



Portrait of Monsieur X by Henri Rousseau



Orpheus and his Lyre



Alice & Dinah

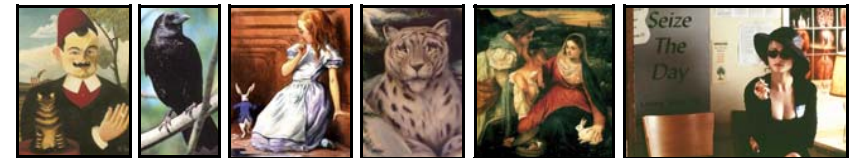


Lady with an Ermine by Leonardo Da Vinci

## Mental Fight Club

mentalfightclub@btinternet.com  
www.into.org.uk/mentalfightclub

# The *Daemons* Project



## *Want to take part?*

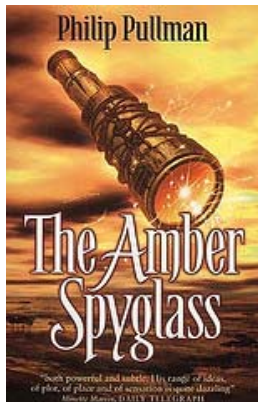
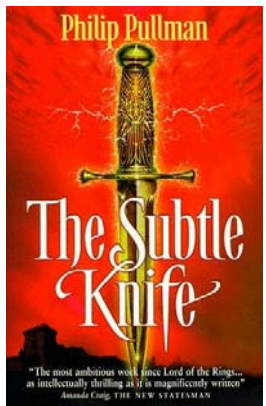
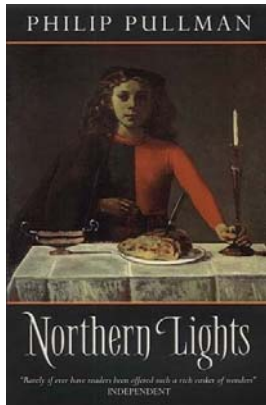
**Mental Fight Club** seeks photographers and sitters, daemons and writers -novices, amateurs and professionals - for an exciting new collaborative creative project

### **Background & Guidelines for Participants**

**FIRST EDITION - 20 JULY 2006**

## **Mental Fight Club**

www.into.org.uk/mentalfightclub



*'Lyra and her dæmon moved through the darkening hall, taking care to keep to one side, out of sight of the kitchen. The three great tables that ran the length of the hall were laid already, the silver and the glass catching what little light there was, and the long benches were pulled out ready for the guests. Portraits of former Masters hung high up in the gloom along the walls. Lyra reached the dais and looked back at the open kitchen door, and, seeing no one, stepped up beside the high table. The places here were laid with gold, not silver, and the fourteen seats were not oak benches but mahogany chairs with velvet cushions. Lyra stopped beside the Master's chair and flicked the biggest glass gently with a fingernail. The sound rang clearly through the hall. 'You're not taking this seriously,' whispered her dæmon. 'Behave yourself.' Her dæmon's name was Pantalaimon, and he was currently in the form of a moth, a dark brown one so as not to show up in the darkness of the hall.'*

*Page of Northern Lights  
by Philip Pullman*

what they want to write in their text. This in turn might throw up new ideas for portraits, and the sitter and photographer might decide to arrange another shoot to explore these new ideas. Once a photograph has been agreed upon, sitters can then work on a final written response to the image and what it reveals about their relationship with their daemon. This can be done in any form of poetry or prose, the length of which can be anything from one to 1,000 words. If preferred a recording of the sitter talking can be arranged, excerpts from which could be presented as text for display with the photograph. Some sitters may find this stage quite challenging. Sarah is happy to discuss with you how you might want to do it and to provide feedback on any draft ideas that you may wish to submit before completing the task. A copy of the final text should then be supplied to Mental Fight Club with indications, agreed in consultation with the photographer, of how the image will be presented alongside the photograph for exhibition.

### **Expenses**

During the collaborative process, Mental Fight Club will pay for one-day travel cards and any refreshment expenses incurred by all participants, upon presentation of receipts. Mental Fight Club can offer free high quality black-and-white digital printing. Otherwise if agreed in advance, Mental Fight Club will pay for one contact sheet and one final copy of photograph through commercial outlets or any paper and ink costs, if you wish to do it at home.

