

# The Number 217: A Glimpse of Armageddon

by [Paul Martin Freeman](#) (June 2025)



Moonlit London Skyline (Photo by Stockcake)

*And palmeres for to seken straunge strondes –Chaucer: The Canterbury Tales: General Prologue*

It happened on the number 217  
While on his way one day to Turnpike Lane  
That Palmer had a glimpse of Armageddon  
And never rode a London bus again.

While sitting on the upper deck as usual  
He happened to observe the evening sky.  
Though later he would write he'd been delusional

He saw what seemed an angel passing by.

We reproduce the story he recounted  
Exactly as his audience testified.  
Though clear that letter cannot be discounted,  
The truth we let the reader now decide.

In fact, although in what he wrote emphatic  
His listeners had believed he thought it real,  
His story so convincing and dramatic  
No subsequent denial could conceal.

And sure, that eerie tale was most compelling  
And real, indeed, as Palmer sitting there.  
So strangely powerful was, it's said, the telling  
That people gasped as though from want of air.

The spirit, it appeared, was wearing armour  
And had a grace no mortal eyes have seen.  
And this would animate our Mr Palmer  
When later he described the curious scene.

It shone in all the colours of the rainbow,  
In hues of brilliant gold and azure blue,  
And flew without a sound—a wondrous dumb show:  
An angel from the heavens through and through.

Its wings appeared of utmost delicacy  
And barely moved as if remaining still:  
An effortlessly subtle efficacy  
Directed by the powerful spirit's will.

Upon its head, the angel wore a helmet  
Emblazoned with a crest of many globes.  
A bevor, too, it wore, as soft as velvet,  
Extending down concealing silver robes.

Its body armour though defied description.  
As Palmer stared, the arabesque designs  
Appeared to move and form a strange inscription  
Composed of scrolling labyrinthine lines.

And truly most exquisite was this armour  
Which seemed diaphanous and filled with light,  
And this had mesmerised our Mr Palmer  
As something only truly wondrous might.

But then occurred what so completely shocked him  
He lost all confidence in what was real:  
A sight so inexplicable it rocked him  
And knocked him off his rational even keel.

The spirit melded with the world around it  
While still remaining what it was itself,  
Its loving being seemingly unbounded  
With all it saw its own extended self.

So when a robin perched upon its arm  
And poked about, spontaneous and free,  
As though to nourish it and shield from harm  
It all at once became a sheltering tree.

And when a thousand starlings darted by  
Delighting in their murmuration trail,  
A million instantly adorned the sky  
Exulting as they buffeted the gale.

Then after, when the birds had flown away,  
Its angel form would straightaway return.  
And all this Palmer witnessed with dismay  
As later to his audience he'd affirm.

Yet Palmer never saw the spirit's face  
Which from his gaze throughout seemed carefully hidden,

That crested helmet hiding thus its grace  
As though to look upon it were forbidden.

But underneath it Palmer sensed its essence:  
Ineffable, mysterious and pure;  
So quite incredible a noble presence  
Of what he'd seen he'd later be unsure.

Now, so enrapt was Palmer in this vision  
He failed to note the darkening cloud behind;  
But then he saw what seemed an armed division  
Of every kind of blackness intertwined.

This squalling blackness swarmed like teeming rodents,  
Or locusts riding high above a storm,  
And these he realised were its opponents  
Beginning in their millions now to form.

For these were wretched denizens of Hell:  
Demonic forces of the darkest deep,  
And wailing phantoms of the damned as well  
Aroused from their eternal tortured sleep.

And every kind of wickedness was there:  
Perverse, unspeakable, grotesque and foul.  
And something stirred in Palmer like despair  
In answer to their endless mournful howl.

And now this mob had come unleashing evil,  
The Fiend in furious malice at their head;  
So numberless, they seemed in power equal  
To anything awaiting them ahead.

The angel, Palmer saw, was on a mission  
To note these dispositions from afar:  
Perhaps upon a scouting expedition  
From some uncharted universe or star.

But as our man was watching, speculating,  
A witness to those strange events that night,  
He realised, too, the angel had been waiting  
For soon appeared the most exalted sight.

A light was on a journey in the heavens  
Dispelling gloom from Turnpike Lane to Kent.  
Composed of gleaming seraphim with weapons  
It now began its measured grand descent.

Majestic in its scale and wondrous aura,  
In harmonies celestial it moved,  
As far from Satan's followers' disorder  
As Heaven is from deepest Hell removed.

This, too, in eerie motion was encroaching  
Unseen upon our world and evening sky,  
As inch by inch these powers were approaching  
To meet, it seemed, above the London Eye.

## [Table of Contents](#)

**Paul Martin Freeman's** book of whimsical verse, *A Chocolate Box Menagerie*, is published by New English Review Press and is available [here](#). This poem is from the author's unpublished work, *The Bus Poems: A Tale of the Devil*.

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