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Weir the Warlock

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SATAN'S BABY

THE DEVIL KID OF CLEVELAND

SOUNDS OF ETERNITY

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FEBRUARY 2014



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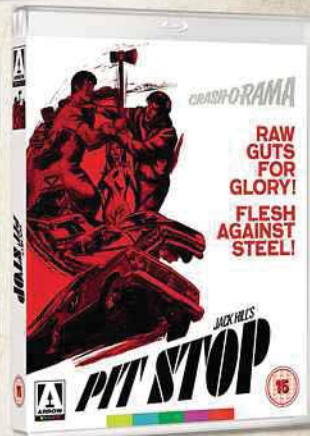
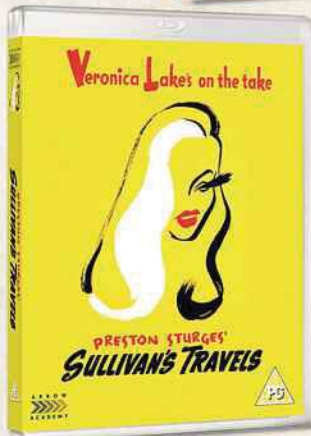
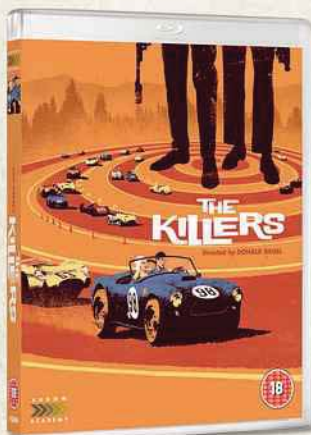
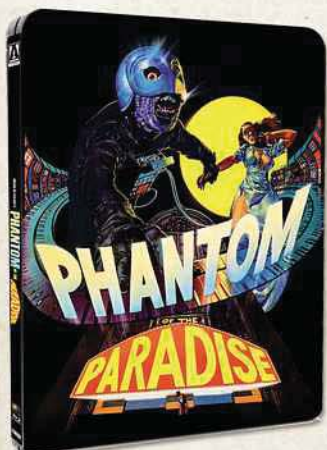
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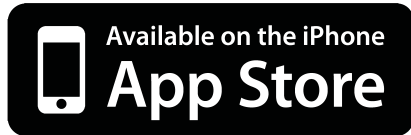


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CONTENTS

the world of strange phenomena

strange days

Raining bats and body parts; river of molten caramel; dog disappearing acts; cookie monster sponge; bleeding from the eyes; little white ligers; pets that look like Hitler; fish attacks; haunted hospitals – and much more.

- 15 ALIEN ZOO
- 16 GHOSTWATCH
- 18 ARCHÆOLOGY
- 19 CLASSICAL CORNER
- 21 KONSPIRACY KORNER
- 23 MYTHCONCEPTIONS
- 25 STRANGE DEATHS
- 26 THE UFO FILES

features

COVER STORY

30 THE HOUSE OF MAJOR WEIR

JAN BONDESON turns detective in an effort to shed some new light on Edinburgh's most haunted house – and finds that, contrary to local belief, the abode of Weir the Warlock still stands today.

38 SOUNDS ETERNAL 1: DRONING ON

JIMMY BILLINGHAM examines the mind-altering properties of the sustained musical drone, from the ancient world to contemporary minimalism and club culture.

42 SOUNDS ETERNAL 2: CHIMING IN

STEVE MARSHALL travelled to Woodstock to talk brainwaves and harmonics with award-winning percussionist and windchime maker Garry Kvistad.

46 SEX GHOSTS OF SICILY

DR PAUL KOUDOUNARIS meets 'Il Pene Grande', 'Il Masturbatore' and the other post-mortem perverts inhabiting the catacombs beneath a Palermo monastery.

reports

28 BLASTS FROM THE PAST

No. 49. The Devil Kid of Newburg

50 DICTIONARY OF THE DAMNED

No. 54. Fortean Machines

54 THE FIRST FORTEANS

No. 4. Eric Frank Russell: Part One

forum

57 No country for old snakes by Shane Cochrane

58 King Arthur's Loco Reserve by Roy Bainton

regulars

- 02 EDITORIAL
- 61 REVIEWS
- 73 LETTERS
- 76 IT HAPPENED TO ME
- 78 READER INFO
- 80 PHENOMENOMIX



46 SEX GHOSTS OF SICILY
Gropers, panty-snatchers and self-abusers from beyond the grave



38 DRONING ON
Musical highs through drones



76 PHANTOM PETS
Readers' spooky tales of cats and dogs



42 CHIMING IN
Brainwaves, harmonics and windchimes



27 HAUNTED SKIES
Elsie Oakensen's close encounter

PAUL KOUDOUNARIS

GETTY IMAGES

STEVE MARSHALL

HAUNTED SKIES VOL. 7: 1978-79

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editorial

Giving the Devil his due...

Our cover star this issue - Major Weir, the Warlock of West Bow - was a bad 'un to be sure (as Jan Bondeson reveals on pp30-36). Weir was found guilty of incest and bestiality, but dark rumours circulating around his native Edinburgh hinted at even more serious crimes... such as a pact with Auld Clottie himself.

The Devil, though, is clearly not thought to pose much of a threat these days - at least not south of the border. In fact, Old Nick's stock has fallen so low that he's even been banished from the Church of England's baptism service. Where once godparents were asked to "reject the Devil" they are now merely required to "reject evil, and all its many forms, and all its empty promises". Traditionalists and Anglo-Catholics have been left fuming at what they perceive as yet another example of 'trendy' Anglican liberalism reducing the liturgy to weasel words even atheists would feel comfortable saying. Apparently, the new experimental rite was prompted by concerns that the traditional words did not 'resonate' with too many people in the 21st century.

Maybe not here in Britain, but we can report that His Satanic Majesty has continued to make the news elsewhere, seemingly untroubled by this latest snub. A mother and another woman in Germantown, Maryland, were accused of murdering two small children while performing an exorcism. Norell Harris, one, and Zyana Harris, two, both suffered multiple stab wounds; their two siblings were injured and hospitalised. The women have been charged with first-degree murder, although the police have not stated what connection the supposed exorcism has with the case. [R], 19 Jan 2014.

Meanwhile, the Catholic Church in Italy, Spain and Malta is training more exorcists than ever to deal with a perceived hike in occult practices. In Spain, there has been an "unprecedented rise" in the number of cases of "demonic possession" according to the Archbishop of Madrid, while Father Francesco Bamonte, president of the International Association for Exorcists, said there simply weren't enough exorcists to go round. Increasing the number of priests who can perform the rite, it was thought, would also help tackle the problem of self-appointed exorcists unauthorised by the Church. *D.Telegraph*, 8 Jan; *Malta Independent*, 9 Jan 2014.

If Father Bamonte thinks the Med is a hotbed of diabolism, he obviously hasn't looked across the pond, where the Satanic Temple has been trying to get a 7ft (2m) monument to the Prince of Darkness erected near the Oklahoma State

Capitol. The application included an artist's rendering of Satan as the goat-headed figure of Baphomet, sitting in a pentagram-adorned throne with smiling children next to him. The New York-based Temple says the monument has been designed to "reflect the views of Satanists in Oklahoma City and beyond". *Guardian*, 7 Jan 2014.

ERRATA

FT305:39: In Daniel Wilson's 'Crook Frightfulness' article, Annie Evans has become a "widower"; clearly she was a widow (spotted by Andy Munro).

FT307:74: Nick Parkins's Fortean Traveller was wrongly credited to Nick Parks - our apologies to Nick for this misattribution (and thanks to Martin Stubbs for pointing it out).

FT309:25: As a number of readers pointed out, last issue's Mythconceptions had carried over the title of the previous issue's instalment; it should have been headed "171. Blind as a bat" and not "170. Porcupine projectiles".

FT309:26: The 'Flying Saucery' item 'Iceland Enigma' about a fireball or unidentified light mentioned that it passed over the "village of Akureyr" in Iceland. Bill Robinson of Slough wrote in to point out that "the good citizens

of Akureyr would not be happy for their quite large town to be called a village. Akureyr, in fact, is the fourth largest town in Iceland, with a population of about 17,500."

FT310:65: Valérie Coupland emailed to point out that our review of Cocteau's masterpiece should have referred to *La Belle et la Bête* and not *La Belle et le Bête*. "I laughed for five minutes," said Valérie, "as *Le Bête* would mean the idiot, rather than the Beast."



"I DON'T THINK CANCELLING SKY SPORTS IS THE KIND OF SACRIFICE IT MEANS."

David Sutton
 DAVID R SUTTON

Bob Rickard
 BOB RICKARD

Paul Sieveking
 PAUL SIEVEKING

Why fortean?
 Everything you always wanted to know about *Fortean Times* but were too paranoid to ask!

SEE PAGE 78

Write Your Way To A New Career!

Writers Bureau Celebrates Twenty-five Years of Helping New Writers

by Nick Daws

When distance-learning pioneer Ernest Metcalfe founded The Writers Bureau in the late 1980s, he can hardly have dared hope that twenty-five years on it would be acknowledged as Britain's leading writing school. Yet so it proved, with thousands of Writers Bureau students seeing their work in print for the first time. And, for many of those who persevered with their writing, the dream of becoming a successful writer has turned into reality.

Students such as Tim Skelton. An engineer by profession, he had always harboured an ambition to write, and at the age of 40 signed up with The Writers Bureau. The decision changed his life: "My writing career took off exponentially. I started appearing regularly in lifestyle and in-flight magazines. The following year I was commissioned by Bradt Travel Guides to write a guidebook to Luxembourg.

"My writing career took off exponentially."

I've appeared in The Times and The Independent, and updated guidebooks for Fodor's, Thomas Cook, and the AA."

Another student who benefited was Hazel McHaffie. Hazel wanted to make her academic work in Medical Ethics more accessible to people, and decided to write the themes into novels. Following her Writers Bureau course, Hazel has had five novels published, and appeared at the Edinburgh International Book Festival. She also has her own website at www.hazelmchaffie.com.

Sometimes studying with The Writers Bureau takes students down new and unexpected paths. Patricia Holness originally enrolled on The Writers Bureau's Writing for Children course. However, she soon realised that what she was learning applied to other types of writing as well.

She is now a full-time writer, regularly selling short stories for both

children and adults. She also has a monthly column in Devon Life.

These are just a selection from the inspirational true stories from students of The Writers Bureau. There's no reason why YOU couldn't be their next success story. With a 15-day free trial and money-back guarantee, there is nothing to lose and potentially a whole new career to gain! So why not visit their website at www.writersbureau.com or call on Freephone 0800 856 2008 for more information?

Hazel McHaffie



Tim Skelton



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Hannah Evans, Winchester "I've been published in The Guardian and Good Life earning £400. And now I've got my first book published by Bloomsbury called MOB Rule: Lessons Learned by a Mother of Boys. The Writers Bureau course provided me with structure, stopped my procrastination but most importantly it provided the impetus to try something different."

Michael Foley, Essex "Completing The Writers Bureau course has made it possible for me to attain my life-long ambition of becoming a published writer. The level of success I have achieved has far outweighed what I was hoping for when beginning the course. I have now had seventeen books published with two more under publication at the moment."



Jane Isaac, Northamptonshire "When I started the Writers Bureau course, I wanted to explore avenues for my writing and develop and strengthen my personal style. I had no idea that it would lead to me being a published writer of novels and short stories. I still pinch myself when I receive emails and messages from readers who've enjoyed my work or when I give talks to book clubs and visit bookstores to do signings. These are magical moments that have changed my life – my dream has come true."

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Members of BILD
and ABCC

strangedays

The eagle has (crash) landed

Body parts fall from the sky, dying bats rain down and a giant raptor plummets to earth



DEMOTIX / PRESS ASSOCIATION IMAGES

ABOVE LEFT: 100,000 bats perished as a result of the heat wave. ABOVE RIGHT: The *Hobbit* eagle comes a cropper in Wellington airport.

- Human body parts fell at an intersection in the Mushrefa neighbourhood of central Jeddah in Saudi Arabia, just south of King Abdulaziz International Airport, at 2.30am on Sunday, 5 January. Police speculated that they could be the remains of someone trapped in an aircraft's undercarriage bay. On the same day, a jet from Saudi Arabian Airlines made an emergency landing in the city of Medina in the west of the kingdom, injuring 29 people. That aircraft had been travelling from Iran's second city of Mashhad with 315 people on board. A spokesman for the General Authority of Civil Aviation said there was no connection between the emergency landing in Medina and the Jeddah incident.

In a desperate attempt to cross borders, some people at poorly monitored airports climb inside the bays housing

“Some bats may appear dead, but they are not...”

aircraft landing gear. Most of them freeze to death once the aircraft reach cruising altitude, but some survive. In 2010, the head of Beirut's airport security resigned after the death of a man who managed to hide in the undercarriage bay of a Saudi-bound jet. The man's body was found by a maintenance worker who was inspecting the gear of the Saudi-owned Nas Air Airbus A-320 after it landed in Riyadh. [AFP] 5 Jan 2014.

- A heatwave across south-east Queensland, Australia, in the

first week of 2014 caused about 100,000 bats to fall to the ground and die; 25 separate colonies were affected, including those at Mt Ommaney, Redbank, Boonah, Palmwoods, Laidley and Gatton. Rubbish collectors were swept off their feet collecting the corpses. “It's a horrible, cruel way to die,” said conservation worker Louise Saunders. “Anything over 43°C [109°F] and they just fall. We're picking up those that are just not coping and are humanely euthanising them.”

At least 16 people received antiviral treatment after coming into close contact with a bat. “If you find a bat it is very important not to touch it because of the risk of infection with Australian bat lyssavirus,” said the state's chief health officer. “Some bats may appear dead but they are not and when people have attempted

to remove them they have been bitten or scratched. Bats also have a claw on their wings which is a frequent cause of injury.” Residents near Boonah's Athol Terrace lookout had to put up with the stench of the dead animals for four days. Hundreds of bats lay dead in trees and nearby bushes, and were being eaten by maggots. *ABC News, 8 Jan; Queensland Times, 5 Jan; D.Telegraph, D.Mirror, 9 Jan 2014.*

- A model eagle with a 45ft (14m) wingspan – used to promote *The Hobbit* film trilogy – fell from the ceiling of Wellington airport in New Zealand during an earthquake of 6.6 magnitude. The tremor damaged buildings and led to train suspensions, rock slides and road closures, but is not believed to have caused any injuries. *D.Telegraph, 21 Jan 2014.*



POPPY THE HITLER CAT

And other power-crazed pets that look like dictators

PAGE 10



NOT SO FUNNY MEN

Mystery clowns pop up from Northampton to Sheffield

PAGE 20



WHEN FISH BITE BACK

Christmas Day piranha attack and Oklahoma Octopus strike

PAGE 22

Sweet disaster

River of molten caramel swamps Brazilian town

A thick river of caramel swamped much of the town of Santa Adélia in the southern Brazilian state of São Paulo after a fire in a warehouse owned by Agrovia Sugar Company on 25 October 2013 melted more than 30,000 tons of sugar. The fire began after a spark from machinery powering a loading conveyor belt ignited sugar stored in the depot. As the fire swept through the building, melted molasses poured out onto the streets and towards people's homes. There were at least four injuries and 17 residents were moved out into hotels. Firefighters finally managed to bring the blaze under control after 75 hours.

"The fire consumed the entire warehouse, and firefighting teams worked to isolate a second

depot by cooling the walls," said Guilherme Raposa, chief executive of Agrovia. Barriers of earth were piled in front of houses to try to prevent the syrupy liquid from engulfing them. Emergency services were still battling against a steady tide of heavy caramel after four days and large suctioning machinery was being used to siphon up the thick liquid. Tractors and JCB diggers scooped up the goo, a ditch dug around the affected area to channel the flow, while barriers were installed in an attempt to reduce contamination to the local river.

According to Jose Ferreira de Andrade, an engineer from the Environmental, Sanitation and Technology Company for Sao Paulo (CETESB), the flood of



treacle had polluted the nearby river Sao Domingos, killing fish. "Yesterday, oxygen levels in the water were zero," said Mr Andrade. "The product is not toxic, but because of its density it depletes the oxygen. So far we have already collected over 15kg [33lb] of dead fish," he added. *Independent, (Sydney) D.Telegraph, 30 Oct 2013.*

• We recall the Great Boston Molasses Flood of 15 January 1919, an unseasonably hot day. As the temperature rose to 43 degrees, the pressure of molasses

weakened the poorly constructed storage vat, popping the bolts holding its steel panels together and spilling 2.3 million gallons (10 million litres) of molasses into Boston's crowded

business district.

A wall of hot treacle, 15ft (4.5m) deep and 100 yards (90m) wide, oozed towards the sea, destroying everything in its path. Twenty-one people lost their lives. In five minutes the wave had passed, but molasses were still waist-high in the street. The stuff had been kept liquid with warming pipes, but quickly congealed. Water from fire hoses failed to shift it and pistol shots were heard through the day as police humanely executed horses trapped like flies on fly-paper. *[AP] 16 Jan 1994; For other molasses floods, see FT53:24, 129:12-13.*

EXTRA! EXTRA!

FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

Thai rice mountain threatens to topple

Melbourne Age, 25 July 2013.

PHANTOM SEX NOISES IN PHUKET, VOODOO SUSPECTED

Phuket News (Thailand), —July 2013.

Man certified as dead elected mayor in Mexico

Toronto Star, 12 July 2013.

ST. CROIX BRIDGE IS MOVING FORWARD

(Minnesota) Star Tribune, 24 Aug 2012.

Man in court over hamster under the rug

Blackpool Gazette, 19 July 2013.

Hungry kids used as guinea pigs

Toronto Star, 17 July 2013.

Fish drops out on advice of doctor

(Minnesota) Star Tribune, 7 Sept 2012.

Party member arrested over Mugabe's lost face

Guardian, 24 July 2013.

Santa Claus to stand trial

Adelaide Advertiser, 26 July 2013.

Daughters remember hitman as 'role model'

Toronto Star, 18 July 2013.



COOKIE MONSTER

The stove-pipe sponge, a tropical creature bearing an alarming resemblance to the Cookie Monster, eats plankton, not biscuits, and can be found in the warm Central American waters. *MX News (Sydney)*, 24 Sept 2013. PHOTO: Cater's News Agency.



SIDELINES...

GOBLIN TROUBLE

Four schools in southern Zimbabwe suspended lessons in early November after complaints that children were being attacked by goblins. "The whole school is being affected," said one headmaster. "We cannot continue operating under such conditions. When the attacks start, pupils run amok. They start screaming and panicking." *Sunday Times*, 3 Nov 2013.

THAT'S NO BABY

Honest Mafa, 24, a self-styled prophet from Harare in Zimbabwe, was arrested at a roadblock on the outskirts of Gweru after police discovered a strange creature in his satchel, thought to be a goblin. Eyewitnesses said the creature, wearing a small red dress, had a humanlike appearance and artificial hair. "It looked like a baby, but with features of an adult human being," said one female passenger. *Zimbabwe Herald*, 2 Dec 2013.

RESCUING MINNIE

Someone called Holyhead Coastguard in North Wales to say they had seen a figure falling in the sea at Llandudno North Beach. Llandudno lifeboat was sent out to investigate and found a large inflatable Minnie Mouse. *BBC News*, 13 July 2013.

BORN EVERY MINUTE

After a spoof Apple Internet advert claimed that updating to iOS7, Apple's new operating system, would render iPhones waterproof, quite a few trusting souls drowned their phones to put iOS7 to the test. *D.Mail*, 27 Sept 2013.



MARTIN ROSS

The eyes have it...

Recent sanguinary curiosities from around the world



HOTSPOT MEDIA

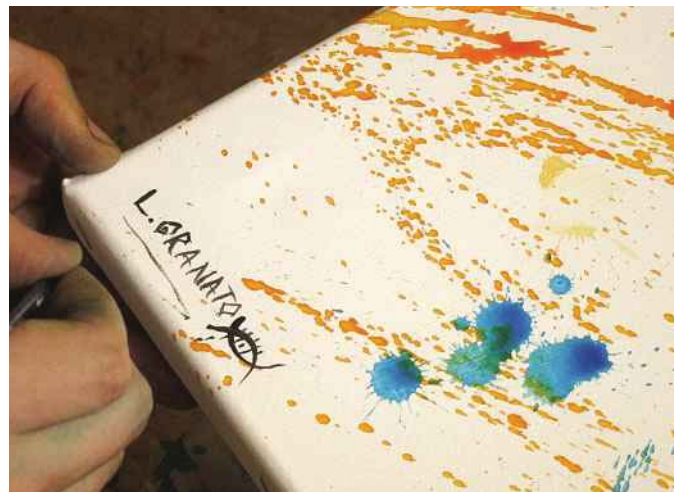
ABOVE: Leandro Granato's very physical approach to his art and (BELOW) the Abstract Expressionist final product.

• Artist Leandro Granato, 27, from Buenos Aires – citing Jackson Pollock as one of his inspirations – creates pictures by snorting paint and squirting it out of his eyes. He has to use about a pint and a half (800ml) of watercolour for each artwork. He spent two years training and developing a special formula of paint that does not damage his eyes. He records himself squirting the paint from his eye and sends the video to his customers, reassuring them it causes no pain. Some of his works fetch £1,500.

"Ever since I was a kid, I knew I had a special connection between my eye and my nose," explained the Argentinean artist. "As I grew up, I started realising that air and liquids could go out of my eye if I put them through my nose. Now I am the inventor of a new painting style in the art world. My whole family – as well as many other people – thought I was going crazy. But as time went by, they began to understand the art I call eye-painting." He believes he is the only person who paints in this way. *dailymail.co.uk*, 3 Oct; *Metro*, 4 Oct 2013.

"I realised that air and liquids could go out of my eye if I put them through my nose"

• After being afflicted with a mysterious condition in June 2013, Yaritza Oliva, 20, from the city of Purranque in Chile, bleeds from her eyes several times a day, suffering unbearable pain. Her local hospital ruled out both an eye infection and conjunctivitis, and believe she may have a rare condition known as hæmolacria, which causes blood to either tinge a person's tears or become the entire composition of tears. Doctors know neither the cause



HOTSPOT MEDIA

nor an effective treatment. Many believe, however, that hæmolacria is a symptom of blood-related diseases and tumours. Very few people have been diagnosed with hæmolacria and doctors have not yet determined whether Oliva has it. Her family lack the financial resources to visit a specialist, and have asked the public to donate funds. *Metro, Sun, 27 June 2013.*

- The only known case of hæmolacria in the United States was recorded in 2009. Calvino Inman, a 15-year-old from Tennessee, said that he cried tears of blood at least three times a day. "Sometimes, I can feel it coming up like a tear. I feel my eyes watering," said Inman. "Sometimes it burns when it comes out." Four years later, there's still no word that Inman has found an effective treatment for his condition. *medicaldaily.com, 26 June 2013.*

- In March 2013, a Canadian man began crying tears of blood. From his other symptoms, which included bleeding from various areas of his body, a medical team determined a venomous snakebite was the culprit (rather than hæmolacria) and administered an antivenom. *Huffington Post, 25 June 2013.*

- Michael Spann from Antioch, Tennessee, cries blood once or twice a week and has been unable to find the cause. Now in his late 20s, he first began experiencing the episodes every day when he was 22. Though the frequency of the bleeding has slowed, the headaches that accompany the bleeding have not. Spann compared his first experience of crying blood to being "hit in the head with a sledgehammer". He also bleeds from his nose and mouth. He believes the bleeding may have to do with a tear duct. *Yahoo News, 18 Oct 2013.*

- In 2007, Twinkle Dwivedi, a 12-year-old girl in Uttar Pradesh, India, suddenly started bleeding between five and 20 times a day. She was losing blood through her skin without being cut or scratched, and underwent



ABOVE: Yaritza Oliva who weeps agonising tears of blood several times a day.

transfusions after pints of it seeped through her eyes, nose, hairline, neck, and the soles of her feet. Sometimes she woke up with her entire body covered in dried blood. Doctors in Delhi decided she had Type 2 Platelet Disorder, a rare condition where blood is dangerously low in clotting particles; however, Dr Drew Provan of St Bartholemew's Hospital in London said: "She may have Type II von Willebrand disease and she should see a coagulation doctor for treatment." He believed her condition was not related to the number of clotting particles, but something called the von Willebrand factor, which helps platelets stick to blood vessels and blood to clot. [FT243:11].

- Jody Smith, 35, of Boston, Lincolnshire, is left in agony when she cries, because her tears contain razor-sharp 'diamond' crystals. She suffers from cystinosis, a rare inherited disease that causes the build-up of an acid called cystine. It forms as tiny crystals, which gather in her heart and lungs and fall from her eyes whenever they water, sparkling like jewels. There is no cure for cystinosis, which takes its toll on sufferers' kidney function. Jody has had two kidney transplants, at the ages of nine and 26, and uses eye drops, but they don't really help. *Sun, 22 April 2012.*

- In July 1989, Sarah Jayne Tait, six, from Edinburgh, came home from school crying, her left eye painfully swollen. Her family could see nothing in her eye, but finally a specialist at the Eye Pavilion put a probe round behind her eye, and out popped a baked bean. Sarah Jayne had no idea how it got there; she didn't even like baked beans. [FT54:8].

- Julie Redfern, 47, from Padiham, Lancashire, first noticed a squeaky noise when she moved her eyeballs shortly after her 40th birthday. She could also hear herself swallowing, her heart beating and her brain wobbling. She had to give up dining in restaurants with friends because she couldn't hear a word they said over the sound of her own chewing. Eventually, she was found to be suffering from superior canal dehiscence syndrome (SCDS), a rare condition of the inner ear caused by a thinning or honeycombing of the temporal bone, resulting in oversensitivity to sound. The syndrome was only recognised in 1998. The number of sufferers is unknown as SCDS can be misdiagnosed as tinnitus or other hearing disorders. It can be cured by surgery, but this runs the risk of making the sufferer deaf. Mrs Redfern has had one ear fixed in a five-hour operation and plans a second op. *D.Mail, Sun, 27 June 2013.*

SIDELINES...

PIGEON SABOTAGE

Hundreds of thousands of cars were gridlocked when pigeon poop damaged an electricity substation and short-circuited 25,000 traffic lights in Shiojiri and Matsumoto, Japan, forcing police to direct drivers with torches. *Sun, Metro, 4 Sept 2013*

ELECTIVE AFFINITY

Shavonnite Taylor gave birth to a baby boy on a Metro platform in downtown Washington. Appropriately, the birth took place at L'Enfant Plaza station. *(Sydney) D.Telegraph, 3 Aug 2013.*

DOOMSDAY PREPARATIONS

Polish-born Katarzyna Dryden-Chouen, 46, and her husband Clive, 60, admitted cultivating cannabis after 2.86lb (1.3kg) of weed was found in their house in Littledean, Gloucestershire. The couple were cleared of intending to supply the drug when Mrs D-C explained that any weed they didn't smoke was to be sacrificed to the god Shiva before the world ended on 21 December 2012. (She also claimed to have a talking pet mouse.) The couple were bailed to await sentence for cultivation. *D.Telegraph, 11 Nov; MX News (Sydney), 12 Nov 2013.*

GLOWING PORKERS

Radioactive boars are roaming the Italian countryside. As many as 29 were found in rural Italy in 2013 – two in mid-December – but there are no nuclear power plants in the country. The radioactivity is thought to come from the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear disaster, with similar cases in neighbouring Austria. Boar-hunting is popular in Italy. *MX News (Sydney), 16 Dec 2013.*



MARTIN ROSS

SIDELINES...

RITUAL BONES

The remains of at least 40 people are missing from a cemetery in the sleepy mountain town of Gurabo in Puerto Rico. Government officials made the discovery last June. Many residents believe the bones are being stolen for Santeria rituals (a blend of Catholicism and African Yoruba faith). [AP] 3 July 2013.

MARVELLOUS MOBILE

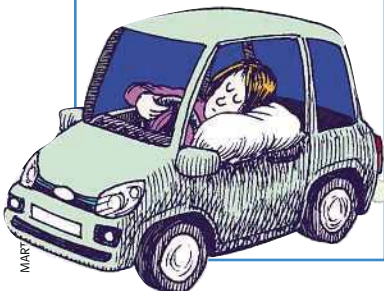
Roger Nilsson recovered his Nokia mobile phone after it had been lost in a Swedish lake for three months. When he dried it out, he was shocked to find it still worked – even though the Nokia Lumia 800 is not especially designed to be waterproof. *TNT magazine*, 5 Nov 2013.

HOWLING ERROR

A Polish farmer took in a ‘stray’ puppy to look after his sheep – but realised it was a wolf when it “howled all night”. Zbigniew Pieczyk, 50, of Podlasie said: “I made a hell of a mistake”. He planned to return the animal to the wild. *FT* is reminded of the classic urban legend known as “the Mexican pet”. *Metro*, 3 Sept 2013.

SNOOZE CONTROL

A woman in New Zealand drove for 200 miles (320km) while asleep, even sending text messages as she went. The unnamed driver set off from her new home in Hamilton at midnight after taking sleeping pills and made the five-hour journey to her old home in Mount Maunganui via Auckland. Alerted by a friend, police found her slumped at the wheel in her driveway with no memory of her trip. She had made a similar sleep-drive 10 months earlier. (*Sydney Morning Herald*, *D.Mail*, 15 Aug 2013.



Super Führer animals

Four-legged friends that really don't look like their owners



ROSS PARRY



birth. Sub-editors had fun with this story, headlining it “Heel, Hitler!” and referring to “the leader of the Furred Reich”. *D.Mail*, *Metro*, *Times*, *D.Mirror*, 26 Nov 2013.

- A month later came news of a feline Hitler, a cat called Poppy. “She’s lovely,” said owner Kate Magee of Sevenoaks in Kent. “It’s just unfortunate she looks like a dictator.” *D.Mail*, 26 Dec 2013.

- For a more up-to-date statesman simulacrum, we have this Staffordshire terrier-German shepherd cross from central Ukraine (below), said to be the splitting image of Vladimir Putin – the same smooth forehead and piercing gaze. The canine doppelgänger was spotted by a man from Kiev, who posted this photograph online and remains anonymous, possibly to protect him from the wrath of the Russian strongman. *Metro*, 20 Sept 2013.

- A puppy called Patch bears an uncanny resemblance to the late unlamented dictator of Germany. The seven-week-old pet, whose father Teddy is a shih tzu and mother Betty a French bulldog, is a “gentle soul” and a “sweetheart”, according to his owners. “None of us noticed the likeness until we put a photo on Facebook and my eldest daughter saw it and said: ‘You’ve got a little Hitler there’. Everybody calls him Adolf now. My grandsons do the goosestep when the puppy’s around,” said Lynda Whitehead, 66. Mrs Whitehead is looking after Patch and his brothers Buster and Huey at her home in York after their bulldog mother, owned by daughter Clare, rejected them at



Rabbit danger

Chasing bunnies can go terribly wrong



SARAH LUCY BROWN / ARCHANT

ABOVE: Lord Medway with Domino, returned thanks to the patron saint of lost causes.

- When the Earl of Cranbrook, 80, took Domino, his 11-month-old Jack Russell, for a walk on his estate in Great Glemham, near Saxmundham in Suffolk, on 7 October, she bolted after a rabbit and disappeared. Later Lady Cranbrook, 77, and her son Lord Medway (Jason Gathorne-Hardy), 45, returned to the spot with Domino's mother Tahra, who homed in on a particular rabbit hole, and they could hear a faint bark. Two workers dug with spades until nightfall but failed to find Domino. The next day, an excavator was brought in to shift 20 tons of sandy soil, but there was no sign of the terrier.

By the time St Jude's storm arrived on 28 October, little Domino had been missing for three weeks, and the family had lost hope of seeing her again. The storm, with 75mph (120km/h) winds, hit around 8.30am and half an hour later Jason's sister Flora, 42, spotted Domino from a window, slowly crawling and staggering across the lawn towards the house on their 900-acre (364ha) estate. Lady Cranbrook said the terrier was covered in sand and her claws were worn down. "The sand had got in her eyes and she was incredibly skinny," she said. A vet reckoned she had survived underground on worms and water seeping through the sand.

The family believes the storm

"Flora spotted Domino crawling towards the house"

– named after St Jude, the patron saint of lost causes – tore down a tree, creating an exit from the rabbit warren and allowing the dehydrated terrier to escape. Lord Medway, a zoologist and wildlife artist, said this was "perhaps thanks to St Jude. Beyond all else, she was a lost cause if ever there was one – lost and buried. We had given up all hope – but somehow she reappeared from the storm." A couple of days later, Domino was on the mend, but hadn't apparently learned any lessons. Lady Cranbrook said: "My daughter took her out and the first thing she did was run straight back down the rabbit hole." *D.Telegraph, D.Mail, D.Express, Sun, 31 Oct 2013.*

- A border cross Lakeland terrier called Bilbo endured a similar ordeal. On 7 November 2011, the seven-year-old pet chased a rabbit down a 10in (25cm) hole during a walk on Bodmin Moor, near his home in Dobwalls, Cornwall, and failed to emerge. Firemen told

owner Nicky Harwood, 39, that the tunnel might collapse if they dug into it and she would have to wait for Bilbo to find his own way out. Mrs Harwood along with her husband and children sat outside the hole for a few hours every day and tried to lure the dog out with various familiar scents – including his bed, the family's bed sheets, and his pet food – but all to no avail. The family gave up hope, but 20 days later Bilbo had lost 3.5lb (1.6kg) and was thin enough to wriggle free. Caked in mud and with trouble breathing, he made his way back to the car park where the family had parked nearly three weeks before. A passer-by recognised him from missing posters that had been plastered round the village and reunited him with his grateful family. This time, a vet suggested the dog had survived by "eating soil and getting water from that". *D.Mail, 3 Dec 2011.*

- A nine-year-old Jack Russell was stuck in a rabbit hole for 16 days. Carl and Erika Toutenhoofd, a couple in their 40s who run a pub in Penistone, South Yorkshire, were walking their pet on the nearby Trans-Pennine Trail on 14 August 2011 when he darted off. Day after day they returned to the spot where he was last seen to try and find him, but gradually gave up hope. Then, 16 days later, their friend Louise Bedford, out walking with her own dogs, heard whimpering coming from brambles and found the Jack Russell in a rabbit hole with his head poking out, and within minutes she had dug him free. He was treated for severe dehydration and made a good recovery, although it was feared he might have to lose an eye because it had developed ulcers while he was stuck underground. *D.Mail, 10 Sept 2011.*

- A Jack Russell called Barney was trapped down a badger hole for five days until he got thin enough to squeeze free and stagger home. "There was a graze on his left side where the badgers must have got him," said owner Cody Rogers, 17, from Torquay. "He's had a bit of TLC and seems to be fine." *Metro, 18 May 2012.*

SIDELINES...

GANGSTERS FOR GOD

"Evangelical drug lords" have forced dozens of priests and witchdoctors who belong to the Afro-Brazilian religion of Candomblé to leave their homes. Claiming they were doing "God's work", the gun-wielding dealers closed the cult's temples in 10 slums across Rio de Janeiro. *Metro, 13 Sept 2013.*

SEXORCISM

Seeking help in seducing her boss, a spice shop worker from Guangzhou in Guangdong Province met 'ghost-buster' Huang Jianjun at an hotel and gave him £2,000. He explained that ghosts in her vagina were preventing her boss from falling in love with her, but that he could exorcise these with his penis. She contacted the police the next day and had Huang arrested; but he insisted he couldn't have had sex because diabetes prevented him from attaining an erection. *NY Daily News, 12 Sept 2013.*

SKULL MYSTERY

Following a telephone tip-off on 5 September, Czech police in Prague found 15 numbered human skulls in a wooden box near a rubbish bin. The previous day, a homeless person had found another skull, also numbered, in a rubbish bin. No further information was available. *Irish Examiner, 6 Sept 2013.*

CRAFTY WORM

Workers at Maidenhead Aquatics in Woking, Surrey, perplexed by the disappearance of dozens of fish, found they had been eaten by a sea worm hidden in their tank. The Bobbit worm, 72in (107cm) long and about 2in (5cm) thick, which is found at depths of up to 150ft (46m) in the ocean, was only discovered when staff emptied the 200-gallon tank to fix a leak. It was probably brought into the shop about 10 years ago inside a rock and burrowed into the gravel floor of the tank. *D.Telegraph, 19 Oct 2013.*



MISSING BRAIN

In *End of Days: The Assassination of John F Kennedy*, James Swanson suggests that the president's brain was stolen by his brother Robert to prevent disclosures about the drugs he was on when he was shot. His brain was not buried with his body but kept at the National Archives. In October 1966, JFK's secretary Evelyn Lincoln discovered it was missing. *D.Telegraph*, 21 Oct 2013.

LOTS OF BOTTLE

Steve Wheeler, 65, of Malvern, Worcestershire, has spent 30 years travelling the world and amassing 20,000 milk bottles. He keeps his "milk museum" in six garden sheds and reckons the collection is worth £100,000. Oddly, he hates the taste of milk. *Sun*, 29 Aug 2013.

VERY LOST

Geoff Fatcher from Maidenhead found a dead aardvark beside a road in Berkshire in early March, 5,500 miles (8,800km) from its Brazilian rainforest habitat. Two weeks earlier, rambblers had spotted an aardvark climbing down a tree a few miles away. *Times*, 2 Mar 2013.

ONE TOUGH FISH

A goldfish thought to have been killed in a house fire was found alive and well after 21 months despite not being fed. Smokey survived under a plastic sheet in a pond following the blaze in Harwich, Essex. "Having him back has really lifted our spirits," said owner Jackie Broadley. *Metro*, 20 Sept 2013.

DIVINE FOOD

In mid-September a potato resembling the Hindu elephant-headed deity Ganesh was drawing pilgrims to the Shri Guru Ravidass Temple in Leicester. A week later, fish-factory workers in Gothenburg, Sweden, discovered a perfectly shaped cross on a Norwegian salmon's belly and decided to take the "Jesus fish" on a tour of the country. *Leicester Mercury*, 18 Sept; *<i> 26 Sept 2013.*

BUG BRUSH

An unrecorded six-legged nymph (immature insect) recently found in the forests of Surinam. The 7mm-long creature has hair-like feelers protruding from its abdomen. *Times*, *Metro*, 19 Nov 2013.

PHOTO: CATERS NEWS AGENCY



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ELFIN SAFETY CONCERNS

Will a new road project in Iceland be scuppered by the little people?



LEFT: Álfborg (Elf Rock) near Borgarfjörður is believed to be home to the queen of the Icelandic Elves and one of the most active elf areas in Iceland.

BELOW: Elf houses near Strandakirkja in south Iceland. **BOTTOM:** Álfróll in Kópavogur. Since the elves are believed to live here, the road narrows to avoid interfering with them.

Elf advocates have joined forces with environmentalists to urge the Icelandic Road and Coastal Commission and local authorities to abandon a highway project because it might disturb the creatures' habitat. The activists are particularly concerned about an elf church that sits on the potential route. The proposed highway would offer a direct route from the Alftanes peninsula, where President Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson has a home, to the Reykjavik suburb of Gardabaer; but the project has been halted until the Supreme Court of Iceland rules on a case brought by a group known as Friends of Lava. The activists cite cultural and environmental impact – including the plight of the elves – as a reason for regularly gathering hundreds of people to block workers from bulldozing the area.

Environmentalist Andri Snaer Magnason said that his major concern was that the road would cut a lava field in two and destroy animal nesting sites, but he was agnostic about elves. Issues about *huldufolk* (Icelandic for “hidden folk”) affect construction plans so regularly that the road and coastal administration has come up with a stock media response for elf inquiries, which states in part that “issues have been settled by delaying the construction project at a certain point while the elves living there have supposedly moved on.”