Thanks for reading this booklet, if you would like to take part in The Daemons Project as photographer or sitter, then contact

**Sarah on 020 7378 1768 or Steve on 020 7381 5564  
or email [mentalfightclub@btinternet.com](mailto:mentalfightclub@btinternet.com)**

sitter's relationship with their daemon, to discuss what setting might be appropriate to portray this relationship and finally, to develop a shared understanding of the photographers' initial ideas on what sort of still image they wish to produce (standard portrait, computer-adapted images, flick book, whatever!) and to see if both parties want to work together on the project.

### **Photographic Shoot Meeting**

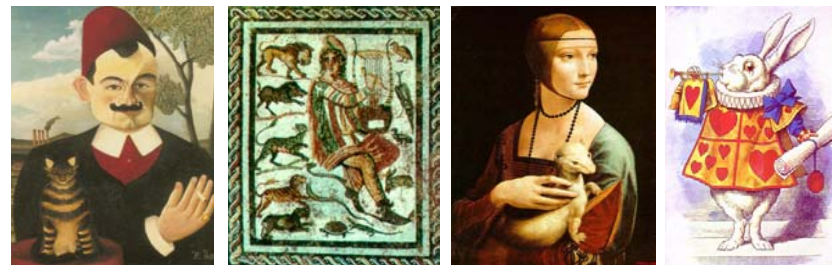
If both sitter and photographer want to work together, then the shoot can take place at a place agreed by both parties. If required, Steve or Sarah are happy to attend, if either photographer or sitter would like. If anonymity is required by the sitter, then they can be depicted as a shadow or blurred out of recognition or just a hand or foot featuring in the photo. When it comes to captioning, no names need be used, just initials or 'anon' as preferred.

### **Review Meeting: Choosing The Final Photograph**

Once the images have been produced, a review meeting will enable both sitter and photographer to decide on which one makes the best portrayal of the sitter-daemon relationship. It may be decided that a further shoot meeting is needed to develop an existing idea or to try a new one. Or it may be decided not to continue. Once a final image is selected, indications, the photographer needs to decide, in consultation with the sitter, how the picture will be presented for exhibition – size of image, size of frame or other presentation mechanism. The photographer is then to supply a copy of the final photograph to both the sitter and to Mental Fight Club.

### **Creating the Text: Writing or Speaking**

The sitter may find that the first set of photographs inspire further thoughts about their relationship, which might change



# The **Daemons** Project

*Want to take part ?*

'Daemon' is the name we are using for any pet who helps their human owner through their daily mental fight to peace of mind. We want to create a series of portrait with accompanying text of people and their daemons, particularly but not exclusively of people who have been through periods of mental crisis.

We are looking for photographers to take the portraits. And we are looking for sitters with daemons who would also be prepared to write or talk about how their daemon helps their peace of mind. No experience in photography or writing required, just an enthusiasm to use your creative and imaginative gifts to produce work for public display during the course of the project's progress. Full guidelines are at the back of this booklet.

This booklet explains how the idea for the project emerged and presents the text-and-image portraits done so far by four MFC members and seven daemons. If, after reading this you would like to take part, then all you have to do is contact

**Sarah on 020 7378 1768 or Steve on 020 7381 5564  
or email [mentalfightclub@btinternet.com](mailto:mentalfightclub@btinternet.com)**



Above: Happy Child with Daemon  
(Pre-severing)

All photographers will be supported by Stephen Burrows and all sitters by Sarah Wheeler.

### **Getting Involved**

Anyone can take part as a photographer, be you novice, amateur or professional. Likewise, the photos can be anything from a mobile phone snap to a large-format studio setup. If you don't have a camera, Mental Fight Club can lend you one we have available in-house. You may already have a sitter in mind whom you know is willing to take part, or you might wish to do a self-portrait and both options are fine. If you don't have anyone in mind, Mental Fight Club is developing a list of people with their daemons who wish to be photographed, so can put you in touch with one or more people. Likewise, anyone who enjoys sharing their life with a daemon can take part as a sitter. If you do not wish to do a self-portrait or do not have a photographer lined up, Mental Fight Club can put you in touch with a photographer (or more than one, if you would like to select one for yourself). The portrait can be done in such a way that sitters can remain anonymous, if they would prefer.

