

OPINION

Is the writing on the wall for taggers?

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Fines rise from \$500 to \$10,000 for subsequent convictions.

The tipping point for Collins, who represents Ward 5 in the east end, was a recent stroll along the Red Hill Valley trail.

"There is not a sign in place throughout the trail where there isn't some form of graffiti," he said.

He says spray vandalism is also rampant on valley bridges and noise walls along the parkway itself.

While Mayor Fred Eisenberger supports the push to find more and better ways to tackle the problem, he noted city staff and police are already hard at it.

"There's no sense that anyone has dropped the ball on this," Eisenberger said.

Certainly, Hamilton police have had a special graffiti prevention program in place for the last three years, which saw a rise in charges and the number of citizen calls soar from 123 to 516.

And it's good to know that police are once again targeting graffiti this



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year. (If you see someone in the act of tagging, you're supposed to call police at 911. The city has its own hotline — 905-546-2489 — for reporting graffiti that's already up.)

Nonetheless, there is an uneasy feeling that even if we're not fighting a losing battle against urban scrawl, we're not winning it, either.

A ramble through the city reveals far too many unsightly splatters and defacing tags on both public and private property, from fences and walls to bus shelters and mailboxes.

"We're chasing our own tails,"



SPECTATOR FILE PHOTO

Councillor Chad Collins feels graffiti is at a tipping point.

Collins said.

Dan Rodrigues, chair of the Clean City Liaison Committee, agrees council needs to take stronger action but says age bans on spray bombs don't do the trick.

"We know that London does have a bylaw restricting selling spray cans and markers to youths 18 and under, but we also know that it has little or no impact on



SPECTATOR FILE PHOTO

Dan Rodrigues, Clean City Liaison Committee chair.

the amount of graffiti in their neighbourhoods."

Rodrigues says research suggests that rapid removal of graffiti is the most effective remedy.

To that end, his committee wants council to change the rules so property owners will have just 72 hours to remove graffiti once they've been notified of a complaint. Property owners

currently have 19 days to clean up before facing a fine or being billed for the work by the city.

"We know the longer it sits there, it's just going to attract more graffiti because it becomes acceptable," Rodrigues said.

His committee also wants council to study how much it would cost the city to take on removal costs for both private and public property.

Although it's estimated the city currently spends about \$250,000 a year combatting it, Rodrigues says the exact figure is not known because the cost is buried in various departmental budgets.

Still, whether a sale ban or quick removal is the way to go, the drum beat to ramp up the war against visual pollution is clearly getting louder.

Andrew Dreschel's commentary appears Monday, Wednesday and Friday.
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Witch doctors, spirits and killings

Uganda sees an increase in ritual murders, sorcery

BY THOMAS FROESE

KAMPALA, UGANDA ♦ Is it the global credit crisis? Is it the evil that lurks? Or is the world just getting madder? Whatever the cause, there's a spike in ritual murders in this impoverished African country.

While most crimes are down (having your cellphone stolen remains the most common incident) here are some of Uganda's recent headlines: Girl beheaded in ritual murder, Witches confess trickery, and Witchcraft exposed.

The victims are often innocent

kids. James Wanzaale, 12, Joseph Kasirye, 12, and Ismael Ssekajja, 9, were beheaded in separate incidents. Jimmy Turaygyenda, 11, was almost sold to a witch doctor for three million shillings (\$1,720 Cdn) ...

by his father. And the body of an unnamed seven-year-old boy has been found with no head, genitals or heart.

Most recently, a mob lynched 64-year-old John Manziyabo and his son, Polly. For good measure, the mob then razed their homes and killed their 10 pigs.

Manziyabo, allegedly a longtime witch doctor who left bodies around his home, was suspected of ritually killing a man known to the mob.

This all in a deeply religious country. Local churches are full and energetic, an extension of a

20th-century revival that lasted for decades and left East Africa — Rwanda, Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania — heavily Christianized. (Africa now has an estimated 400 million Christians, about half the continent's population.)

Responding to this rise in occult activity, Ugandan church leaders recently called for 40 days of prayer and fasting to help heal their land. Ending at Easter, their national campaign was co-ordinated with police and community efforts.

Their ongoing challenge is with Africa's traditional spirituality, a

worldview where everything is seen through the spirit world. You had a car accident? Blame the spirits. The brakes failed? It's the spirits. The brakes were left unserviced due to your own

negligence? It's still the spirits. In fact, your accident may have resulted from a hex that someone cast on you, so you better find a way to reverse it.

Ugandan psychologist Kajumba Mayanja puts it this way: "People want an explanation on everything. If I lose my job, why me? Or my child falls sick, why me and not the other?"

One can't overstate this mindset of spiritual cause and effect. Thanks to the influence of his Ugandan babysitter, even my three-year-old son, who fell and



THOMAS FROESE, SPECIAL TO THE SPECTATOR

A poster from a recent campaign against increasing ritual murders in Uganda.

scraped his knee recently, blamed the devil in a way he wouldn't in our Canadian home culture.