After centuries of Lutheran and quietist scepticism, most people in Norway, Denmark and Sweden have ceased to believe in elves, but they remain a serious concern in Iceland. In a survey conducted by the University of Iceland in 2007, 62 per cent of the 1,000 respondents thought it was at least possible that the critters exist. Many Icelanders also believe in dream predictions and the power of revenants. Couples planning a new house will sometimes hire ‘elf-spotters’ to ensure the lot is free of *huldufolk*; such precautions are seen as simple prudence. Tales abound of broken limbs, busted equipment and other woes befalling builders who go where *huldufolk* traditionally tread.

In the town of Kópavogur in 1996, for instance, bulldozer operator Hjortur Hjarterson ran into trouble as he tried to raze a suspected elf hill to make way for a graveyard. After two different bulldozers repeatedly and inexplicably malfunctioned, and local television cameras failed when trained on the hill – though they worked well enough elsewhere – the crew halted the project. “We’re going to see whether we can reach an understanding with the elves,” said project supervisor John Ingi. Local elf whisperers were called in to arbitrate, and after a while work resumed.

Erla Steffánsdóttir, a piano teacher, spiritual healer, and psychic known as the “Elf Lady of Iceland”, sees *huldufolk* nearly every day. She has drawn up a detailed map of Hafnarfjörður, a small town near Reykjavik, showing where the hidden folk

SCHORLE

CHRISTIAN BICKEL

CHRISTIAN BICKEL

A^Z ALIEN ZOO

KARL SHUKER presents his regular round-up from the crypto-zoological garden

live. She maintains that this town has the largest concentration of such faery habitations in the country – see **FT74:16**.

“For the most part, *huldufolk* are harmless, even gentle beings,” said Magnus H Skarphedinsson, headmaster of Iceland’s Elf School. “But if you brutalise them, bad things will happen – perhaps only that your project will have big cost overruns. But also you could succumb to a disease – or die. It can be very dangerous to bother elves.”

Huldufolk are human-sized, highly sociable beings dressed in colourful, old-fashioned costumes. “Sometimes they will invite humans to their cliff homes for a chat and pancakes,” said Skarphedinsson. He explained that in Iceland, beside the *huldufolk*, there are 13 types of elves, four fairy peoples, three sorts of troll, and two kinds of gnome – but in practice the word ‘elf’ is used pretty loosely. Incidentally, the Phallogical Museum in Reykjavik (**FT135:26, 277:22**) has a tiny jar of cloudy embalming fluid labelled “elf penis”.

Terry Gunnell, a folklore professor at the University of Iceland, said: “This is a land where your house can be destroyed by something you can’t see (earthquakes), where the wind can knock you off your feet, where the smell of sulphur from your taps tells you there is invisible fire not far below your feet, where the Northern Lights make the sky the biggest television screen in the world, and where hot springs and glaciers ‘talk’. Everyone is aware that the land is alive, and one can say that the stories of hidden people and the need to work carefully with them reflects an understanding that the land demands respect... In some senses, Iceland only came out of the Middle Ages in around 1940.” *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette (Little Rock, AR)*, 25 Dec 1999; (*London Eve Standard*, 11 Dec 2000; *New York Times*, 13 July 2005; *Reykjavik Grapevine*, issue 16, 2007; [AP] *Guardian, Independent*, 23 Dec; *D.Mail*, 27 Dec 2013. See also “The land of the hidden people” by Claire Smith (**FT201:42-45**).



AND NOW THERE ARE FIVE

As announced at the end of 2013, a new, fifth species of tapir has been officially described. This latest recognised member of the discontinuously distributed taxonomic family of trunked perissodactyls or odd-toed ungulates (four species in South America, one in southeast Asia) is actually the smallest, with a total length of around 51in (130cm), a shoulder height of only 36in (91cm) (it has short legs), and weighing a ‘mere’ 240lb (109kg). Yet this still makes it the largest new mammal discovered and distinguished in the field – as opposed to museum collections – since the unveiling in 1992 of Vietnam’s saola or Vu Quang ox (**FT66:6**), and the first new species of perissodactyl for more than a century. Formally named the kabomani or little black tapir *Tapirus kabomani* in 2013 (‘kabomani’ means ‘tapir’ in the local Paumari language), with fur colour varying from dark brown to dark grey, it is currently confirmed only from the Mato Grosso and two other rainforest regions of Brazil, but it may also occur in Colombia and French Guiana.

Its distinctiveness from the lowland tapir *T. terrestris* in Brazil has long been recognised by the native peoples here, and had also been noted by Dutch zoologist Dr Marc van Roosmalen. Moreover, a specimen had actually been shot a century ago by American president Theodore Roosevelt, who also considered that this small tapir represented a distinct form. Nevertheless, it has taken several years of comprehensive anatomical and molecular research by a team of mammalogists and palaeontologists headed by Brazilian researchers Drs Mario A Cozzuol and Fabrício R Santos before this species’ separate taxonomic status was at last accepted by science. <http://www.bioone.org/doi/abs/10.1644/12-MAMMA-169.1> 2013; <http://news.mongabay.com/2013/1216-hance-new-tapir-kabomani.html> 13 Dec 2013.



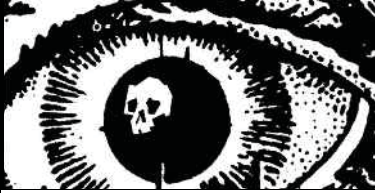
SPECIOUS IN SPEZIA?

Fellow British cryptozoological researcher Richard Muirhead has a wonderful ability to uncover fascinating but hitherto obscure crypto-cases; the following is a recent example. Richard noted on the Facebook Cryptozoology Group that on 29 April 1908 the *Teesdale Mercury* carried a report of what sounds like a truly bizarre beast: “A Strange Beast – Professor Felice del Santa, the Italian painter, was recently painting near the Castle of San Giorgio, in the Spezia district, when, he avers, there suddenly stood before him a strange beast about 16ft [5m] long, with a long tail and a head like a fox hound with a heart shaped tuft on it. After pacing the ground for a few minutes the beast bolted into a thick wood. One or two other people claim to have seen the strange animal vision within the last year or two.”

Needless to say, any terrestrial beast 16ft long would surely have attracted much more attention than this creature apparently did, as there seems not to have been any follow-up accounts. I suspect that either the size was incorrect, or, more probably, that the entire report was a media invention, but it still makes curious reading. *Richard Muirhead, Facebook posting, 7 Jan 2014.*

LIGER, LIGER, TURNING WHITE

Ligers are the very sizeable interspecific offspring of matings between lions and tigresses. Most commonly renowned for their great size, these hybrid cats now have four additionally striking representatives – a litter recently born at Myrtle Beach Safari Park in South Carolina – because all four of these cubs are white. The reason for this is that the parents of Yeti, Odin, Sampson, and Apollo are a white African lion (called Ivory) and a white Bengal tigress (Saraswati), and their offspring are the first white ligers ever confirmed. Having said that, all of these cubs possess limited areas of very pale golden coloration, faint coat markings, dark eyes, and normal-coloured noses, thereby suggesting that they are leucistic rather than albinistic. Moreover, as all four cubs in the litter are white, as opposed to constituting a litter in which some are white and the rest are of normal coloration, this strongly suggests that it is the same mutant gene allele that is responsible for white coloration in both tigers and lions, something that has long been suspected but never before supported by direct evidence – thereby making this mating of particular scientific interest rather than mere curiosity value. www.dailymail.co.uk, 5 Jan 2014.



GHOSTWATCH

ALAN MURDIE examines deathbed apparitions and more hospital ghost stories

Rather than coming from ghost hunts around abandoned hospitals and asylums (see **FT310:16-17**), the most interesting evidence concerning apparitional encounters in American hospitals is to be found in an unjustly forgotten study conducted by Dr Karlis Osis and published in 1961. This was a survey into apparitions seen by the dying, gathered from medical staff who attended them.

Dr Osis sent out a questionnaire survey addressed to thousands of doctors and nurses, receiving four to six per cent response rate. His final results represented reports from 285 physicians and 355 nurses, who reported having witnessed over 35,000 deaths of patients between them. According to the respondents, 40 per cent of dying patients hallucinated, with an overwhelming preponderance seeing the apparitions of dead persons, usually relatives of the dying patient. Typically, the experience had a calming effect and the apparition was interpreted as a spirit coming to greet the patient and help with the transition into the afterlife. The incidence of these experiences did not seem to correlate with the nature of the patient's illness, educational attainment or social background. The great majority of such experiences occurred among conscious, lucid patients, not considered confused by drugs or fever.

In patients in a state of clear (as opposed to impaired) consciousness, the ratio of apparitions of dead to living persons proved greater, and a calming effect much more frequently noticed. The proportion of apparitions interpreted as having "come to take the patient away" was much larger in experiences occurring very close to the instant of death. Some similarities with Near-Death Experiences (NDEs) reported by surviving cardiac patients may also be noted. In many NDEs, the experiences associated with the death of the body seem to have been happy ones, and experiences of the terminally ill and dying often mention the beauty of the scenery that they were passing through in the transition to an afterlife, before their final breath. However, not all visions were welcomed by the dying patients. Some experienced fear and distress, and a marked reluctance to depart with the perceived figures, to the point of calling on the medical staff present to stop the apparition taking them away.

Later in the 1970s, working as research officer from the American Society for Psychical Research, Dr Osis repeated his study with Dr Erlendur Haraldsson, and extended it to India. The results obtained yielded similar patterns, including a higher percentage of religious figures in bright clothing, suggesting cultural



LEFT: Dr Karlis Osis, whose 1961 research into apparitions seen by the dying was based on a questionnaire sent out to thousands of medical staff who attended deathbed patients.

private establishments, but perhaps (as I suspect in the USA) public relations for commercial medicine demand the suppression of ghost reports. Indeed, I only know of rumours of one haunting at a private hospital in the UK, in Yorkshire.

In contrast, it seems almost every large NHS hospital in the UK has a tradition of a ghost. Andrew Green listed haunted hospitals in his *Ghosts of Today* (1980), noting that "young nurses will embellish and even invent stories to lighten a day's problems". The most consistently reported apparition is a nurse in grey uniform, a variation of the traditional grey or white lady. The old Dumfries and Galloway Royal Infirmary was even rumoured to have been closed and converted into a boarding school partly as a result of complaints

about "weird shrieks" and "horrifying moans". Some ghosts were treated with affection, as at the old Colchester hospital where on Christmas Eve staff would traditionally leave out a glass of sherry and a mince pie for the "Grey Lady" (or so I was told when giving a talk in Essex a few years back).

The most publicised UK hospital haunting of recent years was at Derby City Hospital in 2009 where staff were disturbed by a "black shadow" in the medical records department.

This became national news when services manager Debbie Butler sent out an e-mail to staff saying she would be arranging for someone from Derby Cathedral "to exorcise the department". She stated: "I'm taking it seriously as it is affecting some members of staff and the last thing I want is staff feeling uneasy at work." Some press reports stated the "black shadow" sighting was made by two members of staff, though other reports maintained there had been dozens of

sightings worrying staff, especially those in departments near the mortuary. Soon after, however, the hospital trust declared that an exorcist was not going to be summoned, and announced their own chaplain would be speaking with staff to reassure them. "We will be talking to staff in the department to listen to their concerns," said a spokeswoman. "We respect our staff and always listen to their views to help put minds at ease."

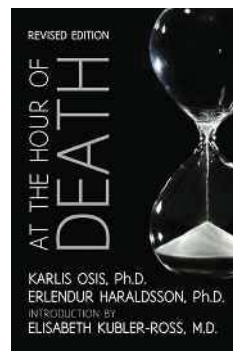
Some reports rather fancifully speculated that the ghost was a Roman soldier because when the hospital was extended in the 1990s it was built over section of a Roman road, Rykneld Street. As with the alleged

THE APPARITION WAS INTERPRETED AS A SPIRIT COMING TO GREET THE DYING HOSPITAL PATIENT

factors and possibly the belief in reincarnation might be at work. However, the Indian surveys also confirmed the dying experiencing identifiable fetching apparitions like those in America, with the authors reporting: "We found that the take away cases were essentially similar in the US and India. They had characteristics in common which neither the Bible nor the Gita suggests. Not least among these characteristics is the very evident coming of deceased relatives, apparitions who are arriving to aid transition to a post-mortem existence". The authors concluded that "the core phenomena cut across cultural differences".

Sources: *Deathbed Observations by Physicians and Nurses* (1961) Karl Osis, *Parapsychological Monographs No.3*; "Deathbed observations by physicians and nurses: A cross-cultural survey" by K Osis and E Haraldsson, pp.237-259. *Journal of the American SPR*, vol.71, 1977.

In Britain actual ghost sightings are associated more with hospitals that are still open rather than redundant ones. NHS hospitals tend to be more haunted than



Roman ghost haunting Gloucester Museum last year, just why a ghost might hang around for 2,000 years before deciding to make problems at a modern hospital was not explained. However, the story was revived a year later.

Jake Bestwick, 12, of Langley Mill, Derbyshire, reported seeing an apparition whilst he and his mother were taking his grandmother for treatment. Jake described it as a hooded figure rising up from the floor, with its facial features concealed inside the hood. He told a journalist from the *Sun* that

“it came through the floor about 20cm [8in] from my face. It stood in front of me for a few seconds and then vanished.” Jake apparently knew nothing of the previous sightings but said: “I know what I saw was a ghost”. Sources: *Sun*, *Guardian unlimited*, 30 Jan 2009; <http://legacy.thisisderbyshire.co.uk/Ghost-sighting-Derby-City-General-hospital/story-11557678-detail/story.html#ixzz2onvSldnV>.

Interestingly, a ghostly hooded figure with a hidden face features in one of the oldest and most remarkable hospital ghost stories to which some reliability may be attached. The apparition appeared in a ward in a British military hospital on the Rock of Gibraltar and was reported to the Society for Psychical Research in 1893. The event had actually taken place over 50 years earlier, in 1839, but seemed to have been reliably recorded in notes made at the time by a Captain Emmett of the Royal Bucks Militia.

In September 1839 Captain Emmett and a chaplain, the Revd. William Brown, investigated rumours circulating amongst the 46th Regiment, then quartered on the Rock, that a ghost or spirit had appeared at the hospital ward at their barracks. For two nights the ward had been disturbed by the sound of footsteps. On the third night, a private of the 46th named Watson was lying awake in bed after eleven o'clock, not being able to sleep as there was a rushlight at the far end of the ward where one patient was dying.

Whilst turning round in his bed, Watson saw someone sitting on the end of the bed occupied by a Corporal McQueen who was suffering from an injured foot. At first Watson thought it was McQueen himself, but then realised McQueen was still in bed as he could distinguish his head on the pillow. The person sitting remained so still that Watson thought it sufficiently unusual, and called out to McQueen, telling him there was someone sitting on his bed. McQueen awoke and Watson saw the figure rise off the foot of the bed, go to the head of it, and rest one hand against the wall, stooping down as if to speak with Corporal McQueen. Watson saw McQueen draw back his head as if alarmed, and Watson became alarmed himself for reasons he could not understand and dived under the sheets.

Corporal McQueen confirmed that he had



LEFT: The Royal Derby Hospital (previously Derby City Hospital), scene of a high-profile haunting in 2009.

heard Private Watson calling to him and at the same time saw a person just rising off his bed and come towards him. He stated the rushlight enabled him to see the visitor was not a patient but was wearing grave clothes, “a long gown of flannel edged with black tape, and tied up about the wrists and neck with bows of the same; a kind of hood was swathed round the head and face. The figure leant down over me, and at first I felt much alarmed and shrank back.”

What followed was even more extraordinary. According to McQueen the figure spoke what he thought was his name and then said: “I am the spirit of Mary Madden, and bespeak your attention”. Mary Madden had been the wife of a fellow soldier then based at the Depot of the 46th in Ireland, and she had died about a year before. McQueen had been a great friend of hers, having been beside her when she died, and helped put her into her coffin. She had been dressed precisely the same as the figure.

When questioned by Captain Emmett and the Revd. Brown as to how he recognised the face and voice as belonging to Mrs Madden, McQueen stated: “I could distinguish no face at all; the voice was not like Mrs Madden’s or any voice I had ever heard; *it seemed to sing through my head* [italics in the original account]. I then felt rather reassured, and asked her what she wanted. She replied that I must communicate with her late husband, Madden, and severely warn him as to a certain evil course he was pursuing; that he was to desist, and that, if he did not desist, his soul would be in immediate peril.

“She then told me to warn him of some other matter, and finished by telling me, by way of proof that she was Mrs Madden’s spirit, a circumstance and conversation unknown to anyone in the world, that took place between us before her death, and this I must decline repeating. It was proof to me that Mary Madden’s spirit was then beside me, *and nothing on earth will convince me to the contrary*. After exacting a promise from me that I would fulfil her wish, she said she would not again trouble the ward, and bid me farewell. She then went to the fireplace, and groped over it with her hands about the wall, then turned round and again came towards me, but gradually looked more and more

indistinct until at last I lost sight of her altogether. I then became very faint and awe-struck, and remained awake until daylight.”

Corporal McQueen wrote immediately to Madden in Ireland in compliance with the wishes of the apparition. Captain Emmett and the Revd. Brown were both impressed with his story. No one else in the ward had seen anything, but it appeared that with the exception of the dying man

in the corner and Private Watson, all other patients had been asleep. In other contexts, this ghostly visitation might have been seen as a death omen for Corporal McQueen, but about three months afterwards he went to England with other invalids. Captain Emmett concluded: “Mr Brown and myself are fully of opinion that he was speaking the plain and unexaggerated truth.”

This fascinating story raises many intriguing questions. As students of Western ghost history know, spontaneous apparitions that speak seem to have ceased almost entirely in the 18th century, whilst those expressing concerns for the fate of the soul take one back further to mediæval times. Here we have an account of a ghostly visitor seemingly lifted from an earlier era and materialising in a Victorian military hospital, with its grave-clothes, signs of consciousness, its declaration of motive, and proof of identity.

One cannot help but wonder just what exactly the “circumstance and conversation unknown to anyone in the world” might have been which the ghost repeated to McQueen, convincing him he was being addressed by the late Mrs Madden? What was the nature of the sin or transgression from which her husband had to be deterred and which put his soul in peril – and why did she not go to him but choose instead to appear before McQueen?

Of course, it might be suggested that the ghostly visitor was actually a living woman, perhaps a camp follower who had risked entering the ward, but what of the two nights of unexplained footsteps preceding the appearance, the strange reaction of Private Watson, and the curiously detailed story which McQueen related to Emmett and Brown? Could the events be in any way connected with the soldier dying in the ward by the rushlight?

The answers to such questions are now beyond mortal discovery, so the story remains a curious anecdote. But today it would certainly be interesting to repeat the surveys conducted by Osis and Haraldsson and also compare them with patterns within the ever-accumulating number of Near-Death Experiences on record. (Source: *Journal of the SPR*, Jan 1894, p.181).



ARCHAEOLOGY

PAUL SIEVEKING presents this issue's round-up of archaeological discoveries and curiosities



GEOFF HICHENS / SWNS.COM

ABOVE: Robert Gray and the ancient Egyptian cat mummy that had been left in the attic for 40 years.

CAT IN THE ATTIC

A cat mummy left in an attic for 40 years has been verified as 2,000 years old and Egyptian. Robert Gray, 56, a bed-and-breakfast owner from Portscatho, Cornwall, found the artefact in the loft, where it had lain since being given in the 1970s to his father, an Egyptologist, who assumed it was a fake. An X-ray revealed the remains of a cat, and the Royal Cornwall Museum in Truro verified the find. *D.Telegraph, D.Mail, 15 Feb 2013.*

- Cats were believed to have been domesticated 4,000 years ago in Egypt, but bodies found at a dig in Shaanxi province, central China, date back 5,300 years. Analysis of bones from the village of Quanhucun suggests the cats preyed on rodents that lived on farm millet. One of the cats was shown to have eaten fewer animals

and more millet than expected, suggesting it had been fed by the villagers. "Even if these cats were not domesticated, our evidence confirmed that they lived in close proximity to farmers, and that the relationship had mutual benefits," said Dr Fiona Marshall of Washington University St Louis. *D.Mail, 17 Dec 2013.*

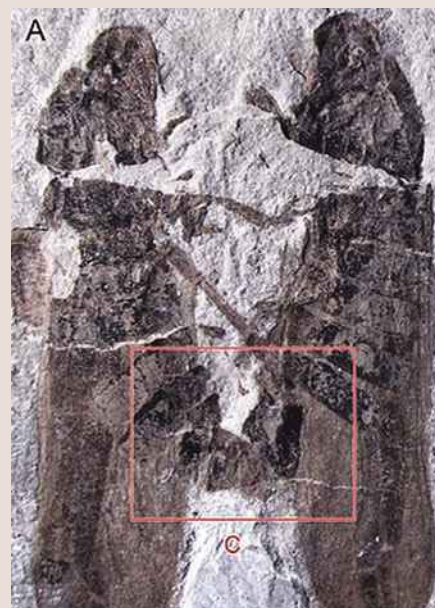
MAN'S BEST FRIEND

Genetic evidence analysed by Finnish researchers indicates that the wolf ancestors of modern dogs were most likely tamed by hunter-gatherers between 19,000 and 32,000 years ago, contradicting the previous conjecture that dogs were domesticated in central Asia after the start of farming about 15,000 years ago. The DNA of various modern breeds of dog, wolf and coyote were compared with samples from fossils of

ancient wolf-like and dog-like animals. It was found that DNA from domestic dogs was more closely related to that of ancient European wolves as well as modern wolves; there were few similarities with wolves, coyotes and dingoes from other parts of the world. It is now thought that proto-dogs sought out the campsites of hunter-gatherers in the hope of scavenging leftover meat, and were tamed to help with hunting and protection. The findings showed that all dogs living today can be traced back to four genetic lineages, all of which originate in Europe. *D.Telegraph, 15 Nov 2013.*

PASSION PRESERVED

A fossil from the village of Daohugou in Inner Mongolia shows two insects locked in sexual congress about 165 million years ago – the oldest such coupling ever discovered. The amorous insects from the Middle Jurassic are an extinct species of froghopper (so named because they jump around on plants like tiny frogs). Today's froghoppers mate in the same fashion: belly-to-belly or side-by-side. The fossil pair exhibit a belly-to-belly mating position, with the male's aedeagus inserted into the females' bursa copulatrix. It's possible they were side-by-side while mating and were displaced slightly as they were buried. Shu Li of Capital Normal University in Beijing and her colleagues, reporting their find in the journal *PLoS ONE*, classified the ancient insects as *Anthoscytina perpetua* – derived from the Latin *perpetuus* (continuous), "in reference to their everlasting copulation". Fewer than three-dozen fossils of mating insects – including fireflies, mosquitoes, bees, ants, and water striders – have been found, mostly preserved in amber rather than as compression fossils. *sci-news.com, 7 Nov; Sydney Morning Herald, 8 Nov 2013.*



SHU LI AND DONG REN

CLASSICAL CORNER



FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

DIETARY DISCOVERIES

The English were eating frogs' legs up to 8,000 years before the French or Czechs acquired a taste for them. A dig at Blick Mead, a site by a spring a mile from Stonehenge, near Amesbury, Wiltshire, unearthed a charred toad's leg among other Mesolithic food detritus. The find, dated to between 7596 BC and 6250 BC, is the earliest evidence of a cooked toad or frog anywhere in the world. Archæologist David Jacques, who led the dig, said: "It would appear that thousands of years ago people were eating a Heston Blumenthal-style menu on this site, consisting of toads' legs, aurochs [wild ox, now extinct], wild boar and red deer with hazelnuts for main, another course of salmon and trout and finishing off with blackberries. This is significant for our understanding of the way people were living around 5,000 years before the building of Stonehenge." *D.Telegraph, 16 Oct; Salisbury Journal, 17 Oct 2013.*

- Teeth from 52 skeletons dating back between 13,700 and 15,000 years exhibit evidence of widespread decay, with only three individuals showing no sign of cavities. The hunter-gathers pre-dated the rise of farming, which has previously been blamed for a marked increase in dental problems, linked to carbohydrate-rich food. However, scientists now believe that the high levels of fermentable carbohydrates in acorns and pine nuts would have attracted oral bacteria. *D.Telegraph, 7 Jan 2014.*

- Humans first made use of pots to cook and store fish. Ceramic vessels used during the Jomon period in Japan, which started in about 14,000 BC, have been found to contain traces of the creatures. The pottery is thought to have been used for celebratory feasts or to store a surplus of fish. The discovery represents the earliest direct evidence of the use of pots. Dr Oliver Craig of York University, whose study was published in *Nature*, said: "Foragers first used pottery as a revolutionary new strategy for the processing of marine and freshwater fish." *Metro, 11 April 2013.*

- The best tables in Pompeii were served with flamingo, Indonesian spices, salted fish from Spain, and even giraffe leg. Analysis of remains from the 4th century in a quiet backwater of Pompeii called Porta Stabia revealed that middle class Romans had a varied diet including a wide range of imported delicacies. *D.Telegraph, 4 Jan 2014.*

172: NERO'S DEZ REZ

(Principal Sources: Pliny, *Natural History*, bk17 ch1 para5, bk35 ch37 para170. & bk36 ch24 para111; Suetonius, *Nero*, chs 31 & 39; Tacitus, *Annals*, bk15 chs38-42.)

On 19 July (anniversary of the 390 BC Gallic burning), AD 64, a conflagration lasting nine days gutted 10 of Rome's 14 regions.

Whether this was accidental (fires were common) or Nero-inspired arson remains a mystery. Suetonius and some others (pseudo-Seneca, *Octavia*, vv831-3; Dio Cassius, *Roman History*, bk62 ch16 para2; Orosius, *Against the Pagans*, bk7 ch7)

blame the emperor outright. Tacitus says it was uncertain whether it was his doing or accidental. Nero was at his birthplace Antium when it began. Either way, no reason to doubt he seized the chance to perform his latest hit, *The Burning of Troy* before this spectacular choreography (cue Peter Ustinov in *Quo Vadis*?)

He didn't fiddle, of course, despite Fats Waller's "Nero was a king, you know. Had a fiddle and a bow." No such instrument then, and Stradivarius was not a Roman emperor. He probably strummed a lyre, although classicist Martin West interprets one picture of him as playing the bagpipes – can't get off Scot-free.

When Richard Brinsley Sheridan was reproached for drinking coffee as his new Drury Lane Theatre burned down (1809), he retorted, "Surely a man may be allowed to take a drink beside his own fireside."

One intriguing discrepancy. Tacitus says Nero punished the Christians as scapegoats. Suetonius praises him for suppressing this "new and mischievous sect", but not in the fire's context.

Nero brought in two crack architects, Celer and Severus, to design his new palace, *The Domus Aurea* (Golden House) – "In Xanadu did Khubla Khan a stately pleasure home decree," this Coleridge line used in *Citizen Kane* to parody Hearst's San Simeon.

Suetonius provides this estate agent-like blurb: "The entrance hall contained a colossal statue topped by Nero's head, 120 feet [37m] high. The grounds were so vast that their triple colonnades ran for a mile. There was an enormous lake, surrounded by buildings to

resemble cities. Animals, domestic and wild, roamed in abundance. Parts of the palace were overlaid with gold and studded with jewels. The dining rooms had ivory ceilings, with sliding panels to allow flowers and perfume to be showered down on to the guests. The main dining room revolved slowly day and night, like the vault of heaven. The baths had both sea-water and sulphur-water."

Puts even Versailles in the shade. Suetonius subjoins, "When he formally dedicated it, Nero remarked, "At last I can begin to live like a human being" – notice he did not say "like a god".

Nero's edifice complex was neatly ridiculed in an anonymous graffito: "Rome is becoming one house! Flew to Veii, Citizens, if it doesn't take over Veii as well" – Veii was a good 15 miles (24km) away.

Flowers falling from ceiling were actually nothing new. There were Republican precedents. Teenaged emperor Elagabalus (FT251:21) went one better, unleashing so many roses that they suffocated his guests – early Flower Power.

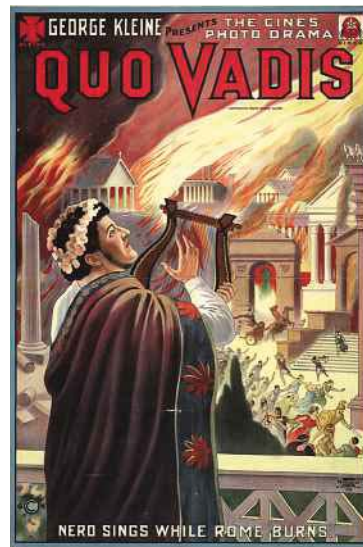
On 29 September 2009, archaeologists announced discovery of the rotating dining room. Another headline find is a fresco apparently giving a bird's-eye view of Rome before the fire – a kind of urban *memento mori*.

Much of the place remains unexcavated. Some have remarked on the absence – so far – of kitchens and lavatories. Maybe Nero was going to exist on take-out meals? And lack of loos might not bother a man who once peed on a goddess's statue.

Quite the most piquant discovery is that of the signatures only yards apart on the same wall of Casanova and the Marquis de Sade (respectively in Rome in 1770 and 1772) – fellow-spirits of Nero.

We don't hear much of life in his new pad. One fortean moment, though, reported by Philostratus (*Life of Apollonius*, bk4 ch43): three days after a solar eclipse with concomitant thunder, lightning hit the dinner table, dashing a goblet from the imperial hand – I know of no such episode at Cæsar's Palace in Las Vegas.

"A seeker after the incredible" – Tacitus on Nero



SEND IN THE CLOWNS

It's been a bad time for coulrophobics, with clown scares gripping the country from Northampton to Sheffield

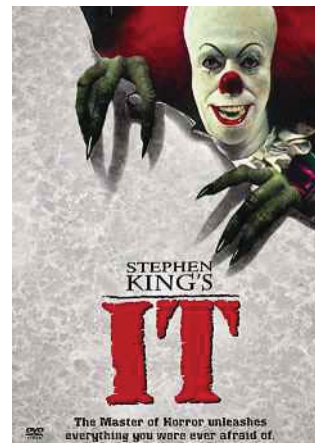


TIM BOYLE / GETTY IMAGES

It began on Friday the Thirteenth of September, when a clown in full costume and makeup, with a curly red wig and white face, appeared in Northampton (FT307:8) and photographs started circulating on Facebook and other social media. The figure popped up at various locations round the town, waving or staring at passers-by, sometimes holding a bunch of balloons or a teddy bear. One day, he knocked on someone's door and offered to paint their sills despite having no painting equipment. Then a video of the clown appeared, emerging from a lake in Abington Park. While he resembled Pennywise, the sinister clown in the film of Stephen King's novel *It*, he never attacked or threatened anyone. Nonetheless, coulrophobics (those with a morbid fear of clowns; see "Don't Send in the Clowns" by Tim Weinberg, FT226:34-41) voiced their unease; for them, clowns induce feelings of dread, increased heartbeat, nausea and anger.

A 'vigilante', dressed in a blue muscle-padded superhero costume and glasses and calling himself "Boris the Clown Catcher" appeared in Northampton on a mission to capture the creepy clown. Some suggested that Boris was himself the Northampton Clown, adopting the role of both hero and villain. In October, the clown was unmasked as Alex Powell, 22, a student at Northampton University, who said: "It was just a bit of fun". He had gained nearly 200,000 'likes' on Facebook. As late as 13 December, he uploaded a photograph of himself in clown costume taken outside a brewery in the town.

Students of social panics will know that waves of coulrophobia occur somewhere (especially in the US) nearly every year. In May 1981, police in Brookline, Massachusetts, issued an all-points bulletin (APB) asking officers to watch for a vehicle containing potential child abductors. The vehicle, an



older model van with a broken headlight and no hubcaps, was reportedly occupied by several clowns in full costume. Several children reported that clowns had tried to lure them into the van with promises of candy. It was only one of several sightings of phantom clowns; the next day, Boston police again searched the city in vain for another van driven by a creepy clown reported to be stalking a public park. As reports spread to

surrounding areas and parents grew nervous, an official from the Boston Public Schools issued a memo to principals in his school district: "It has been brought to the attention of the police department and the district office that adults dressed as clowns have been bothering children to and from school. Please advise all students that they must stay away from strangers, especially those dressed as clowns."

Parents were fearful, children were warned and police were vigilant, but despite searches and police checkpoints, these mysterious clowns were never found. Whether they were real, or the product of mass hysteria, pranks, eyewitness mistakes, the power of suggestion and the media, or – most likely – some mix of these, no evidence was ever found of their existence. The Northampton Clown, on the other hand, was real enough. For more on clown panics in 1980-81, see the amusing feature "A Circle of Clowns" by Bob Tarte and Bill Holm, FT38:46-48.

Momus, god of clowns, was the grandson of Chaos; Discord, Death and the Furies were his siblings. Coulrophobia is fairly common, especially in young children. Sometimes the fear stems from a childhood trauma with a specific clown; in other cases, it's just a general unease with all clowns. But there are a few reasons why clowns are often considered creepy and disturbing. Clowns exaggerate for effect, distorting reality and proportion. They drive impossibly tiny cars and carry outsized gear, such as tricycles the size of elephants and hammers the size of logs. Nearly everything about a clown, including his or her speech, actions and clothes, are either too big or too small, and nothing about them is normal. Clowns are at once both instantly recognisable and yet totally anonymous. We don't know who is behind that makeup and red rubber nose: a kindly



A legal decision in New York looks set to open the giant can of worms that is 9/11. Not the stranger theories – no beam weapons or remotely controlled aircraft; not even an “inside job”. Just before Christmas, a New York appeals court restored Saudi Arabia as a defendant in a lawsuit brought by relatives of those who died. In 2005, Saudi Arabia had been taken off the lawsuit on grounds of “sovereign immunity”: in other words, you cannot sue states in American civil courts. This has now been reversed, and though lawyers for the Saudi state are going to appeal it, US opinion suggests that the Saudi links will be aired in court.

Those links are substantial enough for 28 pages dealing with “specific sources of foreign support” for the terrorists in the 2002 congressional inquiry into 9/11 to have been suppressed for ‘national security’ reasons by President George W Bush.¹ Those still classified pages were recently read by two US Congressmen, who hinted that they described Saudi involvement.

Even if these pages are not declassified before the lawsuit hits the courts, there is enough evidence on the Saudi links to the 9/11 conspirators – 15 of whom were Saudi citizens – to get this issue onto the agenda. If the political will is there.

Some of this has been described by the lawyer Gerald Posner, famous for writing *Case Closed*, one of only two books arguing that Lee Harvey Oswald shot JFK. In his subsequent book on 9/11, Posner recounted how he was told about Abu Zubaydah by two American ‘intelligence sources’. A member of Al Qaeda, captured by the Americans in 2003, Zubaydah was conned by his American captors into thinking he had been handed over to the Saudis and volunteered to his (presumed Saudi) interrogators the names of three members of the Saudi royal family and the then chief of the Pakistani air force as the 9/11 plot’s supporters. Coincidentally or not, Posner tells us that all four men died in accidents (or ‘accidents’) shortly thereafter.²

There are rumours that the Saudis supported the al Qaeda assault on America in exchange for Bin Laden *not* trying to overthrow the Saudi regime, which he thought corrupt; and there are a number of documented early warnings of *something* happening on 9/11 from Middle Eastern sources among the dozens of other tip-offs, which suggest that, supporting Bin Laden on one hand, the Saudis leaked information about the planned attacks in the expectation that they would thus be frustrated.³ These warnings, for whatever reason, were not heeded – cock-up and conspiracy, perhaps: the usual mixture.

This Saudi theory will be dismissed by those who believe that 9/11 was an ‘inside job’; and it does not explain the apparent demolition of the three WTC buildings; but as an hypothesis it explains a great deal. But will it get aired? As America heads towards energy self-sufficiency through shale oil and gas, its need to support the Saudi regime diminishes. There is another American presidential election on the distant horizon; and since the 9/11 events happened under a Republican president, any political fallout from exposure of Saudi state involvement will not damage the Democrats. This one looks like a runner.

NOTES

¹ *Joint Inquiry Into Intelligence Community Activities Before and After the Terrorist Attacks of September 11, 2001* at www.intelligence.senate.gov/pdfs/1071086v2.pdf

² www.huffingtonpost.com/gerald-posner/the-cias-destroyed-inter_b_75850.html; A general summary of Saudi involvement in terrorism is at www.asecondlookatthesaudis.com/

³ Known advance warnings of 9/11 are listed at <http://globalresearch.ca/articles/SMI402A.html>.



grandfather or a psycho? Notorious serial killer John Wayne Gacy, for example, worked as Pogo the Clown at children’s parties (FT85:17). And, of course, clowns are also unnatural in another way: no normal person would willingly put up with hordes of children screaming and jumping all over them for that long.

In late September, while the Northampton clown scare was at its peak, a man calling himself the ‘killer clown’ turned himself in to the police in County Antrim, Northern Ireland, after alarm was raised among frightened parents. Two men had been reported acting suspiciously near secondary schools in Carrickfergus, and pictures of a clown and a balaclava-wearing sidekick had appeared online. Speaking to BBC Radio Ulster, the clown said it was “just a bit of fun” and he had no intention of scaring children. “I’m a parent myself,” he added.

From late September onwards, clowns similar to the Northampton prankster were seen in Rotherham (South Yorkshire), Burnley (Lancashire), and Scunthorpe (Humberside); also in Lincolnshire (Lincoln itself, Gainsborough, and Market Rasen) and in Nottinghamshire (Retford, Elkesley, and Mansfield). One clown report (out of 29) to Derbyshire police read: “Caller scared as someone had tried to get into their house – posted on Facebook that a clown had been going round village trying door handles.” Another report described a clown going up to the windows of houses brandishing a gun and a

knife.

By November, there were 28 clown sightings around Sheffield in South Yorkshire – in the city centre, London Road, outside the West One building, Parson Cross and Ecclesfield woods, among other places. The “Sheffield Clown Sightings” Facebook page had over 7,000 likes less than two days after it was created. Several witnesses said the clown’s costume was ‘filthy’.

Meanwhile, Norfolk police received a report of a clown in a red suit and with red hair in Gaywood, near King’s Lynn, on the evening of 26 November. The following evening, two figures sporting “Halloween-type” clown masks were spotted near a skate park in the town. In both cases, the witnesses were alarmed after being chased a short way up the road. Police told the public not to approach anyone in a clown outfit.

Professional clowns voiced disquiet, claiming the wave of incidents was damaging the circus art form. Tony Eldridge, secretary of Clown International whose clown name is Bluebottle, said that most legitimate entertainers follow a code of clown conduct, which includes not wearing their costumes in public or when not working.

<i> 17 Sept; LiveScience, 18 Sept; D.Mail, 20 Sept; MX News (Sydney), 24 Sept; BBC News, 28 Sept; Times Higher Education, 17 Oct; forgetoday.com, Sheffieldforum.co.uk, 19 Nov; Lincolnshire Echo, 21 Nov; [PA] Guardian, 28 Nov; D.Telegraph, Sydney Morning Herald, 27 Dec 2013. For more on clown panics, see FT61:38-39, 85:17, 226:38-39.



APP / GETTY IMAGES

FISH BITE BACK

A Christmas day dip ends in a mass piranha attack and unexplained drownings are blamed on the 'Oklahoma Octopus'

More than 60 people were injured in a mass piranha attack in an Argentine river mid-morning on Christmas Day. Dozens of bathers including more than 20 children were bitten by the shoal of flesh-eating fish. A seven-year-old girl lost part of a little finger and a young boy was left with deep lacerations to his hand. Other swimmers suffered deep cuts to their ankles, fingers and hands.

