

# Society for Psychical Research

## The Life After Death Project (DVD)

By Paul Davids



From the project website: A mesmerizing CSI-calibre quest for proof of life after death. Four New York Times best-selling authors, three top science professors and three well-respected mediums make a leap into the unknown, investigating astonishing evidence in the case of apparent "After Death Communication" (ADC) from Sci-Fi luminary Forrest J Ackerman. We journey from spiritualists to skeptics, and from chem labs to ground-breaking computer software that may enable communication between the living and the deceased.

Author Richard Matheson says Forry Ackerman was an atheist who did not believe in life after death, but Forry told close friends if it turned out he was wrong, he would drop them a line. He passed away on December 4, 2008. Here's "the line" we think he dropped to the director of this film, his long time friend Paul Davids:



The ink has been scientifically tested by top chemists at Indiana University and the College of New Jersey. After 3 years of study, the chemists are convinced it's very strange and science has yet to explain it.

The Life After Death Project 2 - Personal Encounters: Spellbinding accounts of personal encounters with life after death from archaeologists, physicists, a retired colonel, a librarian, clinical psychologist, sales executive, publisher and doctors and nurses who have worked with hundreds of dying patients. They have seen souls leaving the body at death, angelic beings, spirit entities, golden orbs, physical manifestations and more. Updates the continuing saga of the Forrest J Ackerman case.

The DVDs are NTSC, Region 0.