### **Preparation for First Meeting**

Ideally, prior to the first meeting, the sitter will already have thought about their relationship with their daemon. If so, early thoughts jotted down in note form or as a draft text should be sent to the photographer as a basis for discussion at the first meeting before any photographs are taken.

### **First Meeting – Sharing Stories & Ideas**

Photographer and sitter need to meet once - more often if you feel it's necessary - before any photographs are taken. The purpose of this meeting is to talk about the history of the

## The **Daemons** Project Guidelines

This project is about exploring, with sensitivity and creative awareness, the interaction and dynamic between sitter and animal and photographer. Because it's a sensitive project, Mental Fight Club asks sitters and photographers to follow these guidelines in their completion of each image and text.

### A Delicate Process

The aim of each photograph is to try to capture something of the relationship between the sitter and their daemon. The aim of the writing (or transcript of talking) by the sitter is to explore what the photographs manage to reveal or capture about this relationship. It is thus a highly collaborative venture between photographer and sitter, which might take place over days or weeks or months.

For sitters, the project involves a personal process of reflection on their life experience. So it's important that photographers take time to talk to the sitter and learn about the role the daemon plays in the sitter's daily mental fight. It's also important that sitters are given equal input into the setting and selection of the photographs.

We hope that the interaction between sitter and photographer will be creative and supportive, but some pairings may not work out and may need to be re-thought on both sides. We are aware that for some sitters, the verbal or written reflection on the photograph might prove quite challenging, raising aspects of their mental, emotional and life experiences which they have not so consciously explored before. Equally, photographers may also have vulnerabilities which mean that timing and delivery needs to be flexible.



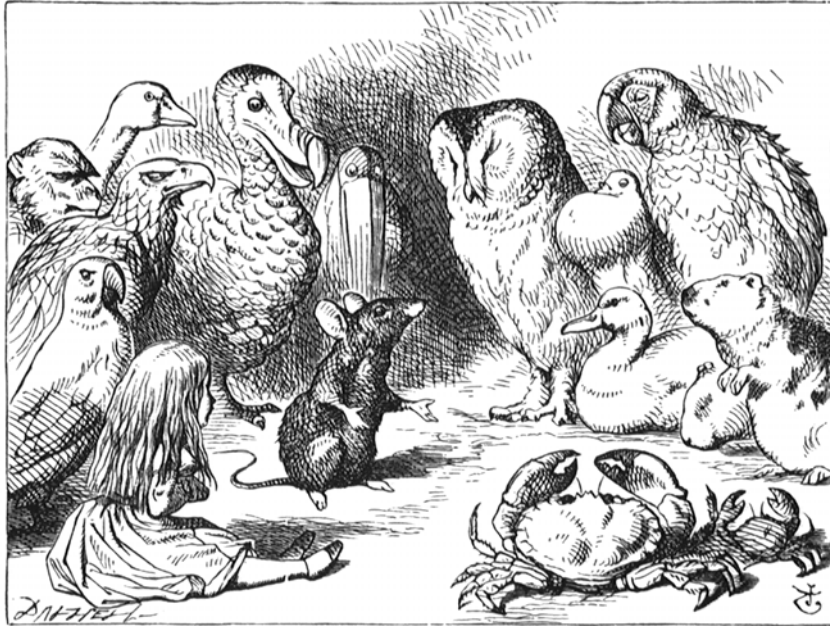
## INTRODUCTION

by Thomas Tobias, Creative Director

### Turning On the 'Northern Light Switch'

The idea for the Daemons project finally crystallized when I read the book *Northern Lights* by Philip Pullman, the first in *His Dark Materials* trilogy. In these books each character is followed by their daemon - an animal form which accompanies them through the narrative. Each daemon reflects something of the characters' self and their mood-state to the reader. Daemons are in constant dialogue with their human selves, sometimes advising them, sometimes challenging them, sometimes expressing what is not overt in the character's dialogue or behavior.