The terrifying attack took place on a popular beach on the Parana River in the city of Rosario, about 300km (186 miles) north of Buenos Aires. Swimmers trying to cool down in temperatures of 100°F (38°C) raced out of the water bleeding from wounds and shouting for help while the parents of children in the water rushed to their aid to drag them to safety. Coastguards called paramedics before police temporarily closed off the beach, forcing people out of the water. The attack, blamed on a piranha sub-species called palometas, was the most serious of its kind in the city since 2008 when 40 swimmers were hurt.

Some officials suggested that bait or debris left by local fishermen may have lured the large number of palometas to the area; others said the unusually warm weather was responsible for the fish congregating near the river's surface before the attack. It was also mating season for the three piranha species. Prosanta Chakrabarty, a fish biologist at Louisiana State University, suggested that the bathers inadvertently wandered into male breeding territories, provoking a brief but hostile response.

Carlos Vacarezza, a local expert, said the only explanation he could suggest was that one of the fish had been injured, the shoal had congregated to eat it, and human bathers had simply got in the way. And though he claimed the attack was "exceptional and unlikely to be repeated," less than a month later, on 18 January 2014, 10 people suffered a similar attack on the same beach. Authorities have rejected the



TOP: A man is treated after being bitten by a palometas on 25 December 2013.
 ABOVE: Piranhas have a fearsome reputation, but this has been disputed.
 BOTTOM RIGHT: Lake Thunderbird in Oklahoma, the reputed haunt of "Okie".

idea of installing a containment mesh in the area due to the high volume of waste and debris in the Parana River, but told swimmers to respect the red flag warnings in the area before entering the water.

Though cannibalism among piranhas is commonplace, with more aggressive fish taking a bite out of smaller rivals, human attacks are relatively rare. However, there are precedents.

In November 2011, for example, 15 swimmers were bitten by piranhas in the River Paraguay in western Brazil; and on Boxing Day (26 Dec 2013), 600 miles (965km) up the River Parana, five children and teenagers were attacked by piranhas, all needing hospital

treatment. (*Parana*, incidentally, means "big as the sea" and is unrelated to *piranha*.)

Piranha fatalities are extremely rare; they tend to attack humans only if trapped or hungry. In 2012, a five-year-old Brazilian girl is said to have been attacked and killed in the water by a shoal of the fish; and in December 2011, an 18-year-old fisherman called Oscar Barbosa, from Rosario dei Yata in northeast Bolivia, bled to death after jumping out of his canoe while drunk into the Yata River, which was teeming with red piranha. He suffered dozens of bites to his throat and face. He knew the river well and would have been aware that it was full of piranha at that time of year. The

local police chief thought that the teenager had committed "suicide by piranha" [FT285:27].

Although the 19th century naturalist and explorer Alexander von Humboldt said the piranha was one of South America's greatest dangers, the fishes' fearsome reputation was really established by US President Theodore Roosevelt. In his travel book *Through the Brazilian Wilderness* (1914), he described how piranhas could eat entire animals, such as cattle, alive. "They are the most ferocious fish in the world," he wrote. "The head with its short muzzle, staring malignant eyes, and gaping, cruelly armed jaws, is the embodiment of evil ferocity; and the actions of the fish exactly match its looks." What Roosevelt was not told was that a piranha attack on the cow was staged for his benefit. Brazilians had trapped hundreds of piranhas in a netted-off stretch of the river, where they were starved for days. When Roosevelt arrived, a sick old cow was led into the water, with its udder slit to release blood to further encourage an attack. Trapped, starving and excited by blood, the piranhas made short work of the unfortunate ungulate.

Richard Conniff, author of *Swimming With Piranhas at Feeding Time*, maintains that the fishes' fearsome reputation is a load of nonsense. "I once climbed into a tank of hungry red-bellied piranhas at the Dallas World Aquarium. (They fled to the opposite corner)," he wrote. "I stood waist-deep in the Rio Napo while catching and releasing piranhas on a hook-and-line. (The nibbles were strictly of the usual kind.) In the flooded grasslands of Venezuela, I drove around tossing a chicken carcass into various bodies of water to time how long it took for the flesh-maddened swarms to strip it to feathers. (There was enough chicken left at the end of the day to feed a family of four.)"

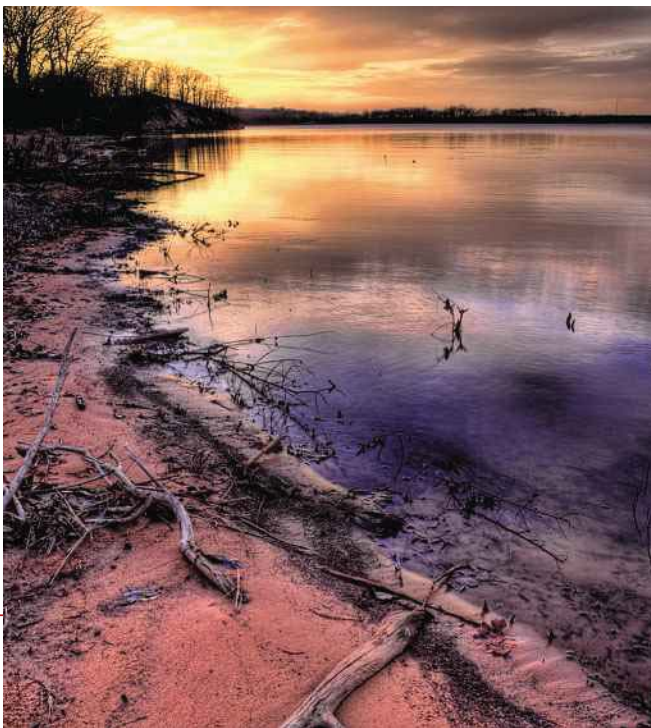
Conniff does admit, however, that piranhas "do that swarming, blood-crazed, flesh-ripping

thing” in a couple of rare circumstances, both involving a highly concentrated food source: they will swarm around bird rookeries, where the fledglings often tumble into the water; and they’ll do it around docks where fishermen clean their catch and heave the guts into the water – which was one explanation offered for the Christmas Day attack in Argentina. It’s true that the fish have very sharp teeth and very strong jaw muscles. The bite force of the black piranha has recently been measured at 320 newtons, nearly three times greater than that of an American alligator – more than enough to rip off a finger. *D. Telegraph, NY Post, 27 Dec; D. Mail, 30 Dec 2013; Int. Herald Tribune, 4 Jan; [AP] 18 Jan 2014.*

- As the rate of unexplained drowning deaths has crept up in Oklahoma’s placid lakes, some observers have blamed a freshwater octopus. The legend of a killer cephalopod lurking in the murky waters of the state’s Lake Thunderbird, Lake Tenkiller or Lake Oologah has been surfacing for several years. This beast (or beasts), dubbed the “Oklahoma Octopus” (or Okie), reportedly drags swimmers down with its many strong arms. This unlikely animal might be a rare living fossil, left over from the time, millions of years ago, when this part of the

country was a shallow sea – and a perfect octopus habitat. Over the millennia, this particular line of octopuses has adapted to freshwater, its proponents suggest.

It’s true that the octopus has managed to populate just about every type of marine environment and can even occasionally walk on land for short periods. Could it conceivably adapt to fresh water as well? Bolstering the case for the Oklahoma Octopus, some species of this animal are found in the brackish mouths of large rivers – but this theory provokes major objections. A shift to entirely fresh water would require some extreme changes in physiology, including the basic ion transport in their cells. No cephalopod has been known to make this transition. Moreover, most of Oklahoma’s many lakes – including those in question – were constructed in the mid-20th century as engineering projects by damming local rivers; and a “river octopus” would have to have adapted to fresh water and at some point made its way up the Mississippi and subsequent smaller rivers, swimming numerous dams. Nevertheless, the rise in drowning deaths is unexplained – except by those who venture that giant catfish are to blame. *Scientific American, 19 Dec 2013.*



MICHAEL VADALA

Mythconceptions

by Mat Coward

171. WAKING THE DEAD SLEEPY



HUNT EMERSON

The myth

If you wake someone who is sleepwalking they will suffer a heart attack or stroke. Or they’ll lose their mind. Or drop dead from shock.

The “truth”

There is no known case on record of a somnambulist being killed or made ill by being woken up, and no known reason that such an act could be dangerous. It’s thought that this folk belief dates from the times when sleepwalking was linked with possession; if you woke a sleepwalker while their spirit or soul was absent from their body, it might not be able to get back in. However, while the medical literature is devoid of sleepwalkers being killed by being woken up, it does contain people who died because they *weren’t* woken up. Some somnambulists carry out complex activities, such as driving, and are capable of feats of considerable strength. Sleepwalkers on the loose do sometimes cause accidents, or even commit acts of violence, and very occasionally these can be fatal to themselves or others. One word of warning, though: if you do wake a sleepwalker, be prepared for him to lamp you one. Sleepwalkers are in fact neither asleep nor awake, and on being suddenly woken they may be disorientated, not recognising even people they know well, and lash out at their rescuers.

Sources

www.nbcnews.com/health/waking-sleepwalker-totally-safe-them-773962; www.scientificamerican.com/article.cfm?id=waking-a-sleepwalker-may-kill-them; www.nytimes.com/2005/09/13/health/13real.html?_r=0

Disclaimer

All authorities seem to agree that waking sleepwalkers cannot harm them; if you have contrary information, and can still remember it when you wake up, please let us know.

Mythchaser

While we’re on nod-related matters: do people need less sleep as they get older?



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NECROLOG

This month, we wave off the co-founder of the Fellowship of Isis as she goes to meet the Goddess and bid a fond farewell to a charming champion of psychic research



OLIVIA DURDIN-ROBERTSON

The second child of Nora and Manning Robertson, an architect and town planner, Olivia was a writer, artist, and visionary, who through her family's social and cultural connections provided a link with the hermetic spiritualist tradition of the Celtic Twilight, as exemplified particularly by George Russell ("AE") and WB Yeats. In 1925, on the death of Olivia's grandmother, the family left Reigate in Surrey and returned to their Irish ancestral home, Huntington Castle, Clonegal, on the Carlow-Wexford border. Manning Robertson wrote prolifically and critically as Ireland's first serious commentator on 20th-century architecture. When Yeats died in 1939, his widow asked him to design the poet's headstone at Drumcliff, Co Sligo.

The young Olivia was introduced to the "magic of the sidhe" through the mysterious "aged hermit" Mr Fox, who lived on a hallowed site beside the river Slaney. She worked as a volunteer nurse in England during World War II, returning to Dublin to study history of European painting at University College in 1943. She spent four years working with Dublin Corporation's inner-city playground scheme, drawing portraits of children that would feature as in her six books about Dublin.

In 1946, she received her first awakening into what she termed

"the eternal reality... the source of our being and all that we hold to be good, noble and true" from the Egyptian goddess Isis. In 1960 she joined her brother Lawrence, a former Anglican rector, and his wife Pamela, who had returned to Huntington Castle, where they formed a Centre for Meditation and Study in 1963. She said that in the early 1970s she and her brother "became aware of the imbalance in the world... Suddenly I realised the missing factor was the total ignorance of, and deliberate attack on the religion of God the Mother."

The siblings sought the divine through an instinctive, all-embracing new symbolic order. This led to Lawrence Durdin-Robertson's *The Cult of the Goddess* (1974), Olivia's autobiographical book *The Call of Isis* (1975), and their formation of the Fellowship of Isis (FOI) in 1976. They built a temple in the castle's dungeon with 12 shrines and five chapels, each dedicated to a particular goddess. Over 40 or so years, Olivia wrote a succession of booklets, illustrated by her drawings as the fellowship became multireligious, multicultural and multinational. In 1993, her travels included her representation of the fellowship at the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago, where she breakfasted with the Dali Lama.

When asked for her message to the world, Olivia replied: "Be happy now... eternity is between seconds.

You find Deity, the Goddess, the God, *now...* wherever you are is Heaven." The Fellowship – which includes the societies of the Druid Clan of Dana (DCD) and the Noble Order of Tara (NOT) – is said to have between 20,000 and 30,000 members worldwide.

Olivia Melian Durdin-Robertson, writer and High Priestess, born London 13 April 1917; died Wexford 14 Nov 2013, aged 96.

TOM PERROTT

Tom Perrott was an active psychical researcher, folklore collector and long-time chairman of the Ghost Club. In the hot-house world of paranormal research he was also one of the most charming and helpful figures one could hope to meet.

Born at Bridport in Dorset in 1921, he moved with his parents to London in 1925 to a house in Muswell Hill and to which Tom was later to return and occupy as his own family home with his wife Doris for the rest of his life. However, at heart he always remained a Dorset man, becoming secretary of the Society of Dorset Men, an organisation founded in 1904 to promote the culture and traditions of the county.

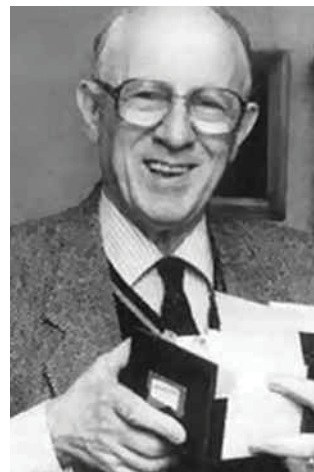
Tom spoke fluent German, having spent six weeks in Germany in 1938 as an exchange student. On enlisting with the British Army in World War II, his language skills were immediately put to use by the Reconnaissance Corp. This was followed by work

with the Office for Prisoner of War Intelligence, for whom he interrogated prisoners captured by the Allies, endeavouring to treat all humanely. After the war he was remembered with admiration for his behaviour as a true English gentleman by a number of former prisoners, to the extent that they and their descendants remain in touch with the Perrott family to this day. Following demobilisation, Tom pursued careers in business and personnel management, and also worked for the Red Cross.

Joining the Society for Psychical Research in 1964, he turned his people skills towards paranormal research, undertaking the investigation of cases of apparitions and poltergeists reported to the Society by the public, often finding cases of 'haunted people' rather than 'haunted houses'. Frequently, when asked of what his ghost hunting equipment consisted, he would reply, "Mostly just a notebook, a pencil and a sympathetic ear" – advice that many of today's hi-tech and gadget-laden ghost hunters might usefully ponder.

A prime example was Sanford Orcas Manor House in Dorset, promoted in 1966 as Britain's most haunted manor house. Its owner, Colonel Francis Claridge, declared the 16th century building and grounds were actively haunted by a dozen spectres including a phantom rapist who appeared to virgins, a lady in red, a ghostly farmer in a white smock, various monks, a stinking man and an assortment of other spirits. His claims caused a sensation and are still repeated in books and on websites today. However, on checking out reports of each of the spectres, as well as the Colonel himself, Tom swiftly concluded that evidence for any haunting was slight, nearly all manifestations having been imagined by the publicity-conscious Claridge and his wife.

Yet Tom was not a sceptic, and soon after joining the Ghost Club in 1967 he encountered paranormal phenomena at a notoriously haunted council house in Spenser Grove, Hackney, east



London. Here in the company of other investigators he heard unexplained knocking coming from a wardrobe inside an empty room. The property had been abandoned by its tenants, a family named McGhee, on account of poltergeist activity, mysterious fires and a white lady-type apparition that had emerged from the same wardrobe.

Becoming chairman of the Ghost Club in 1971, Tom also came into contact with many figures active in psychical research, ghost hunting and occultism, generously giving help and active support to many. In particular, he worked closely with veteran ghost hunters Peter Underwood and Andrew Green (1927-2004 – obit **FT189:26**) including running sessions on British hauntings on many adult education courses hosted by Green at Battle in Sussex until 2002. Having built up a database of records and photographs covering some 3,000 haunted sites across Great Britain, he was frequently called upon as a repository of facts and figures for journalists and other researchers.

Another colleague was witchcraft expert Dr Eric Maple, with whom he worked from the 1960s, also helping develop 'Haunted Britain Tours' for American researchers and tourists, which continued into the early 1990s. Active also in collecting folklore, particularly from Dorset, Tom co-authored *The Ghosts of Dorset, Devon and Somerset* (1974) and published his own book *Strange Dorset Stories* (1991) as well as lecturing extensively on a wide range of other topics including German culture and the history of pantomime. In 1994 Tom secured the future of the Ghost Club on a long-term basis by placing an advertisement in *Fortean Times* that succeeded in drawing in many new and younger members, and he continued to serve as Club chairman until 1998.

In paying tribute to Tom from the United States, Dr Rosemary Ellen Guiley, author of *The Encyclopaedia of Ghosts and Spirits*, writes: "Tom's presence will be missed, but he left a fine legacy of contributions to the field, and to life. All who knew Tom were better for it, and I wish we had more men like him in the world".
William Thomas Gilbert Perrott, psychical researcher, born Bridport, Dorset 28 Dec 1921; died 10 Oct 2013, aged 81.

Alan Murdie

STRANGE DEATHS

UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL



Last May, Luke Monrose, 27, left the village of Rescorla, Cornwall, telling his mother he was meeting friends for a drink. He made his way to Lantern Pit, a remote flooded quarry, where he lowered himself into the water wearing goggles and a lifejacket. He left a note explaining that he was trying to catch hypothermia to "unlock the secrets of the afterlife". He hoped the experience would bring him psychic powers and lead to an out-of-body experience – but his experiment proved fatal. Police divers found his body two days later. Cornwall Coroner's Court was told that he became obsessed with meditation and near-death experiences after leaving school, even practising how to survive drowning by submerging himself in the bath. He was a fan of David Icke and an avid follower of alien and conspiracy theories. *D.Telegraph, Sun, 31 Oct 2013.*

Roman Pirozek Jr, 19, was performing a stunt with his model helicopter in Calvert Vaux Park, Brooklyn, New York, when he lost control. The chopper blades struck him in the head and neck, slicing off parts of his scalp and slitting his throat. He was attended by the emergency services but pronounced dead at the scene. The helicopter was a top-range Trex 700 model weighing a little over 6lb (2.7kg), with a 62in (157cm) blade span. The petrol-powered rotor spins at more than 2,000 rpm. It is thought to be only the second-ever-recorded fatality from a model helicopter – in the US anyway. *Metro, Eve. Standard, 6 Sept; Guardian, 7 Sept 2013.*

Valerie Tibbles, 59, was a felinophile spinster who slept with her 15 cats in her bedroom in Worthing, West Sussex. She was often scratched and left bleeding, but shunned treatment. In January 2013, she died in her sleep from sepsis – caused when an infection sends the immune system haywire. *Sun, 28 June 2013.*

The body of an animal-loving divorcee was found gnawed away by her pet cats at her home in Ringwood, Hampshire. The remains of Janet Veal, 56, were so badly decomposed that it was difficult to establish cause of death as parts of her body were missing; but she suffered from chest problems and probably died from lung disease. She was discovered on 4 April on her kitchen floor, surrounded by a number of cats' bodies and a dead dog. It was not known how long she had

been dead, but the surviving cats in the house were thought to have not been fed properly "for months". *Metro, 14 Aug 2013.*

A young girl sitting in the back seat of a car was killed when the vehicle hit a kangaroo on the Warrego Highway near Brisbane in Australia on 27 October. The animal smashed through the windscreen, went through the car and out the rear window. The girl, aged six, was in the back seat with a sibling. Her parents and the other child suffered minor injuries, treated at the Toowoomba Base Hospital. *(Sydney) D.Telegraph, (London) Eve. Standard, 28 Oct 2013.*

A former Royal Marine, who moved to the US from Bristol 20 years ago and set up a plumbing business, was killed after colliding with an elk. Timothy Parker struck the animal on his Harley in Colorado on 29 June, his 49th birthday. It is believed he broke his neck and died at the scene. *Sun, 5 July 2013.*

Skateboarder Matthew Zeno, 30, was electrocuted urinating on a live (625-volt) subway track in Brooklyn, New York. A friend who pulled him off the track was in a serious but stable condition. *(Sydney) MX News, 9 July 2013.*

A 38-year-old Indonesian mother was so concerned that her nine-year-old son's small penis would ruin his life that she drowned him in the bath. She told police that her son had a small penis before he was circumcised but that it was even smaller after the operation. *(Queensland) Courier-Mail, 2-3 Mar 2013.*

Edwin Maheno, 39, from New Zealand, shot dead his aunt and uncle – Ivan (44) and Carmen Maheno (38) – with a .22 calibre rifle after an argument about him using a used teaspoon in the sugar. At the High Court in Whangarei on 17 September, he was jailed for a minimum of 18 years. *Adelaide Advertiser, 18 Sept 2013.*

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MOTHMAN MYTH MOTHBALLED?

The late, lamented John Keel brought the Mothman legend to prominence in his 1975 book *The Mothman Prophecies*. The weird goings-on in and around Point Pleasant, West Virginia, during late 1966, leading up to the collapse of the Silver Bridge in 1967, have thrilled forteans for decades now (see **FT156**); whatever truth lies behind the events, Mothman has been a gateway legend to forteana for many people.

Theories abound as to what Mothman might have actually been and, as with all things unexplained, you never have to wait long for a new, improved explanation to come along. *Mirage Men* author Mark Pilkington has alerted us to the February 2014 issue of *Soldier of Fortune* magazine, in which Harold Hutchinson airs his belief that the unusual aerial glowing figures that formed the basis of the legend were in fact Green Berets training for combat in Vietnam! Apparently high altitude low opening (HALO) parachute insertions (pictured above) were being practised near Point Pleasant in 1966, and in order to keep track of each other as they came down the Green Berets used time-limited identification paint. When seen from the ground these soldiers would perhaps look like glowing figures falling to earth – or Mothmen, if you are so perceptually inclined. Can this be true? Well, it's a theory – a plausible one at that – and perhaps a more likely source for the legend than a weird giant moth-like humanoid. And, of course, having civilians believe that sightings of military personnel in secret training were supernatural creatures would be an ideal cover-up, with the estimable Keel unwittingly misdirecting press and public away from what was really going on. www.sofmag.com/

UFO ARCHIVE SAVED

The Internet has been a source of UFO-based information, hoaxed rumour and, quite frankly, nonsense since it began. Many have seen it as a sort of glamour, distracting ufologists from serious debate and discussion and replacing that with speculation and ill-informed web pages. In the face of this torrent of half-fact, Errol Bruce-Knapp provided a moderated forum where researchers of all



shades of belief could convene and discuss the UFO phenomenon seriously. Although 'UFO Updates', which started in 1996, was without doubt *the* place to hang out if you wanted informed, if contentious, debate about everything from the latest sightings to cold case UFO investigations, Errol has had enough and the list has now closed. Although primarily US-focused and somewhat harsh on the British sceptics, UFO Updates became an arena in which newbie ufologists could joust with heavyweights such as Jerry Clark or Stan Friedman. Luckily, UK ufologist Isaac Koi has ensured this valuable repository of information has been saved for posterity and a history of the list and where its archives can be found is at: www.abovetopsecret.com/forum/thread991506/pg1

PLANELY A NEAR MISS?

Airline pilots are generally regarded as being 'credible witnesses' in that they are supposedly trained observers, able to identify other objects in their airspace. But when, on 19 July 2013, the pilot of an A320 Airbus cruising at 34,000ft (10,400m) over Berkshire saw a 'rugby ball' shaped object streak within a few feet of his aircraft he was at a loss to explain what he saw. Whatever 'it' was passed within feet of the cockpit and the pilot was convinced the object was going to hit the Airbus. The UK Airprox Board's report into the incident states: "He was under the apprehension that they were on collision course with no time to react. His immediate

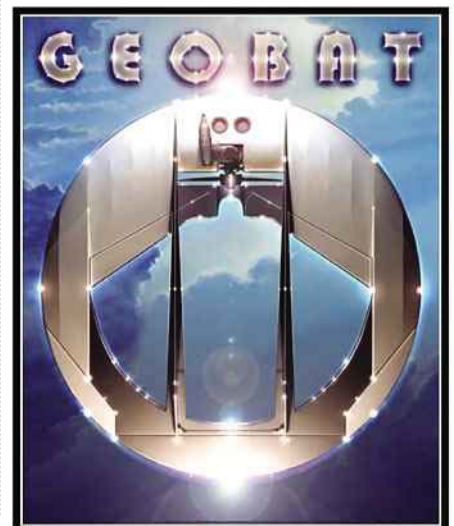
reaction was to duck to the right and reach over to alert the FO (First Officer); there was no time to talk to alert him." Despite the detailed observation by the pilot, who described the object in classic UFO terms as being cigar or rugby ball-shaped, bright silver and possibly metallic, the Airprox Board has, as yet, failed to resolve the sighting. A comprehensive investigation appears to have taken place in which other aircraft, civilian and military, have been ruled out, along with meteorological balloons. The report's conclusion was that it was "not possible to trace the object or determine the likely cause of the sighting". So what was it?

www.telegraph.co.uk/news/

newstips/howaboutthat/ufo/10551201/Jet-in-near-miss-with-UFO.html

THE NEXT BIG THING?

There's always something 'up there' to mistake for the inevitable landing of Zorg from the Pleiades. In a year or so, it's going to be the Geobat, which will join military and private drones to baffle the casual sky watcher. This circular aircraft will be manufactured in several sizes from single pilot to passenger plane and in tests has already been mistaken for a 'real' UFO. Remember, you saw it here first! www.youtube.com/watch?v=A_r5fmRm9i4 <http://articlechase.com/node/444>



410TH AIR EXPEDITIONARY WING

MUCH MORE THAN MARSH GAS...

In a recent issue (**FT309:70-1**) I made a promise to reader Geoff Clifton, who argued that these columns are “at odds” with the widely promoted view that UFOs might be alien in origin. Mr Clifton felt it reasonable to want “a slightly better explanation for the global UFO phenomenon than Chinese lanterns, Earth lights, the planet Venus, marsh gas, faulty radar and unreliable witnesses.” I do not myself believe that the UFO mystery is that simple. Whilst convinced that 95 per cent of reported UFO sightings *do* involve misperception, I think there may be more oddities to discover and have reported cases in these pages that are not easily resolved.

However, suggesting potential resolutions – such as military air traffic straying off course, as in my recent column on the puzzling East Anglian airfield case (**FT307:25, 308:25**) – is an important part of documenting our evidence. We should strive to be UFO *investigators* and not merely UFO *believers*. The data from any case has to be balanced to allow readers to make their own judgement on how to evaluate the facts, but such objectivity should never be mistaken for negativity.

Nevertheless, I did promise to look at cases that challenge my own doubts about the alien explanation. Here are just a couple of examples where that is a viable possibility.

At 5.30pm on 22 November 1978, Elsie Oakensen, head of the Daventry teachers’ centre, was driving home to Church Stowe, Northamptonshire, when she passed beneath a strange hovering “egg timer” with red and green lights. As she turned off into her small village, her foot was flat on the accelerator but there was no sound from her engine and she was coasting to a halt. There was a “jump” in reality and “absolute blackness” as her car lights failed and she was no longer moving. Circles of light were dancing around the road, illuminating a nearby farmyard. Later, at 7.10 pm, she felt a tightening sensation around her forehead – one that she had also felt prior to her close encounter.

I met Elsie numerous times and believe something odd occurred in this case. While it’s tempting to think of some kind of powerful atmospheric energy that could trigger the head pain, blackouts, time loss and electrical effects, the lack of other witnesses is puzzling, because she first saw the UFO as she turned off the A5 at rush hour. Moreover, 10 minutes after Elsie’s ‘head tightening’ – at 7.20pm that evening – four young women driving for a night out through the village of Preston Capes had another strange experience. This was just four miles (6.4km) from Church Stowe, but they were unaware of the earlier encounter. They also saw red and green lights and beams shooting out from clouds as their car engine started

to lose power.

I interviewed the driver of this second vehicle and she was mystified. Her car was only seven months old, worked perfectly afterwards and the women carried on driving without apparent further incident, quickly deciding that all was “best forgotten”. Options such as aircraft lights on a landing flight path crossing this area have to be considered, but you have to at least ponder the possibility that something more bizarre occurred.

Doug Pickford, a Staffordshire researcher, reported to me another impressive case from 16 June 1991. This witness was a terrified and bewildered businessman driving home from a late meeting in Chester to his home in Leek. It was 1.30am, and because he had drunk copious cups of coffee he decided to stop at Rushton near Rudyard Lake in order to relieve himself.

The spot chosen was beside the Bridestones, a Neolithic site with standing stones that were visible in the half-light as this was close to Midsummer’s eve. The witness was then shocked to see a golden beam of light above the stones from which emerged a shower of sparks. Unsurprisingly terrified, he scuttled back toward his car but the engine was dead and would not start. As he desperately tried to get away a large glowing ball headed from the sparks straight towards him. This was so bright that it caused pain in his eyes and he felt ‘rooted’ to the spot. Then he blacked out.

He regained his senses, now on the ground at a spot that proved to be several hundred yards away from his car. The UFO was no longer present, but, worse still, he was naked above the waist and his shoes were missing. As he tried to get up, feeling very disorientated, he brushed down his body and discovered that his trousers were charged with static electricity causing sparks to jump from his body. After staggering around he found his car, the key still in the ignition. Next to the door were his shoes and shirt, folded on the ground and warm to the touch.

The car started without trouble and he drove away at speed – only then seeing the dashboard clock and realising that it was 3.05am and that one and half hours had

vanished. When he got home, he told his wife that he had been in a minor accident as she saw his state of shock. He reported only to Doug on condition that he would share facts anonymously and would never go public for fear of the effect on his career.

I would not normally be convinced by anonymous stories, but I trusted Doug and he vouched 100 per cent for this witness. Again, you can interpret this as some kind of atmospheric energy, but it also has aspects that are harder to explain, like the period of ‘missing time’.

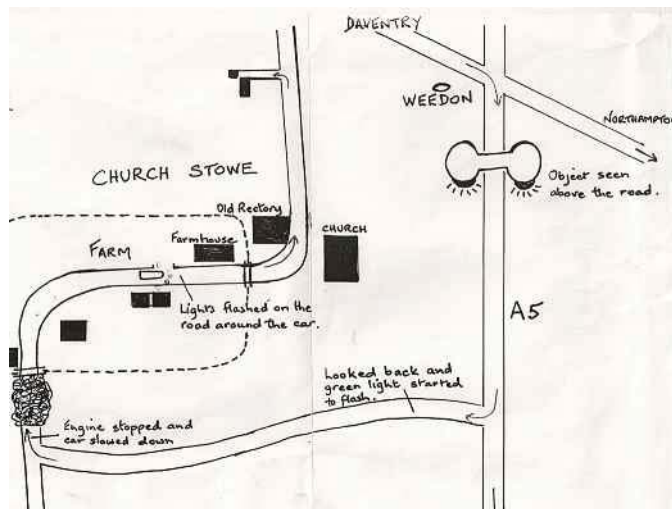
This case also had obvious similarities with one that came direct to me from a witness called Daniel. This man was hiking in Delamere Forest outside Chester on about 29 June 1971. It was 3am, and as he walked through the woods an “electric blue light” appeared ahead and moved towards him, dancing erratically in and out of the trees. Daniel walked trance-like towards it, but said: “Before I had gone 20 paces, I found myself walking calmly back”. At that point the object moved along a mud track and disappeared into a small ‘garage’ inside the bushes. Daniel recovered, wandering around disorientated in a state of extreme confusion, which might hint at what the businessman near Rudyard Lake was doing during the missing time. But how were they both immobilised? When Daniel recovered, he searched for the ‘garage’ into which the light disappeared, but nothing was there.

A final case ties both of the ones above together. It came from Dr Richard Sigismunde, a social scientist who had participated in the US government UFO study – the Condon Report – and whom I visited along with Dr J Allen Hynek. Two of Dr Sigismunde’s friends, a married couple from nearby Longmont, Colorado, were driving around midnight on 19 November 1980 when a blue glow surrounded their car, the headlights faded and the radio filled with static. Then the vehicle started to rise into the air, before, suddenly, they were driving onwards *an hour* later.

Stopping at a garage, feeling ‘strange’, their body coordination was in a mess; the driver walked into a door after misjudging his muscle control. His wife, who was pregnant,

developed a scary red patch on her abdomen and was rushed to hospital where she became seriously ill for a few days – although she survived and the child, though born prematurely, was healthy.

There are many other cases of this type that I consider crucial to our understanding of the UFO mystery. Do they prove an alien intrusion? No. But when you see patterns like these emerge from independent cases around the world then it is hard *not* to think that something more fascinating than marsh gas must be at their heart.



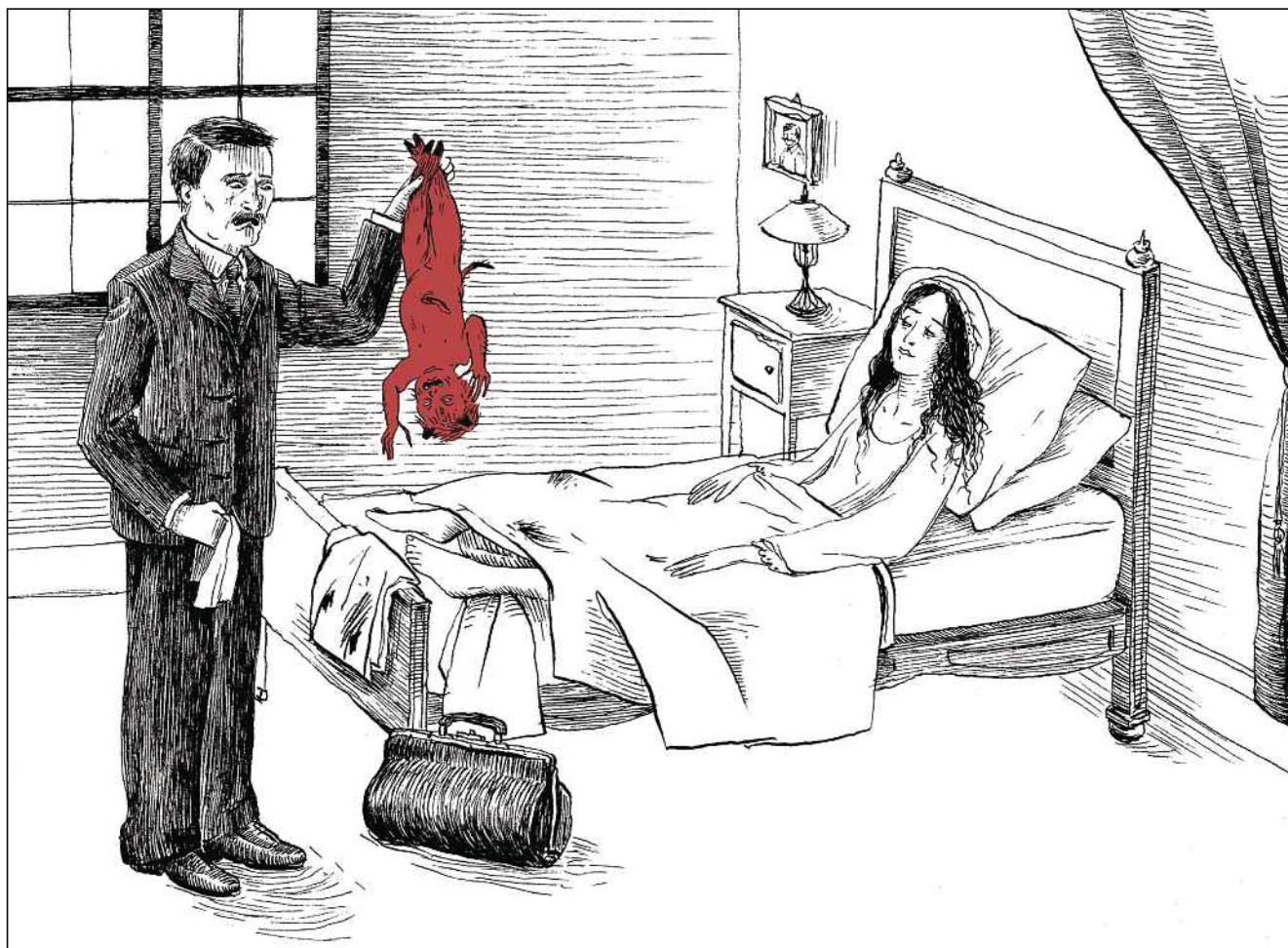
LEFT: A sketch of Elsie Oakensen’s close encounter in Church Stowe.

BLASTS FROM THE PAST

FORTEAN TIMES BRINGS YOU THE NEWS THAT TIME FORGOT

49 THE DEVIL KID OF NEWBURG

THEO PAIJMANS looks back at reports of a most unusual and alarming birth in 19th century Ohio



CAPUCINE DESLOUIS

When in 1992 Dick Kulpa, editor of the now defunct tabloid *Weekly World News*, launched the incredible story of 'Bat Boy', a child half-human and half-bat, he created the publication's most endearing icon. Kulpa also pulled an old trick out of his hat: in the field of make-it-up-as-you-go journalism, Bat Boy belongs to a long tradition, and one of his early progenitors created just as much of a stir more than a century before: The Devil Kid of Newburg, Cleveland.

On 22 March 1888, the Ohio newspaper *Plain Dealer* broke the news of how, some three weeks earlier, east of Broadway

The creature was "red as blood, with hair all over its body. Two horns about six inches long grew from its head, and in place of feet it had two cloven hoofs"

at Newburg, near the new wire mill in a Polish settlement, a woman had given birth to "one of the most marvellous freaks of nature that was ever on the face of the earth." The doctor in attendance saw a creature "red as blood, with a hairy growth over its body. Two horns about six inches long grew from its head. Its hands were long and like claws, while in place of feet it had two cloven hoofs."

All in all, it resembled a satyr or devil, even having a tail and long pointed teeth. The horrified doctor said: "Great God! But we must kill this thing; it ought to be done." But according to the *Plain Dealer*, the newborn baby-thing adopted a malignant expression and said: "I guess not!"¹

Not only was all of Newburg at a fever pitch of excitement, streams of people visited the

town to see the infant with their own eyes. A Detroit man offered \$10,000 for it and dime museum agents scoured the town high and low, but nobody, including the residents, was able to find the creature.² A sketch artist sent by the paper had better luck. He located what was by now termed 'the Devil Kid': "When the *Plain Dealer* artist was ushered into the room containing this fiendish monstrosity a feeling of inexplicable uneasiness came over him... when in a moment more, the fantastic shape and devilish physiognomy were revealed in all their ugliness the draughtsman could not suppress a cry of horror. Believing that the report of this freak's deformity

had been much exaggerated he was totally unprepared for the actual revelation.”

He finished his sketch, though, which was published in the newspaper, and hurriedly left. A reporter who accompanied the artist, managed to wrangle more lurid details of its birth out of the nurse who had delivered the baby: “It was all coiled up in a sort of ball and looked red, like a big bunch of flesh. It was awful! It makes me sick to think of it even now. I supposed the child was dead – it seemed to be only a ball of flesh. But when the umbilical cord was severed there was a flash of blue flame, a strong smell of brimstone and when the thing touched the bed it uncoiled as if there was a spring in its insides and bounded up two feet from the bed, uttering a horrible scream... I think the mother was possessed of a devil, and that it entered the child.”³

The nurse had arrived at the theory, she explained, since she had read in the newspaper about a German woman from Newburg who had the devil cast out of her – it surely must have been this devil that had entered the baby. “You laugh, but you don’t understand as much about evil spirits as I do. When I was in the old country I knew a woman who was possessed of a devil and she was terrible. But a priest cast it out and she became well as ever.”