For further details visit [www.lifeafterdeathproject.com](http://www.lifeafterdeathproject.com) (<http://The Life After Death Project. Written, Produced and Directed by Paul Davids> The great science fiction entrepreneur Forrest J Ackerman was known as "Mr. Sci-Fi" (among other affectionate soubriquets), not only because he had coined the term 'sci-fi' in 1953, but because of his achievements as editor, writer, collector and promoter in the fields of science fiction, fantasy and horror. Most importantly, he was founder-editor in 1958 of the influential magazine Famous Monsters of Filmland, editing nearly 200 issues, but his other contributions were many, not least co-creating the comic book character Vampirella and giving Ray Bradbury a start by acting as his agent (Ackerman had less success as literary agent for Ed Wood of Plan 9 From Outer Space fame). He seemed to know everybody, and was loved by them in return. He conducted tours of his 18-room "Ackermansion" on Glendower in Los Angeles which, along with three garages, was stuffed full of his astonishing collection of memorabilia. He was a showman of the first order, convivial and approachable, and he was widely mourned when he died in December 2008, aged 92. During his lifetime Ackerman, an atheist, was dismissive of the paranormal. That included the idea of life after death, though he did say that should he be wrong he would try to "drop a line" to those left behind. Even so, it was something of a surprise when his friends and collaborators started to receive hints that something of Ackerman had survived the transition. One of these was Paul Davids, Davids had known him since the age of 14, in 1964, and Ackerman had been one of his mentors. Davids' film The Sci-Fi Boys was partly about Ackerman, so it was not unreasonable that if Ackerman were attempting to reassure friends of his continued existence, Davids would be one of his choices. As a filmmaker, Davids was quick to begin making a record when it seemed that his old friend might be trying to get in touch, and as he realised that others were being affected, he decided to compile a documentary which assembled the evidence and discussed its implications. The result is an entertaining and informative film, made over a four year period, documenting the strange occurrences following Forry's death that led a group of friends and associates to believe that he was communicating in an oblique but meaningful way. It is all circumstantial, but the accumulation of details builds up a picture of a personality, in much the same way as the SPR's cross-correspondences do: small details in isolation which are, when combined, greater than the sum of their parts. On 18 March, 2009, not long after Ackerman's death, something very odd happened to Davids. While staying alone at his holiday home in Santa Fe, New Mexico, he began printing out a 24-page log of various business meetings and phone calls while he went out. On his return he picked the sheets up from the printer, placed them on his bed, and left the room. The ink on the sheets was obviously dry. When he returned five minutes later, there was an unusual ink mark, still moist, on the top page obliterating four words in a single line: "Spoke to Joe Amodei." The mark's neatness appeared to indicate intentionality. What is more, it was not uniform, "Spoke to" could be discerned, but "Joe Amodei" was completely obscured. Davids had to check the line on his computer. Nothing could have leaked onto the page, he was sure that the document was untouched when he left it on the bed, and such an obvious mark would have been noticeable when he picked it up from the printer. Curiously, for such a significant action, the name Joe Amodei, who is a film producer, meant little to Davids. They had spoken once about a deal that had not taken place, but otherwise did not know each other. What could it mean? Davids took the page to experts for advice. Jay Siegel, who is the chairman of the chemistry department at the University of Indiana, and John Allison, a chemistry professor at The College of New Jersey, both examined the mysterious mark, but could come up with no explanation for how it might have appeared on the paper. After hundreds of hours in the lab they were unable to recreate its precise appearance. They deduced that the agent blacking out the words was the same as that of the printer ink, but contained silver not present in the printer ink. A solvent of some kind had been used to spread ink, and add more than had been on the page to start with, but how, and by whom? The anomalies extended to those involved in the tests. Dr. Allison had been experimenting with various methods trying to recreate the ink mark and had put a batch of pages with his tests on a chair in his dining room, tucked under his briefcase. When he came back into the room to pick up his things, prior to collecting Davids who was visiting his lab, he found the sheets on the floor, further out than gravity alone would have taken them. This was like Davids' paper episode, with no draught, animal or person around to have done it. Such anecdotes by themselves might not seem particularly convincing to people sceptical of a survival explanation, but it was the first instance of a growing body of incidents that seemed to indicate that Forry was using whatever means were at his disposal to demonstrate that he had survived death. The day after the mark appeared, Davids arranged for a psychic to visit. She checked the electro-magnetic fields in the house and found something unusual around a Zimbabwean ceremonial mask that stood in a case just outside the bedroom in which the document was marked. In the film Davids is shown moving an EMF meter around the case, and the needle is going off the scale. Somewhat unnerved, he moved the mask out of the house, but he mused that Ackerman had a collection of masks, and this was an artefact he would have enjoyed. To add to the weirdness, the person who had given him the mask, an inveterate traveller, had a collection of slides of all his journeys, and he discovered that the ones relating to the African trip during which he had acquired the mask had mysteriously disappeared from their neatly stored carousel. No other box had been touched, and the missing slides have never reappeared. So far so strange, but there was more. A week and a half before the ink mark appeared, on 7 March, 2009, a memorial arranged by Joe Moe, who had been Ackerman's personal assistant and carer, was held at Hollywood's Egyptian Theater. A documentary made by two Canadian filmmakers, Mike MacDonald and Ian Johnston, Famous Monster: Forrest J Ackerman, was shown that evening. Davids spoke at the tribute, and the pair told him afterwards that they had just had some peculiar experiences. While in town they had a spare day so they had visited Ackerman's final resting place in Forest Lawns and MacDonald, perhaps not in the best of taste, knocked on it, asking if anyone was home, the sort of joke that Forry would have enjoyed. They didn't receive a reply, but returned to the room they were sharing in Hollywood to find their computers doing peculiar things. MacDonald's Facebook page required him to insert a random security captcha in order to proceed. The code that he had to retype? "Ackerman 000", and the first letter was initialised. As they were absorbing this and saying some of the things that might have come up onscreen, one of them said "Ackerman dead", whereupon Johnston's computer, supposedly in sleep mode, suddenly yelled "Oh my God, no way!" This was the voice of an animated character on YouTube, but he did not have YouTube open on his computer at the time. It seemed to be a comment, echoing their thoughts, on what had just happened with Facebook. What made it even odder was that Johnston had a photograph of Ackerman aged about four and a half on his computer which he had uploaded when working on the documentary, an age appropriate to the childish voice which said "Oh my God, no way!" The computer events were within 30 seconds of each other, less than an hour after MacDonald knocked on Ackerman's tomb. They told Davids about this on 8 March, ten days before the mark appeared, so Davids started to wonder if there was a pattern, and if so, was it one that was originating in a disincarnate Ackerman. The significance of the blacked-out line was still not apparent. It was only when speaking to Joe Moe to find out about Ackerman's editing practices that he realised that "Joe Moe" was contained in "Joe Amodei", Ackerman had loved puns, using them extensively in his writing, and this was precisely the sort of wordplay that he would have enjoyed. Was this the reason why that line alone had been affected, Ackerman literally "dropping him a line"? As if in confirmation, Moe then told Davids that a few days after the memorial, he had had a vivid dream in which Ackerman had appeared to him and praised the gathering, calling it the "9th wonder of the World" (King Kong of course being the 8th). So it would seem that Ackerman contacted Joe in his dream and then Davids, to tell him, "Spoke to Joe Moe." Davids later found that when editing, Ackerman often

