he had decided to appropriate the character for his own novel *The Peculiar*.

And yet . . .

By that age I was just beginning my career in journalism, too green to be given enough to do for most of the time. In a moment of boredom, I found myself looking for Honoré Lechasseur in my first newspaper's archives. To be honest, it came as something of a surprise that I found him.

Private Honoré Lechasseur of the US Army, from New Orleans, Louisiana. Injured by a German explosive device in the course of his duties in Belgium and transported to the UK in 1943 to be treated for his physical injuries, and also for what in the modern day would have been called Post Traumatic Shock Syndrome. Back then, it was merely referred to as shell shock. Discharged himself from hospital in the middle of his treatment and then disappeared.

The report came with his regimental photograph, row after row of black faced soldiers and a single white face, presumably the commanding officer. I had no idea which of those faces was Lechasseur, but regardless I scanned

the photograph furiously, searching for the long dark hair and soulful eyes described by Clevedon.

Lechasseur was real. And the strange abilities ascribed to him by two of my favourite authors of the mid-twentieth century . . . ?

Perhaps I would have left my investigations there, thought it a strange little coincidence and nothing more. Except that, less than a week later, I found myself sent to interview an elderly lady for a heart-warming piece about her cat, which had travelled several miles to return to her after being sent to relatives to be cared for. A harmless fluff piece to fill out a slow news day, destined for page 17 next to an advert for a loan company – where indeed it did turn up the next day, written in a style so similar to my own that even I had trouble believing I hadn't written it.

It feels strange to talk about this now, here of all places. I feel I should be restricting myself to saying what a remarkable piece of fiction this story is, and collecting my cheque and maintaining my professional standing. Particularly since there is still a part of me that not only remembers visiting that sweet old dear and drinking her over-milked tea, but actually *wants* to. Because the other memories are so illusive, only coming late at night, in snatches. Because the other memories are so untrustworthy. Because they frighten me.

I don't believe that I did see that dear old woman and her mangy little cat. I believe that I was abducted by a covert United Nations military force and interrogated about my interest in Honoré Lechasseur. I believe that they tortured me, abused me, and then when they were certain I had nothing of any note to tell them, they wiped my memory and implanted a falsehood

inside my mind.

I understand, of course, what you must be thinking. There is a history of mental illness in my family, and I assure you that my first thought when these memories started resurfacing was that my own particular time had come. That is why I have kept these thoughts to myself, even as I tried to find out more about my interrogators – more cautiously than I first tried to investigate Honoré Lechasseur, naturally.

They exist, I promise you that. If you know where to look, you can find them. You can find the people left behind in the wake of their operations, poor individuals so scarred by their experiences that they'll begin to believe anything: alien invasion, demonic possession, ghosts and ghouls whispering in the gas pipes. But to a journalist such as myself, with enough experience to listen for the truth within the delusions . . .

If you talk to people – hypothetically, naturally – about whether time travel is possible, most will tell you that it isn't. If you press them, they'll ask you why we haven't been overrun by time travellers, all wanting to take a look at the great moments in history: the Great Wars, the fall of the Berlin Wall, the destruction of 10 Downing Street.

The answer is simple: we haven't been overrun because the UN is controlling them.

A few months ago, an ex-military man of my acquaintance showed me a piece of paper. An official UN headed piece of paper that under no circumstances should he have been allowed to steal, but steal it he did. The paper purported to be a list of time active individuals regularly visiting our own time-line, interfering and altering history in unknown ways. Amongst the

euphemistic aliases – the “Certain Medical Gentlemen”s and the “Dashing Captain”s – were two names I recognised instantly: Honoré Lechasseur and Emily Blandish.

I should, perhaps, have mentioned Miss Blandish before now – but to be honest with you, I wasn’t convinced that she even existed before I read that piece of paper. She was a character of some importance in Clevedon’s *Peculiar Lives* – a companion and partner of Lechasseur, and the moral heart of the narrative, as well as something more.

Clevedon divides his time active characters into two clear groupings – “time channellers” and “time sensitives”. Lechasseur is in the later group, a new breed of human who can see through time in all directions and thus have problems engaging with the here and now, often descending in a disconnected alcoholism which eventually destroys them. Blandish is in the first group, with no discernable talents of her own – until, that is, she is brought into contact with a time sensitive, whereby she can utilise their ability to see into the past and future and take it one step further: if a time channeller and a time sensitive both think of the same person at the same time, they can travel backwards or forwards along that person’s timeline.