The more usual theory bandied about was that the mother of the Devil Kid must have been frightened just before birth by something similar, hence its horrific appearance: “Two or three months ago, shortly before the child was born, the mother witnessed a spectacular play at one of the local theatres. During the performance the devil springs from a trap in the stage and frightened the mother very much... the child, which was born shortly afterward... exactly resembles this ‘stage devil’”. This folk-belief, that if an expectant mother was to be frightened before giving birth by something, the object of her fright would unwholesomely influence the outward

appearance of the unborn infant, was widespread. “A number of cases are on record”, the *Plain Dealer* explained, “one of which occurred a great many years ago in Summit county. A man, becoming angered at his wife, seized a tame crow and beat her on the head with it, killing the crow. The child, born soon after, had a crow’s head and never was able to speak, making a harsh, croaking noise when it opened its mouth. A few years ago this being committed suicide by tearing open a vein in its arm with its mouth or beak.”⁴

But in the meantime nobody, except the *Plain Dealer* people, had actually seen the Devil Kid or knew of its whereabouts. Crowds had begun to throng the streets and the flocks of visitors from out of town had swelled so greatly in numbers that the Broadway and Newburg street railway company had to enlist two extra cars. The excitement was not without its dangers. The family of Fred Gillman had to be protected by three police officers when a false rumour started circulating that he housed the Devil Kid. FOAF-tales floated around, and accounts even surfaced from those who claimed to have seen it with their own eyes, such as Mr JA Rizenour. He related that the baby had been asleep and he did not see its horns, but he noticed that the tail was wrapped around the mother’s wrist and two batlike wings were folded against its back. Now others remembered similar occurrences, such as a Mr Wanner from Canada. No, he had not seen the Devil Kid, he said, but he remembered a similar occurrence in Berlin, Canada. There, a woman saw a large snake, became very frightened by it, and when her child as born shortly afterwards, it had a snake’s head: “The mouth was on top of the head and was fully six inches wide. Fortunately the snake-child lived only a few hours.”⁵

The *Plain Dealer* had a field day, publishing large, multicolumn articles, opinions and accounts almost every day: “Nothing which has ever been published in Cleveland created

half the excitement caused by the *Plain Dealer*’s description of a diabolical monstrosity which has come to be generally termed ‘the devil kid.’ Envious newspapers have sought to belittle the case because they were ‘scooped’, and some have even gone so far as to boldly declare that the story was a fabrication. The creature is so weird, so uncanny that nobody can be blamed for doubting the possibility of the existence of so incredible a thing without having seen it, but since the *Plain Dealer* printed the description thousands of people have scoured South Cleveland and not a few declare that they were fortunate – or unfortunate – enough to find the imp. The blood curdling stories which a few of these tell will be found further on...”⁶

Other places wanted a piece of the action, too. A merchant from the town of Bryan claimed to have had the “perfectly formed body of a child with the exception of the head, which was that of a dog” preserved in alcohol. He also had a jar that contained “the body of a pig and the head was human.” And in that area, a young woman lived who was covered from head to toe in a “fine, short, reddish hair resembling the fur of a squirrel.”⁷

In the end, the *Plain Dealer* ran out of steam, and conveniently the Devil Kid ‘died’ in May that year. A Mr Devaux of Toledo claimed to have located the family of the Devil Kid, and convinced them to relocate with him to Toledo. After the Kid died on 6 May, he had the corpse embalmed and put it up for exhibition.⁸ And so the story ended; in November, the *Plain Dealer* commented: “The devil kid editor of the *Plain Dealer* has escaped from his keepers and is writing laboured essays on Truth in the gloom of Bank street.”⁹ The echo remained though; in December that year some contrivance, purported to be the remains of the Devil Kid, was on exhibit in Kansas City, Missouri. Its newspaper reminded how: “A young man with a large stock of romance, who is employed on a newspaper in this city, was, up to a few months ago, on a morning

paper in Cleveland, and about a year ago wrote the story. It was intended as a joke, but nearly everybody believed it.”¹⁰

During the month after the tale was printed, hundreds of letters were received at the office of the newspaper enquiring about the freak and ordering copies of the paper containing the story.¹¹

The embalmed corpse that was exhibited was, of course, a hoax in the best tradition of the Feejee mermaid. *En passant*, we get a glimpse of a most unusual underground in which fantastic monsters, unbelievable artefacts and faux-fortean objects were manufactured for the sideshow business. According to the *Plain Dealer*, the owner made a fortune with the dead Devil Kid, exhibiting it in New York, Pennsylvania and Ohio, “and now has it west of Mississippi.” The corpse was made of papier mâché mache and was “the handiwork of an ingenious Detroit man, who manufactures to order dead Aztecs, Egyptian mummies, dried bodies of cave dwellers, devil children and other interesting and curious articles of bric-a-brac.”¹²

It’s a wonderful tradition, where sometimes actual fortean creatures, such as the Leeds Devil, were emulated – in that instance, an enterprising showman exhibited a poor kangaroo with a pair of wings attached in a dimly-lit circus tent. Others were completely invented, such as the Hodag, a terrible monster said to roam the wilds of Wisconsin.

While the story of the Devil Kid was laid to rest, short memories and a sense of business saw the demon child return some five years later. A travelling Dime Museum offered to its visitors the Steam Man Hercules (“the exterior of this celebrated man is of cast iron and his interior is said to be a furnace”), but as a newspaper described, the audiences all came for what was billed as “the original and only Devil Kid”.¹³

Somewhere in wonderland there is a cave where Bat Boy, the Devil Kid and the Leeds Devil chuckle and snort together.

NOTES

1 ‘Satan Incarnate. A Demoniactal Monstrosity in a Polish Family’, *Plain Dealer*, Cleveland, Ohio, 22 Mar 1888.

2 ‘The Devil Baby. Many People Search After It But

Without Avail’, *Plain Dealer*, 24 Mar 1888.

3 ‘The Devil Kid. The Most Diabolical Developments’, *Plain Dealer*, 25 Mar 1888.

4 ‘Satan Incarnate. A Demoniactal Monstrosity in a Polish Family’, *Plain Dealer*,

22 Mar 1888.

5 ‘The Devil Kid. The Most Diabolical Developments’, *Plain Dealer*, 25 Mar 1888.

6 ‘The Devil Kid. The Most Diabolical Developments’, *Plain Dealer*, 26 Mar 1888.

7 ‘Freaks Of Nature’, *Plain*

Dealer, 31 Mar 1888.

8 ‘The Devil Kid’, *Plain Dealer*, 4 July 1888.

9 *Plain Dealer*, 16 Nov 1888.

10 ‘The Demon Child’, *Kansas City Star*, Missouri, 25 Dec 1888.

11 *Ibid.*

12 *Ibid.*

13 ‘Freaks And Curios’, *Plain Dealer*, 1 Nov 1892.

THE HOUSE OF MAJOR WEIR

JAN BONDESON turns detective in an effort to shed some new light on Edinburgh's most haunted house - and finds that, contrary to local belief, the abode of Weir the Warlock still stands today.

*In rangles round before the ingle's lowe
Frae gudame's mouth auld warld tales they
hear
O' warlocks loupin' round the wirrikow,
O' ghaists that win in glen and kirkyard drear,
Whilk touzles a' their tap, and gars them shak
with fear!*

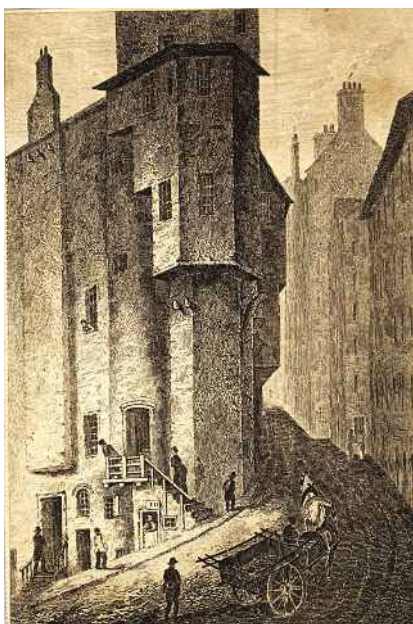
The Farmer's Ingle, by Robert Fergusson.

Some years ago, when working on my book *Amazing Dogs*, I was amassing cheap old scrapbooks, from eBay and other sources, hoping that they would contain some useful canine memorabilia. One of the dogless scrapbooks instead provided some other items of interest, namely a collection of Georgian and Victorian drawings, prints and engravings of Edinburgh. One of these curious engravings, the work of James Skene of Rubislaw, was said to depict Major Weir's sinister-looking haunted house in the West Bow. Since some research showed that the opinion regarding the location of this sinister dwelling was wildly divergent, clearly the time had come to visit the Athens of the North to find out more about the most haunted house in Edinburgh.

THE TERRIBLE THOMAS WEIR

There is no doubt that Thomas Weir was an historical person, born at Kirkton, in Clydesdale, in 1599.¹ His family was quite prominent locally, and he is likely to have received a decent education. A man of strict puritanical notions, Weir served as an officer in the Covenanting forces, in both Scotland and Ireland, rising to the rank of Major. In 1642, he married Isobel Mein, the widow of an Edinburgh merchant, and was made a Burgess and guild brother of that city without having to pay any fee. In 1645, he became Captain of the City Guard, and settled in Edinburgh permanently. A tall

HE CARRIED A LARGE BLACK STAFF CARVED WITH THE GRINNING HEADS OF SATYRS



ABOVE: The scarce engraving of the West Bow and Major Weir's house, by James Skene of Rubislaw.

dark man with a grim countenance and a big nose, he always carried a large black staff carved with the grinning heads of satyrs. When the Marquis of Montrose was taken to Edinburgh for execution, Major Weir was responsible for guarding him. This was a task the gloating Major relished, calling the former royalist general a Dog, Traytor, Apostate and Excommunicate Wretch, and puffing hard at his pipe to annoy the Great Montrose, who could not abide the smell of tobacco smoke.

Having retired from the City Guard, Major Weir lived quietly in Edinburgh with his wife and stepdaughter. He became a member of the 'Bowhead Saints', a group of Covenanters living in the upper part of the West Bow, a steep, Z-shaped street leading through some of the most ancient parts of Edinburgh, from Castle Hill down to the Grassmarket. Noted for his religious fervour, Weir sometimes led conventicles in his house, and was known to his brethren as 'Angelical Thomas'. There was a regrettable episode in 1651, when Major Weir had business in Lanark. A woman reported him for bestiality with a mare, and he was arrested and brought before the local minister. But due to the Major's excellent reputation, his accuser was not believed: Weir was set free, and the woman who had informed against him was whipped through the streets of Lanark for slandering such an eminent Christian.

After the death of Isobel Weir and the marriage of her daughter Margaret, the Major's sister Jean, who had kept school at Dalkeith, moved into his house in the West Bow. Due to the indolent Major's reluctance to work, Jean became the family breadwinner, spinning diligently when she was not managing the household. Throughout the 1660s, Thomas and Jean Weir remained living together, in increasingly straitened circumstances. In

1669, the former Captain of the City Guard was rewarded for his services by being authorised to collect a tax on goods imported from England. But Major Weir was now quite an old man, and his mental and bodily health far from good. He started to behave very oddly, expressing terror whenever he heard the word 'burn'. In 1670, he broke down altogether at one of his prayer meetings, and confessed to the most atrocious crimes. His West Bow friends thought he must have gone mad, but the Provost of Edinburgh, Sir Andrew Ramsay, sent physicians to examine the 70-year-old Major. They found that he was fully sane, and as a result, he was removed to the Old Tolbooth, along with his sister Jean, to stand trial before the justiciary court on April 9 1670, self-accused of bestiality, incest, fornication and adultery. There was horror among the Bowhead Saints when 'Angelical Thomas' freely admitted several charges of bestiality with a mare and a cow, incest with his sister Jean since she was 16 years old, and adultery with the servant Bessie Wemyss. He had also committed incest with his stepdaughter Margaret, marrying her off to an Englishman when she ended up pregnant. The Major was in a pitiful state both mentally and physically, weeping piteously and fearing the torments of Hell.

Jean Weir, who stood accused of incest and sorcery, also had much to say. Her brother had been a warlock, dealing with the devil for many years. In 1648, the Evil One had invited Major Weir and his sister for a ride to Musselburgh in a fiery coach pulled by six horses with flaming eyes. The Major's large wooden staff was the source of his magical powers. It had a life of its own, and could jump about at will. Thomas Weir was found guilty of bestiality, incest, fornication and adultery, and his sister guilty of incest; both were sentenced to death. Considering the importance given to the sensational witchcraft stories, by both contemporary writers and later legend, it is surprising that no exertions were made to secure a conviction on these charges.

On 11 April 1670, the feeble old Major was dragged to the Gallowlee, between Edinburgh and Leith, on a horse-drawn sledge. When tied to the stake, he was urged to say "Lord be merciful to me", but he answered "Let me alone, I will not; I have lived like a beast, and I must die a beast!" He then was strangled to death and burnt at the stake, along with his magical staff. Superstitious people found him uncommonly long a-burning, and thought they saw the staff "give rare turnings" among the flames. When Jean Weir was told about her brother's execution, she hardly seemed to care, but merely asked where his staff was. When told that it had also perished on the pyre, she screamed wild curses in a furious rage. She was hanged at the Grassmarket the day after.

There has been a good deal of speculation about what was wrong with Major Weir and his equally weird sister. Was the Major just a hypocritical, dirty old man with an abnormal fondness for the company of



ABOVE: Major Weir's fiery coach, from Roughead's *Twelve Scots Trials*.

four-footed animals, or was he a follower of the antinomian heresy, believing that he was one of the elect, and thus predestined to salvation regardless of any sins he committed? Or did he perhaps suffer from some kind of religious mania, exaggerating the extent of his crimes, and inventing some altogether? Contemporary writers, both legal and religious, did not think so, but found the strange confessions of the two Weirs perfectly credible.²

THE SHUNNED HOUSE

After Thomas and Jean Weir had been executed, their house in the West Bow was shunned for many decades to come. Stories of Weir the Warlock's dealing with the Devil, the fiery coach, and his staff that had a life of its own, were told in the crowded Edinburgh closes and alleyways. Some old soldiers in the City Guard could remember that if they went to a *howff* [tavern] to have a

wee dram, the Major was sure to track them down and scold them for neglect of duty. They now knew who had helped their former commander, a strict disciplinarian in spite of his diabolist tendencies, to track them down – it was the Meikle Devil himself! As for the magical staff, it was told that it had acted as gatekeeper at the Major's house, admitting people at will at the turnpike. At other times, the Major sent it on errands, like buying snuff from a nearby shop, and it willingly tapped away along the West Bow, to return with the desired item. On dark nights, the staff acted as linkman, tapping along before the major and carrying a lantern. As for Jean Weir, who had been said to be very good at spinning, superstitious folks now knew that it was Auld Clottie who had helped keep her spinning wheel moving at such an extraordinary speed.

Major Weir's house in the West Bow was recognised as the most haunted in

REPRODUCED BY PERMISSION OF MR STEWART P. EVANS.

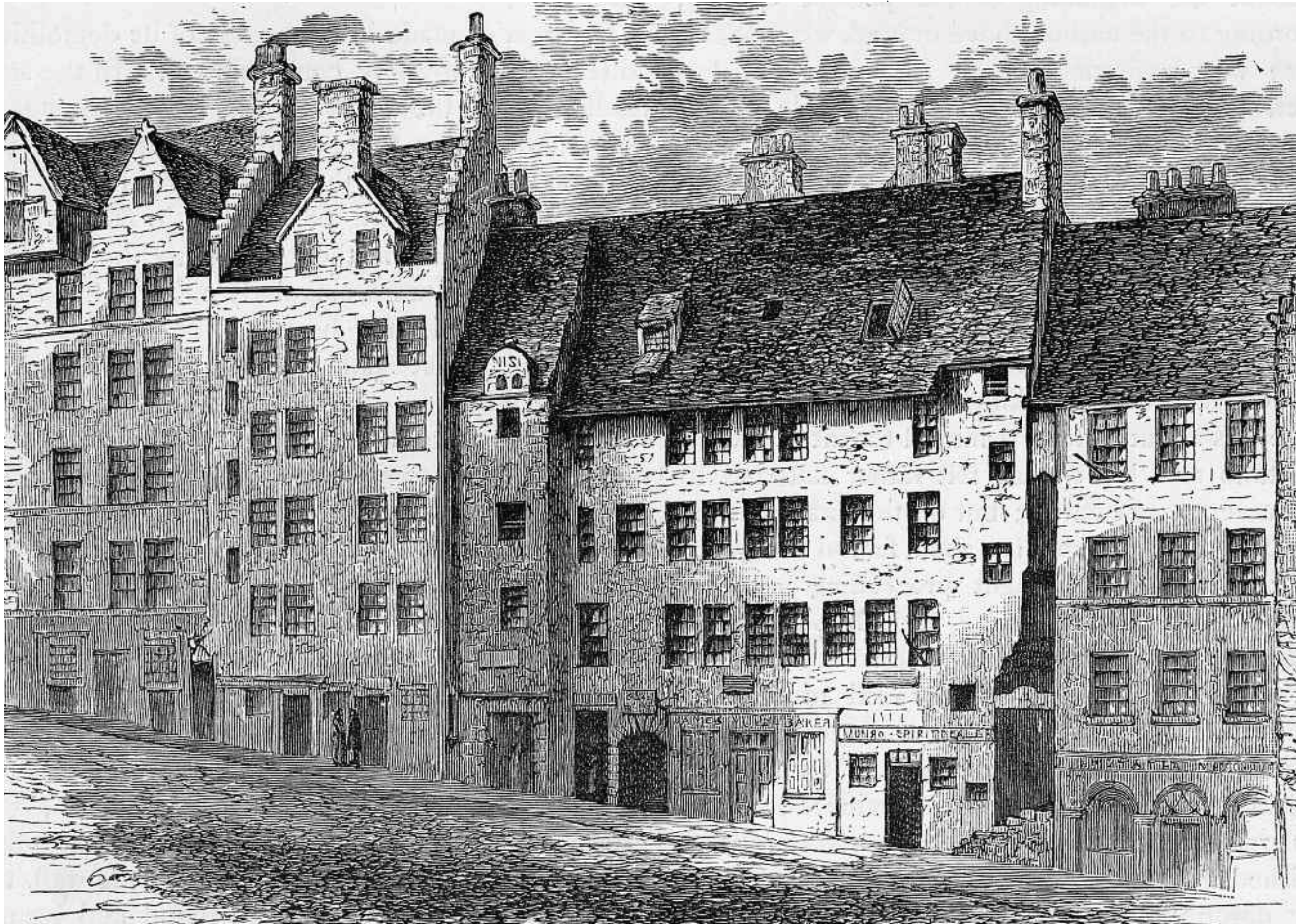
Edinburgh. Although no person dared live there, its windows were lit up at night, with weird shapes flitting past the dirty panes and strange music emanating from within. The house was home to an impressive array of ghosts. Sometimes, the Major himself rode off into the night from an alleyway, seated on a headless horse; at other times, Jean Weir was heard spinning at her magical wheel. Once, some spectral 'gentlewomen' paid the Major's ghost a visit, and on another occasion, a sinister giantess came to call on Weir the Warlock. Many Edinburgh children, the father of Robert Louis Stevenson included, were told to avoid the Major's residence and to be wary of a spectral coach pulled by six fiery horses. Many people spoke of hearing this coach come rattling up the West Bow from the Grassmarket in the wee hours, for the Devil to pick up Major Weir's ghost at his house, and then taking off at supernatural speed. In an interesting early account of Major Weir's haunted house, it was said that this abode of terror was shunned by all things living for more than a century.³ But in the 1780s, when Edinburgh people were becoming less superstitious, a certain William Patullo, a poor man of dissipated habits who had once been a soldier, was willing to move into the house, since the landlord promised to charge him a very low rent. A great deal of curiosity was shown with regard to the outcome of this reckless experiment. The old bugaboo stories about Weir the Warlock and his haunted house were repeated, and there was much speculation about what would happen to Patullo and his wife, who had volunteered to stay at this house of horrors. The old soldier is said to have become increasingly apprehensive, and both he and his wife were in a state of great excitement when they took possession of the Major's house. They decided to stay awake all night, to prevent being overwhelmed by the ghosts. To begin with, all seemed well, but in the small hours, a strange form materialised from the wood panelling. It looked like the ghost of a headless calf! The ghost walked forward, approaching the bed, and planted its forefeet on the stock. Despite its headless condition, it seemed to stare intently at the two terrified people in the bed. After a while, the spectral calf faded away, but Patullo and his wife kept a sharp lookout for ghosts for the remainder of the night, their teeth chattering with fear. At the first light of morning, they deserted Major Weir's haunted house, never to return.

After hearing the tale of the spectral calf, and pondering the very brief tenure of the Patullos in Major Weir's abode, the people of Edinburgh agreed that this house of horrors should remain uninhabited and undisturbed for good. It was shunned by all things living: horses shied away and dogs whined if persuaded to go near it. It would take a brave young lad from the High Street crowd to come near the most haunted house in Edinburgh, to hear the tapping of the Major's enchanted staff as it went through the empty rooms or the hum of Jean Weir's necromantic spinning wheel. In 1803, Sir Walter Scott could confirm that the Major's house of horrors remained uninhabited; it had at different times been a brazier's shop and a storage-room for lint, but



TOP: A view down the head of the West Bow, from *Modern Athens*, a collection of Thomas H Shepherd's Edinburgh drawings.

ABOVE: The entrance to Major Weir's house in the West Bow, from Sir Daniel Wilson's *Memorials of Edinburgh*.



ABOVE: Major Weir's Land, from James Grant's *Old and New Edinburgh*.

no person dared to sleep within its walls. Sir Walter's friend Charles Fitzpatrick Sharpe once promised to show the house to his friend Lady Stafford when she came to Edinburgh, but he could not find it. Instead, Sharpe sent Sir Walter an amusing doggerel prologue to Byron's *Manfred* when it appeared in 1817, with its hints of incest:

*Most gentle Readers, 'twill appear
Our Author fills this scene
With what betided Major Weir
And his frail sister Jean.*

*He freely here his faults avows
In bringing not before us
The Major's Cat, and Mares, and Cows
Assembled in a Chorus.*

*But by and bye he'll mend his Play,
And then the World shall see
That Incest only paves the way
For Bestiality.⁴*

Sir Walter Scott's daughter Anne used to refer to her father's heavy walking-cane as 'Major Weir', and it has been speculated that some episodes in his novel *Redgauntlet* were inspired by the activities of the Edinburgh warlock.⁵ In 1830, Scott wrote that civic improvements meant that Major Weir's house would soon be demolished, but here he was certainly wrong, since the house was described in Chambers' *Reekiana*, first published in 1833.

WEIR WAS FOUND GUILTY OF BESTIALITY, INCEST AND ADULTERY

Throughout Victorian times, there was much work going on clearing slums and improving street access in Edinburgh's Old Town. West Bow was cut into two, with a short rump remaining of the northern end and the lower part becoming a continuation of Victoria Street, a newly constructed thoroughfare from George IV Bridge. Writing in 1848, the antiquary Daniel Wilson took care to dispose of another rumour that Major Weir's house had been demolished in 1836, along with other houses abutting the alley called Stinking Close. Both popular tradition and legal documentation placed the Major's abode near the Bowhead, and thus nowhere near Stinking Close, where one of the ghosts had once been sighted. The house now functioned as a broker's store, Wilson could report, and no person

dared to spend the night there, although the visits of the Major's ghosts were becoming fewer and less ostentatious. Would even the Edinburgh Improvement Commission, which was demolishing historical buildings at will, in the West Bow and elsewhere, be able to find workmen bold enough to raze Weir the Warlock's house of horrors to the ground?

For three more decades, the gloomy old house stood unperturbed. But in 1878, the Burgh Engineer ordered the demolition of a number of dilapidated old houses at the head of the West Bow, to be replaced with modern tenements. Thus went Major Weir's house of horrors, several good authorities assure us, Robert Louis Stevenson and William Roughead included, and this has remained an Established Fact ever since.⁶ But a close student of the adventures of that extraordinary dog, Greyfriars Bobby (see FT297:44-51), has learnt to be wary of Established Facts emanating from that animal's home town...

FINDING THE HOUSE

When local historian George Robinson and I began investigating the mystery of Major Weir's house in early 2012, we paid attention to the topography of the upper part of the West Bow, where the majority of writers had placed the house. An early and important deduction was that the sinister-looking turreted building that is prominent on both Skene of Rubislaw's engraving and on one of the plates in Sir Daniel Wilson's *Memorials of*

Edinburgh, is not Major Weir's house. Firstly, we know that the Major's house stood on the eastern side of the West Bow; secondly, the turreted building constituted part of the Edinburgh assembly rooms. It is a mystery how the normally reliable Sir Daniel Wilson, who knew Edinburgh well, could have captioned a plate for his book, with an open door to the assembly rooms and a woman walking up the stairs, 'Entrance to Major Weir's house'.⁷ It is less surprising that a bevy of modern writers have embraced the myth of Major Weir's turreted house in the West Bow; but just like the myth of Jane Vernelt of George Street, the haunted 'No. 17', and various spooky Edinburgh tales emanating from the unreliable pen of Elliott O'Donnell, this by-product of 'Greyfriars Bobby historiography' has nothing to recommend it.

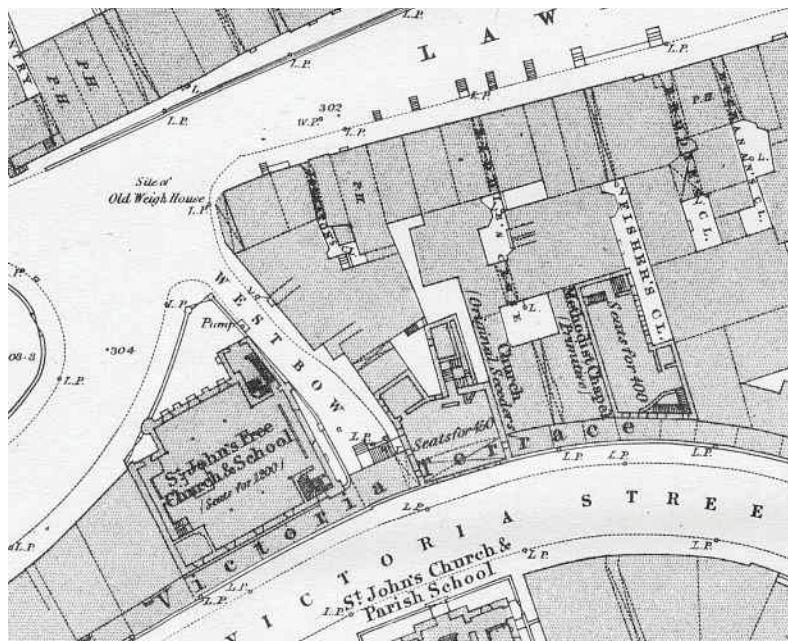
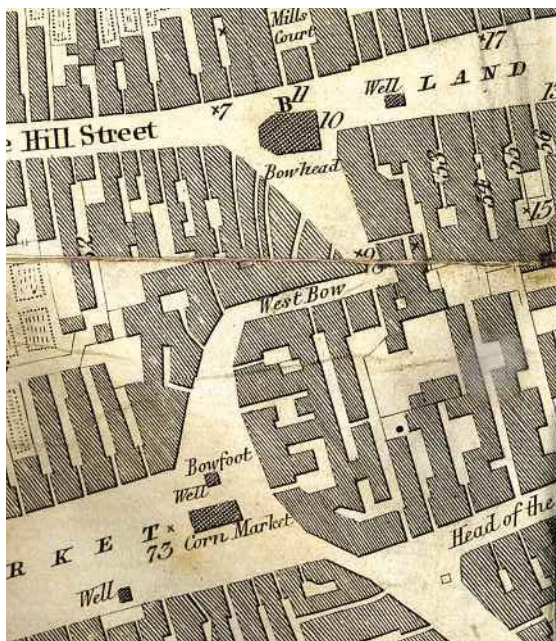
A more promising lead is a plate of 'Major Weir's Land' in Grant's *Old and New Edinburgh*, said to be a reproduction of an original drawing from 1830.⁸ These houses are all on the eastern side of the West Bow, and can be numbered using other original drawings and the Ordnance Survey maps in the National Library of Scotland. Many people spoke of the Major's house being close to the Bowhead, including a correspondent to *Notes & Queries*, who wrote that "Major Weir's house was not near the Castle, but in the Bow, on the right hand coming up from the Grass Market. I have constantly passed it as a child, and was always very glad to get out of its vicinity."⁹ We took good care to look into the topography of this section of the West Bow, speculating which house (the fifth from the Bowhead) might have been the warlock's dread abode. But if Major Weir's house was in



“A DESOLATE ABODE, ONCE THE DWELLING PLACE OF THE NOTORIOUS MAJOR WEIR”

this part of the West Bow, it was destroyed in the 1878 demolition, according to reliable contemporary accounts and the Ordnance Survey maps for 1893. There was even a newspaper story that parts of Major Weir's house were later re-erected at the Edinburgh Exhibition of 1886 as one of the entry gates, once passed through by Queen Victoria herself.¹⁰

Chambers's *Reekiana*, a scarce old book about Edinburgh history, offered up yet another clue.¹¹ When this book was published, in 1833, Major Weir's house was still standing, and Chambers not only supplies a drawing of the house, but also pin-points its location on a map. In this drawing, Edinburgh's house of horrors looks nothing like the turreted house in the West Bow, or the tall houses in Major Weir's Land: it is an ancient three-story building of relatively primitive construction. It has to be appreciated that in Edinburgh topography, a *land* is a name for a tall tenement building, or occasionally a row of distinctive buildings, facing a major street. Thus we have Morocco Land, Mahogany Land, Golfer's Land, and Clam-Shell Land, in various central Edinburgh locations. The term implies that Major Weir lived near or inside the *land*, and not necessarily that he lived in one of the houses facing the West Bow. And indeed, the *Reekiana* puts Major Weir's house *behind* the tall houses in Major Weir's Land: it was accessed through a *pend* [street gateway] leading to a *transe* (a covered alleyway), in its turn leading to a small court behind the fifth building on the east side of the West Bow. Making use of the online map repository in the National Library of Scotland, and the folio *Atlas of Old Edinburgh*, this house can be seen on some quite early maps. Daniel Wilson's 1848 description of Major Weir's house corresponds well with



TOP: The drawing of Major Weir's house from Chambers's *Reekiana*. This is the only correct representation of the warlock's abode.

ABOVE LEFT: Part of William Edgar's 1742 map of Edinburgh, showing Major Weir's house and other notable Edinburgh locations, from Chambers's *Reekiana*. The Major's house is marked with a small cross. ABOVE RIGHT: The relevant part from the 1877 Ordnance Survey map, showing the rump of the West Bow, and the Pend leading to the court in front of Major Weir's house, which is now part of the chapel in Victoria Terrace.



BOTH REPRODUCED BY PERMISSION OF THE TRUSTEES OF THE QUAKER MEETING HOUSE, VICTORIA TERRACE, EDINBURGH

that in the *Reekiana*: “A low vaulted passage immediately adjoining it leads through the tall tenement to a narrow court behind, and a solitary and desolate abode, once the unhallowed dwelling-place of the notorious Major Weir”.¹² The Edinburgh artist Jane Stewart Smith reproduced a drawing made from inside this narrow court, showing the *transe* leading out to the West Bow.¹³

The next clue came from an 1866 newspaper article describing the construction of the Original Secession Chapel in Victoria Terrace. In addition to the site on which the chapel stood, the builders had also “acquired the old building known as Major Weir’s house, which is being converted into a meeting-house, vestry and other offices in connection with the church”.¹⁴ The original plans for the conversion verify that the chapel’s rear extension contained a vestry and various other offices; its layout much resembles that of the Major’s house from the *Reekiana*, except that the doors to the ground floor had been blocked off to dissuade burglars. The relevant Ordnance Survey maps clearly show the old building, once reached through the *Pend* from the West Bow, being assimilated into the newly built church. In time, the Original Secession Chapel became the headquarters of the Edinburgh Boy Brigade, and it is today the Quaker Meeting House at No 7 Victoria Terrace. Clearly the time had come to pay Major Weir’s ghost a visit.

A GHOSTLY SURVIVAL

We were kindly given a tour of the Quaker Meeting House by its manager, Anthony Buxton. After a solid door from the West Bow had been unlocked and opened, we entered a long and gloomy corridor, replicating the old *transe* through which Major Weir’s ghost had once spurred its headless steed. After another door had been unlocked, there it stood, the most haunted house in Edinburgh, looking as gloomy and sinister as ever! Its



ABOVE: A postcard showing Baillie McMorran’s house in Riddle’s Court, by the celebrated artist Reginald Phillimore.

position exactly matches that pinpointed on the old Ordnance Survey maps, and its dimensions are reasonably intact, compared with the *Reekiana* drawing. Either this drawing exaggerated the size of the court in front of the house, or the 1880s houses in the West Bow extend further to the rear than the original ones in Major Weir’s Land. The north-facing blind wall is of impressive thickness. The east-facing wall has clearly been rebuilt twice, once in 1866 to close off the doors, and also more recently to change the positioning of the windows, for the house’s present-day use as a toilet block for the Meeting House.

Thus it can be concluded that, contrary to local belief, Major Weir’s house still stands today. This is a matter of some interest for Edinburgh antiquaries, since the area around the Lawnmarket and the Bowhead is one of the most ancient parts of the city, containing many of the existing pre-1750 buildings in the Old Town.¹⁵ The 1866 article pointed out that the old house was *converted*, and thus not pulled down and entirely reconstructed, although it would seem rational for the builders to make sure the ancient building was restored and updated. Stone analysis will be required to determine the extent of the 1866 rebuilding of the house and the age of its foundations. In spite of suffering the indignity of having their old house converted into a toilet block, surely an effective way of exorcism, there is some degree of doubt whether the spectral residents of the most haunted house of Edinburgh have found peace. One of the staff at the Meeting House once saw the ghost of a man emerging through a quilt, walking on a level different



REPRODUCED BY PERMISSION OF THE TRUSTEES OF THE QUAKER MEETING HOUSE, VICTORIA TERRACE, EDINBURGH

ABOVE: Photographs of the front, side and rear elevations of Major Weir's house as it stands today.

from that of the present-day floors. He has also felt a 'chill' whenever entering another part of the building.

In the late 1580s, Baillie John MacMorran purchased some buildings and land in Riddle's Court, off the Lawnmarket near the Bowhead, and gave orders to construct a 'great tenement' there. In 1598, when this grand house was finished, King James VI and Anne of Denmark were invited to a banquet there. Although subjected to various indignities in Victorian times, Baillie MacMorran's house in Riddle's Court still survives to this day. It is being investigated by the Scottish Historical Buildings Trust, who have their headquarters on the premises, to inform their project to repair and convert the building into the Patrick Geddes Centre for learning. Some historians believe that remnants of the King's Wall, the earliest city wall of Edinburgh, run through the site.

Thus, before attending the much-touted local ghost tours, or paying homage to the statue of that 'silly wee dug' at Greyfriars, fortean tourists to Edinburgh should visit Baillie MacMorran's house in Riddle's Court. The house is open to the public on Thursday afternoons during the summer, and well worth visiting in its own right, since it is a rare survivor of old Edinburgh, and of great architectural value.¹⁶ As an unexpected bonus, the north wall of Major Weir's house can clearly be seen through the railings on the right-hand side in Riddle's Court, in its sinister-looking little courtyard. Pondering the remains of the Edinburgh warlock's abode, perhaps you will hear the tapping of an enchanted staff, or the hum of a necromantic spinning wheel? A sneering rationalist, with no time for ghosts and spooks, would be more likely to hear the faint echo of a flushing toilet, however. **FT**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks to local historian and author Mr George Robinson for valuable additional research, and to Ms Audrey Dakin, of the Scottish Historic Buildings Trust for architectural advice. We may well have more to say about Major Weir's house in a future scholarly article.

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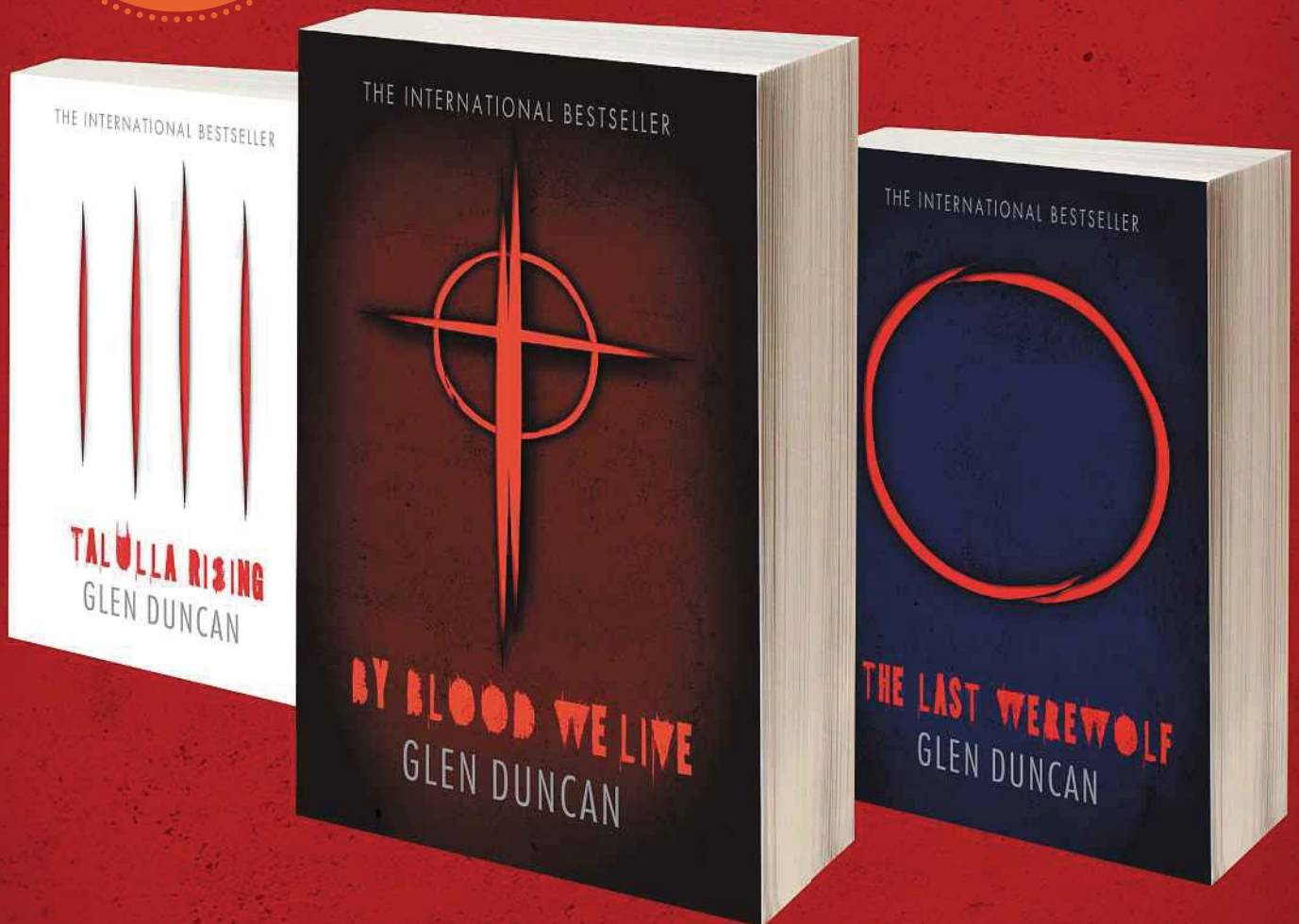
THE LAST WEREWOLF

TRILOGY

BY

GLEN DUNCAN

'Duncan
is the cleverest
literary horror
merchant since
Bram Stoker'
The Times



'YOU'RE THE LAST. I'M SORRY.
THE END IS COMING.'