deleted sentences in exactly the same way as on his paper. The film recounts a number of similarly small but significant manifestations, often involving paper and print, appropriate for someone who had been as involved with publishing as Ackerman had been. For example, two years before Ackerman's death he autographed an issue of *Famous Monsters for Davids*, who after his death realised that the signature was above a line that reads: "The invisible ink men strike again", a phrase, appearing nowhere else in the entire run of the magazine, one that Davids had associated with the mark over "Spoke to Joe Amodie." Davids wrote an article for *Fate* magazine, 'The Strange Case of Forrest J Ackerman', and despite careful proofreading some lines were duplicated, those referring to the blanked-out words on Davids' paper. The editor of the magazine could not account for the glitch. Just before a trip to New Mexico, he printed out a letter and placed it on the dining room table while he went to get an envelope. When he returned a blank sheet of stationery had replaced his letter. Davids considered that he could have absentmindedly filed the letter, so he reprinted it. When he walked back into the dining room, there was his original letter, but no blank sheet. It must have felt like someone was playing with him, and perhaps they were, and with others too. After the auction of Ackerman's possessions, a ring given to him by Bela Lugosi, who had worn it when playing Dracula, was sent on tour. Mike MacDonald, who had rapped on the tomb, left his house in Halifax and walked a few hundred yards. To his astonishment he spotted the ring in a gallery window, where it was on display for just one day. Of all the places it could have gone to, it turned up round the corner. It may have been chance, but it felt significant. It wasn't only those who were directly connected to Forry and the investigation who were involved. Davids visited the house that had been the Ackermansion, now extensively remodelled. Its two tenants claimed that the house was haunted. One, a singer, told him that often when she put music on her stand and left the room, she would come back to find it on the floor. Again, draughts and animals were ruled out. It echoed Davids' and Allison's experiences and was exactly the sort of action someone might carry out to attract attention. Also, the shadows of what looked like a man had been seen at night on the wall of what had been Ackerman's office when there was nobody else around. The film opens out from a discussion of Ackerman, and a number of experts are brought in to discuss the issues raised. These include the ubiquitous Gary Schwartz of the University of Arizona's Laboratory For Advances in Consciousness and Health, Claude Swanson and R Leo Sprinkle; and on the opposing team, Michael Shemer, founder of The Skeptics Society and editor of its Skeptic magazine, who discusses humans' tendency to impose meaning on randomness, and less usefully tells us that if the paranormal is proved, it isn't the paranormal any more. QED. Also included are the late Richard Matheson, author of *What Dreams May Come* and *Somewhere in Time* and a friend of Ackerman's, Whitely Strieber, author of *Communion* (Anne Strieber is an executive producer of the film along with Paul Davids' wife Hollace); Dannon Brinkley, survivor of three near-death experiences; and Mark Macy who researches Electronic Voice Phenomena. During his interview two cameras were filming him, when the image broke up on both as he was talking about electromagnetic energies surrounding equipment. Davids has readings with three mediums who give remarkably accurate portraits of Ackerman's character and interests. There is also archival footage of Ackerman himself, which shows a lively waggish personality, and demonstrates that the sorts of instances of ostensible communication detailed in the film would be just the sort he might employ. Can all these instances be explained away, and if they can't, must we conclude that Forrest J Ackerman is transmitting evidence for the continuation of his personality? We are assured in the opening sequence that "The events in this film are true. The mysteries and anomalies have not been contrived or invented in any way. There were many unexplained occurrences as the cameras were actually filming." Despite this assurance, the mark on the paper could be a hoax, either by Davids who wanted material for a film, or by someone on him. These cannot be ruled out, though such a hoax on Davids appears to be so pointless and difficult to achieve as to be not worth considering, and much took place independently of Davids. Possibly he made the mark himself while in a fugue state, but given that he has not admitted to other acts of a similar nature that too seems unlikely. Even so, the mark could have a natural, as yet unexplained origin. The experiences of the Canadian filmmakers could be coincidences, as could those of other more peripheral participants, retrospectively appearing meaningful. There could also be some element of cherry-picking. For example, Davids owns a painting of Ackerman, wearing the Lugosi ring, which was produced by L J Dopp in 2004, four years before Forry's death. It shows the dock behind him standing at two minutes to 12.00, the precise time he died (a version of the picture can be found on the DVD cover). Given enough material, there is a chance that things will be found that form a pattern. That is the line that Shemer would take. There is always the frustration of ambiguity about such communications, the wish for something immediately verifiable instead of hints, and as so often in survival research we haven't got it. The overwhelming point made throughout the film, though, is that the playful 'messages' are consistent with the living Ackerman, and support the contention that he is behind them. Schwartz is shown with his 'Silicon Photomultiplier System' which demonstrates to his satisfaction that Ackerman is increasing the number of photons in a light-tight box to demonstrate his presence and ability to respond to Schwartz's questions. Schwartz provides a good overview, dividing the evidence into four categories: physical phenomena (most notably the marked page); synchronicities, unusual pairings of events, the conjunction of which appear meaningful; from mediumship; and from instrumentation. While none on its own is conclusive, he argues, the four strands together are mutually reinforcing and point to the survival of consciousness. The problem is that psi proponents will want to take that approach, while sceptics will insist on taking each strand separately, on the grounds that the plural of anecdote is not data. It is thus unlikely that the film will change anyone's mind, but it is an important contribution to our database of possible candidates for survival of bodily death. The Life After Death Project (1 hr 46 minutes) was initially aired on the Syfy Channel in the US and is now available on DVD. As well as the film, the DVD includes 40 minutes of bonus features relating to Ackerman. Accompanying the first disc is a sequel, *The Life After Death Project 2 – Personal Encounters* (1 hr 41 minutes), which features personal accounts, filmed for but not included in the main documentary. These are taken from a wide range of individuals from all walks of life who in one way or another have had encounters with life after death. A 2-disc DVD including the two films and the extras is released on 16 July 2013.)