So going to your local traditional healer, a.k.a. witch doctor, is as

common as going to the corner store. It's estimated four out of five Ugandans have gone to get this or that.

This is where things get murky.

Uganda has about 157,000 traditional healers. That's 100 times more than medical doctors. And none are regulated. Many use common herbs to cure what ails you. But if clients want something else, say money or power or some relationship, the good doctor may ask for something more potent to offer the spirits — like a head.

How the global economic crisis may play into this is anyone's guess. It is true that the developing world is very dependant on the West.

About half of Uganda's revenue comes from foreign donors. And Ugandans who work abroad are now sending less money back to needy relatives.

But the global economy may be a secondary factor at best. Some argue that there, in fact, is no link between poverty and this spike in ritual sacrifices.

Otherwise killings would be higher in Uganda's poorest regions, and upper-middle class businessmen would not be involved.

As an observer who has seen the beat here for several years, I tend to agree. The bigger issue is that a false belief system pervades daily life.

And what we believe — for better or worse — has a profound impact on not just who we are, but what we do.

That's as true where you are as it is here. The only difference is in what the two cultures tell us, and if we can sort spiritual truth from deception.

Thomas Froese is a part-time Hamiltonian who lives in Uganda most of the year. His book, Ninety-Nine Windows: Reflections of a Reporter from Arabia to Africa and Other Roads Less Travelled, is available at thomasfroese.com. thomasfroese@thomasfroese.com

Picking new spymaster serious business

OTTAWA ♦ A couple of days after 9/11, with the world waiting for al-Qaeda to land another deadly blow, the man then heading Canada's spy agency emerged from the shadows. With only a petite female driver covering his back, Ward Elcock wandered the capital's trendy Byward Market shopping for late summer vegetables.

This country's spymasters are as unassuming as the country itself. More bureaucrat than spook, their habitat is out in the open where they are easily observed. Even more than his predecessors, that was Jim Judd's method in the more than four years he led CSIS, the Canadian Security Intelligence Service.

Startling journalists but not friends or colleagues, Judd is leaving in June, foregoing the dubious pleasures of a second term. By exiting six months early he facilitates a smooth transition at a particularly sensitive time. Next year Canada hosts the Vancouver Winter Olympics and the Huntsville G-8 meeting in July. Both are vulnerable events best



JAMES TRAVERS

safeguarded by a CSIS chief who has had time to learn the ropes.

More intriguing than Judd's decision is who the Prime Minister will choose for a job with at least as many risks as rewards. Three names already circulating here are Jim Wright, now Canada's High Commissioner in London, Citizenship and Immigration deputy minister Richard Fadden and Luc Portelance, executive vice-president of the Canada Border Agency. Wright and Fadden have foreign affairs and security backgrounds while Portelance held senior position at CSIS, including in counter-intelligence.

All are bright and capable of making the instant high-wire

decisions that are anathemas to most civil servants. Commanding CSIS is not for sissies or the shy. Rising in 1984 from the ashes of RCMP barn burning, the agency is, given the secretive nature of its work, notably transparent. Two watchdogs sniff its files and the top spy is open to Parliamentary cross-examination.

That world-leading openness wouldn't be so remarkable if the stakes weren't so high. Nothing chews official Ottawa fingernails like the fear of an attack on the U.S. launched from Canada. Protecting this country from the predictably devastating economic consequences of a strike made counter-terrorism a CSIS preoccupation in the '90s and will certainly shape the search for its next director.

Along with steering a quasi-military organization with a complex, accident-prone mandate and crippling history of strained RCMP relations, the new chief must be wise to a rapidly shrinking, intricately interconnected world. Those without layered international affairs and security experience need not apply.

Making the head hunting even more problematic is the sorry spectre of Stephen Harper's last choice to lead an icon. Two years ago the Prime Minister bucked tradition by naming Bill Elliott, a senior but obscure mandarin with old Tory ties, to replace the disgraced Giuliano Zaccardelli as RCMP commissioner. Whatever the rationale, the results are disappointing. The force still pin-balls between embarrassments — the Vancouver Taser tragedy and apparent coverup stand out — with no clear trajectory towards reform.

Despite last month's awkward confusion over the use of information extracted by torture, CSIS is in much better shape. It's not a cult, it has the public oversight missing from the RCMP and its current performance, particularly in Afghanistan, gets flattering reviews. Still, with the Barack Obama administration obsessing on border security, this country can't afford a repeat of Harper's RCMP mistake.

Judd will be remembered for reaching out to Canadian Muslims

and unusual media interviews but most of all for the absence of catastrophic failure. The Prime Minister's choice of successor will be tested against that same standard.

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HAVE YOUR SAY

Yesterday's question was:

Do you think garbage collection limits will lead to more illegal dumping in Hamilton?

Yes	92%	890 votes
No	8%	79 votes

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Want to get into the debate? Have Your Say on thespec.com