DRONING ON

JIMMY BILLINGHAM examines the mind-altering properties of the sustained musical drone, from the ancient world to contemporary minimalism and club culture

It's been a part of religious ceremonies throughout history, induced trance states, inspired avant-garde musicians, and been accused of corrupting high-hungry teenagers. Seen in this light, the sustained drone takes on a distinctly fortaean flavour. While links have been made between repetitive beats and the stimulation of altered states of consciousness, from shamanic ceremonies to contemporary club cultures, the significance of drone music as a mind-altering stimulant has not been explored to the same extent. Looking at the drone in these terms, what emerges is a web of connections between ceremonial practice, aesthetic innovation, sound therapy and liminal experiences, with the consciousness-alerting power of the sounding drone as the central node.

HIGH ON ONE NOTE

The drone in music is characterised by the long sustain of a note or group of notes, as distinct from the repetition of a pattern sequence of notes or percussive sounds, which is taken to extremes in the early work of minimalist composers Steve Reich and Philip Glass, and in the trance-inducing drumming of shamanic rituals and their modern incarnation in electronic dance music. Musically, the drone traditionally provides an underlying constant tone on top of which a melody is performed, with instruments or parts of instruments designed specifically for this purpose. Though this definition of a drone is by nature open-ended and inclusive (when does a tone become a drone? How long must it be sustained for?), some styles of music isolate and emphasise the drone as a central and recurrent feature. But while technological advances have facilitated this capacity for creating drones, through synthesisers and looping technology for example, drone music is by no means a purely contemporary phenomenon.



DRONES WERE EMPLOYED IN THE MUSIC OF THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST

Drones were employed frequently in the music of the ancient Near East, with evidence of drone instruments in use as far back as 2800 BC, with bagpipes and double flutes (like the Greek *aulos* pictured above) first emerging in ancient Egypt and then spreading throughout the Roman Empire via the technological developments of the ancient Greeks.¹ In classical Indian music, the drone is normally provided by instruments such as the *tambura* and *harmonium*, which provide a sustained harmonic base for the melodic *raga* accompaniment. It is here

that the drone is most explicitly linked with ceremonial practice, the sustained basic note stimulating the sustained focused attention that is central to the ancient yogic principles underpinning South Asian religions.

Influenced by classical Indian music, the contemporary drone pioneer La Monte Young explored this idea of sustained music within the context of the avant-garde arts scene of 1960s New York and in his earlier work as a UCLA student. Influenced by the Fluxus movement and the related musical minimalism of John Cage and Karlheinz Stockhausen, Young took the sustained drone to new lengths, with his Theatre of Eternal Music creating extended, open-ended pieces of music consisting of repeated drones on various instruments, often lasting hours, days or even years. One of several notable members of Young's troupe was Terry Riley, who was also experimenting with epic improvised performances, playing night-long shows of sustained layered tones, as well as pioneering tape delay techniques. Riley combined the open-ended and drone-focused nature of Young's compositions with more rhythmic modal patterns (as found in the work of Reich and Glass), as well as explicitly relating these principles to both their historical prominence in ceremonial music and the emergent psychedelic movement; Riley claimed that "you can get high by staying on one note, there's different ways but that's definitely a way to ecstasy," and spoke of a "need to experience music in a deeper, more continuous way".²

DREAMS AND NIGHTMARES

This meditative, trance-inducing potential of listening to sustained tones and cycles was articulated comprehensively by musician Pauline Oliveros, with her concept of 'deep listening', advocating greater sonic awareness of both music and environmental sound as a meditational aid, reinforced through a series of techniques she referred to as 'sonic meditations'. Oliveros's work can be seen as part of what was an increasingly



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functionalist approach to drone music and concern with its implications for spiritual and emotional well-being, reaching its apotheosis in the genre of 'New Age' music. The New Age movement, with its roots in Sixties counter-cultural spirituality and earlier esoteric traditions, repackaged archaic practices and principles to offer the antidote to the woes of the modern, urbanised and technologised individual, a contrast that Oliveros encapsulates: "The mantra of the electronic age is hum rather than Om".³

This functionalistic approach of New Age music brings to the fore the transformational potential of the drone, wedding scientific claims with eclectic mysticism to promote the consciousness-altering power of drone music. No longer just a part of a wider ceremonial practice of religious and spiritual contemplation, it now becomes a distinct, stand-alone tool for achieving related states of inner peace and transcendence. Musicians such as Steven Halpern – a key advocate of healing through music and one of the most commercially successful New Age artists – used ideas from emergent brainwave research to support their claims and refine their compositions. The key idea is that the mind and body resonate sympathetically in response to vibrational frequencies in an environment, and that sustained harmonic frequencies can bring about mental and physical harmony. EEG measurements of the rhythms of electrical brain activity during certain mental states gave rise to the idea that sustained audio frequencies of a similar cycle could initiate these same states through a process known as entrainment. For example, the alpha frequency band of neural oscillations (8–12Hz) is associated with a state of relaxed wakefulness, such as experienced during meditation. This



PAUL ZIMMERMAN / GETTY IMAGES



VINCIANE VERGUETHEN

TOP: A Bengali musician playing the tambura. ABOVE: Composers Terry Riley (left) and Pauline Oliveros (right) have experimented extensively with drone techniques.

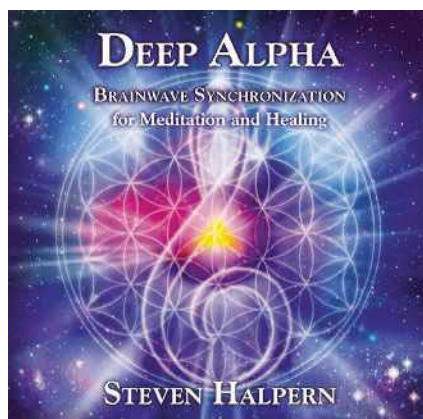


ABOVE: The soundtrack to David Lynch's film *Eraserhead* used drones to create a sense of unease.
BELOW: More often, drones have featured as an important musical component of New Age 'healing' CDs.

frequency of sound is inaudible in itself, and so is 'encoded' as a differential between two higher frequency tones contained in the music (100 and 108Hz, for example), together producing a subtle beating effect known as 'binaural beats' (eight beats per second in this case). The claim is that brainwaves lock into this beating cycle, stimulating the corresponding state of consciousness. These sustained drones are often embedded in otherwise beatless music, which acts as a kind of calming carrier – the relaxed, contemplative tone facilitating the change in consciousness.

The marketing of this music as a healing aid is more in line with prescription drugs than psychedelic ones, with trademarked products administered by expert practitioners, sold on the basis that they produce subtle improvements in well being without interrupting everyday functioning. Drone music here becomes a soothing background remedy (which carries into ambient music, though lacking the explicit spirituality). However, this very quality – unobtrusive, subtle and steady – has also led to contrasting reactions to drone music when heard in different contexts and surrounded by an alternate discourse.

For example, the drone has an altogether more malevolent feel, yet just as subtle effects, in the films of David Lynch, where a droning soundtrack is often used to evoke disturbing atmospheres and convey the troubled mental states of protagonists, most prominent in his first feature, *Eraserhead* (1977). As if underscoring the dreadful situation of central character Henry, the sustained humming and hissing rumble



seems inescapable and threatening, tied to neither scene nor place. It feels like a manifestation of a liminal, existential, despair, lurking on the threshold of perception but omnipresent. The *Eraserhead* soundtrack is dense, monotonous and ominous, filled with industrial machine noise and whirring bass frequencies, and the result for a viewer is in many ways the antithesis of the New Age state of mind. Lacking harmonic balance and melodic progression, this kind of dissonant drone is more likely to induce extreme anxiety than a blissed-out state of inner peace; Lynch's interest in transcendental meditation (see FT216:46-48) is an interesting counterpoint here. But it is possible to see both types of drone in terms of altered states of consciousness, with the drone form as the agent of this state and the tonal/timbral content as the colouring of this experience – as a dream-like state or a nightmarish one.

DRONES AS DRUGS

The effect of the tonal character of the drone in combination with its surrounding discourse and context can also be seen in the case of 'I-Dosing'. I-Doser is a software application that plays back commercial audio content in order to "alter consciousness in ways that create a simulated mood or experience, such as to mimic recreational drugs [sic]".⁴ Although the I-Doser utilises the phenomenon of binaural beats, and is therefore essentially just an update of New Age audio entrainment techniques, the discourse around it is markedly different. It is in some ways a return to the abandon of pre-New Age psychedelia and the hedonism of losing (as opposed to finding) yourself through music, but without the spiritual or socio-political context. Though this emphasis on getting high via electronic music is not exclusive to the digital age, I-Doser certainly ramps up this functionality, and with a newfound plurality. With a choose-your-own-interpretive-framework selling point, featuring product names such as 'recreational doses', 'prescription doses', 'sexual doses', 'sport doses' and 'chakra collection',⁵ I-Dosing is the ultimate postmodern audio therapy, more closely aligned with smart drugs than with Terry Riley.

The intangible, immaterial nature of the audio stimulant in I-Dosing, coupled with the outlandish claims (and YouTube videos) of the I-Dosing community (generally teenagers au fait with digitally delivered content and eager for altered states), not to mention those made by the company itself, led to quite a panic about the practice in the media a few years ago, more in common with the hysteria around actual teenage drug-taking than new music fads or scenes.⁶

Whether dressed up with rainforest ambience, orgasmic groans or electronic sound effects, at the core of I-Dosing and all forms of audio brainwave entrainment is the drone, and while the specific psychological effects – whether psychedelic or remedial – are said to be due to the pulsing phenomena of particular waveform interactions, and therefore related to more explicitly rhythmic forms of trance induction such as shamanic drumming or stereoscopic flicker devices, like Bryon Gysin's 'dreamachine' (see FT261:38-42), it seems there are defining qualities of drone music in itself that can make it a key stimulator of altered states of consciousness.

ABANDON AND TRANSCENDENCE

Characterised by slow attacks, long sustains and drawn-out releases, drone music is expansive. It seems to stretch out moments, with a lack of clear beginnings and endings of notes and often epic durations, leading to a sense of indivisible time; the same, but not repeated. There are parallels here with the sense of unity and oneness that

underlies the mystical religions and that typify the religious experience, and so we can see why formal characteristics of the drone can help to bring about this state of mind (or to approach it, at least) and why it figures prominently in spiritual music, from Gregorian chant and choral music (with the physical environment of cavernous abbeys and cathedrals emphasising the drone characteristics) to Hindustani *dhrupad* singing and 'Om' chants (and here the entrainment can be physical too, through heart rate when singing in unison).⁷ Drone music can therefore be placed alongside meditation, entheogens, prayer, fasting and other transcendence triggers. However, it is distinct from other external stimulants, in that drone music seems in itself to have the qualities of the state that it can aid in prompting, opening up a world of aural oneness and infinitude for the listener to enter into, and – in a sense – preceding this state. We can therefore regard listening to drone music as a potential threshold phenomenon, opening out from our ordinary sense of hearing and tonality to a zone of sonorous transcendence, and leading through this to a liminal experience. Indeed, this can account for the unpleasant sensations that drone music can stimulate as well as the blissful ones – it threatens boundaries of divisible time and space and of the ego-self, such that it may be experienced as dissociative.

Drone music also pushes at aesthetic boundaries, often disregarding the conventions of musical phrasing and pattern-based music, blending layers and individual instruments into one tonal entity. Though the defining characteristics of drone music have been present in music for millennia, the emergent radical arts scene of the 20th century, facilitated by developments in electronic music technology – such as tape equipment and synthesisers – brought these elements to the fore, to the extent that drone can now be considered a musical genre in



its own right. And though radical gestures in the arts are often softened with time and repetition, drone music is still a significant marginal force in contemporary music. It's a transgressive and multifarious form, in many cases forming offshoots of previously established genres by applying drone techniques to particular instruments and sounds. Take, for example, the drone metal of artists like Sunn O))), the droning indie fuzz of 'shoegaze' bands, the ambient wash of post-club 'chillout' music, the droning experimental electronics of the US noise underground, and the resurgent (New) New Age scene that recently emerged from this, reworking the familiar tropes of long-form shimmering synths and spirituality-through-sonics. The unifying thread here is a simultaneous commitment to both abandon and transcendence.

This pronounced and profound escapism through drone music and its ability to stimulate varying degrees of altered states of consciousness seems to offer a lasting and significant appeal. Utilised in sacred ceremonies, sonic meditations and therapeutic practices, as well as being used as a nightmare-inducing soundtrack and a narcotic-like stimulant, drone music provides access to that zone of threshold experiences that humankind has been seeking since time immemorial. **FT**

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY




JIMMY BILLINGHAM is a London-based musician with a doctorate in film theory. He currently works in publishing and is a long-standing fortean. This is his first piece for *Fortean Times*.

I-Doser


Recreational Simulations I.
Marijuana / Peyote / Opium / Cocaine




Marijuana



PEYOTE



Opium



Cocaine

A SAFE and EFFECTIVE*
way to binaurally achieve a simulated
mood or experience.

ABOVE: I-Dosing uses drones as part of its brainwave entrainment, supposedly mimicking the effects of drugs.

CHIMING IN

STEVE MARSHALL travelled to Woodstock to talk brainwaves and harmonics with award-winning percussionist and windchime maker Garry Kvistad. Photos by the author.

“Close your eyes and lean back, now
Listen to wind chimes.
In the late afternoon,
You’re hung up on wind chimes.”
Brian Wilson, 1967

Many New Age practitioners make wild claims about the power of sound, which is always assumed to be beneficial. In my experience, this is not necessarily the case. I recall a village hall open-mic night where a woman turned up with a large crystal singing bowl. After a lengthy speech about its healing properties, she began to wipe a stick around the bowl’s rim, producing an horrific shriek that rapidly grew in intensity from unpleasant to agonising. In less than a minute most of the audience were running out of the room, hands clamped over their ears. After the interval, she performed again, this time thrashing a huge ‘healing’ gong that sounded like a Jumbo Jet on take-off. Again, the room cleared in seconds.

Less contentious is the belief that musical harmonics can produce a sense of calm and wellbeing, or even ‘altered states’, by somehow affecting brainwave activity. What are harmonics? Any periodic sound such as a vibrating string is made up of many different frequencies, or partials. The untrained human ear cannot separate the partials – they are perceived as one sound, of a pitch that generally corresponds to the fundamental (lowest) frequency. Partial that are integer multiples of the fundamental frequency f are its harmonics. The harmonic series – f , $2 \times f$, $3 \times f$, $4 \times f$, etc – continues upward to infinity.

Overtone singing utilises the harmonic series. By singing a steady note and altering the shape of the vocal cavity a singer can produce powerful resonances that

accentuate individual harmonics of the voice. The effect is of singing two notes at once – a low drone and above it a whistling tone of harmonics that may be used to play a tune. Great claims are made of the beneficial effects of listening to overtone singing; certainly for the singer it can sometimes produce euphoria, meditative states or trance.

From the harmonics of one note a musical scale may be derived, and ancient peoples did exactly that. A scale tuned by ‘just intonation’ in this way sounds ‘pure’ or ‘natural’ because the harmonics of its individual notes are in tune with each other; the only disadvantage is that it may only be used to play in one key, that of its ‘root’ note. Most modern music, however, uses the ‘equal temperament’ tuning system, in which the octave is divided into 12 equal

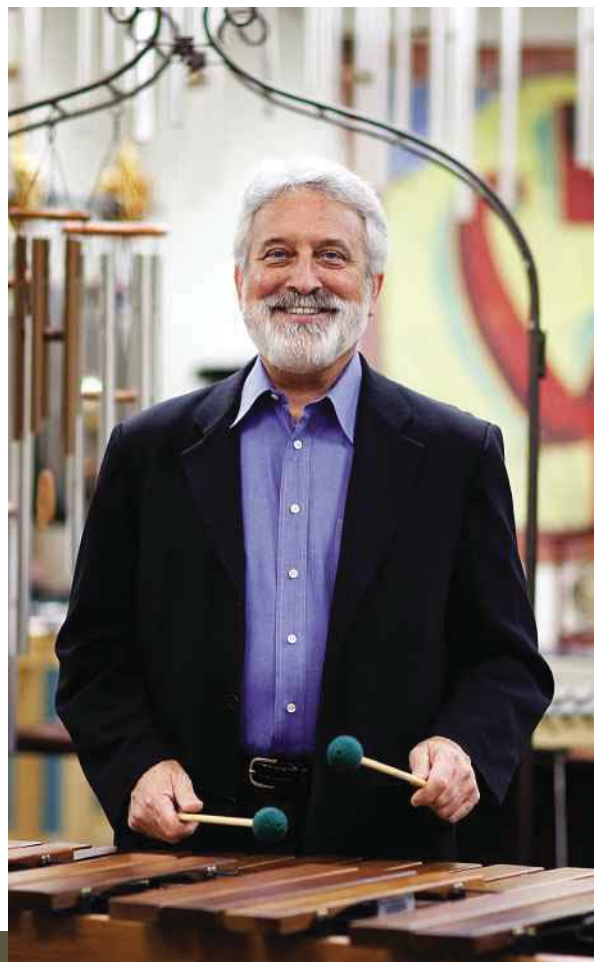
semitone steps. Devised in the 16th century to allow modulation between many different keys, equal temperament is a ‘compromise’, in that the harmonics of the various notes are slightly out of tune with each other. We choose to ignore this because of the system’s versatility, but most people instinctively prefer just intonation, even though the differences are slight.

One man who has explored this issue in detail is Garry Kvistad, founder of Woodstock Percussion Inc, a company that manufactures an extraordinary range of windchimes. Like Glastonbury, Woodstock, New York, is forever associated with a famous music festival: the two places have much in common. With its smartly-painted wooden houses and picturesque surroundings Woodstock at first resembles any other New England small town – except its main street is lined with rainbow-coloured shops selling crystals, candles and cake. As in Glastonbury, there is a sizeable population of grizzled, elderly hippies who arrived with the festival and never made it home. In this surreally familiar setting, I arranged to meet Garry at his studio.

As well as being the CEO of a highly successful manufacturing company, Garry Kvistad is a renowned professional percussionist who has worked with Steve Reich for many years. His playing on the 1998 recording of Reich’s *Music for 18 Musicians* earned him a Grammy Award.

Garry’s ‘studio’ turned out to be a vast warehouse, packed to the gunwales with all manner of percussion instruments and other wonders. The ceiling was festooned with windchimes; half hidden at one end was the *Wurlitzer Military Band*, an antique mechanical orchestra. Deep joy!

After running around the place like a dog in a butcher’s shop, I eventually got around to asking Garry about chimes and tunings. I described how the house I was staying in, not far from Woodstock, was surrounded by Kvistad-designed windchimes – many





ABOVE: Garry Kvistad's Woodstock studio – a maze of windchimes and percussion instruments. ABOVE: Garry plays along with the score of Reich's *Clipping Music*.

sets of them, in a variety of sizes. Instead of a clangorous racket, as might be expected, they produced a shimmering curtain of pure, harmonious sound. The effect was mesmerising. So how was this done?

“Our windchimes are very precisely tuned, but what makes the difference is the fact that we use just intonation rather than equal temperament,” explained Garry. “That’s why, as you’ve heard, there are no clashing harmonics, even between different sets of chimes, as long as they are designed to work together. We do make chimes in different keys and different scales, but they’re labelled so people know which ones will combine.”

How did this all begin? And why start a company in Woodstock, of all places?

“I first studied music, art and the physics of musical instrument building as a Masters degree in Illinois. Then, in the 1970s, I was in a percussion group called Black Earth. We toured North America and the UK – I was playing a lot of John Cage and

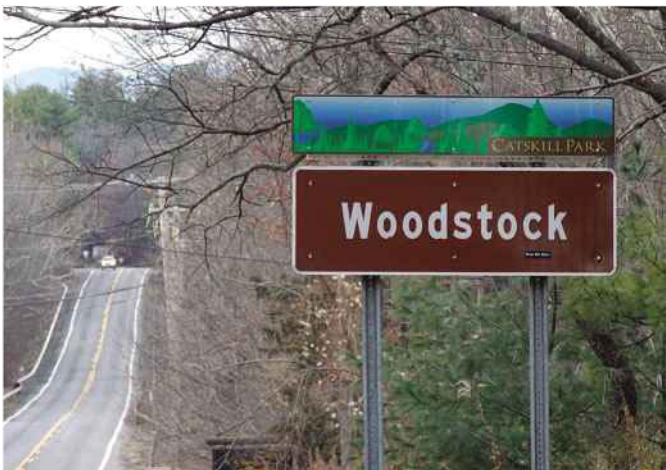
“I NAMED IT THE ‘ADAPTED LAWN CHAIR’ AND PLAYED GIGS WITH IT FOR YEARS”

Stockhausen back then,” he smiled. “I’m originally from Chicago and my wife and I eventually decided to leave the city and ‘get back to nature’. It was either the west coast or here, and Diane didn’t like the thought of earthquakes... So in 1979 we came to Woodstock. I became fascinated by the ‘Scale of Olympos’ – an ancient Greek scale from

the seventh century BC. I wanted to hear what the scale sounded like in its original form, but that’s impossible on the equal-tempered piano. In those days, you could just go down to the city dump and take stuff that had been left. I found a bunch of lawn chairs there, made of aluminium tubing. So I cut the tubing into the correct lengths, mounted them like the bars of a marimba and finally got to hear the Scale of Olympos! I still have the instrument here – I named it the ‘Adapted Lawn Chair’ and played gigs with it for quite a number of years.”

More trips to the dump followed and Garry continued to experiment with tunings. He began suspending his recycled aluminium tubes on strings and selling them as windchimes at craft fairs. The Woodstock Chimes company grew on the strength of its first product, the Chime of Olympos, which remains a top seller.

“Harry Partch was a big influence,” said Garry. “He was totally outside of the box. After rejecting equal temperament in favour



ABOVE: Welcome to Woodstock – just like any other small New England town, apart from the rainbow-coloured shops selling crystals, candles and cake.



ABOVE LEFT: Garry peers out from a jungle of percussion. ABOVE RIGHT: Harry Partch playing the gourd tree, just one of the many instruments he designed and built.

of just intonation he went on to build his own instruments, tuned to scales he invented himself. What an amazing guy! He lived like a hobo for years, jumping trains and hanging out with all these underworld characters. I got to meet him just once, not long before he died in 1974. That was one of the most

interesting afternoons of my life.”

How about Steve Reich? I inquired. His music sometimes produces the effect of shifting harmonics – is he into this stuff too?

Garry shook his head. “No, not at all. I’ve worked with Steve for 32 years and he has no interest in harmonic tunings. That’s

because he’s always wanted his music to be accessible to everyone. So it must be playable on conventional instruments, tuned to equal temperament. Harry Partch’s music can only be played on his own invented instruments, but Harry never cared about that! Incidentally,” he added, “I’m presenting a paper next month to the Acoustical Society of America, entitled ‘Psychoacoustical Effects of the Music of Steve Reich’.”

Do the people who buy Garry’s windchimes appreciate why they have such harmonic purity, I wondered?

“Actually,” he chuckled, “hardly anyone does! People just know they sound good. It’s all explained in our literature, but most people don’t get it. In fact, when we go to trade shows my marketing manager describes our chimes as being ‘like a well-tuned piano’. I have to bite my tongue when she says that, because a piano *isn’t* well tuned – it uses even temperament! But she’s right, of course – it’s just a way of helping people to understand that they’re different.”

We explored some of the studio’s wonders. Garry fired up the Wurlitzer Military Band, which unfortunately was suffering from a change in humidity. Mechanically controlled by a punched paper roll, its array of incredibly loud brass horns, drums and cymbals should have played a jolly Sousa march. However, since several of its valves were stuck open it produced a cacophony more like a Manhattan traffic jam. It was entertaining, nonetheless. The 120-year-old Unaphon was louder still, and performed perfectly. Once popular at shows and political rallies, its vibrating metal plates can be played from a tiny keyboard. Then, after a musicianly exchange of drummer jokes, Garry suddenly leapt to his feet. “You know what? If you like harmonics, there’s something here you gotta see!”

I followed him through the maze of musical



ABOVE: Garry demonstrates his harmonic tubes – “Not something you hear every day!”



ABOVE: The Wurlitzer Military Band; not heard at its best on this occasion. BELOW: The Unaphon, with its vibrating metal plates played from a tiny keyboard.

instruments to a large rectangular stand hung with aluminium tubes of different sizes. Most were suspended vertically; at the bottom were two huge horizontal tubes. On a table to the side was an assortment of soft percussion mallets in various sizes.

"You're gonna love this!" Garry exclaimed with glee. "Although you'll probably want to be sitting down while I play it..." I was directed to a stool a short distance away. "This," he explained, "is something I built a couple of years ago. The big tube on the bottom is tuned to a low G. It's 99 inches long – about two and a half metres. That's the fundamental, or first harmonic. The smaller tube above it is an octave higher – that's the second harmonic. So you get the idea! There's a tube for each of the first 16 harmonics of low G. It's pretty powerful."

With a demonic grin, Garry picked up the largest mallet. "I'll get all 16 harmonics going, then improvise a little with the higher ones. The two bottom tubes ring for a very long time, so just try to relax and enjoy. It's not something you hear every day!"

Actually, it was something that most people never hear in a lifetime. When struck, the two biggest tubes emitted a solid wall of sound that pressed powerfully against my whole body, though it was most concentrated in



my stomach. It was rather like the pressure wave one feels from a nearby explosion, except there was no transient: the pressure rose rapidly to a maximum and just stayed there. Garry then picked up a smaller mallet and added more ascending harmonics. This

produced a bizarre kind of synaesthesia; as the harmonic spectrum altered, my impression was of changing colours that I felt, rather than saw. There were physical sensations too, mostly in my arms and chest, which moved around as the harmonics changed. The vibration of the smallest tubes evoked tiny flickering lights, again felt more than seen, moving above and around my head. It was one of the strangest things I have ever experienced.

Garry eventually stopped playing the tubes and stood silently as the sound began to slowly fade. After what seemed like an age, he turned with a wry smile. "My chakras," he declared, "are in order now!" **FT**

Woodstock Chimes are represented in Europe by White Pebble International: www.whitepebbleinternational.com

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



STEVE MARSHALL worked as a musician and composer for 30 years. These days, he writes on archaeology and researches and photographs the Wiltshire landscape. His book on Avebury is out this year.



SEX GHOSTS OF SICILY

DR PAUL KOUDOUNARIS meets 'Il Pene Grande', 'Il Masturbatore' and the other post-mortem perverts inhabiting the catacombs beneath a Palermo monastery

ALL PHOTOGRAPHS BY PAUL KOUDOUNARIS

Midway down a corridor beneath the monastery of Santa Maria delle Pace in Palermo, Sicily, stands a grizzled, leather-faced mummy with a moulting head of what was once thick black hair. The desiccated cadaver itself is not unusual, being one of hundreds under the cloister in a maze of passageways popularly called the Palermo Catacombs. What is notable, though, is the penchant for sordid behaviour displayed by the mummy – or, rather, the ghost which is believed to emanate from it. Legend claims that this lusty spirit has a habit of pilfering women's

underpants, as well as having once appeared out of a glowing fog to proposition a newlywed couple to engage in a *ménage à trois*.

Such improprieties hardly set the mop-topped mummy apart from those displayed in the niches around it, however. The corpse-filled labyrinth is rightly known for being one of the world's finest macabre sites, but it is also home to an impressive roster of sexually active ghosts. Part of an oral history that has been passed down since the inauguration of the catacombs in 1599, the legends of the city's perverted poltergeists run a wide gamut of lurkers, predators, and lotharios, but the

accounts of the sexualised dead in Palermo are not as unusual as they might initially seem. They represent only one chapter in the history of spectral apparitions which have lecherous intentions towards mundane humans, a tradition which dates all the way back to the ancient world.

In classical Greece, such tales were well known, although at the time the spirits involved were considered manifestations of gods. Perhaps history's most famous story of a sexual liaison with a spectre was that of the maiden Danæ, who had been locked in a tower by her father. This could not keep out



ABOVE: *Il Pene Grande* – ‘The Big Dick’ – whose famed member made him a sort of patron saint of penises to be entreated by those in search of extra girth.

a glowing entity, however, and it cascaded through the roof to perform coitus upon her. Described as a shower of gold, it was decided that her lover must have been Zeus, who was considered the culprit in several other inexplicable trysts. These included changing shape to assume the form of women’s husbands in order to seduce them, and metamorphosing into the decidedly un-divine guise of a large, glowing ant in order to make love to a princess named Eurymedousa.

The onset of the Christian age put an end to pagan gods, but not, as it turned out, otherworldly seductions. Those who fell prey to them included such Church luminaries as St Teresa of Avila. She described how some kind of spectre – with his face “afame” and his body “all on fire” – appeared before her and plunged a “flaming rod into her body. She described a “pain... so severe that it made me utter several moans... the sweetness caused by this intense pain is so extreme that one cannot possibly wish it to cease.” Teresa’s orgasmic experience was attributed to “an angel”, but it could have just as easily been considered a demon, since incubi and succubi were typically blamed when those less beatific were molested. In fact, the phenomenon was so common that a term was eventually coined for it by the 17th century Franciscan monk Ludovico Maria Sinistrari: *demoniality*, meaning sexual intercourse with what were presumably demons.

THE ENTITY WOULD VISIT HER IN BED AND TAKE LIBERTIES

Sinistrari set out to compile a treatise on the subject, but the apparitions he described seem more ghostly than demonic – bodiless, but capable of manifesting themselves physically, they had the ability to pass through walls and other material objects. Typical accounts included that of a woman in Pavia, Italy, who described an entity which would visit her in bed and attempt to take certain liberties. It began to hound her – in one instance it ripped the clothes from her body and left her standing naked in front of a church. Finally, suffering feelings of rejection, the spectre became angry. It began to physically assault the woman and cause things in her home to move and break, and as a *pièce de résistance*, finally showed up one night in her room with a huge quantity of flagstones, which it used to create a wall around her bed and trap her.¹

Similar libidinous spirits were found in all cultures, however, and Sinistrari was forced to admit that they might not be demons after all, since their peccadilloes had been regionally blamed on any number of creatures, including sylphs, nymphs, fairies, or sith. These types of encounters continued into the latter half of the 20th century, when paranormal researcher Brad Steiger published a pair of books containing large numbers of modern stories, which were by this time mostly being blamed on ghosts.²

Accounts included a well-documented seduction of a widow from South Africa by an anomaly appearing as a man with long hair and curved fingernails that would appear in her bedroom and insist on having sex with her; eventually the city council of Pretoria was forced to intervene and find her new housing. Supernatural trysts have survived to the present day, even finding a niche in contemporary celebrity culture: the actress Lucy Liu, singer Ke\$ha, and the late model Anna Nicole Smith are all among those who have admitted to them.³

Whatever is behind the phenomenon of the sexual spectre, it is universal, and the stories surrounding the mummies in Palermo are numerous enough apparently to mark that city as ground zero. Among the accounts of bizarre erotic encounters with spirits from the catacombs is the story of an entity known as *Il Pene Grande*, or “The Big Dick”. It involves



ABOVE LEFT: The serial groper who terrorised 19th century Palermo. ABOVE RIGHT: The leather-faced mummy who was once a notorious panty thief.

the ghost of a man who was apparently famed for his large member during life – so much so that in death he became something akin to a patron saint of penises; men who were well-endowed looked up to him as a role model, and those embarrassed by their lack of size would beseech him to grant them extra girth.

Men were not the only ones who might attempt to tap the power of *Il Pene Grande*, however. In an incident dated to the late 18th or early 19th century, a recently married woman decided to enlist his aid for her husband, whose penis was unfortunately not large enough to please her. Hoping to tap into some of the mummy's renowned power, she went to the monastery and rubbed a cloth over its genitals, and then returned home and rubbed the same cloth over her husband's. The method worked – all too well. When they next made love, her husband's penis grew considerably larger. But at the point of orgasm the woman looked up into his face, only to see glaring back at her the apparition of the mummy itself.

In performing what amounted to an act of sympathetic magic, the woman had allowed the entity access to her husband's body, so that it could possess him whenever his penis grew erect. Better sex had been gained at the expense of a considerably bigger problem,

IN DEATH HE BECAME A SORT OF PATRON SAINT OF PENISES

which persisted until the ghost was expelled by an ingenious method: a tight fitting metal sheath was created, conforming in size to the husband's flaccid penis. The woman stroked her husband until he started to become stimulated, and then quickly strapped on the penis sheath. The spirit manifested as the man's erection grew, only to find its famed member caught in a painful trap. As the entity howled in agony, it was doused in holy water and dispelled.

The Palermo mummies also include a serial groper. At some point in the 19th century, the city's women were plagued by an assailant wearing a heavy grey cloak. Lurking in back alleys and secluded areas, he would lie in wait until unescorted women came along.

Appearing suddenly, he would grab their buttocks and breasts from behind, whisper crude suggestions in their ears, and then seemingly disappear as quickly as he had come. His identity remained a mystery until he grabbed the wrong woman. His victim turned in horror, only to find herself in for an even bigger shock: her molester was none other than her own grandfather, who had been dead for 30 years.

Among other post-mortem perverts are a widow who returned from the dead to sexually abuse her former husband; a ghostly gynæcologist intent on taking liberties with his former patients; and the spirit of a bonneted skeleton which is said to appear in the beds and baths of German tourists in particular. The catacombs include a cubicle for girls who died with their virginity intact, and among them is the mummy of a would-be bride who was jilted. Left at the altar, she apparently died soon after of a broken heart. Her speciality, according to accounts dated to the 19th century, is testing husbands-to-be by appearing as a beautiful woman the night before their weddings and attempting to seduce them. If she succeeds, she will afterwards assume her true corpse-like guise and physically assault the scoundrels for their lack of fidelity.



ABOVE LEFT: The bonneted skeleton which is said to stalk German tourists. ABOVE RIGHT: *Il Masturbatore* – a stern warning to any local boys tempted to self-pleasure.

There is also a prude in the bunch, however. *Il Masturbatore*, or “The Masturbator”, is a slack-jawed mummy standing near the entrance to the catacombs. During his lifetime, he was claimed to have been an exceedingly pious monk, but the Devil got to him in his old age and caused him to masturbate. The shock of orgasm was said to have caused him to drop dead of a heart attack, thus accounting for his horrified facial expression. While one might equally consider the expression to be one of joy or excitement, *Il Masturbatore* became a kind of bogeyman against the evils of masturbation. Giacomo, an elderly man still living in Palermo, recalls being told as a boy as late as the 1940s that he should not masturbate lest the ghost of *Il Masturbatore* take him to task.

No doubt many boys did not heed the warning, but the fate of one who was flippant in his disregard is recalled by Giacomo. At some point in the early 19th century, a teenager decided to put *Il Masturbatore* to the test. While pleasuring himself, he dared the old ghost to make his presence known. It did not. The ghost again failed to materialise when the boy issued the same challenge on a second night. The boy again mocked *Il Masturbatore* on a third night – and finally received a reply. As he was about to ejaculate,

a voice behind him hissed: “Let me help you with that.” A skeletal hand suddenly reached out, grabbed him by the penis and yanked him upward. *Il Masturbatore* had arrived, and would have his due. Pulling the boy by the genitals, the ghost ferried him from the house and dumped him in front of a church, where he again spoke. Uttering the words, “You won’t be needing these,” he gripped the boy’s testicles with such incredible strength that the child passed out and was rendered sterile for life.

“People don’t talk about these stories now,” Giacomo says wistfully, “I think because there was always a sense that Sicily was a backward place, and they want to ignore this kind of history in an attempt to appear modern or enlightened. The truth is that ghosts and spirits have always been common here, this is the land of it, and there is no reason to think they wouldn’t continue pursuing sex or anything else they pursued in their lifetime.”

Did he know that there is an entire history of these kinds of stories, dating back to the ancient world?

“I had no idea,” he replies, “but even the Incarnation of Christ in Mary is a similar story – some unknown being appears through the walls in her room, and announces that she is suddenly pregnant. Maybe the birth of

Christ himself is even the act of ‘sex ghosts’, or whatever you want to call them.” **FT**

NOTES

1 A modern English translation of Sinistrari’s research is *Demoniality*, trans. Rev. Montague Summers (New York: 1989) 14-21 (sections 28-29)

2 The incident is mentioned on pp 116-117 of Steiger’s book *Haunted Lovers* (New York: 1971), reissued as *Otherworldly Lovers* (San Antonio: 2008). Steiger’s other book containing such accounts is *Sex and the Supernatural* (New York: 1968)

3 See www.thedailybeast.com/galleries/2012/12/07/keshalucyliu-other-celebrities-with-sexy-ghost-encounters-photos.html#introSlide

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PAUL KOUDOURARIS

holds a PhD in art history and writes and lectures on the cultural reception of death. His book *The Empire of Death: A Cultural*

History of Ossuaries and Charnel Houses was published by Thames and Hudson in 2011, and his forthcoming volume *Heavenly Bodies: Cult Treasures and Spectacular Saints from the Catacombs* will be released in Fall of 2013. He can be found on the web at www.empiredelamort.com.

THE FIRST FORTEANS

4. ERIC FRANK RUSSELL: PART ONE

Who were the First Forteans? British fortean lineage began in the early 1930s, when Charles Fort was still alive and his books quite rare in these isles. **BOB RICKARD** continues his rummage for our fortean roots.

Probably the single most influential SF writer to draw attention to Charles Fort and his writings was Eric Frank Russell (EFR). He was hugely productive: between 1937 and 1962 he wrote 10 novels, more than 100 short stories (many anthologised), nearly 40 essays (many on fortean topics), and three non-fiction books, including an anthology of fortean essays, *Great World Mysteries* (1957). I'll deal with his fortean writing – including his famous novel *Sinister Barrier* (1939) – the darker side of his character, and his wartime exploits in later instalments.

Despite biographer John Ingham's heroic effort in detailing so much of EFR's life,¹ the man himself remains an enigma. We can say, however, that he was born at Sandhurst, Surrey, on 6 January 1905, where his father taught at the military academy. As with many military families, they moved frequently, including an 18-month posting to Egypt. When the family finally settled down in Liverpool in 1915, EFR was about 10. Ingham speculated whether the lack of consistent childhood friends, enjoyed by most neighbourhood kids at that time, contributed to his strongly private character.

After school – EFR studied chemistry, physics, metallurgy, crystallography and quantity surveying – he did a brief stint in an infantry regiment before joining a local engineering firm as a commercial salesman. This job spanned 40 years on and off, excepting war-time service,



RUSSELL ONCE DESCRIBED HIMSELF AS HAVING “THE BOLD, HANDSOME FEATURES OF A HORSE PEERING OVER A HEDGE”

LEFT: Eric Frank Russell (right) and Leslie Johnson had both travelled from Liverpool to Leeds for the very first British SF convention, in January 1937. BELOW: Olaf Stapledon gave a lecture at a BIS meeting in October 1948.

overlapping with the beginning of his writing career. In 1930 he married Ellen Broadhurst, a nurse. Their daughter Erica told Ingham that she felt her lack of interest in SF was a disappointment to her father; but nevertheless, on his death, she donated his papers to the University of Liverpool.²

His reading graduated from early British comics to all kinds of pulp fiction – except westerns, which he loathed with a passion. American crime fiction and thrillers (especially *Black Mask* magazine) were firm favourites and from them he picked up his distinctive (but distinctly un-British) use of slang and rapid-fire repartee. He was a tall man – perpetually photographed, it seems, in a three-piece suit, with hands jammed into trouser pockets, his hips thrusting forwards – who once described himself as having “the bold, handsome features of a horse peering over a hedge”.