The Life After Death project, Yellow Hat Productions, July 2013.

**Reviewed for the SPR by: Tom Ruffles**

The Life After Death Project, Written, Produced and Directed by Paul Davids

The great science fiction entrepreneur Forrest J Ackerman was known as "Mr. Sci-Fi" (among other affectionate soubriquets), not only because he had coined the term 'sci-fi' in 1953, but because of his achievements as editor, writer, collector and promoter in the fields of science fiction, fantasy and horror. Most importantly, he was founder-editor in 1958 of the influential magazine *Famous Monsters of Filmland*, editing nearly 200 issues, but his other contributions were many, not least co-creating the comic book character Vampirella and giving Ray Bradbury a start by acting as his agent (Ackerman had less success as literary agent for Ed Wood of *Plan 9 From Outer Space* fame). He seemed to know everybody, and was loved by them in return. He conducted tours of his 18-room "Ackermansion" on Glendower in Los Angeles which, along with three garages, was stuffed full of his astonishing collection of memorabilia. He was a showman of the first order, convivial and approachable, and he was widely mourned when he died in December 2008, aged 92.

During his lifetime Ackerman, an atheist, was dismissive of the paranormal. That included the idea of life after death, though he did say that should he be wrong he would try to "drop a line" to those left behind. Even so, it was something of a surprise when his friends and collaborators started to receive hints that something of Ackerman had survived the transition. One of these was Paul Davids. Davids had known him since the age of 14, in 1964, and Ackerman had been one of his mentors. Davids' film *The Sci-Fi Boys* was partly about Ackerman, so it was not unreasonable that if Ackerman were attempting to reassure friends of his continued existence, Davids would be one of his choices.

As a filmmaker, Davids was quick to begin making a record when it seemed that his old friend might be trying to get in touch, and as he realised that others were being affected, he decided to compile a documentary which assembled the evidence and discussed its implications. The result is an entertaining and informative film, made over a four year period, documenting the strange occurrences following Forry's death that led a group of friends and associates to believe that he was communicating in an oblique but meaningful way. It is all circumstantial, but the accumulation of details builds up a picture of a personality, in much the same way as the SPR's cross-correspondences do: small details in isolation which are, when combined, greater than the sum of their parts.

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Davids took the page to experts for advice. Jay Siegel, who is the chairman of the chemistry department at the University of Indiana, and John Allison, a chemistry professor at The College of New Jersey, both examined the mysterious mark, but could come up with no explanation for how it might have appeared on the paper. After hundreds of hours in the lab they were unable to recreate its precise appearance. They deduced that the agent blacking out the words was the same as that of the printer ink, but contained silver not present in the printer ink. A solvent of some kind had been used to spread ink, and add more than had been on the page to stick with, but how, and by whom?

The anomalies extended to those involved in the tests. Dr. Allison had been experimenting with various methods trying to recreate the ink mark and had put a batch of pages with his tests on a chair in his dining room, tucked under his briefcase. When he came back into the room to pick up his things, prior to

collecting Davids who was visiting his lab, he found the sheets on the floor, further out than gravity alone would have taken them. This was like Davids' paper episode, with no draught, animal or person around to have done it. Such anecdotes by themselves might not seem particularly convincing to people sceptical of a survival explanation, but it was the first instance of a growing body of incidents that seemed to indicate that Forry was using whatever means were at his disposal to demonstrate that he had survived death.

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Davids wrote an article for *Fate* magazine, 'The Strange Case of Forrest J Ackerman', and despite careful proofreading a reference to the blanked-out words on Davids' paper was somehow inserted, twice, garbling the text. The editor of the magazine could not account for the glitch. Just before a trip to New Mexico, Davids printed out a letter and placed it on the dining room table while he went to get an envelope. When he returned a blank sheet of stationery had replaced his letter. He considered that he could have absentmindedly filed the letter, so he reprinted it. When he walked back into the dining room, there was his original letter, but no blank sheet.

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PS After publication of my review Paul Davids asked me to append some comments, which I am happy to do:

"As God is my witness, I swear there is no hoax, no deception or exaggeration – only facts for the benefit of mankind and science. That is the motivation... I did not need "another film", and independent documentaries are generally not good investments of time or money. Also the scientists have testified they don't know how anyone could have created the ink obliteration when fully cognizant, so surely it could not have been created by me in a "fugue state." A final point: I was alone in the house, no one else was there, no person could have been physically there as an intruder."