They can travel through time together.

Clearly, Miss Blandish seems like a most important individual to have left to this late stage to mention, but I have my reasons for my doubts: when investigating Honoré Lechasseur, I of course did the same for his partner Miss Blandish. And yet I never found any trace of her – not one single line in history, not a birth certificate nor a single penny in tax paid. Despite Clevedon’s assertions that the fictional Lechasseur and Blandish were not



romantically linked, I even searched for Emily Lechasseur, in case marriage was obscuring her from my search. Nothing. I could find no shred of evidence that Emily Blandish ever existed.

Until, that is, last week.

The note apparently appeared from nowhere – certainly none of my colleagues had noticed who had slipped it onto my desk, which in a busy newsroom was quite the achievement. It didn't say much, just five words that held no meaning at all for me, not then. The girl in pink pyjamas. That was all. I of course investigated.

The girl in the pink pyjamas was something of a celebrity, for a while. She was found at the site of an explosion in London, shortly after the Second World War had ended, wearing nothing but a pair of flimsy pink pyjamas and with no memory of how she had gotten there. The newspapers of the time were all over the story – in fact, my own newspaper had paid a local woman room and board to keep the mystery lady, and provide regular updates on her condition.

The last update the newspaper received was that the girl in the pink pyjamas had received a visit from a “black man called Lechazur”. Following this visit, the girl in the pink pyjamas announced that she had remembered her name, and promptly vanished from history. The landlady didn't report what the girl's remembered name was, but by that time I was willing to pay good money to bet that it was Miss Emily Blandish.

Clearly, you're going to assume that this is all the work of a fevered mind, making connections where there are none. Particularly when I'm telling you that the fictional characters you are about to read about are as real as

you or I. Perhaps it is: that would make me rest more easily in my bed at night.

This book that you are about to read arrived on my doormat only a few days ago, with a note from the author explaining that he was a follower of my journalism work, and that he would be honoured if I would write a foreword for his novella. As soon as I saw Lechasseur's name, I couldn't put the book down and had read it in just under an hour. Perhaps that will be the part of all this that they actually use: "I couldn't put the book down" – Bryan Ellershaw.

I managed to meet with Dale Smith after a morning spent on the telephone convincing him I was who I said and not a debt collector. He insisted on meeting in a pub, and struck me as a bore of the old fashioned variety: obnoxious, loud and frequently drunk. I asked him why he had chosen me to write this foreword – clearly he could have no reason to suspect that I would – but all he would say was that he thought that I had an interest in the subject, and might tell the truth. Then he retreated back into his drink.

The truth.

I saw Honoré – I'm sure I did: yesterday, after the morning edition had been put to bed and the team were grabbing what rest they could. I was tired, so very tired, and yet . . . Long black hair, a thin beard and moustache and the most feminine soulful eyes I have ever seen in my life. He was wearing the trench coat and hat, just as I pictured them from Clevedon's work, and leaning over my computer as if he'd never seen one before in his life. He appeared here from over fifty years ago – probably he *had* never seen a computer before. He looked up as I walked in, and I could tell he was deciding whether to run, or whether to ask for assistance.

‘How do you work this thing?’ he asked me eventually.

And I showed him: it was the archive search he was trying to use, and I explained it was simply a matter of typing in the information he was looking for. Just like typing on a typewriter, only instead of paper there was a screen, and the information would be delivered instantly. He only had a one word search. They were after him, he said. After them both. Possibly after all of us, for reasons he couldn’t even begin to explain.

His search was fruitless: we had no information for him.

The word was “S–

*Bryan Ellershaw was political editor of The Guardian for five years, before tragically committing suicide at the age of 38. This foreword was unfinished at the time of his death, and his family requested that it be left out of the published version of Dale Smith’s Time Hunter: The Albino’s Dancer for fear that it would encourage the conspiracy theories that had grown surrounding his death.*

*Honoré Lechasseur and Emily Blandish are fictional characters created by Daniel O’Mahony for his novella The Cabinet of Light, and currently appearing in Telos Publishing’s Time Hunter series of novellas.*

*The Cabinet of Light is currently out of print due to the expiry of Telos’ licence for the publication of Doctor Who fiction with BBC Enterprises. It is not currently the subject of a “D-Notice” and nor has it ever been.*