In 1934, when he was 29, he read Leslie Johnson's letter in that April's *Amazing* about forming a British rocket and space exploration society. EFR and Johnson got on well together – despite (or perhaps because of) having quite different personalities. Months after Johnson and Philip Cleator established the fledgling British



The British Interplanetary Society

General Address: 217 PRINCE ROAD, LONDON, S.W.11.

LECTURE SESSION 1948-9

“INTERPLANETARY MAN”

by Olaf Stapledon

The above lecture will be delivered at St. Mark's School, 217, Cheving Chase Road, London, W.C.11, on Saturday, 14th October, 1948, commencing at 7 p.m.

The British Interplanetary Society will have as a writer an outstanding and philosophical scientist, and as the author of such thought-provoking books as “Last Man” and “Last and First Men”.

In his opening lecture Dr. Stapledon will discuss the practical, philosophical and religious questions which will undoubtedly arise from interplanetary exploration, the possibility of finding intelligent life on other worlds, the existence of planets, interstellar communication, and the possibility of telepathic communication.

After the lecture there will be an opportunity for discussion. A full report of the lecture and subsequent discussion will appear in the Society's Journal.

Admission is free. Tickets may be obtained from the Secretary, together with a copy of the full lecture lecture programme.

Notes: Full details of Lecture Series (Lectures and Philosophy Club), Treasurer, General Address (General Council) and English Agency (Science Club).



Interplanetary Society (BIS; see FT309:50-51). EFR joined and assisted Johnson with the administration. He helped produce their magazine and even designed a society logo, although it was only ever used twice.

Russell was instrumental, in 1935, in recruiting philosopher-novelist Olaf Stapledon (1886-1950) to the BIS. Professor Stapledon, who lived in West Kirby, close to Liverpool, said later that he didn't regard his famous novels – at that time *Last and First Men* (1930) and *Last Men in London* (1932) – as science fiction, although they were usually seen as masterpieces of the genre. Stapledon later told fanzine editor Walter Gillings that he had never come across any SF magazines until Russell had asked him what he thought of them that summer afternoon.³

On one of the few times that Russell met Stapledon again, in the late 1940s, he presented the philosopher with a pile of Ray Palmer's *Amazing Stories*, at that time presenting Richard Shaver's tales of humankind tormented by advanced robots from inside a hollow Earth. Not long afterwards, on learning that Stapledon had just died, Russell wrote: "Have since had the feeling that maybe this killed him stone dead." Adding, "After all, Shaver was sheer murder".

EFR lost interest in the BIS when they moved their HQ to London in 1937; his new focus

was the Fortean Society (FS). He began corresponding with its chief instigator Tiffany Thayer,⁴ sending news clippings and contributing regularly to the FS magazine, edited by Thayer. They became firm friends and EFR was soon promoted to 'Honorary Fellow' of the FS and its 'British Secretary', charged with collecting UK subscriptions and handling local correspondence.

Much of EFR's promotion of the FS must have been done verbally or through correspondence, because little of it is visible in the fanzines of the day. One brief glimpse appeared in the October 1937 issue of Maurice Hanson's fanzine *Novae Terrae*: a small ad from EFR offered the very first issue of the *Fortean Magazine* for one shilling.⁵ This had been published by Thayer in New York the previous month and, presumably, Thayer had sent a bundle over to Russell in Liverpool. EFR began sending over news clippings and even contributing some commentaries.

"Thayer was so impressed with Russell's enthusiasm," Ingham writes, that "in 1941, when the U-boat threat to Atlantic convoys was nearing its peak, he somehow managed to send to Russell a crate of the newly published 1,125-page Holt 'Omnibus' edition of Fort's *Collected Works*". Russell would have been on active service around this time so I presumed, at



BOB RICKARD



LEFT: EFR, on the right with his daughter Erica and, on the left, Tiffany Thayer and his wife Kathleen.

BELOW: The first issue of Thayer's Fortean Society Magazine. ABOVE: A cartoon of EFR wielding a cornucopia of newsclippings drawn by Art Castillo. It appeared intermittently in *Doubt*, heading a selection of stories sent by Russell from Britain.

first, that his wife Ellen – whom, Ingham hints, shared, however lightly, EFR's interest in forteana – must have serviced some postal sales while he was away. However, a curious note in Michael Rosenberg's wartime fanzine *FIDO*, for August 1941, seemed to imply that it was all EFR's initiative and that orders should go to a distributor in Berkshire. It reads: "It is very doubtful whether any individual reader in this country will be able to obtain the book from the USA, owing to restrictions on the export of cash... Import licences can be got by bona fide publishers, so I'm arranging for a number of copies to be imported and distributed on behalf of the Fortean Society by King, Littlewood & King Ltd of Bray."⁶

One of the big surprises in John Ingham's biography concerns EFR's reading of Fort's third book, *Lo!* – serialised in *Astounding Stories* in 1932. Coming shortly after Fort had died, it was for EFR – as it was for many in UK fandom – his first encounter with Fort's writing and philosophy. Therefore it will shock many forteans – it certainly surprised me – to hear EFR's confession that he had read it "without a glimmer of interest".

Just as he had prevaricated over joining the BIS, EFR proved to be a slow-burner with forteana. It was only when he re-read *Lo!* in book form several years later – probably in 1934 – that

he became obsessed enough to begin a long and frustrating hunt for Fort's other titles. US published books were pretty scarce in British bookshops at the time, and Fort's books were scarcer still. In the end, EFR managed get all but *New Lands* through antiquarian dealers who imported them specially for him. He must have mentioned this to various US correspondents because, eventually, the straggler was presented to him by the American SF writer Edmond Hamilton (1904-1977) when EFR and his wife visited New York in March 1939.

The NY trip was well timed: *Sinister Barrier* had just been published and EFR revelled in the acclaim it attracted and the open adoration of his New York fans and peers. Among them, he met many of his correspondents – including Tiffany Thayer, SF editor John W Campbell, and writers Henry Kuttner and Jack Williamson – who treated the pair at restaurants and even took them to the World's Fair.

Above all, EFR was delighted to meet people who had known Fort and who could so readily and wittily discuss his work. I think it was this shared intellectual appreciation – seeing how Fort was admired by so many of EFR's own peers – that cemented his opinion of Fort's "peculiar genius". Being a bit of a loner, who never really took part in fandom – the way that, say, Arthur C Clarke did – and whose writing style was modelled more on the American writers of crime fiction, the whole NY experience was, for EFR, very different from the



LEFT: Theodore Dreiser (left) and Charles Fort enjoy a relaxing moment in Dreiser's garden.

fan milieu back in Blighty where Fort was less well-known. Henceforth, Russell was a vocal and ardent disciple, finding in Fort, as Ingham writes, “a brand of eccentric and subversive individualism that chimed with his own”.

Sometime in the 1960s, Ingham discovered, “Russell was asked by the publishers Doubleday to write a biography of Fort”. By this time, EFR had ‘retired’ from writing, but the real reason he declined may never be known. The project went to Damon Knight, another SF writer and anthologist, whom Thayer had made a life member of the Fortean Society in 1938. Eventually, Knight’s *Charles Fort: Prophet of the Damned* was published in 1970. Knight had one significant advantage over Russell, a direct link to Fort. In his introduction,

Knight wrote: “Though I cannot remember doing so, I may have met Fort, because, before he died, I knew and spent time with his friend Theodore Dreiser, along with some of the latter’s friends present.”

After Thayer’s death in 1959, the Fortean Society evaporated and with it went EFR’s active involvement, helped, quite possibly, by his becoming tired, like many other members, of Thayer’s increasingly barking rants. He became ever more reclusive and prickly and his writing dried up. EFR had been a lifelong smoker and it took its toll on him with heart problems, emphysema and bronchitis.

He died on 28 February 1978, aged 73 – just five days before his old friend Harold Chibbett. **FT**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I could not have made this record without the generous help of the SF fan historians and archivists who went out of their way to preserve the correspondence, images, fanzines and reports of the day. Chief among those are...

Rob Hansen for his two archives:

THEN: A History of UK Science Fiction Fandom (1930-1980): www.ansible.co.uk/Then/ and *FIAWOL*: www.fiawol.org.uk/FanStuff/index.htm

Dave Langford for his Ansible archive:

<http://news.ansible.co.uk/>

Greg Pickersgill for his Gostak archive:

www.gostak.demon.co.uk/

Peter Weston for permission to use images from the various photographs he has collected, and for his *Relapse*:

<http://efanzines.com/Prolapse/>

Jill Godfrey for permission to use Harold Gottliffe’s photos from several of these sites.

REFERENCES

- 1 I owe a huge debt to John L Ingham’s biography of Eric Frank Russell, the result of decades’ worth of patient detective work. All citations and quotes from Ingham are from his *Into Your Tent* (Plantech UK, 2010). It is available from coldtonnage.com
- 2 <http://archiveshub.ac.uk/features/0501efr.html> The Liverpool librarians describe the legacy as “20 boxes of archive material and the personal library of Eric Frank Russell comprising 23 boxes of magazines and fanzines and circa 324 books”.
- 3 The recruitment is not mentioned on Stapledon’s wiki page. *Tent*, p86.
- 4 Thayer was another larger-than-life character and it is easy to see why he and EFR warmed to each other. Dennis Wepman (‘Thayer, Tiffany’, *American National Biography Online*, February 2000) describes him: “Characterizing himself as an atheist, an anarchist, and a skeptic, he enjoyed his image of impudent prurience, though he revealed little to the public of his personal life”. This

could equally describe EFR, as we’ll see next issue.

5 This is the first indication in print that I have found linking EFR to the Fortean Society and shows him as its British agent. This would have been the very first edition of the *Fortean Society Magazine* (Sept 1937). The first issue with a credited contribution from EFR is the second (Oct 1937), being a summary of fortean clippings from the UK. It opens with an announcement from Thayer that EFR “is taking up with a group which calls itself The Probe, whose members... are concerned not only with the investigation of mediumship but also with all forms of psychic phenomena and unusual happenings, which may throw a light on the PURPOSE of humanity’s terrestrial existence. He will report.” This is also the first evidence in print linking EFR with Harold Chibbett’s Probe group.

6 *FIDO* – being Michael Rosenblum’s *Futurian War Digest* Vol.1 No.11 (August 1941).

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No country for old snakes

SHANE COCHRANE recalls the strange experiment of James Cleland, the man from County Down who ended Ireland's supernatural power over serpents



SHANE COCHRANE is a freelance writer living in Northern Ireland. He's currently researching the country's fortean past. This is his first piece for *Fortean Times*.

In 1831, James Cleland bought six snakes in Covent Garden market, brought them across the Irish Sea to Rathgael, Co Down, and released them into his garden. Cleland was testing the centuries-old belief that Ireland has some form of supernatural power over snakes.¹ “No reptiles are found there, and no snake can live there; for, though often carried thither out of Britain, as soon as the ship nears the shore, and the scent of the air reaches them, they die,” was how St Bede described the country in the eighth century.²

In all likelihood, Ireland's snake-free status was a result of the last Ice Age. The cold weather wiped out the snakes, and the sea stopped them coming back again. But somehow, this quirk of the environment came to be seen as a magical property that permeated Ireland's earth and air. There are tales of the Fir Bolg – an ancient and possibly mythical race of Irishmen – exporting Irish earth as a form of snake repellent;³ and up until the end of the 19th century, Irish stones were kept in homes in Northumbria to ward off snakes.⁴

St Patrick is generally credited with being the source of this power. In the popular story, Patrick drives out the snakes with his staff and his prayers while fasting on Cruachan Aigle, the mountain known today as Croagh Patrick. The story comes from the *Life of Patrick*, written by Jocelyn of Furness at the end of the 12th century, 700 years after Patrick's death. It wasn't the first account of Patrick's life, but it was the first to include this tale. There are no snakes in Mactheni's seventh century biography; and Patrick failed to mention the event in his own writing. But, for the next 800 years, Patrick and the snakes were inextricably linked.⁵

Regardless of who or what was

responsible, the range of this power has, on at least one occasion, defined Ireland's territory. In 1617, a Scotsman, Crawford of Lisnaris, launched a legal challenge for Rathlin Island. At that time, the island belonged to Randall McDonnell, an Irishman, but Crawford claimed that James IV of Scotland had given it to his family in 1500.

The dispute focused on establishing the nationality of the island. As evidence of Rathlin's Irishness, Randall pointed to the absence of snakes – a feature shared with Ireland, but not Scotland or England. Crawford argued that there were many Scottish islands without snakes; Randall replied that those islands were snake-free because of the missionary work of Irish monks. Randall retained the island.⁶

So, Cleland was testing a belief about the country that had defined it for centuries. But he wasn't the first. At the end of the 12th century, Giraldus Cambrensis recorded: “For we read in the ancient books of the saints of that country, that sometimes, for the sake of experiment, serpents have been shipped over in brazen vessels, but were found lifeless and dead as soon as the middle of the Irish Sea was crossed”.⁷

And a Wexford man had made an attempt in 1797; he managed to bring vipers across the Irish Sea, but they perished on being released on Irish soil. However, Cleland's snakes fared considerably better: they survived – but with some unexpected consequences.

Cleland had told few people about



ABOVE: St Patrick and snake.

his endeavour. So, when one of his snakes was found and killed, three miles away in Milecross, it was initially a source of mystery. The people who found the snake thought it was some kind of eel. But, when a local naturalist identified the mystery creature, it triggered strange reactions.

“Old prophecies were raked up, and all parties and sects, for once, united in believing that the snake foreshadowed the ‘beginning of the end,’ though they widely differed as to what that end was to be. The writer, who resided in that part of the country at the time, well remembers the wild rumours among the more illiterate classes, on the appearance of these snakes; and the bitter feelings of angry indignation expressed by educated persons against the – very fortunately then unknown – person, who had dared to bring them to Ireland”.⁸

And what were these wild rumours? The snake quickly became a rattlesnake, then thousands of rattlesnakes – hiding in the undergrowth. The rattlesnakes developed special powers: they could cause the birds to fall from the sky into their waiting mouths, just by looking at them. By the time the news had reached Belfast, the snake slain in Milecross – which had possibly been 3ft (90cm) long – had become a “great serpent” of 10.5ft (3.2m).⁹

Cleland's experiment ended Ireland's supernatural reign over snakes, in a very dramatic way, and sealed the fate of the Irish earth export market. **FT**

NOTES

- 1 WE Praeger, ‘Snakes Introduced into County Down’, *The Irish Naturalist* (June 1913) v22 n6, p121.
- 2 St Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation* (www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/bede-book1.asp).
- 3 Alexander H Krappe: ‘Irish Earth’, *Folklore* (September 1941) v52 n3, p230.
- 4 Krappe, op cit, p232.
- 5 John Healy, *Life and Writings of St Patrick* (M H Gill & Son Ltd, Dublin, 1905) p651.
- 6 Wallace Clark: *Rathlin: Its Island Story* (North-West Books, Limavady, 1988) p113.
- 7 Giraldus Cambrensis: *The Topography of Ireland* (In Parentheses Publications, Cambridge, Ontario, 2000).
- 8 Praeger, op cit, p122.
- 9 WW: ‘Irish Earth’ in the *Dublin Penny Journal* (14 June 1834) v2 n102, p400.

King Arthur's Loco Reserve

ROY BAINTON goes in search of the Strategic Steam Reserve – a legendary cache of mothballed locomotives ready to steam back into action even now.



ROY BAINTON is the author of *The Mammoth Book of Unexplained Phenomena* (2013) and a new book on maritime mysteries due out later this year.

In 2002, I interviewed the late author Barry Herbert, who had been enjoying some success with his books on railway ghosts.¹ During the conversation he told me a peculiar story of his meeting with a retired Sheffield engine driver, who, like him, was a dedicated railway buff.

Warning: FOAF ('friend of a friend') tale imminent!

Other than the location, Sheffield, Mr Herbert refused to give me details of his footplate friend's identity, claiming that the retired driver had signed the Official Secrets Act.

The aftermath of the 1963 Beeching Report, which decimated Britain's rail network, coincided with the dark days of the Cold War and the growing paranoia around the possibility of nuclear Armageddon. As a long-serving steam locomotive driver, the hapless Sheffield railwayman was among many who were given the sad task of seeing their faithful engines, which were to be replaced by diesel units, off onto their final trip to the breaker's yards at Barry Island in South Wales. This driver had already heard strange stories of footplate crews being sent home early from work only to return to find 'their' engine had vanished during the night. Then, one night in 1967, he'd been approached by 'a man from

the MoD' and was asked, along with a selected few other drivers, to become part of a special crew taking selected locomotives on a journey not to the scrap yard, but to a secret location, where they would be mothballed for future use. However, every driver, fireman or Fat Controller employed in this scheme was required to sign the Official Secrets Act and never reveal the whereabouts of their slumbering Thomas Tank Engines.

Urban legend – or conspiracy nuttury?

The facts are thin on the ground, but selective records were kept of all locomotives decommissioned and scrapped. Members of the train spotting fraternity are noted for their meticulous thoroughness, and those with a keen eye soon spotted the absence in the records of approximately 70 engines. It is known that at one time the Royal Engineers ran courses for the Sappers in steam loco driving.² With the closure of the Longmoor Military Railway in 1969, which ran 70 miles between Liss and Bordon in Hampshire, the MoD lost its own in-house training facility. All this could be cited as circumstantial evidence, although it doesn't prove locos were 'spirited away'. However, if they *have* been hidden, then their location remains the Holy Grail for romantically minded rail fans.

This secret fleet of locos, claimed by train aficionados to be Stanier 8 and 9F models, most of which were only 10 years old, with an expected service life of between 50 and 100 years, were to be kept in reserve in the event of a nuclear attack. The USSR had already done this,

as had Sweden and some other Eastern European countries. It became known as the SSR (Strategic Steam Reserve). Railway fans of a more quixotic bent saw these fine machines in the role of a mechanical King Arthur, ready and waiting to answer the call in the hour of Britain's need. Being organically propelled vehicles, and, at the time, the UK having huge coal stocks, they offered the prospect of some kind of transportation in an apocalyptic *Mad Max* landscape where everything electrical had been trashed due to the immense electromagnetic radiation given off by a nuclear blast.

Most serious railway observers regard the SSR as a fanciful legend. But this is the age of conspiracies, and there's no shortage of determined choo-choo theorists out there who remain determined to follow the rusty rails which they hope will lead to Arthur's mothballed leviathans. So – if there's any veracity in all this – *where are the missing locos?* Time to go underground.

It's well known that had the Soviets thrown a few megatons at us, then we, Joe Public, would end up as crispy bacon, while our noble leaders would have survived at the British government's alternative seat of power in the underground 'city' known as Burlington,³ 100ft (30m) below ground at Corsham in Wiltshire. Covering 35 acres (14ha), 1km (1,090 yards) long and 200 metres (220 yards) across, its 10 miles (16km) of tunnelling were built between 1956 and 1961 to safely house 4000 'worthies' – the Prime Minister, Cabinet Office, local and national government agencies, intelligence and security advisors and domestic support staff. After Burlington was decommissioned in 1991, it still remained secret until it was declassified in 2004. You'll find no railway lines down there, because our rulers had their own fleet of battery-powered buggies to get around on. However, some SSR hunters cite Burlington's close northern neighbour, Tunnel Quarry Central Ammunition Depot, as a potential loco store. It has underground railway platforms and a siding which many 'hunters' claimed as the final wartime destination for the Royal Train, transporting the Windsors to Burlington bunker; and that the 4,000 Whitehall staff's requisitioned trains would disembark there ready for them to take up their Burlington residence. Tunnel Quarry remained in MoD hands, to house the Corsham Computer Centre, and its rail link⁴ to the ex-GWR main line *could* have been used to house the SSR.⁵



LEFT: The Longmoor Military Railway crossing at Bordon, Hampshire.



Another favourite potential locomotive hidey-hole is Brunel's 1836 Box Tunnel between Bath and Chippenham.⁶ Rail travellers would be familiar with the Western portal to the tunnel, but there's also an elusive Eastern portal. This is a small side tunnel to the north, leading to an underground quarry that supplied the fine Bath stone used for many buildings along the line. Some claim that the locos are hidden away there behind large steel doors.

Then, in 2000, I came across an intriguing website run by one of the SSR's leading enthusiasts, Rory Lushman.⁷ Headed 'Heapey, There's Trains in Them Thar Hills', this is a solid testament to the boundless investigative determination of an enthusiastic urban (or in this case, rural) explorer. After dismissing the idea of the Box Tunnel as the SSR's hiding place, Lushman tells us: "I was put in contact with... Paul Screeton who told me about another possible site. Paul has been investigating for many years unusual stories across the country, especially those concerning rail myths. He came across a railway worker who claimed to have seen lines of locomotives at an old former Royal Ordnance Factory in Heapey, Chorley." The ensuing 10 pages offer all manner of tantalising hints – elderly locals who used to call this place "the steam train graveyard", and mysterious reports of nocturnal comings and goings. After his lengthy exploration of the site (albeit from a restrictive distance) Lushman sums up:

"The locals recount the tales of the steam trains being kept in the hillside. We know for definite that the site is still visited by lorries and the police. What is going on in this small village of Heapey? Do the locals care? Is there something more than old ammunition, or maybe even new ammunition kept in the hillsides? Could



Some claim the locos are hidden behind steel doors

old steam trains be kept there?"

Of course, this was all pre-Google Earth. So, using this, I took a look at the site and indeed there are four roads that end in tunnel entrances, and the site is still secured by serious fencing and walls, and patrolled by security guards. Could there be trains in there? Not according to secret bases expert Alan Turnbull.⁸ Turnbull admits that Heapey is still secret and still active, but has doubts about King Arthur's locos.

Other possibilities include one of the three Woodhead tunnels in Yorkshire (although the favoured Tunnel 3 now carries National Grid cables), locations in Wales, and Scotland has its own clan of SSR hunters. This, for example, is from a Secret Scotland forum discussion on the subject:

TOP: Withdrawn Stanier 8F locos ready for scrapping... or were they saved and hidden away?

ABOVE: Brunel's 1836 Box Tunnel.

BELOW: A tunnel at the old ROF Heapey.



*"SSR is a possible explanation for the long tunnel in Greenock from the top of the town (where the Kilmacolm line and the link to the Paisley line join) to Princes Pier. This remained double tracked and the rails were still there the last time I looked... Why would you leave the rails in a disused tunnel? The rails also continued through the Paisley link tunnel joining the Wemyss Bay line at Inchgreen... and I am talking recently."*⁹

Ultimately, the Strategic Steam Reserve wears the same mythical cloak as Joseph of Arimathea visiting Glastonbury or Adolf Hitler staying at a B&B in Liverpool on the late 1920s. Anti-SSR adherents (and they're legion) have some strong counter-arguments. Locomotives stored in damp tunnels, for instance, would need regular attention to stop them seizing up or rusting away. And here's another thought – perhaps we already have the SSR in the form of the many preserved steam lines to be found throughout the country.

But those mighty iron beasts, waiting there in the subterranean darkness... it's a notion to keep any fortaean in motion. **[T]**

NOTES & SOURCES

1 Sadly, WB Herbert passed away in 2008, but his entertaining books are still available: *See Railway Ghosts & Phantoms*, David & Charles, 1989; *The Phantom Goods Train*, Silverlink Publishing, 1998; and *A Stranger in The Fog*, Silverlink, 2001.

2 According to the latest REME recruitment video (www.army.mod.uk/rolefinder) becoming a 'train operator' is still part of the overall transport training course.

3 See the comprehensive website www.burlingtonbunker.co.uk.

4 There's a video of how they built the bunker that backs onto the platforms at www.britishpathe.com/video/underground-factories.

5 See *Who Killed The Strategic Steam Reserve* at <http://englishrail.wordpress.com>.

6 Some claim Brunel deliberately aligned the tunnel so that the rising Sun is visible through it on his birthday, 9 April, each year. True or not, in Angus Buchanan's book *Brunel: The Life and Times of Isambard Kingdom Brunel*, Hambledon and London (2002), on p269 Buchanan writes: "The alignment of the Box Tunnel has been the subject of serious discussion in the *New Civil Engineer* and elsewhere. I am grateful to my friend James Richard for making calculations which convinced me that the alignment on 9 April would permit the sun to be visible through the tunnel soon after dawn on a fine day."

7 See www.angelfire.com/mn2/Oublette/Heapey.html; Lushman, Rory: *Heapey - There's Trains in Them Thar Hills!*

8 Alan Turnbull 'BAe Systems Heapey Depot Conspiracy' at www.secret-bases.co.uk

9 See www.secretscotland.org.uk/forum/m-1242495333/s-0/2009.

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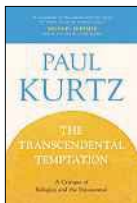
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reviews



They seek your slippery brain

The scientific method would bring ordinary people into the sunlit uplands of rational thought if it weren't for their irritating and puzzling habit of believing in things



The Transcendental Temptation

A Critique of Religion and the Paranormal

Paul Kurtz

Prometheus Books 2013

Pb, 640pp, notes, ind, \$21.95/£17.99, ISBN 9781616148270

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £16.99

The American philosopher Paul Kurtz, who died last year, was a giant of the modern Humanist movement. He was indefatigable in its promotion, publishing countless books and articles, and founding or chairing many of its institutions. While the original *Humanist Manifesto* was written in 1933, Kurtz co-wrote the second in 1973. It was famous for the line “No deity will save us; we must save ourselves”.

Kurtz founded the Committee for Skeptical Inquiry (CSI, formerly CSICOP) in 1976 “to encourage the critical investigation of paranormal and fringe-science claims” as part of the Humanist campaign to counter the spread of supernaturalism in the media and society at large. CSI's success in securing funding, building a strong organisation and receiving endorsements from academics, Nobel laureates, educators and scientists is widely credited to Kurtz's dedication and industry.

This fat “critique of religion and the paranormal” was first published in 1986, and Kurtz updated it to reflect his

experiences investigating faith-healers and UFO ‘abductees’. The central section is a critical analysis of the tenets and ethics of Christianity, Judaism and Islam, and their descendants (especially the Mormons, Spiritualism, astrology and UFOs); other religions and modern cults barely get a glancing mention.

Underpinning all discussion here is Kurtz's unshakable conviction that science – crucially, the scientific method – can carve away the obfuscation on any subject. Unfortunately, the real world, full of complicated people, put obstacles in the way. For example, Kurtz makes an interesting observation from his study of the persistence of religion in China and the Soviet Union where “all the powers of the totalitarian state [are] used to stamp out religious belief and practice [...] and massive campaigns of education, persuasion, and state terror [have been] used to inculcate an atheistic outlook”, yet “in both societies theistic and paranormal/occult/mystical systems of belief seem to be very strong.”

Elsewhere, he acknowledges that “a powerful tendency” to accept the transcendental or paranormal version of reality – the ‘temptation’ of the title – is buried deep within everyone “in spite of the overwhelming refutations of their claims”. He is puzzled about why believers, obstinately, continue to believe. His disciple, Michael Shermer – who writes the foreword – seems to have thrown in the towel: “There is little to no chance that we can convince True Believers of the errors of their thinking.”

Kurtz provides us with extensive analytical sections on

“Some sceptics – possibly ‘hardcore’ – have castigated Charles Fort as the ‘enemy of Science’

‘the meaning of life’, the role of doubt, magical thinking, ‘life after life’, out-of-body experiences, ESP, the scientific method, critical intelligence, belief, etc – all with no further insight into that ‘why’. Shermer says the real battleground “is to reach the vast middle-ground between hardcore skeptics and dogmatic believers; people [...] who thought there might be something to these claims but had simply never heard a good explanation.”

Wait! Who are these ‘hardcore skeptics’ and ‘dogmatic believers’? The usual implication is that the former are within the pale of Science and the latter in the cesspit of credulity outside that fence. Some sceptics – possibly the ‘hardcore’ kind – have castigated Charles Fort as the “enemy of Science” because he dared to point out that leading scientists of his day, many of them – *mirabili dictu* – authorities, were as dogmatic as their opponents... and opponents, mind you, not always among those ‘damned’ wallowers but from within the edifice of Science. I often wonder whether Fort's modern critics among the sceptics have actually read his words as carefully as they should, because their criticisms are quite immoderate. Fort's shots were at the scientists who, as he pointed out, behaved more like priests of their religion guarding

sacred and immutable truths; criticisms that would be equally valid today if any modern scientist behaved in the same way, resting his case on his authority.

Kurtz, thankfully, is more careful with his words. His single mention of Fort recognises him as a “cataloguer of a great number of strange events. One cannot simply reject all of them out of hand.” Yet that is what some of the ‘hardcore skeptics’ seem happy to do. Fort was a collector of anomalies and tried to marshal his data as scientifically as he could. That other great collector of anomalies, William Corliss, who was also a good scientist, was happy to acknowledge Fort's effort as an essential process in understanding not just rules, but variations and contradictions of rules. Herman Kahn called such data “pre-scientific”, in the sense that it might lead to some scientific understanding, and Corliss was fond of quoting William James: “Anyone will renovate his science who will steadily look after the irregular phenomena, and when the science is renewed its formulas often have more of the voice of the exceptions in them than of what were supposed to be the rules.”

Kurtz (and Shermer), argue that the job of the sceptics is to provide those “good explanations” and does his best to lay out the moral imperative for scientists in general, the secular humanists in particular, with the sceptics as the outreach troops. That, at least, is the mission – saving humanity from its own stupidity.

Unfortunately, it sometimes appears as if, by painting themselves as the ‘good guys’,

Continued on page 62

Fort said that belief was too precious to squander on anything but the truth

Continued from page 61

they define us (i.e., anyone not a member of their exclusive and self-appointed group) as both stupid and morally wrong, doubly so when our slippery brains resist truths so self-evident to them. What we might call ‘militant skeptics’ seem to be arrogating to themselves the sole right to judge us and determine what the rest of us should or should not believe; behaviour which would not have been out of place for the Inquisition, or the McCarthy sessions, or any other body that suppress opposition or dissent. This is made worse when their methods involve false accusations, humiliation, and character assassination (as, for example, the way Rupert Sheldrake and Graham Hancock were recently treated by a TED committee). Kurtz is too focused on so-called ‘true-believers’ in this thesis to mention any ‘bad scientists’ or supposed sceptics who didn’t live up to Shermer’s ideal: “We are the watchmen who guard against bad ideas, consumer advocates of good thinking”.

I don’t doubt Kurtz’s kindly intentions, erudition and belief in secular scepticism as the panacea for humanity’s ills. Secular Humanism, for all its belief in democracy and humanity, seems to set itself apart from and above the greater part of humanity, which it believes to be misguided. How is it ‘humanitarian’ when he denies the majority of humans their way of being human? Their way of finding ‘meaning’ and relevance?

He emphasises the shortcomings of moral systems that are yoked to different religious and social ideals; declaring that morality can be independent of religion and be the better for it. Yet he can praise the Christian followers of Aristotle who helped define standards of good and evil based upon human responsibility and not divine decree. Nor does he say much about Buddhism, which has no god, yet emphasises the

possibility that anyone can attain supreme virtue.

In the plain sermons of Gautama we can see prime examples of thinking critically and decisively. Take, for example (one of my favourite passages) his advice to the villagers who complained to him of the endless parade of gurus peddling conflicting messages. “Do not be led by what you are told [...] by whatever has been handed down from past generations [...] by hearsay or common opinion [...] by the scriptures [...] by mere logic, deduction or inference [...] by outward appearance [...] by preconceived notions or analogies [...] by what seems acceptable or believable to oneself [...] or by what your teacher tells you is so.” [my paraphrase of the Kalama Sutra]. Doubt was the proper response, he said, and careful examination before you accept anything. He wasn’t saying don’t listen to these things but to test them; “Be a lamp unto yourself”. Could there be any clearer call for what Kurtz has called the spirit of rigorous inquiry? Fort said the same thing; belief was too precious to squander on anything but the truth, so don’t waste it.

Kurtz writes clearly and presents complex points well and passionately. Even so, this is hard reading, needing much concentration and perseverance; yet I recommend it to anyone, especially forteans. Test yourself against this. Kurtz is a good, if conservative, guide; although, perhaps like me, you might think Kurtz doesn’t go far enough where it matters. It’s up to you to continue the journey from where he leaves you. You yourself have to get off the cerebral equivalent of your arse and make the philosophical effort. As Richard Feynman wrote: “I think it’s much more interesting to live not knowing, than to have answers that might be wrong.”

Bob Rickard

Fortean Times Verdict

DIFFICULT BUT REWARDING CALL FOR RIGOROUS ENQUIRY

7

Lizard Man

The True Story of the Bishopville Monster

Lyle Blackburn

Anomalist Books

Pb, 189pp, illus, bib, ind, \$13.89/£11.00, ISBN 9781938398162

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £11.00



Texas rock musician and creature hunter Lyle Blackburn’s *The Beast of Boggy Creek* (2012) dealt with the so-called

Fouke monster, which inspired a cheesy yet curiously influential 1972 docudrama. Blackburn now revisits the Lizard Man episode, in which a bipedal creature supposedly chased a young man in the early hours of 14 July 1988, near Bishopville, South Carolina. It is said to have leapt atop his car, waving a three-clawed hand, as he fled. Other reports, one of them a certifiable hoax, followed. Blackburn believes this amounts to a cryptozoological mystery.

Though the creature was quickly dubbed ‘Lizard Man’, even a cursory examination of witness testimony shows that claimants were describing nothing especially novel. It looks like the sort of hairy biped that has figured in reports since at least the early 19th century in America and Canada. In other words, all that’s distinctive about Lizard Man is its name; there is little here to engage the informed or jaded fortean.

Blackburn pads the book with stories of upright reptoidal beings allegedly spotted far from South Carolina. Either the Lizard Man story amounts to little, or Blackburn’s brief (one week) on-site visit was insufficient to uncover any remaining secrets. In his research for the superior *Beast of Boggy Creek*, he returned repeatedly to the site (in rural Arkansas) and got to know locals. *Lizard Man* is not a bad book, just slight and largely forgettable.

Disappointingly, too, Blackburn, an otherwise thoughtful observer, never takes up the question of whether any of this has to do with cryptozoology. In fact, the question does not occur to him. Cryptozoology is supposed to be about potentially real (if so far uncatalogued) animals; whereas hairy bipeds outside the Pacific

Northwest – where something like an arguable case for unknown hominids can be made – function more like the phantom entities of experience anomalies: vividly perceived, genuinely enigmatic, but stubbornly unprovable and almost certainly uncategorisable.

In short, all we can say is that Lizard Man and his relatives are there to be experienced, but no more than that. Blackburn’s book would have been more interesting, perhaps, if he had taken time to ponder that paradox.

Jerome Clark

Fortean Times Verdict

NOTHING MUCH TO SEE HERE. MOVE ALONG...

5

The Caretakers of the Cosmos

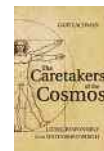
Living Responsibly in an Unfinished World

Gary Lachman

Floris Books 2013

Pb, 330pp, £16.99 ISBN 9781782500025

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £15.29



The Caretakers of the Cosmos applies years of esoteric scholarship to our biggest questions: why are we here and

what are we to do? Lachman – biographer of Jung, Blavatsky, Steiner and other mystic luminaries – weaves together an encyclopaedic knowledge of spiritual, philosophical and artistic practices to show that human consciousness is more than just a cosmic coincidence. Consciousness grows, evolves and interacts with the Universe, and is the means through which creation comes to know itself. There is no room for nihilism in these pages. “Save the planet? Yes, assuredly. But why stop there? Why not save the Universe while we’re at it?” are the sentiments that conclude the author’s introduction. Don’t worry if this sounds a touch New Agey: the material will challenge and surprise.

The book grew from concepts the author explored in an earlier work on Hermeticism. In this tradition, humankind is of two worlds – the corporeal and the spiritual. While man-as-dual-being is not unique to Hermeticism, Hermetic thought interprets the

spirit-matter divide as a wilful choice instead of a regrettable catastrophe. Humanity has not fallen but instead is in the world for a purpose. To determine what this purpose could be Lachman consults and connects the writings of mystical thinkers (Swedenborg, Saint-Martin), philosophers (Scheler, Heidegger), and artists (Blake, Kazantzakis), just to name a few. The list of sources is immense and not confined to the ivory tower – bits from pop culture and mythology are added to the mosaic. It is through the synthesis of disparate minds that the most striking insights are generated. In just one example, parallels are drawn between psychologist Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs and phenomenologist Max Scheler's hierarchy of values. In finding commonality across seemingly unrelated thinkers and disciplines, Lachman senses "an objective discovery about reality, not a subjective opinion or point of view."

What, then, is humanity's role in the greater objective reality pointed to by philosophers and mystics? A couple of key concepts reappear. One is *tikkun*, a Kabbalistic idea that involves a repairing of the world by unlocking divine energies through the completion of redemptive acts. This participatory stance is deepened with the idea that the Universe is not only designed to produce intelligent life, but also that human consciousness is how the cosmos achieves self-awareness. Though not anti-science, Lachman is indeed wary of a science that demystifies the Universe and turns the cosmos into an indifferent and meaningless void with no place for the soul. This book's greatest achievement is that it is an intelligently constructed counter to the traps of determinism and hopelessness. If pressed to summarise this sweeping, neuron-to-nebula study with one word, it would be unification. Why are we here and what are we to do? For Lachman, these questions are inextricable. We are here to do good works. We are here to become as conscious as possible for the benefit of ourselves and

the cosmos, which are at once separate and the same.

Mike Pursley

Fortean Times Verdict

A FRESH AND IMPORTANT LOOK AT WHAT IT'S ALL ABOUT **8**

The Paranormal Presidency of Abraham Lincoln

Christopher Kieman Coleman

Schiffer Publishing Ltd 2012

Pb, illus, notes, bib, \$16.99/£14.95, ISBN 9780764341212

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £14.95



While Lincoln didn't necessarily believe, the 16th president of the United States was open to a variety of fortean phenomena, including omens, prophecy and, most interesting, a particular "madstone" – a large rock with supposed curative powers, to which he rushed his son Robert after the boy had been injured. A great deal of ink is spilled here on whether Lincoln attended séances (he did) and if believed their results (no one knows). The author includes but does not challenge the well-known but dodgy account of a dream Lincoln allegedly had, predicting his assassination.

It boils down to a lot of 'what ifs' and 'maybes', and such a broad view is taken of so many frontier superstitions that the reader comes away learning little about Lincoln's interior life, but a lot about his theological era – and that's where this book excels.

It's usually thought that the United States' embrace of eschatology and spiritualism a few decades before the Civil War was centered in the 'Burned Over District' of western New York State. But while early Mormonism and the Millerites were certainly located there, this volume instead makes clear that the entire nation was already on fire with unconventional belief systems; frankly, America was coming unglued. As stated in the introduction, in this one respect the greatest president was merely "a man of his times".

Jay Rath

Fortean Times Verdict

MISSSES ITS TARGET WITH LINCOLN, BUT SNARES THE COUNTRY **7**

In the cards...

