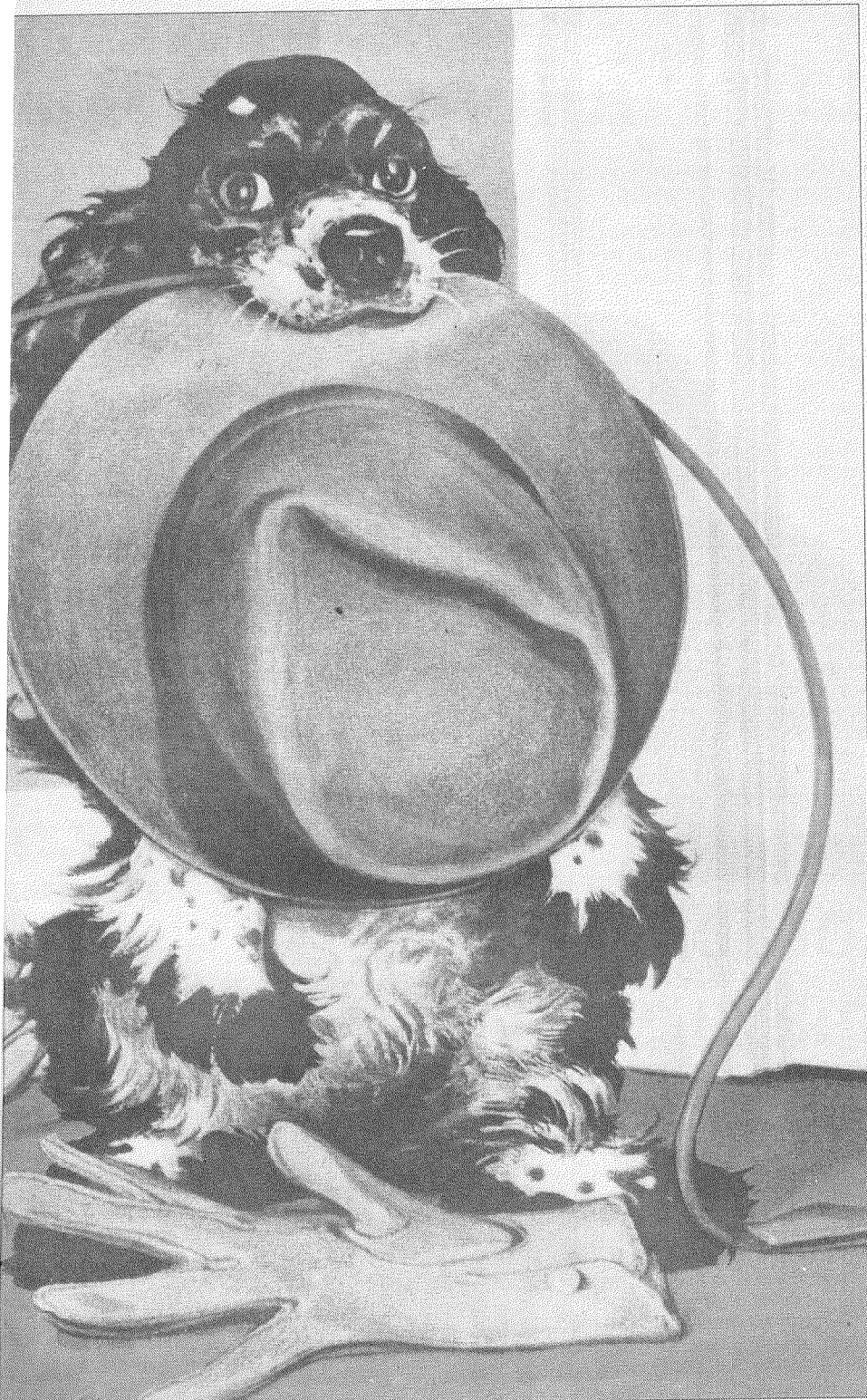


ts, **Rupert Sheldrake** explains his theory of a mystical life force

ve a sixth sense?



as yet unrecognised by science.

For many millions of years, among the wild ancestors of dogs and cats, the young remained behind while adults went off hunting. The return of the hunters with food is an event of the most vital importance. Behind the greeting behaviour of pets lies a long evolutionary history. The close bonds between people and dogs date back over 10,000 years.

Research with pets that know when their owners are coming home is open to anyone who has such a pet, especially if they can count on the co-operation of family, friends and, of course, the animal itself. For students from homes with such pets, such research could be a science project of an extraordinarily interesting kind.

Why was this not done years ago? Because of powerful taboos, usually operating unconsciously. To start with, there is a general prohibition against taking psychic or paranormal phenomena seriously. If they really happen, they throw into doubt the mechanistic world view.

This taboo is actively upheld by sceptics who tend to equate the mechanistic world view with reason itself, and are passionate in its defence. They are scientific fundamentalists. Their fear is that if claims of the paranormal are allowed to gain a foothold, civilisation will be swamped by superstition and religion.

Among respectable educated people, interest in the paranormal is treated like a kind of intellectual pornography. It flourishes in private and in the less reputable branches of the media; but it is more or less excluded from the educational system, from scientific and medical institutions and from serious public discourse.

Yet knowing when their people are coming home is only one of the ways in which pets show surprising power. There are several others, including apparent telepathic communication. In dramatic cases, some pets seem to know when their distant owner is in danger, reacting with signs of alarm and distress. Other

home (unless we called). Sometimes I'd stay a half hour or so later at an activity. Sometimes my husband's hearings would last all day, sometimes an hour."

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basic pioneering research, it could soon be established whether or not this phenomenon goes beyond the conventional kinds of scientific explanation. If there is a seemingly paranormal effect, and if this is confirmed by a

had conversations like this. But rather than petering out inconclusively in the usual way, this particular one sparked off the idea for a simple experiment. If a pet responds well in advance of the arrival of its owner, the