In Pullman's creative universe, children's daemons are flexible; they change shape to fit the situation and mood of the child. While adults become fixed into one form. Intriguingly, the Baddies' agenda in the book is to separate children from their daemons. And in doing so, they create 'severed children'. A severed child, that exists without its daemon is ghostly, pale and inert. As someone who started to experience a perplexing and ghost-like absence of Self from around the age of ten, the idea of daemons and the 'severing' of children behind Pullman's daemonology rang very curiously true.....



Alice and the animals confer

enough, is sometimes referred to as the ‘Alice In Wonderland’ disease. But yes, a symbol of well-being he is indeed. He arrived in my life at a time when I was just beginning to get the hang of odd process of recovery. And now White Rabbit is an intrinsic part of that ongoing process. He is a very patient and calming creature to be around. Many people observe that he appears to exist in quite another dimension. Of a sacred or yogic kind, they all seem to concur.

To me he is many animals in one. I chose him deliberately because of his dog-like or hare-like appearance. (Am not a great fan of the cuter variety of bunny, although during the day he is perfectly capable of imitating them, by going into a kind of cushion-shape with his ears flat back.) To be all Blakean for a moment, the thing that intrigues me most about White Rabbit is that he is the living embodiment of the Lion lying down with the Lamb! Sometimes, he can stretch out in a particular way which seems magisterial and fierce. At other times, when he is joyful and frolicking, his strange large white head can seem suddenly very lamb-like. There is something amazingly crazy about the fact that even with those ludicrously large ears, he can slip from being quite another creature altogether. For me, as someone who has struggled with the question of identity, this quality of the White Rabbit is another one of his many fascinations.





St Jerome and the Lion



### Sharing Your Daemon with the Group

Pullman's use of daemons in *Northern Lights* prompted me to remember something I had noticed during my two years attending an intensive group therapy at the York Clinic at Guy's Hospital.

While I was there, I was struck that many of the other group members, just like me, had unusually strong emotional, sometimes almost psychic, attachments to their animals. People's sense of well-being seemed often very closely bound up with their animal. It would often happen that people wouldn't show up to the group because they had to feed and care for their animals. Much to the inevitable consternation of other members, who often felt rather neglected as a result. If these daemon-owners were challenged on this, they would often be their fiercest and most emotional in defense of their animals..

I also observed that a number of group members also bought themselves animals once they had left the programme. And it has been interesting to note how the animals they have chosen so closely echo powerful and creative aspects of their own personalities.



“You are not a beautiful and unique snowflake.  
You are the same decaying organic matter as everyone else,  
and we are all part of the same compost pile  
we are the all-singing, all-dancing crap of the world”

**Tyler Durdon, Fight Club**

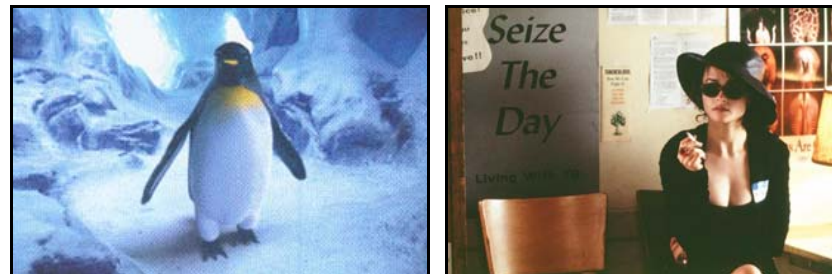


## White Rabbit and Me

I had just come out of a really terrible and dangerous Mental Elf attack. And just for a change, there I was once more in a windowless consulting room at the York Clinic reviewing ‘The situation’ with my consultant psychiatrist. He remarked warmly that it was good to see me looking so much better. He seemed genuinely pleased.

But I felt a stab of guilt and alarm at hearing him say this. Time to do things differently, I thought. Time not to have any secrets - guilty, creative, financial or otherwise. After that I simply couldn’t help myself. ‘Yes’ I smiled ‘I *am* a lot better’. And then I looked him squarely in the eyes, preparing him for the painful truth ‘but you do realise that I am now engaged in busily filling my flat with rabbits’. He looked rather disconcerted. I didn’t explain. My key-worker looked slightly less troubled when, several weeks later, I found myself telling him that my newly installed flat-mate, White Rabbit was a ‘symbol of my well-being’. The Tale of White Rabbit is a long story, which weaves its way between reality and imaginative truth, fact and fiction and the painful process of recovery from a very painful and bizarre mental illness. An illness which, oddly