Despite an unconvincing argument or two, an interesting look at Tarot's past



The Esoteric Tarot

Ancient Sources Rediscovered in Hermeticism and Cabala

Ronald Decker

Quest Books 2013

Pb, 330pp, illus, notes, bib, ind, \$23.95/£19.00, ISBN 9780835609081

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £18.00

The origins of Tarot have long been a matter of fierce debate. In 1783 Etteilla claimed that Tarot was precisely 3,953 years old, and of ancient Egyptian origin, leading Aleister Crowley in the 1940s to call his deck the *Book of Thoth*. A London occultist of my acquaintance argues for Chinese origins. Many writers, including myself, go for an origin in 15th century northern Italy, and reckon that whatever the cards' original purpose (a game, a story-telling or a mnemonic device, or just objects of beauty) their esoteric use is no older than the 18th century, with the writings of Etteilla (Jean-Baptiste Alliette) and Antoine Court de Gébelin.

Ron Decker says early on that Etteilla, De Gébelin and other 18th century Tarot authorities were "creative but incompetent in their scholarship", a view it's difficult to disagree with. He rules out their interpretation of an ancient Egyptian origin, but believes that the Renaissance originators of Tarot were strongly influenced by Hermetic ideas from Egypt, filtered through the

mediaeval city of Harran in what is now south-eastern Turkey, where he claims astrologers, before AD1000, "invented the 4-suit deck of cards and used esoteric symbols as suit signs". He dismisses kabbalistic influence on the early cards, saying that the only correspondence is the 22 cards of the major arcana and the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Yet he also argues that the Kabbalistic Tree of Life "is the very foundation for the cartomantic meanings of the numeral cards". It's a complex argument, and not entirely convincing.

Decker pays attention and respect to other Tarot authorities, even when he disagrees with their ideas. He explains his theories well, though perhaps in rather too much detail. Long chapters on Hermetism, Hidden Hieroglyphs, Numinous Numbers, Astral Archetypes and Sacred Symmetries can bog the reader down in such fine detail that the overall argument is obscured.

I fail to be convinced by Decker's core belief that "the Tarot de Marseille substantially preserves the oldest Tarot"; there are some resemblances between the earliest Italian cards we have, from the mid-15th century, and the mid-18th century French pack, but there are also many differences. Despite these criticisms, *The Esoteric Tarot* is a useful addition to the study of the origins of these fascinating cards.

David V Barrett

Fortean Times Verdict

DETAILED AND USEFUL STUDY OF THE ORIGINS OF TAROT **7**

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Sage of Northampton

A biography of Alan Moore deals with his magical beliefs rather than falling back on uncritical fanboy raving



Magic Words

The Extraordinary Life of Alan Moore

Lance Parkin

Autumn Press 2013

Hb, 426pp, illus, ind, PRICE, ISBN 9781781310779

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £12.59

Alan Moore is not only one of the most important modern comics creators but one of the comic world's most colourful and divisive figures. He wrote landmark comics and graphic novels like *Watchmen*, *V for Vendetta*, *Marvelman* and *From Hell*, along with stories for characters like Superman, Green Lantern and Doctor Who that are still well regarded today.

Moore is famous not only for his work but for his highly publicised fallings-out with a series of publishers. He's also known for having declared in 1993 that he was a magician and for focusing on occult and esoteric topics in his work. So what relationship do Alan Moore's occult interests have with his work? Lance Parkin's biography traces Moore's life and work from its beginnings in postwar Northampton to success and critical acclaim today in, er, Northampton.

Magic Words is assembled from a wide variety of sources, including interviews with Moore, published writings, early – and often rare – work and comments from Moore's collaborators. There appears to be little new material. Instead, this is a thorough trawl through the available sources that looks at Moore's career from a variety of different angles.

Most comic-book journalism suffers from either a fannish or

slightly abashed approach to its subject. Early on, Parkin shows a little bit of the latter, suggesting that Moore "imposed 'realism' on hokey characters like Marvelman, Swamp Thing, Batman and the Joker" – a claim that actually contradicts his own account of Moore's *Batman* work later in the book. This kind of defensiveness turns up in a lot of serious books about comics, and sounds a warning note for the reader. Fortunately, however, this doesn't continue throughout the book.

The book proceeds in chronological order, starting with Moore's childhood and moving into his early work. What's really interesting about this section is the way in which Parkin situates Moore's work in its cultural context, both within the British counterculture of the era and the local Northampton arts scene. Without taking away anything from Moore's individual creativity, Parkin shows how his work developed within a particular intersection of underground art, comic fandom and a British comic industry in a state of exciting, ramshackle dynamism.

Parkin's writing is pitched at the reader who doesn't know much about comics production, but there's still a lot of valuable information for the seasoned fan, including detailed discussion of Moore's scripting process and an even-handed analysis of the great *Watchmen* controversy and Moore's other collisions with the comics industry.

What really sets *Magic Words* apart from a lot of other writing about Alan Moore is the chapter on magic. Moore's magical practices, including devotion to a mid-Roman snake deity called Glycon, are often treated as an amusing eccentricity, evidence of mental deterioration or a sign that Moore has moved beyond the superhero work of his earlier days (and never mind that Moore's announcement that he was a

magician coincides with his most overtly commercial work at Image in the early 1990s). Parkin avoids any of these simplistic readings, showing how Moore's magical beliefs and practices – insofar as they can be deciphered from his public comments and the remarks of others – actually appear to be a continuation of concepts he has been exploring since his earliest work. Moore's fascination with the structure of time, the relationship between ideas and reality, and the nature of myth are evident from his earliest work in comics. It's no surprise that these concepts play an important role in his magic.

A book with an endorsement from Moore on the back cover might be assumed to be a puff piece, but Parkin isn't afraid to be critical when required, although his criticism are always expressed in a diplomatic voice. There are occasions when he seems to be apologising for Moore, but generally his approach is very even-handed.

Like any book about Alan Moore, *Magic Words* is heavy on analysis of his work from the 1980s and slows down a bit later on, touching on his runs at Image and the America's Best books but not discussing them or much of his more recent work in any detail.

Even while denying the charge that Moore's best work is behind him, Parkin seems much more comfortable talking about *V for Vendetta* or *Watchmen* than *Top 10* or *WildC.A.T.s*, although *Lost Girls* and *Promethea* do get some attention. This is hardly surprising, but it would have been nice to see more discussion of Moore's modern work in this excellent, otherwise comprehensive account of his life and career.

James Holloway

Fortean Times Verdict

EVEN-HANDED STUDY OF NORTHAMPTON'S FAMOUS SON

7

Aleister Crowley

Wandering the Waste

Martin Hayes & RH Stewart

Markosia Enterprises 2013

Pb, 144pp, notes, bib, £14.99, ISBN 9781909276017

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £14.99



A 'graphic novel' adaptation of the life of Aleister Crowley, largely set at Netherwood, his final abode, and in the last days of his life. The conceit, essentially, is that a fictional writer goes to see Crowley, who then tells him his life story.

The emphasis is very much on the early part of Crowley's life: his childhood, mountaineering, involvement with the Golden Dawn, the abbey at Cefalu, etc., after which things rather tail off until we arrive at his death. The comic strip part of the story runs to 108 pages, and there are then extensive annotations filling in some of the back story. The problem with this is that it doesn't actually work very well: it's impossible to read the graphic part of the story without consulting the notes to find out what's going on, or who people are, so one is constantly flicking back and forth from page to page. More than this, though, the storytelling (narrator and interlocutor in conversation, interspersed with flashbacks to what they're talking about) simply isn't suited to the comic-strip medium, which at least demands a certain amount of drama, if not actual action. Very little of either is present here, despite the considerable concentration on the more sensational aspects of Crowley's life; the important part, his actual contribution to magical thought, is largely passed over. RH Stewart's black-and-white artwork is functional, but little more. It's actually quite difficult to know who this is intended for. Anyone interested in Crowley would be far better off with a straightforward biography; perhaps the graphic novel audience is rather less demanding.

Steve Moore

Fortean Times Verdict

A STRANGELY UNINVITING LOOK AT ALEISTER CROWLEY

5

For car buying
advice, would you
go to neighbour
Petulia?



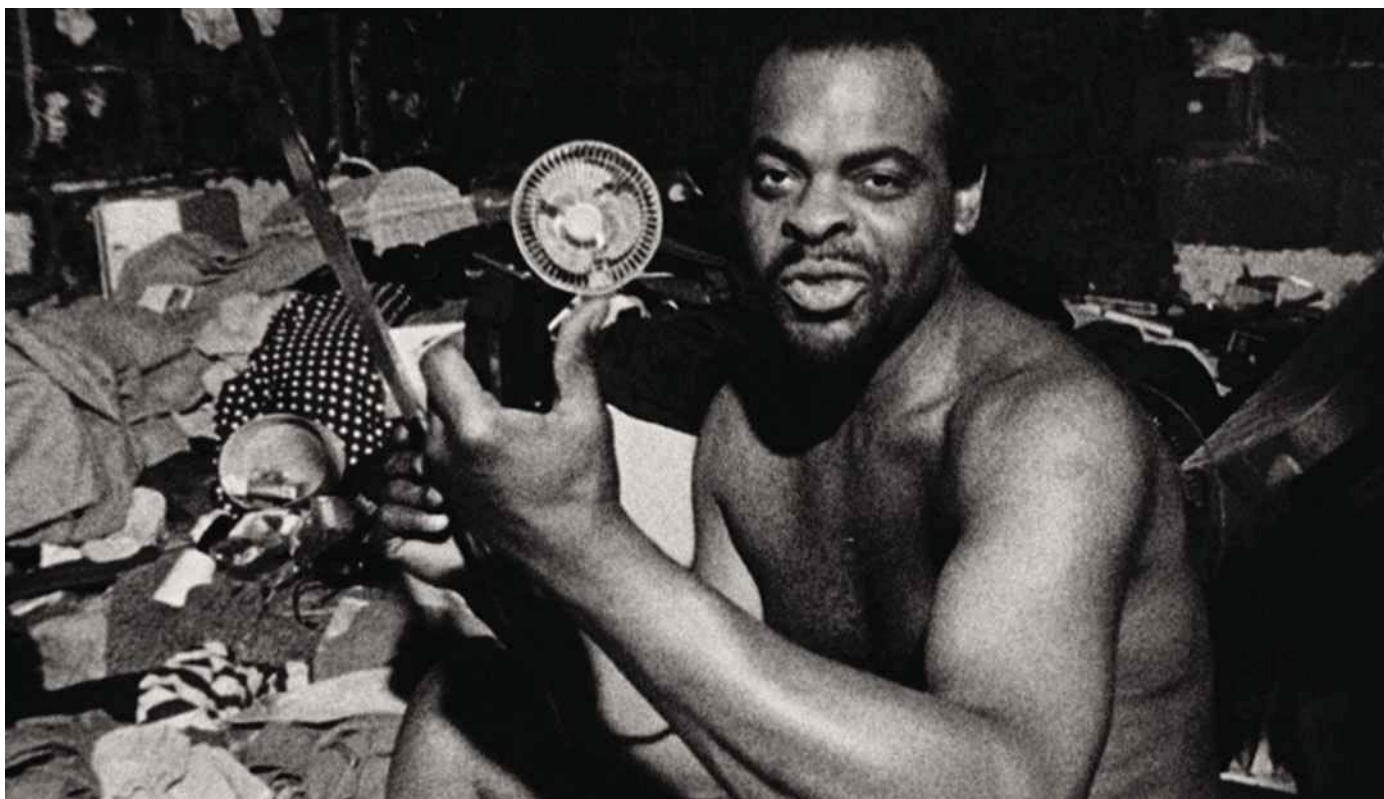
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Dark Days

Dir Marc Singer, US 2000
Dogwoof, £11.99 (DVD)

An everyday morning ritual: a man wakes up; complains about the cold; shaves with an electric razor; brushes his teeth; then takes his station wagon from his house, ready for a day's work.

Except it's not the morning ritual those of us lucky enough to have a proper roof over our heads are used to: the house is a hut made from salvaged wood. The station wagon is a shopping trolley. The work is salvaging items from the rubbish to eat or sell on. And the razor is run on electricity that isn't paid for by the home "owner". This is the morning ritual of a homeless person who has found shelter in a dark tunnel running beneath New York City's Penn Station.

British filmmaker Marc Singer's elegant documentary about the lives of a group of tunnel residents (which picked up three awards at the Sundance Festival back in 2000) is celebrating its 14th birthday and getting a deserved limited cinema release as well as being made widely available on DVD.

It's elegant despite being made by a director who, up until that point, had had no photographic or

film experience, and whose crew were the inexperienced homeless themselves.

And it's elegant, too, because it's a very simple concept.

Singer filmed his friends (as they became), talking to camera or to each other, and in the process, reveals the warm human beings they are: just like you and me, in fact. It's very simply shot in gritty black and white and the music is sparse but effective, by hip-hop maestro DJ Shadow.

Dark Days is an intimate portrait of people living subterranean lives. Most of them are either trying to combat, or are simply drowning in, crack addiction, and attempting to make themselves comfortable in circumstances the rest of us find very hard to imagine. It's funny in parts and heartbreaking in others: two of the subjects argue like an old married couple and others tell truly horrific back-stories.

These men and women don't see themselves as homeless. They've made homes as best they can in the dark, with doors on their huts and basic cooking facilities. And when a representative of Amtrak suggests their health is at risk as he tries to have them removed, we learn that life will only be worse for them should they be moved to

shelters instead. The drugs some of them have managed to give up will be endemic in the shelters, and the few possessions they have will be stolen.

Dark Days is at times as dark as its title would suggest, but this isn't the whole story, because Singer has allowed us to see that the domestic rituals in these peoples' lives are similar to our own; because we've seen some of their humour as well as their sadness and hardships; and importantly, because it isn't a political rant, he reminds us that the homeless are just as human as the rest of us and deserve exactly the same respect.

Julie McNamee

Fortean Times Verdict

INDIE DOCUMENTARY
RE-EMERGES FROM THE DARK

8

Odd Thomas

Dir Stephen Sommers, US 2013
Metrodome, £15.99

You wouldn't want to be Odd Thomas. He's a young man who sees dead people; but unlike some, he does something about it...

When his quiet hometown of Pico Mundo is overrun by 'bodachs' (malevolent spirits who feed on death and disaster), Odd (the

appealing Anton Yelchin) knows something very bad is about to happen. The only clue he's got is a weird guy dubbed 'Fungus Bob'.

This is a fun supernatural comedy-thriller based on the *Odd Thomas* novels by Dean Koontz. There's shades of the 1980s work of Joe Dante and a dash of Peter Jackson's *The Frighteners* here, although the story is a bit of a runaround powered by Yelchin's voiceovers and just about held together by his charms (and those of Addison Timlin, playing his very much in love girlfriend, Stormy). Willem Dafoe plays the local police chief, happy to take Odd's psychic experiences at face value if they'll help him solve a case.

Odd Thomas is a Stephen Sommers (*Van Helsing*) film, so there's sometimes too much CGI, but the movie has a good deal of pace and some inventive scene transitions. Intended as the start of a series, this has been held up from cinematic release due to legal wrangles, so grab the chance to see it on DVD while you can.

Brian J Robb

Fortean Times Verdict

NOT EXACTLY GHOSTBUSTERS,
BUT THEN WHAT IS?

7

The Complex

Dir Hideo Nakata, Japan 2013
Koch Media Ltd, £12.99 (DVD)

Hideo Nakata has been the director to compete with for the last 15 years, when *Ring* appeared in 1998, and until Del Toro comes up with the goods again, looks unlikely to lose his position as horror's head honcho. Revisiting the visual terrain of 2002's *Dark Water*, the big city is a drab, empty place, where sometimes ghosts are your only friends and there's an implicit menace in anonymous housing complexes with mysterious neighbours. On one level it's a fair criticism that it's this alienation and isolation that Nakata loves so much he can't resist revisiting it, but it must be remembered the man has an endless collection of tales to tell and a vast directorial bag of tricks to scare us witless. It's undeniable, too, that even his recycled and reheated leftovers are better than the best efforts of most others in the genre.

The story is seemingly simple; Asuka and family move into a haunted housing complex, but when her parents endlessly repeat their dialogue (à la *Groundhog Day*) and we are told that "for the dead, time has stopped moving", who's to say who the ghosts really are?

As is often the case with Asian tales of this nature, an initial slow movement turns into superior fare about half-way through and you'll find breathing difficult for the last half-hour. Highly recommended. Tim Weinberg

Fortean Times Verdict

NOT EXACTLY GHOSTBUSTERS, BUT THEN WHAT IS?

7

Big Trouble in Little China

Dir John Carpenter, US 1986
Arrow Video, £14.99 (Blu-ray)

John Carpenter films are like a litmus test for cinematic idiots. On their release, movies like *The Thing* and *Big Trouble in Little China* were seen as duds and sank quickly at the box office. Yet now, decades later, they're rightly hailed as classics by the very Hollywood suits that buried them first time round.

Big Trouble is a loopy, genre mash-up in which inept hero Jack Burton battles against the spiritual

THE REVEREND'S REVIEW

FT's resident man of the cloth **REVEREND PETER LAWS** dons his dog collar and faces the flicks that Church forgot! (www.theflicksthatchurchforgot.com; @revpeterlaws)

TENEBRAE

Dir Dario Argento, Italy 1982
Arrow Video, £24.99 (Steelbook)

After a sublime double dip into supernatural horror with *Suspria* and *Inferno*, 1982's *Tenebrae* saw Dario Argento returning to the genre that fitted him like a tight leather love: the *giallo*. This time, American crime fiction author Peter Neal is understandably distracted from his European book tour by a brutal serial killer who seems to be slashing up anyone remotely connected with Neal and the book. Argento flings himself back into the crime pool with swathes of lurid violence – the standout being an arm chop that washes the wall with so much gore that it's as preposterous as it is shocking. Not surprising, then, that the film wound up on the video nasties list and remained pretty much unseen in the US until a heavily censored edition surfaced in 1984. Admittedly, Argento was never a slave to logical plotting, but these cut versions rendered *Tenebrae* virtually incomprehensible. Yes, it's violent and, yes, much of that violence is directed towards women, but to assume this equals misogyny is overly simplistic.

Famed for his visual style, Argento doesn't disappoint in

this film (made even more eye-popping in Arrow's sumptuous new HD transfer). The much-celebrated crane shot, slowly moving over a house and lingering through the windows, is a master-class in Hitchcockian dread: think the opening shot from Carpenter's *Halloween*, but from the POV of death itself, floating about, looking for someone to devour. Then there's my own favourite: a split-second visual trick used in one of the final reveals that remains for me one of the most effective shocks in cinema.

The plot is crazy, convoluted but riveting, twisting events and skewing evidence to do what all crime fiction should do: turn the viewer into an amateur sleuth. The always welcome Daria Nicolodi plays Neal's assistant, and genre god John Saxon turns up as a literary agent dressed more for 1940s film noir. But the hinge of it all is Anthony Franciosa, Peter Neal himself. As a mainstream star of American film and TV dramas I can't imagine what he thought when presented with this wacky Italian script. Can you imagine him settling down to watch *Deep Red* and *Suspria*, to get some idea of this new guy he was going to be working with? Well, something must have convinced him to do *Tenebrae*



and, no, I don't think it was just the money. Because he throws himself into Peter Neal with a performance that some call stilted and starchy, but I call perfect. Especially on reflection, after the credits roll. *Tenebrae* is a film that is comprehensively wrapped in what would come to define the 1980s: excess. The music, (a cracking disco score from Claudio Simonetti and co) the sets, the blood, the camera work, the plot. All of it seems pumped with steroids. The result is one of the quintessential *giallos*. Argento may have disappointed in recent years, but it's films like *Tenebrae* that stocked up so much good will in horror fans, that many can't help but adore him no matter what he does. See it.

Fortean Times Verdict

EXCESSIVE EIGHTIES ARGENTO IS QUINTESSENTIAL STUFF

8



forces of the Chinese underworld, in San Francisco. It's a genuine firecracker of creativity packed with laughs and quotable lines: "Son of a bitch must pay!" How annoyingly unfair that Kurt Russell's subversive, laugh-out-loud performance was so criticised first time round. With a cracking HD transfer and excellent extras, Arrow Video reminds us once again that Carpenter was so often a director ahead of the rest.

Who knows, maybe in 10 years' time *Ghosts of Mars* will turn out to be a masterpiece too.

Rev Peter Laws

Fortean Times Verdict

A FIRECRACKER OF A MOVIE
CONFOUNDS ITS CRITICS

8

Upstream Colour

Dir Shane Carruth, US 2013

Metrodome, £12.99 (Blu-ray), £9.99 (DVD)

Last year, Shane Carruth delivered his long-awaited and much-anticipated follow-up to his 2004 indie time travel film *Primer*. Was it worth the wait? You'll have to excuse me if I'm a bit vague on the details, but it's that sort of film.

Some kids perform a strange ritual. A dodgy-looking bloke harvests a grub from one of those oriental orchids that don't look quite real and which people sometimes give you as presents that end up languishing in the bathroom. He mugs a random (I think) woman (Amy Seimetz) and forces her to ingest the grub. She has some Cronenberg moments, and then sort of wakes up, seemingly with no memory, and appears to be under the hypnotic control of the dodgy bloke, who gets her to empty out her bank accounts and stuff before vanishing. The woman meets a man who walks about with a tape recorder, recording things and using the sounds to make (sort of) music, and keeps pigs. He might be God or something, and he performs some sort of operation on her, involving one of the pigs. Then she wakes up properly, and her kitchen is a mess and her life an even worse one. She has a haircut, and on the train (I don't know where she was going, given that she didn't seem to have a life any more) she meets an equally spaced-out sort of chap

(director Shane Carruth, clearly a man of many parts; he also wrote the ambient noodlings that make up the soundtrack, by the way) and they strike up a relationship of sorts. The rest of the film (about an hour, if you're wondering) is made up largely of a series of not-quite-conversations, as they don't seem to be able to communicate like normal people (or maybe they are normal in Carruth's world; who knows?); there's a bit of variety, though, as there are numerous entirely inexplicable references to Thoreau's *Walden* and we sometimes see the pig man and his pigs, which are very cute, although some of them are put in a bag and drowned. The film reaches a sort of thrilling climax as the pig man gets shot by the woman (I don't know why) and we see the dead piggies decomposing under the water, and more of those fake-looking flowers growing along the river bank (where I don't think they would grow, really, but that's just a niggle). These are harvested by someone (he might be the original grub-guy, but I couldn't remember what he looked like) and life goes on, I suppose, although I felt as if I'd been mugged by a strange man and forced to ingest a psychotropic worm that turned my brain to jelly and sapped my will to live for 96 long minutes.

Upstream Colour is obviously not intended to be entertaining (I checked my watch at 5 mins, 9 mins, 16 mins, 20 mins and 27 mins, for the record, before finally accepting my lot with good grace and going into a sort of semi-trance state for the rest of the film, but you may have a completely different tolerance for this sort of thing; thoughts of Bergsonian *durée* seem apposite). Most critics, I discovered, rather liked it, and used words like 'visionary', 'dreamlike', 'woozy', 'brave' and 'fascinating' (ho ho) in their reviews, which are generally much more fun (in a Pseud's Corner sort of a way) than the film itself.

No, I didn't like it, but you may have an entirely different reaction to this painfully dull and achingly portentous chinscratcher. The only way you'll find out is to watch it...

David Sutton

Fortean Times Verdict

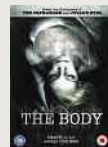
GRUBS, PIGLETS, FLOWERS
AND THE MEANING OF LIFE?

3

SHORTS

THE BODY

Kaleidoscope, £15.99 (DVD), £17.99 (Blu-ray)



A nightwatchman flees a morgue in terror, only to be run down by a car. What has he seen to provoke such fright? Detective Pena (Jose Coronado) discovers there's a body missing, and calls in the grieving husband, Alex (Hugo Silva). The viewer knows early on that he has actually murdered his older, rich wife Mayka (Belen Rueda), but who's taken her body? And why? Unfolding in and around the claustrophobic confines of the morgue during a thunderstorm, with occasional (but often unreliable) flashbacks, Oriol Paulo's pacey Spanish language thriller has more than a touch of Hitchcock. By the end, some viewers may think *The Body* instead recalls the work of accomplished but flashy Hitchcock imitator Brian DePalma, or even 'the French Hitchcock', Henri-Georges Clouzot (*Les Diaboliques*). There are occasional suggestions that something supernatural might be going on (is Mayka a ghost, a zombie, or has she somehow faked her own death and is now out to spook Alex?). By the end it's revealed to be little more than an overly-complicated, if macabre, revenge scheme. It's fun while it lasts, but don't expect all the narrative twists and turns (and storytelling cheats) to make sense in the cold light of day. **BJR 7/10**

HERE COMES THE DEVIL

Metrodome, £10.99 (DVD)



Another Spanish language chiller, this one written and directed by Adrián García Bogliano (*Cold Sweat*, *Penumbra*) and set in Mexico. It starts with a torrid lesbian love scene that is interrupted by a machete-wielding, finger-slashing psycho who then runs off and has sex with the ground. Then we join a family day out that goes wrong when the daughter is surprised by her first period before getting lost for the night, along with her younger brother, in a spooky and suggestively vaginal looking cave; turns out it's linked in local legend to a dead serial killer and various mysterious disappearances over the years. The kids reappear next day, but seem disturbed and withdrawn, although they won't say what happened to them. Poltergeist-like phenomena start to plague the increasingly troubled home. Have the children been doing things they shouldn't? Have they been sexually abused? Or possessed by something evil? It's a handsome film, well shot and thoughtfully composed, but its ambiguities and twists don't really deliver. **DS 6/10**

THE LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT OF ROSALIND LEIGH

Metrodome, £12.99 (DVD)



Finally, the role Vanessa Redgrave was born to play: a mental dead woman scaring us witless from beyond the grave. No, no spoiler alert, my friends, for this is the initial premise of a low-budget, very likeable Canadian production that takes horror tropes strained to exhaustion and adds its own relatively fresh spin. That's very much due to the writing and directing of Rodrigo Gudino of the Rue Morgue 'horror-themed, entertainment empire' and in this case, his take on the classic haunted house movie. It's almost dialogue-free, with long, sinuous tracking shots that turn a very ordinary house into a terrifying fairground ride. Generally and genuinely skilful stuff, and really very scary. **TW 7/10**

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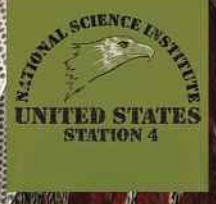
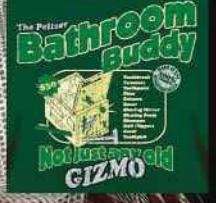
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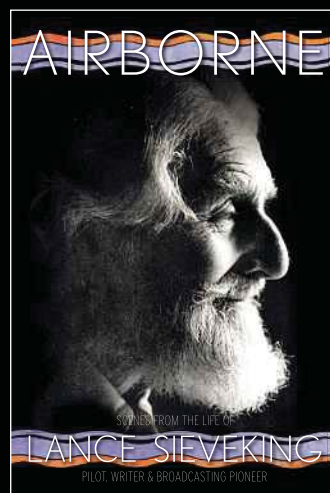
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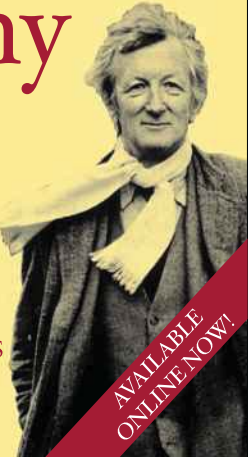
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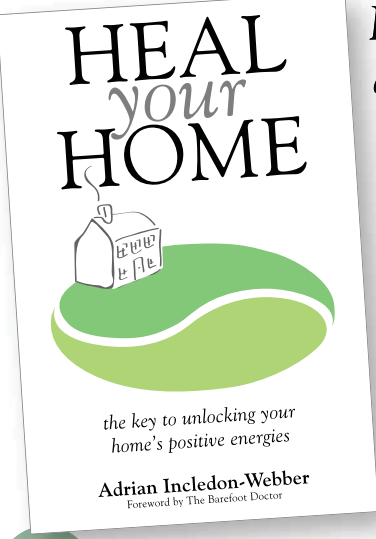
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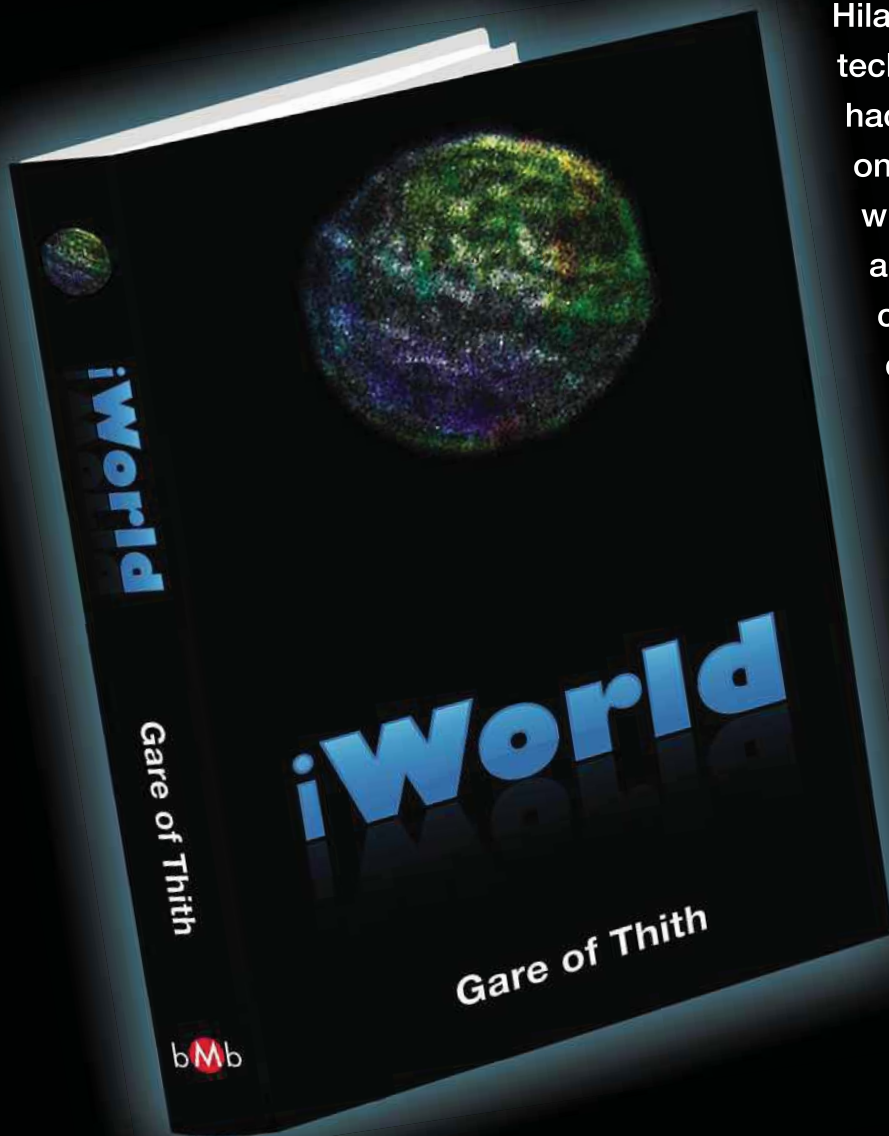
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Dear FT...

letters



Drunk Elephants

I think I may know where the myth of elephants seeking out rotting Marula berries in order to become drunk [Mythconceptions, FT275:17] may have originated. In 1974 in South Africa, Jamie Uys, a popular local film director, released a film called *Beautiful People* (www.imdb.com/title/tt0071143/) in which he married a nature documentary with (in part) a sort of animal Candid Camera to make a very anthropomorphic film. One part of the film where he used this technique was a segment depicting elephants stripping Marula trees of fruit and then, along with other animals, eating what was on the ground. This footage (shot with some rather stagey camerawork) and cut with a very suggestive script by the late Paddy O'Byrne (a radio announcer on the SABC's Springbok Radio), gave the impression that the animals were inebriated. Whether or not this footage (www.youtube.com/watch?v=D5ESTjkDvU0) is real or staged, I can't say – though I'm inclined to believe it was staged, given Uys's tendency towards slapstick and unsubtle film-making. I know this doesn't answer your question, but it might add a little more to the debate.

Sean Stanley-Adams

By email

Oil Pit Squid

Re the Fortean Top 40: I immediately recognised Robert Damon Schneck's recollection of the toxic waste squid [FT308:31] as it is a report that weirded me out when I read it in the late Mark Chorvinsky's *Strange Magazine* no.18, summer 1997, pp.28-30 [summarised at FT108:19].

The article by Tim Swartz, entitled "Mystery of the Oil Pit Squids", reported that in November 1996, workers in a former GMC plant in Anderson, Indiana, were cleaning out a toxic waste sludge pit when they discovered creatures which one employee described as 'squid-like', with a greyish red 'earthworm'-like colour. "The pit was full of these things, all swimming around... These things looked like small squids with thin tentacles and eyelike attachments; it was quite a shock to see them

Simulacra corner



Matthew Drew took this photograph (above) of "an elephant trapped in snow" at the top of Bredon Hill, near Pershore, on 11 February 2012.

Elephant-shaped rock salt formation (below) at Illizi, southern

Algeria, photographed by Patrick Gruban on 15 April 2006. Sent to FT by Karen Parker.

We are always glad to receive pictures of spontaneous forms and figures, or any curious

images. Send them to the PO box above (with a stamped addressed envelope or international reply coupon) or to sieveking@forteantimes.com with your postal address)



surviving in the toxic waste.” An employee obtained a sample of one of the creatures and kept it in a jar – which subsequently disappeared before investigators could obtain it. This didn’t stop them, however, from declaring that the creatures were really just a common, harmless bacterial growth (a notion firmly rebutted by the original eyewitnesses). After the story hit the front page of the *Anderson Herald Bulletin* (4+5 Mar 1997), a local attorney embraced the publicity and had buttons made up reading “Anderson, Indiana... Squid City, USA”. The article states: “When asked why he chose the name ‘Squid City, USA’, [the attorney] replied that ‘Common Bacterial Growth City, USA just didn’t have the same ring...’” The article is accompanied by the button, an eyewitness drawing, and two photos of the exterior of the plant. And, yes, a squid-like, spooky graphic designed to accompany the article.

An astonishing account, to be sure, in and of itself. But I think the reason it has stayed with me all these years is that it reminds me of a similar creepy story I first encountered in my early teens: the Ronnie and Kenny story from Frank Zappa. As immortalised in the song “Let’s Make The Water Turn Black” on the album *We’re Only In It For The Money*, the story goes that brothers Ronnie and Kenny (friends of Zappa’s in the early Sixties) would hang out with their friends and drink beer in a garage with no toilet facilities. Instead, they would all relieve themselves into “a large earthenware crock” which was

never dumped out. Eventually, everyone moved on, but returned “months later... [and] just for old times’ sake, took a peek at the crock in the garage. Lifting the board which covered it, they beheld several ‘denizens’ swimming in the piss – unknown ‘things’ that looked sort of like tadpoles. Kenny fished one out and plopped it on the shop bench. It had a tail, and a head that Kenny described as being ‘about as big as your little fingernail – white, with a black dot in the middle of it...’ Motorhead poked it with a nail and ‘some clear stuff came out.’” [*The Real Frank Zappa Book* by Frank Zappa, p.87]

Steve Scanlon
Hampton, Connecticut

Ancient Reproductions

I was recently discussing the Rosetta Stone with friends and the thought occurred to us that, since it was in three different scripts and carved in stone, it could have been some sort of copying matrix. For instance, if the decree needed to be sent out across Egypt either to be read out or posted in public, or for the keeper of local records to have a copy, then it could perhaps be reproduced in the form of what we would refer to as a ‘brass-rubbing’. Is there any evidence of this kind of thing occurring in the ancient world?

Matt Butcher
Littleborough, Lancashire

*Barry Baldwin replies: ‘Stone-rubbing’ – a Chinese technique, apparently of some antiquity – might be a better term: for what it’s worth, Wikipedia dubs brass-rubbing ‘a peculiar British’ thing, not tracing it back beyond the mediæval period. I don’t off-hand recall a definitive Greek or Roman text for such reproduction of inscriptions. It might, however, be inferred from the history of paper and cognate writing materials in Pliny, *Natural History*, book 13. 21. 68-83. One thing to consider is how practical papyrus and parchment would be for rubbings? However, Pliny mentions the thinness of Roman writing material at Augustus’s*

*time. My own impression is that, if the Greeks and Romans could have done it, they would have. The texts of Athenian orators frequently indicate verbatim readings of inscriptional laws and the like. Rubbed versions would be handy for courtroom clerks, although they could obviously have had written copies. In Rome, such vital texts as Augustus’s *Res Gestæ* would surely have attracted historians. Inscriptions honouring an individual or inscribed epitaphs on tombstones might well have been rubbed for a keepsake.*

Ex Nihilo

The biggest obstacle to understanding our origin is convincing someone that they are still actually nothing; that although they are something, the something is still actually a form of nothing. Cast your mind back before the Big Bang to a time when the Universe was total nothing. When $0+0=0$. When absolutely everything everywhere was $0+0=0$. No amount of magic or powerful explosion was ever going to break this mathematical constant of $0+0=0$. No matter how powerful the explosion, no mathematics was ever going to break $0+0=0$. So how did we arrive? Initially a dreamlike substance must have formed that did not break the mathematical barrier of $0+0=0$. Gradually this dream spread and ultimately dreamed everything we now know into existence.

Please reply with any related information.

Craig Flowers
By email

Huffing And Puffing

As a scientist I always enjoy *FT* because it reminds me we don’t know an awful lot, and things can creep under our guard. What weirder thing can one get than a physical Universe producing self-aware entities? (A good argument for God.)

Entangled atoms have me huffing and puffing since we can only perceive four of at least 11 dimensions. Alright, we can easily be fooled by tricksters, but there is always the Remainder depend-

ing on the Observer. Your magazine is always full of individuals who may be self-deluded but who plug into something other than what we perceive as reality.

The dim room experiment, where one watches one’s face in the mirror morphing into the face of a devil is a common experience for a schizophrenic, but why has it evolved across a species? Why again has death evolved a pleasant passing for all of us as a passage lighted on the way to see relatives? Near-death experiences are worldwide and involve very few alternatives. There is surely no evolutionary pressure to make death easy. Or is there?

Patrick F James
Swallowcliffe, Wiltshire

The Violet Rays

Following David Hambling’s interesting HP Lovecraft Forum piece, in which he suggests HPL “deserves credit for upgrading zombies” [*FT304:56-57*], readers may be interested to learn of an obscure short story I discovered recently which predates Lovecraft’s *Herbert West: Reanimator* by some years, but uses a very similar theme to good effect.

The Violet Rays is a short (four-page), intelligently written vignette by CD Terry, a pupil at the Leys School, Cambridge, and published in the school magazine on 26 May 1916. In this tale, three friends at a school reunion dinner reminisce about their experiences since leaving school. After a few drinks, one of the party, now a scientist, reveals a strange story about some experiments he has undertaken using an ultra-violet ray machine to cure patients of various ailments. He relates that 18 months earlier he and a colleague were summoned to an un-named European state to revive an ailing statesman with their ray treatment. However, the Premier’s condition worsened and he died before they were able to set up their apparatus. Undeterred, the Premier’s friend insisted that the scientist and his colleague use the rays on the body regardless. They do so and, much to everybody’s surprise, the Premier is brought back to life – but he is unable to speak and can remember nothing of his past. In the final paragraph, the narrator ponders the nature of the bizarre re-animation: “Is it a sort of galvanic action, which has partly spread to



CAROL USMACK

the brain? If so, how long will the effect last? Has the soul, the spirit, fled and is the body merely moving about under the galvanic influence? Or did the ultra-violet rays arrest the soul's flight and cause it to return to the body? These are the questions which I have not been able to answer and probably never shall. But the fact remains that there is either a living corpse walking about or the age of miracles is not yet past".

