

Goblins of the moors inspire first novel

INTERVIEW
After an unusual experience in Yorkshire, engineer Ian Johnson decided to put pen to paper. He spoke to **Yvette Huddleston**.

WITNESSING a series of eerie, hard-to-explain occurrences on the North York Moors some years ago led engineer-turned-author Ian Johnson to write a novel inspired by the events.

In 2003 Johnson, who lives near Malton in North Yorkshire, was the construction manager supervising a team of 14 on a refurbishment project of several houses on the North York Moors. In the preface to his chilling fantasy novel *The Witcher Keys*, he describes how one of the houses appeared to have various unexplained problems – there was an oppressive feeling inside, people who stayed there couldn't sleep, suffered from acute headaches, nausea and depression and the roof was charged with 60 volts of static electricity.

Various tests were carried out and eventually, Johnson says, a team of geomancers – specialists in ground-based paranormal activity – was brought in to investigate.

"They pretty quickly discovered that there were multiple ley lines of energy running underneath the house," he says. "That was pretty unusual but then they said that the house was surrounded by 'elementals', small goblin-like creatures." Apparently the elementals were upset that their water supply – which came from an old stone trough hidden in the trees – had been diverted. The trough was dry and they were very unhappy about it. Johnson and his team quickly restored the water supply and the house returned to normal. This may all seem difficult to believe, but Johnson says he was convinced. "The events were quite well witnessed," says Johnson. "My degree



CHILLING TALE: Author Ian Johnson whose debut novel *The Witcher Keys* is set on the North York Moors.

appear to wish her family ill. The book contains vivid descriptions of Rosedale and Farnedale and Johnson says that it is in part a tribute to the North York Moors.

"I worked there for 14 years and grew to love the moors very much in all their guises," he says. "It is an absolutely stunning landscape which I

wanted to try and describe as accurately as I could."

The response to the book so far – which is suitable for children from 11 upwards but has crossover appeal – Johnson says there has even been some interest from the film industry. "I am keeping my feet on the ground though," he says. "Because there's no way of knowing if anything will come of it."

Meanwhile he is still working with old properties. "Just recently the architect I had worked with on that project in 2003 told me that there were problems with that house again," he says. "So I got in touch with a member of the team who is still working up there and he went back up to the trough – it had dried up again."

■ **The Witcher Keys**, £9.99, Book Guild. www.thewitcherkeys.co.uk



EERIE OCCURRENCE: Ian Johnson and the old stone water trough at the centre of some unusual events on the North York Moors in 2003.

BRIEFLY



Crime festival announces line-up

THE Theakstons Old Peculier Crime Writing Festival has announced its full line-up. This year participating authors include Ann Cleeves, John Harvey and Lynda La Plante. Some events have already sold out including those featuring J K Rowling and *Broadchurch* creator Chris Chibnall. The festival takes place from July 17-20 at the Old Swan Hotel Harrogate. www.harrogateinternationalfestivals.com/crime.



Palin travels again to promote book

MICHAEL Palin will embark on a tour to celebrate the publication of his third volume of diaries, *Travelling to Work* covers the years 1988-1998, when Michael took on a new role as a television traveller, and will be published on September 1. He will appear at York Opera House on September 28, for tickets call the Box Office on 0844 871 3024. His tour concludes at Sheffield's Crucible Theatre on October 22; for their Box Office call 0114 249 6000.

CHARTS

Paperbacks

- 1 *The Fault in Our Stars*, John Green/Middle School: *How I Got Lost in London*, James Patterson
- 2 *Life After Life*, Kate Atkinson
- 3 *The Midnight Pricer*: *A Laura Marlin Mystery*, Lauren St John
- 3 *The Luminaries*, Eleanor Catton
- 4 *Never Go Back*, Lee Child
- 5 *Divergent: Divergent*, Veronica Roth
- 6 *Levels of Life*, Julian Barnes
- 7 *Insurgent: Divergent*, Veronica Roth
- 8 *Blood & Beauty*, Sarah Dunant
- 9 *The Quarry*, Iain Banks
- 10 *The Book Thief*, Markus Zusak

Hardbacks

- 1 *Minecraft: The Official Construction Handbook*
- 2 *Minecraft: The Official Combat Handbook*
- 3 *Mary Berry Cooks*, Mary Berry
- 4 *Minecraft: The Official Redstone Handbook*
- 5 *Minecraft: The Official Beginner's Handbook*
- 6 *Be Careful What You Wish for!* The Clifton Chronicles, Jeffrey Archer
- 7 *Peppa Pig: Peppa's Easter Egg Hunt*
- 8 *Allegiant: Divergent*, Veronica Roth
- 9 *A Spy Among Friends*: *Kim Philby and the Great Betrayal*, Ben Macintyre
- 10 *Look Who's Back*, Timur Vermes

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ENGINEER AND DEBUT NOVELIST

IAN JOHNSON is a qualified civil engineer who has lived in Australia and New Zealand. Back in the UK he rebuilt a historic fire-damaged hotel in the Cotswolds before running it for two years. He moved up to Yorkshire from the Cotswolds in 1990.

He is a keen inventor, has three daughters, and lives near Malton, not far from the North York Moors.

The *Witcher Keys* was longlisted for the Rubery Prize – a long established international award for independent publishers – last year. Johnson hasn't started writing another book yet but says he has an idea for a follow-up to *The Witcher Keys*.