*Photograph by Stephen Burrows  
Thomas Tobias & White Rabbit*



### And Finding One's 'Power Animal'

The group therapeutic dimension to The ~~Daemons~~ Project is amusingly echoed in one of the opening scenes of the film *Fight Club*. The lead character 'Jack' becomes addicted to self-help groups - whatever the affliction - and he becomes what he calls 'a tourist'. At the 'Melanoma Group, Monday night', everyone settles in their seats. The group leader takes the microphone. 'Okay, everyone, close your eyes. Imagine your pain as a white ball of healing light. Go down your secret path to your cave and join up with your power animal'.

In Jack's imagination, he finds himself in an ice-blue cave with an Emperor penguin advancing towards him, smiling. Like many of the fleeting but significant ingredients of *Fight Club*, this is a very important detail. And like the rest of the film, it is one which is all too easy to dismiss with a guffaw as a clever, if somewhat confusing satire. In fact, a reference to a Power Animal returns later on in the action to give the viewer a subtle clue to what is really happening in Jack's increasingly disturbed universe. Power animals and daemons are very different concepts but both are symbolic of their dreamer/owner and it is hoped that perhaps power animals will also be incorporated into the project too.



## Remember Who You Are

First perceptible tremor. First noticing of a lump. First time there is blood where there should be none. Memorable days marking catastrophic change in our lives. Our first visit to the foreshore was a similar day; of shock and bewilderment. I sank beneath Penrose in status that morning as my right to liberty was taken and the power of prejudice eliminated other rights to dignity and compassion. We roamed London and our new world together for three years as I lost by increasing degrees everything that held value for me. Penrose is the only witness to the truth of my experience of severe mental illness. He enabled me to cope with the pressures of my necessary lies. He understood my pain at the myriad small betrayals. Comparing the conduct of my own species with that of my dog, instilled a distrust of humanity, perhaps the worst loss. Penrose gave me legitimacy, granting openings to relate to others in an ordinary way, at times when I could bear the weight of human contact for minutes only. I heard many stories of rough times eased by the unquestioning love of an animal and the whispered words “Dogs are better than people.” As I move out of the shadows reclaiming the status that was always mine by right as a human being, I’m making sure Penrose remains where he belongs, right by my side.

*Photograph by Andrew Moodie  
Sitter - anon.*



## The Lovebirds and I

I had always wanted to keep lovebirds when I was a fanatical bird-keeping teenager. But at that time they were too expensive. I thought then they were rather timid, sad birds because that is how they seemed to be in the pet shops I so often and so longingly visited. I could not have been more wrong. Lovebirds are noisy, active and gregarious birds. They are comical, intelligent and always very curious to know what is going on. The reason they look sad and timid is that when in captivity, lovebirds, like a lot of parrot species, are prone to depression! Their sky-high social and intellectual needs have to be met in order for them to thrive to their full and glorious extent.

I bought a pair several years ago to celebrate one of my emergences from despair. I put them in a large cage with plenty of light and a nesting box. They made me smile so much just to watch them. And others too. Visitors to my flat are all quickly enchanted by their vibrant plumage and their odd and engaging personas. I decided that they must have been called lovebirds, not because (as I had previously thought) of the very close pairings they form, but rather because of the feeling of Profound Well-Being they generate in the Human Beings

*Photograph by Stephen Burrows  
Thomas Tobias & the Love Birds*



The Snow Queen from Chronicles of Narnia by C S Lewis

*(Note: A portrait of my ice-cold depersonalised rage-filled mind-state if ever there was one - Thomas Tobias)*

who encounter them ! (Until they start shrieking that is...) Unlike White Rabbit, the lovebirds arrived in my life when I was still in the thick of my highly destructive bipolar illness. They therefore have a different significance for me. Not so much symbols of my well-being, but loyal foot-soldiers in my own personal War against Terror. And this endeavour, they have very nearly copped it on a couple of occasions. So paralyzed was I by despair that days would pass and I would forget to feed them. Sometimes I would just leave the flat altogether, in a stupor. And it was always my stalwart friend (and now co-coordinator of the Daemons project), Steve who would patiently come to come to their aid.