CD Terry appears to have been a gifted young writer, winning several prizes for his stories, which appeared in the *Leys Fortnightly Magazine* alongside work by fellow pupil James Hilton (later the author of *Lost Horizon* and *Goodbye Mister Chips*). He was also captain of the Leys School Second Eleven cricket team and made occasional appearances for the first team. Whilst little else is known of him, some cursory research by publisher and weird-fiction expert Morgan Wallace suggests the author was one Charles Douglas Terry (born 1900), who later went on to join the newly-formed RAF immediately after WWI, possibly being stationed in India. If any reader can corroborate this or provide any further information I would be grateful. Additionally, if any FT reader is interested in using the story for research purposes or inclusion in any short fiction anthologies, please drop me a line via FT and I will be happy to assist.

Alistair Moffatt

Halifax, West Yorkshire

Stunning Precision

Call it coincidence that I read Julie McNamee's FT review of the movie *Blackfish* [FT303:64] the same day that animal rights' activists protested at Sea World here in Orlando. The killer whale "Tillikum" in the film produced and directed by Gabriela Cowperthwaite is likewise named after the orca who resides at Sea World's Orlando Park and has killed three humans – the first at Victoria's Sealand in British Columbia and the other two at Sea World in Orlando.

'Tilly's' third – and latest – 'marine murder' was the much-publicised death of trainer Dawn Blanchard, but it was his second victim that deserves space in FT's

'Strange Deaths'. A Sea World guest hid in the bushes after the park closed and decided to take a dip with the four-tonne whale. The next morning park employees discovered the nude body of the man – sans testicles – draped across Tillikum's back as he lolled at the surface. A diver retrieved the victim's testicles from the bottom of the pool.

The fact that Tillikum was able to excise the man's balls without mauling his body is an amazing feat in itself inasmuch as the mouth of a killer whale – armed with 44 teeth 3.5in (9cm) long – is designed for seizing and ripping apart large sea creatures. This feat is comparable to one being able to tie the stem of a cherry in a knot while in one's mouth.

Greg May

Orlando, Florida

Unsuitable Razor

While Benjamin Radford offered a great deal of new and interesting information in his insightful piece "Stonehenge Surprise" [FT306:24-29], he tarnishes his efforts by invoking Occam's Razor as some sort of definitive catchall that will bury any alternative explanations once and for all. When will sceptics learn that Occam's Razor doesn't mean what they think it means? Occam's Razor (i.e. "Entities should not be multiplied unnecessarily") was never intended to evaluate paranormal claims.

Beginning as a principle in physics to weed out competing hypotheses of varying complexity, it is supposed to be used to separate theories that predict the same result for all experiments with the fewest number of uncorroborated assumptions. If the simplest hypothesis is proven to be incorrect then the next simplest one is chosen, and so on and so forth. While it works well as a general rule-of-thumb, it is by no means axiomatic. Radford either doesn't know this or is intentionally misusing the term to bolster his argument (which itself is full of a lot of ifs and buts). This is not to say that he is wrong in his assessment of the Julia Set formation, but using the simplest theory to try to explain anything away (other than the purpose

for which it was designed) is just plain wrong and not what Occam intended. To quote physicist Phil Gibbs: "The law of parsimony is no substitute for insight, logic and the scientific method. It should never be relied upon to make or defend a conclusion. As arbiters of correctness only logical consistency and empirical evidence are absolute." Ironically, if we choose to use Occam's Razor in the way that Radford wants us to use it then not only would we have to question the validity of his article (after all, which is the simpler explanation: that a group of circle artists conspired to formulate a complex "915ft [280m] spiral of 151 circles" in broad daylight, without discovery, near a busy highway and famous national monument, or that it was created by aliens or some other paranormal means?), but we would also be at pains to explain a lot of the things we take for scientific truths including the butterfly effect (and chaos theory in general), quantum mechanics, the theory of relativity, etc., etc..

The simplest explanation, in any regard, is always relative and sceptics would do well to excise Occam and his Razor from their debunking exercises because it does nothing to further their arguments and, in fact, only hurts them in the end.

Trevor Ouellette

By email

Rise Again, Angry

Living in Indonesia, I often come across some pretty odd ads on Facebook. This one features a person in Muslim funeral dress which, when it walks as a ghost, is called a pocong (poe-chong). The ad reads in translation: "Dead grandmother lives again. She was already in the coffin, but she rose again, and was angry! Mourners were shocked and running scared." It links to a story which tells the tale of a 101-year-old woman who, thought dead, sat up in her coffin in Guangdong province



The Owlrus

The picture of a snowy owl [FT274:21] inspired me to photo-shop this 'owlrus'. Like centaurs, mermaids and suchlike, the owlrus is clearly a mash-up-ial, and should properly carry a pouch. As I could not be bothered to add one, I pretend it's obscured by feathers.

Nils Erik Grande, Norway

in China.

The *Malaysia Star* reported (26 Jan 2013): "A centenarian who was about to be laid to rest in a coffin came alive suddenly during her funeral last Sunday. The body of 101-year-old Peng Xiuhua, from Lianjiang city in China, was found to have turned stiff last Saturday morning. Her daughters did not detect any heartbeat and presumed she had died. Peng was bathed and dressed for her funeral the next day, Nanyang Siang Pau reported. However, she suddenly opened her eyes and uttered, 'There you are', much to the surprise of the undertaker. The funeral was later turned into a banquet feast for Peng.

Christopher Laursen

By email

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Sudah dimasukan peti mati. Nenek ini bangun lagi dan marah2. Pelayat syok, lari ketakutan.

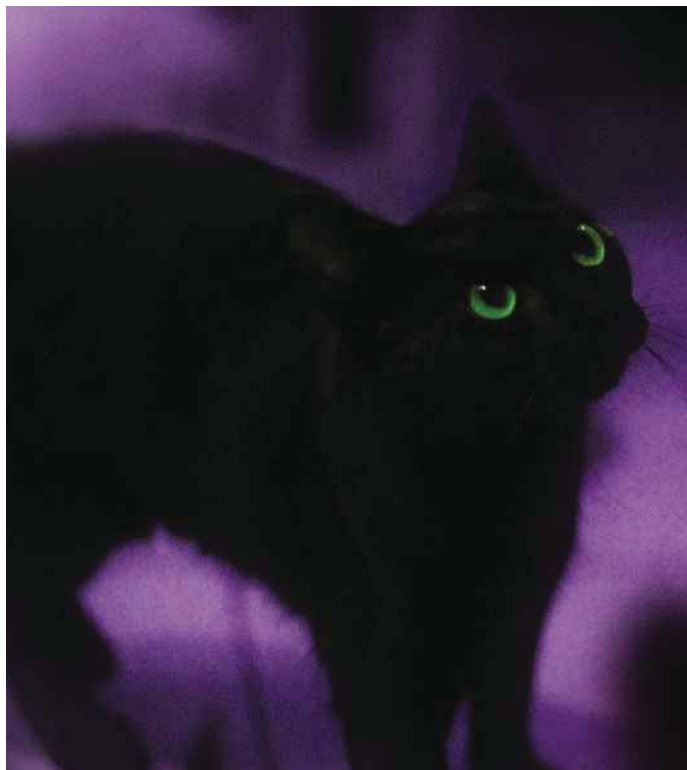
it happened to me...

Animal Revenants

In 1991 my beloved dog died, just two days before I left home for University in Swansea. On the first day in my new surroundings, I took some time out in Singleton Park, resting on a grassy knoll in the sunshine with my eyes closed. After a while I heard a dog coming towards me, puffing and panting. I opened my eyes to greet the dog, but there was no sign of it. I could still hear the dog seemingly running in circles around me, with the impression that it was never further than about five or 10 metres away, and sometimes close enough to reach out and touch (though I did not manage to connect with anything). Yet there was still nothing to see. I was aware that echoes and sound reflections can travel abnormally on certain thermoclines, but the mound I was sitting on gave a good view of the rest of the park, and there were no dogs within sight that would be creating the same pattern of noise – indeed, to my knowledge, sound from one direction should not be able to impart fluctuations separately to each ear to give the impression of the sound moving around me. I was amused by this phenomenon for several minutes before standing up and trying to walk towards or into the “invisible” dog, but then the effect faded away never to resume.

Contrary to plausible expectation, I did not feel that this was the ghostly form of my dog; it didn't sound like him or have his mannerisms of movement. Then it dawned on me that it had been three days since he died. I mention the three days because of something my father once told me. In the 1960s, my parents and grandparents took part in regular séances and spirit-writings. My father often held the pen at these sessions and also acted as the medium in many family-only sessions. Though I'm not throwing out the following statements as fact, I have no reason to believe these family members were intentionally out to fool each other; none of them had the motive or disposition to sustain such a prank in regular spiritualist meetings over several years.

There is perhaps more to tell here, but the key element relating to this communiqué is that their spirit guides in these spirit-writings sometimes wrote about the soul taking three days to cross over in



death from “our world” to theirs (i.e. the newly deceased would be in limbo for three days and unable to connect to a séance or send a message back until arriving at the other side). I'm not aware of any literature or references to support this “three day crossover” proposition, and my knowledge is limited in this area of *forteana*, but it was a genuinely curious experience. Was it a doggy messenger from the other side? I like to think it was a positive message from my dear four-legged friend; but I've no idea how to translate that message with any certainty.

Then, about eight years later, my girlfriend's beloved cat of 20 years, to which I had also become very attached, died. I woke one night soon after to the sound of a cat licking itself at the bottom of my bed. I couldn't see anything in the darkness, but I could hear it very distinctly, and could feel the weight of it causing tension on the duvet cover. I woke my girlfriend and asked her to listen – she also thought it sounded like a cat. Again, I didn't feel that this was her cat, but on reflection the following morning, I realised once more that this visitation had occurred three days after his death.

After several minutes of grooming itself, the “ghost” cat stopped abruptly, mid-lick, as though it had suddenly become aware of my

presence watching it (although I could not actually see it). It started walking up the bed towards my head. I was amazed to actually feel the physical footsteps of the cat pressing through the duvet. Then, as it reached my lower chest it briefly hesitated, before pouncing in the direction of my face! I had the impression that the cat was suddenly angry with me, but the impact, if there was one, was certainly more perceptual than physical. What it did trigger though, was an immediate state of semi-paralysis in me. My facial muscles and awareness were not impaired, but the rest of my body went into convulsion and held there (like the muscle tension applied through an electric shock). It felt similar to the descriptions I've heard about “night terrors”, or the visit from a hag sitting heavily on your chest. I certainly felt an element of fear, with a ghost cat leaping menacingly onto my face and implications that it had sunk its claws and teeth into me; but I felt no such pain, and any potential terror in the experience was offset by my sheer curiosity and fascination. The paralysis and sensation of the “attack” faded away after maybe 10-20 seconds and has never returned, but I have been fortunate not to have lost a loved one (animal or human) since.

So what was it? Proof of an

afterlife, ghosts, psychological delusion based on emotional loss, or a psychophysical manifestation of emotional energy? I offer these experiences hoping to hear of other similar experiences to broaden the evidence and one day take curiosity and speculation into evidential science.

Dr Alec Barney Page
Chellaston, Derbyshire

Paws By Night

Having read Brenda Ray's account of night-time visitors [FT36:75], I felt stirred to write in with my own experience.

I was about 12 at the time and living in a basement flat in Hastings. I awoke one night and gradually became aware of the sound of movement. My first thought was that the cat we owned, which had just had kittens, had got into my room. It was dark, but the faint light from the street lamps was enough to show the door to my room was still shut. The sound, however, was identical to a cat walking across a carpeted room, claws catching on the nylon carpet. I became very nervous but lay still, not even thinking of turning the light on (probably not wanting to move from under the blankets!) while the apparent ‘paw’ steps grew closer. I then felt something spring up onto the bed, felt the weight of whatever it was walk across me and the thud as it jumped off and landed on the floor next to my bed. After that it was silent, so finally I summoned the courage to turn the light on and check on the cat and kittens, which were all still fast asleep in the living room. I went back to bed somewhat confused. I didn't get any sense of malice from this encounter, so was never worried about it and, being a child, just accepted it.

I never felt my visitor again, though I have subsequently seen small balls of light about tennis ball size which appeared to respond to my request to come back after they first disappeared – and a couple of years ago a ghost stag leap a fallen tree trunk I happened to be sitting on.

I wonder whether you have any information on the old George Inn at Mells in Somerset as I had the strongest sense of ‘seeing’ in my mind a cavalier from Civil War times on the balcony of the mediæval courtyard when I visited there a while ago. He appeared to be aware of

me and I got the sense that he was still waiting for orders after all these years. He didn't seem averse to following me into the ladies, though he did stay outside the loo door. I got the feeling he quite liked being noticed!

I'm a normal average person, not psychic, who has an open mind about such things. I'm an archaeologist by profession, so not very spooky-dooky.

Tracey Smith

By email

Invisible Cat

In the summer of 1970 my grandfather was very ill; too ill to attend my wedding. My new husband and I had just moved into a very nice apartment, but the phone had yet to be connected. Anyway, one early afternoon I was napping on the living room sofa as that was the coolest room in the apartment. I had a very vivid dream in which my mother came to the door of my apartment and told me my grandfather had passed away. I woke and started getting ready to go to work when there was a knock on the door. It was a telegram from my mother telling me my grandfather had passed away and that he died at the time I had the dream. I was grateful that the Universe or whoever prepared me for the news.

My husband and I have a cat, which is very pampered and sleeps on our bed. Not too long after we moved into our current home a strange thing happened. I was in bed reading when I felt the cat jump up on the foot of the bed and walk up my body. When I lifted my head to greet her, she wasn't there! This freaked me out. This experience continued over several years and didn't seem to bother my real cat, except when the paranormal cat started moving things around in the kitchen. We could all hear it knocking at things on the counter and the table. I took to shouting toward the kitchen antics "Stop it!" and it would stop. Since that seemed to bring peace, I started talking to the cat on the bed, gently telling it that it really didn't belong here with us and should find where it belonged. The experiences dwindled and now happen rarely. I still have to shout at the kitchen once in a while.

Diana Yoshino

California



It's not zelly

I was managing a pub in Wymondham, Norfolk. One of my employees lived on the premises with me and we often used to go to clubs after we had locked up at 11pm. One evening I had quite a lot of paperwork to complete, so Anna went out with one of the regulars. The premises of the pub were quite large with five bedrooms and I also had staying above the pub another of our company employees who did security. He had his dog Zelly upstairs too, but was visiting his mother on this particular evening. After I had been sitting upstairs alone for about an hour, Anna phoned. She had obviously got bored and was on her way home. As we were talking, I could hear Zelly, a black Labrador, whimpering outside my door, so I tapped on the bed to let Zelly know to come in and up on the bed.

Still talking on the phone, I saw a black figure move along the side of the bed and down to the foot of the bed. This I thought was Zelly. So I continued tapping on the bed to call the dog up as I was still on the phone. When the bed started moving I must admit I might have started screaming a little bit. I looked to the door and Zelly was just outside the door, still whimpering and cowering upon the ground. Anna on the other end of the phone had also started freaking out as I was too busy holding on to the bed

with my other hand and screaming to explain what was going on.

Over the next minute before Anna had screeched into the car park and had started running up the stairs to my room, the thing at the bottom of the bed seemed to be trying to get under it, despite the fact it was a divan bed with only an inch between the base and the floor. At the moment Anna's keys hit the lock to the back door at the bottom of the stairs, the bed just settled. I was still holding on to the bed in one hand and the phone in the other when she reached my room.

Needless to say, we didn't go to sleep that night. We stayed up in the lounge and called other friends to stay for moral support. When Anna had run in, I was apparently as white as a sheet, wide-eyed and rigid in my position.

Lynsey Drewitt

Norwich, Norfolk

Tina Distressed

At the end of one Monday evening in the autumn of 2006, the bar staff at the Holt Hotel in Rainhill, Merseyside, along with the manager, were clearing away the glasses when Tina, the manager's bitch dog, suddenly started to bark frantically in front of a closed door in the bar area. This door led into a porch, which in turn led out onto the street. The door to the street was locked by this time. The manager could see no reason for Tina's distress, so persuaded her

to follow him up to the residential quarters. I was working part time at this establishment in those days. When I arrived at eight on Tuesday morning, Tina was again barking at the closed door. This inner door had a glass panel, so the porch was visible through it. We could see nothing at all that could cause Tina to be so upset. None of the staff heard or saw anything, but something had certainly upset Tina. By 2007, both the manager and Tina had moved on to another pub of their own. Did Tina sense something paranormal that evening and following morning, or did she just have a headache?

Brian Winnard

Rainhill, Merseyside

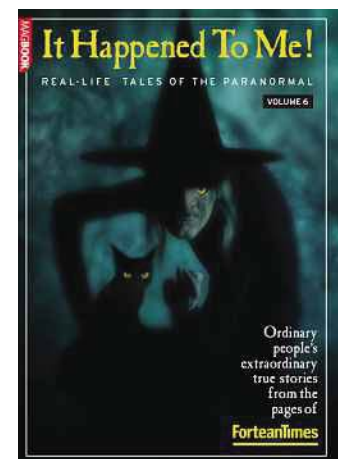
Ghost dog on the roof

The year was 1952, and I was spending the weekend, as my family often did, at my great aunt's little seaside house. Walking alone near the house one day, I saw a dog on the roof of a similar bungalow. A dog is unremarkable; a bungalow roof is unremarkable; but together they're odd, and I stopped for a moment to stare. Later, a man we knew told someone else in my presence – I can't remember who, but it wasn't me – that this particular bungalow was haunted by the ghost of a dog. Had I really seen a ghost or was he, perhaps having seen me staring at the house, playing a sophisticated joke on me by letting me overhear? I didn't know then, and I'm sure I don't know now!

David Gamon

By email

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Why Fortean?



Fortean Times is a monthly magazine of news, reviews and research on strange phenomena and experiences, curiosities, prodigies and portents. It was founded by Bob Rickard in 1973 to continue the work of Charles Fort (1874–1932).

Born of Dutch stock in Albany, New York, Fort spent many years researching scientific literature in the New York Public Library and the British Museum Library. He marshalled his evidence and set forth his philosophy in *The Book of the Damned* (1919), *New Lands* (1923), *Lo!* (1931), and *Wild Talents* (1932).

He was sceptical of scientific explanations, observing how scientists argued according to their own beliefs rather than the rules of evidence and that inconvenient data were ignored, suppressed, discredited or explained away. He criticised modern science for its reductionism, its attempts to define, divide and separate. Fort's dictum "One measures a circle beginning anywhere" expresses instead his philosophy of Continuity in which everything is in an intermediate and transient state between extremes.

He had ideas of the Universe-as-organism and the transient nature

of all apparent phenomena, coined the term 'teleportation', and was perhaps the first to speculate that mysterious lights seen in the sky might be craft from outer space. However, he cut at the very roots of credulity: "I conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while."

Fort was by no means the first person to collect anomalies and oddities – such collections have abounded from Greece to China since ancient times. **Fortean Times** keeps alive this ancient task of dispassionate weird-watching, exploring the wild frontiers between the known and the unknown.

From the viewpoint of mainstream science, its function is elegantly stated in a line from Enid Welsford's book on the mediæval fool: "The Fool does not lead a revolt against the Law; he lures us into a region of the spirit where... the writ does not run."

Besides being a journal of record, **FT** is also a forum for the discussion of observations and ideas, however absurd or unpopular, and maintains a position of benevolent scepticism towards both the orthodox and unorthodox. **FT** toes no party line.

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PHENOMENOMIX WB YEATS Part 3 HUNT EMERSON & KEVIN JACKSON

LAST TIME... WE SAW HOW WB YEATS ENCOUNTERED A SPIRIT CALLED LEO AFRICANUS AT A SEANCE...

LEO VISITED YEATS AGAIN AND AGAIN OVER THE YEARS! THEY BECAME GREAT CHUMS...

YOU'RE MY BEST FRIEND... SO YE ARE!

... OR SOMETIMES LIKE MASTER AND STUDENT...

YEATS BEGAN TO WRITE NEW TYPES OF POEM IN WHICH HE WOULD THRASH OUT THE OLD PHILOSOPHICAL BLETHER BETWEEN TWO SPEAKERS - ONE BASED ON HIMSELF, THE OTHER ON AFRICANUS...

'TIS! 'TISN'T!

MEANWHILE, THE ORDER OF THE GOLDEN DAWN FELL INTO CIVIL WAR! CROWLEY WAS SENT OFF TO THE TEMPLE IN HAMMERSMITH TO STEAL MAGICAL EQUIPMENT...

HE WAS SEEN OFF BY THE POLICE...

BUT HE CAME BACK TWO DAYS LATER IN FULL HIGHLAND REGALIA AND A "MASK OF OSIRIS"...

HOOTS!

THIS TIME, HE WAS SEEN OFF BY ONE OF YEATS' OCCULTIST FRIENDS, EDWARD HUNTER - A KEEN BOXER!

OW! YOU HAVEN'T HEARD THE LAST OF ME, YOU SHABBY IRISH FRAUD!

BIFF!

WITH CROWLEY OUT OF THE PICTURE, YEATS BEGAN TO CHECK OUT OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SUPERNATURAL! HE LOVED BRAM STOKER'S DRACULA!

HE EVEN PLANNED A TRIP TO TRANSYLVANIA, THOUGH THIS NEVER CAME OFF...

A SHAME... I COULD MURDER A NICE TASTY POET...

AND HE BECAME CONVINCED THAT IT WAS POSSIBLE TO TRAVEL IN TIME! FOR YEARS HE WAS A FAN OF A BOOK ENTITLED AN ADVENTURE (1911), WHICH TOLD OF TWO OXFORD DONS WHO FIND THEMSELVES IN VERSAILLES AT THE TIME OF LOUIS XVI...

Next time! MORE SPIRIT GUIDES! SEX!! and THE END OF THE WORLD!!! (with monsters)

The Fortean Times

Random Dictionary of the Damned

compiled by the Hierophant's Apprentice



No 54: FORTEAN MACHINES

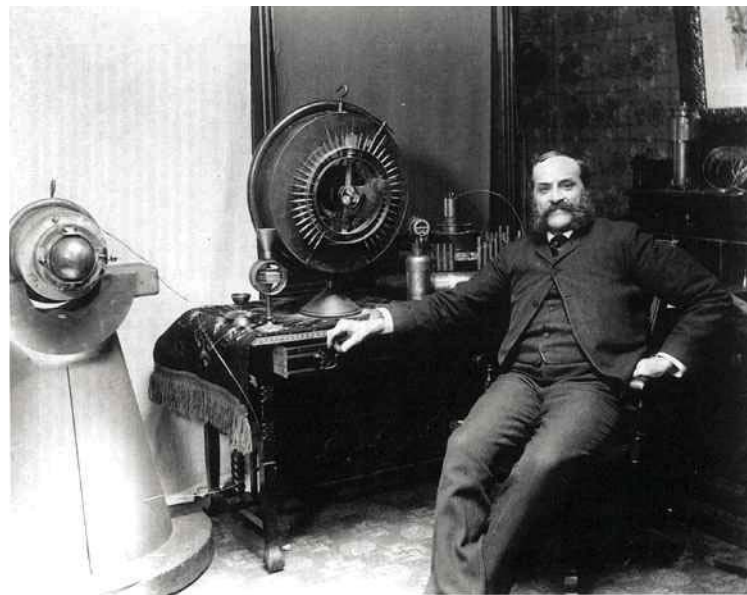
Among the variety of mysterious and unexplained creatures taking advantage of the Apprentice's domestic arrangements is a tripod dog. Perhaps the creature is naturally idle and feckless, or perhaps it just finds locomotion uncomfortable thanks to having had one leg shot off by a Balkan bandit. It does not say, but neither does it choose to move willingly, or very much. However: it is a cheerful pooch and wags its tail – a large, foxbrush-like thing with a sweep of wide radius – with relentless zeal. Failing to figure out a practical means of employing this talent in household duties, we then surmised that this remorselessly jolly tail *could* be utilised – perhaps by way of attaching certified dog-friendly rods and strings – to charge a battery. The battery would drive an electric motor, which would be attached to the wheels of a sprung platform just large enough to accommodate the becushioned, supine canine. The dog could thus locomote with all the lack of effort it puts into hopping. On the rare occasions the tail fails to wag, a solar panel could take over. Idle questions of steering, brakes, rear-wheel differentials and other such trivia one

leaves to experts and the meddlesome. The contraption outlined above is not a fortean machine (“Sometimes it is necessary to state the obvious”—Buddha). But one cannot help feeling Heath Robinson missed a trick here.

Actually, there are rather few fortean machines, in the sense that Fort himself mused only on the sundry contrivances of John Ernst Worrell Keely (1837–98) in the last chapter of his last book, *Wild Talents*. These days, the fortean world's astounding-apparatus artisan of choice is Nikola Tesla (1856–1943; see FT217:32-39), who

goes unmentioned by Fort but did invent a number of genuine, original, and *functioning* bits of kit; in 1912 he declined a Nobel Prize, but in 1960 was duly honoured by having the IS unit for magnetic field strength named after him.

Fort, naturally, had an oblique take on Keely, not uncunningly preceding his account with a somewhat incomplete treatment of John ‘Babbacombe’ Lee (1864–?1945). Lee was famous as ‘the man they couldn’t hang’. He stood on the gallows three times o’ the same morning, 23 February 1885, and three times the ‘drop’ failed to open. He also, of course, vehemently protested his



ABOVE: John Ernst Worrell Keely with a machine and maybe a baby Dalek. Why does this well-fed man look strangely smug?

innocence in the murder of his employer, elderly Emma Keyse, of which he had been convicted – and not very plausibly, by modern standards. Fort implies that Lee's virtue was entire, and that the failure of the drop was the upshot of his spotless heart interfering with deadly matter.¹ This slight sleight of hand allowed Fort to suggest in turn that Keely's machines worked only in his presence because Keely operated them by some psychic means, conscious or otherwise.

ALL AIR AND WATER

The vulgar expression is 'all piss and wind', and it was fitting that John Keely claimed that his magic machines generated energy from air and water by way of "vibratory sympathy" and "interatomic ether". One should always beware of lone geniuses who can explain their inventions only by resort to studiously unscientific terms, but for a quarter of a century Keely made a comfortable living from those who put faith in him, without taking out a single

patent, or ever explaining how his machines worked or, indeed, putting one to proper work (let alone selling one). Keely's early life gave no clue to his budding genius: he had a series of jobs as a carpenter, painter, upholsterer, flute player in a theatrical orchestra, carnival barker, mechanic and, interestingly, spent some time exposing mediums. He first demonstrated a machine in 1872 in Philadelphia; getting it going apparently depended on tuning forks (others he started variously with a harmonica, violin, flute, zither or pitch pipe – all handy for signalling to hidden accomplices). But those present were sufficiently impressed to put up tens of thousands of dollars to continue research and development. In 1875 the *New York Times* reported that:

Mr. Keely says that the first public exhibition will be upon the Pennsylvania Railroad, when he proposes to take a train from this city to New York and return. He will have the "generator" stationed at West Philadelphia fill the "receiver" which accompanies the engine and take vapour enough to draw 20 cars to New-York and back. The passage of the train will be silent. There will be no cinders, no escaping steam, or dropping of coals to set fire to bridges. The engine will be smaller than those now in use, but will be of greater horsepower. He says that the generator can either be carried on the train or left at a depot, according to the wishes of the engineer. It is small and compact and takes up very little room.

Needless to say, that train did not run. Twelve years later nothing useful had been produced either, but Keely had certainly refined his expository powers:

It is an elaboration of interatomic ether by vibration. The atomic ether vibrates all around the molecules of matter. There is a magnetic force attached to it at the same time, and it assimilates with the molecular atomic aggregations – that is, assimilates with a certain attractive force that it is hard to tell what it is. I call it a vibratory negative. It don't act like a magnet drawing metals toward it. There is a certain magnetic effect about it that causes it to adhere by vibratory rotation to different forms of matter – that is the molecular, atomic, etheric, and ether-etheric. The impulse is given by metallic impulses, the rotary power that is formed by etheric vibration – that is the force that holds it in position.²

Keely made free use too of such terms as: sympathetic equilibrium, quadrupole negative harmonics, hydro-pneumatic pulsating vacuo-engine, and etheric disintegration. Some sceptics reportedly said that: "it was worth the price of being duped to



ABOVE: Canadian John Hutchison, whose bizarre collection of devices allegedly produced poltergeist-like phenomena.

hear the eloquent language Keely used to explain his theory."³ The whole charade, and Keely's inspired ducking and diving in keeping his investors and patrons writing the cheques, is beyond our scope here; but someone ought to make a musical of it. After his death – by which time Michelson and Morley had shown there was no ether – Keely's workshop was excavated. A wondrous realm of hidden wires, tubes, pipes, pumps and other apparatus was discovered, whose nature revealed how the industrious genius's devices had been operated: by (compressed) air and water – just as he had said – but without a quasi-magical transformation into mysterious vapours as he had claimed. Inevitably Keely has his disciples and apologists to this day.⁴

Keely stands as one of the most artful, and successful, of 19th-century conmen – once he even suggested his epitaph might read "The greatest humbug of the 19th century". Charles Fort deployed his story in a tactic of mystification – a respectable enough occupation when considering the spectrum of intent in stories of the strange – entertaining to us, while suitably offensive to puritans. One

could call Fort 'sincerely deluded' in this instance (not in others), but mystification was his life's subversive work. Nonetheless, where this kind of magic technology and its obfuscatory terminology are concerned, there is a distinction to be made between smooth operators like Keely, who gulled even John Jacob Astor into investing in his scam, and the *actually* deluded. Among the latter we might include that infinite legion of inventors (and re-inventors) of anti-gravity and perpetual motion machines.⁵ But it's not always obvious who among the world's neglected geniuses is guilty of which error until they die. We present a couple of living examples for readers to ponder.

A GREAT TRADITION

Neglected Canadian genius John Hutchison first came to a degree of fame in the UK by way of Albert Budden, who had interviewed him in the mid-1990s and presented videos of his amazing machine at work. In a 1997 *Nexus* article (Vol 4, No 1, Dec 1996–Jan 1997), Budden wrote:

Basically, what Hutchison did was cram into a single room a variety of devices which emit electromagnetic fields (such as Tesla coils, van de Graaff generators, RF transmitters, signal generators, etc.). He found that after they had been running for a while, effects began to occur that were identical to what have come to be regarded as poltergeist phenomena. Objects of any material levitated into the air and hovered there, or moved about and then fell; fires started in unlikely places around the building; a mirror smashed at a distance of 80ft [24m] away; metal distorted and broke; water spontaneously swirled in containers; lights appeared in the air and then vanished; metal became white-hot but did not burn any surrounding materials; and so on.

This is a trifle vague, technically speaking, *à propos* the machine itself. And the question arises as to what actual use such a device may be put. Hutchison's collations of electronics seem to generate their effects unpredictably and at random – you might see a levitation, you might get a fire somewhere, who can say – and it seems Hutchison has found no way to direct them either. Overcome those problems, of course, and all manner of civil and military applications, plus riches and fame, open up.

According to Hutchison's fansite (www.hutchisoneffect.ca), Hutchison discovered his 'effect' in 1979, while trying to replicate experiments by Tesla (who else?).⁶ However: "Many



ABOVE: Andrea Rossi and Sergio Focardi of the University of Bologna, photographed with a prototype of their Energy Catalyser, or E-Cat.
 BELOW: Dr Judy Wood, who believes that “directed energy weapons” played a part in the destruction of the World Trade Center on 9/11.

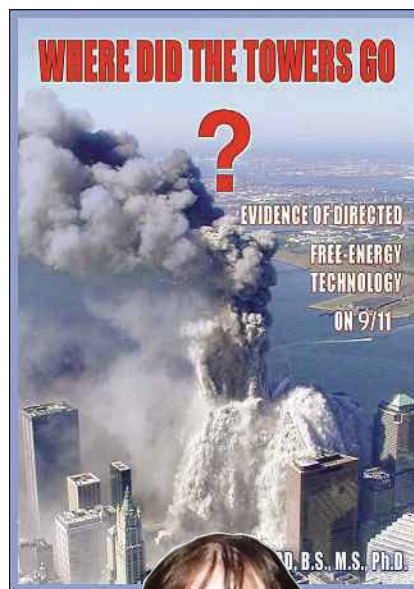
different political factors ensured Hutchison would not be allowed to continue in his research unless he signed agreements with either the Canadian government or the U.S. military.” Naturally, Hutchison refused, and has “remained independent regardless of multi-million dollar offers to conceal his findings from the general public. NASA is among the agencies he has turned down, as well as both the superpowers offerings [sic] to privatize and or militarize his inventions. John believes in a world of free energy and the marvels of anti-gravity for the general public, not just those in positions of power.”

Of course, there was a price to pay once the dread Establishment had his number, and (almost predictably) the tale goes that Hutchison was hounded by various arms and organs of the State until finally obliged to take refuge in a camper van stuffed with his kit and his wife, leave Canada, and freely roam the highways of the USA. Hutchison seems to share the talent of the ‘whistleblowers’ beloved of conspiracy theorists of sundry stripes: an ability to remain alive and vocal despite defying powerful governments’ interests with their wondrous revelations. This suggests he doesn’t have very much to interest them, actually, a thought perhaps reinforced by Hutchison’s failure to produce a portfolio of peer-reviewed papers in reputable science journals, still less the “world of free energy and the marvels of anti-gravity for the general public” to which he is so devoted. A remarkable proportion of the proofs of Hutchison’s work – or ‘effect’ – along with some of his equipment – seems to have disappeared into various official or corporate vaults. Perhaps more research is needed.

Perhaps it’s been done. In an 2008 affidavit produced for a New York Federal Court,

Hutchison stated that his work had been “classified as a matter of National Security by the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (see Figure 2).” Go to Figure 2, and we find a letter from Canadian MP Chuck Cook, acknowledging one from Hutchison requesting information from the [Canadian]

Department of National Defence. That information, Cook says, is “a matter involving national security.” What we *don’t* see is Hutchison’s initial letter. That might give us a clue as to what exactly he was asking for, which may well have been something best, in Canadian eyes, kept under wraps, but nothing to do with him. The drift of Hutchison’s citing Cook’s ambiguous (in the circumstances) letter is that the Canadian government had first grasped the value of, then classified, and then half-inched his ‘discoveries’. More revealing, in its way, is that the affidavit itself was written to support the contention of Dr Judy Wood (see drjudywood.com) that “directed energy weapons were a causal factor in the destruction on 11 September 2001 (9/11) of the World Trade Center complex (WTC) in New York, NY.” Not reverse-engineered alien technology, this time, then, or even the fearsome machinations of the Illuminati, but the fruits of an unacknowledged genius filched by dark forces and used in a false-flag operation (or something). For reasons that temporarily escape us, we think this tells us more about Hutchison than it tells us about the validity of his research. ⁷



DOES KEELY RIDE AGAIN?

Readers of this journal of strange phenomena will be aware of cold fusion, and the famously discredited Fleischmann–Pons claims to have achieved this in 1989. In 2011, Andrea Rossi

and Sergio Focardi of the University of Bologna were granted an Italian patent (which “received a formal but not technical examination”) for a device called the Energy Catalyser, or E-Cat. An international patent application had failed on the grounds that the thing offended “against the generally accepted laws of physics and established theories”. The E-Cat allegedly produces six (or more) times the input energy by way of a ‘low-energy nuclear reaction’. In other words, cold fusion; and cynics may recall how creationism renamed itself ‘Intelligent Design’ in a forlorn attempt to gain a flake of scientific plausibility (see FT211:46-50). Then, in November 2013, the Leonardo Corporation of Miami Beach, Florida – apparently licensees for the apparatus – announced that it would accept orders for a 1-megawatt-generating E-Cat plant, asking price \$1.5 million, or a \$1.50 a watt. The company said: “Orders are accepted from all over the world and require a routine due-diligence process. Customers must comply with several criteria set by Leonardo Corporation in order to qualify for a purchase of a ECAT 1MW plant.” Might one criterion be not asking too many questions? The thing consists, we’re told, of 106 E-Cat ‘cells’. “Each reactor contains three cores and consumes small amounts of treated Nickel powder and Hydrogen gas (under pressure, approx. 15 bar). The plant is recharged by specially trained and certified personnel,” says Leonardo.

Mainstream scientists say the E-Cat doesn’t work as claimed because it shouldn’t, and therefore it can’t, and so it’s probably a hoax – or, more accurately, a scam. As it happens, the scientists have a point. The E-Cat combines nickel powder with hydrogen gas, mixed with a secret formula of catalysts, at 25 bars pressure. This is heated electrically. The inventors say nuclear fusion then

occurs between the two elements, to produce (1) a lot of heat and (2) copper. As noted, this shouldn’t happen, not least because of the low pressure involved: to explode, a fusion bomb has to compress hydrogen to a density about 20 times that of (solid) lead.

Then there is the ‘Coulomb barrier’ – the massive electrical repulsion between the nuclei of hydrogen and nickel atoms – to overcome. This doesn’t happen *anywhere* in nature. Copper is not formed by banging atomic nuclei together, but when isotopes 62 or 64 of nickel capture a neutron, and ‘transmute’ into isotopes 63 and 65 of copper, kicking out beta and gamma particles at the same time – as happens in massive stars. Massive stars eventually go nova, generously spewing out copper (among other elements) for the rest of us to put to good use. The E-Cat doesn’t emit gamma rays: if it did, we’d have the proof, for observers of the E-Cat in action would by now be dead. It would have taken about a metre of concrete to shield them. And they weren’t so shielded.

And finally. If the E-Cat kit were doing what it is said to do, it would be generating dry steam at a rate of knots. Calculations by suitable experts of what would be expected from the equipment on show, and claims made for it, at a 2011 demonstration (which was videoed) variously predict the exit velocity of the steam as 67, 76, and 137mph (108, 122, 220km/h). From the video, one might reasonably guess the exit velocity to be nearer 10mph (16km/h).⁸

So, unless you are very, very rich indeed – and have a quirky sense of humour – the E-Cat does not yet look like a great investment for the hard-nosed capitalist. John Keely, on the other hand, may well be smiling down from the Great Beyond on Sr Rossi’s venture. **FT**

NOTES & REFERENCES

1 John ‘Babbacombe’ Lee (whom we first met, so to speak, through Fairport Convention’s eponymous ‘folk opera’) was a convicted thief who summarily dumped his pregnant wife to run off with another; and, while he was probably not the killer of his elderly employer, was probably present at the murder. The reason he did not die on the scaffold was soon established. Two days later the Home Office had a report from Exeter Prison: the bolts holding the trapdoors of the ‘drop’ closed were in effect an eighth of an inch too long. With no weight on them, the doors opened as intended. A man’s weight on them caused the structure to shift fractionally, so that the bolts did not pull back far enough. This happened, it seems, because the scaffold at Exeter was moved from one building to another in 1882, and had not been used or even properly tested since being dismantled and (not very meticulously) reconstructed. Thus do tiresome facts get in the way of folklore and claims of psychokinesis – or psychostasis, in this case. See <http://murderresearch.com/lee/the-bothed-executions/>.

2 See www.lhup.edu/~dsimanek/museum/keely/keely.htm, and the *New York Times*, 7 June 1885: after this exposition, “the reporter went on his way wondering.”

3 See (again) www.lhup.edu/~dsimanek/museum/keely/keely.htm

4 See for example Hans von Lieven’s pages on Keely, at: http://u2.lege.net/John_Keely/keelytech.com/index.html, and for full-blown conviction, Dale Pond’s

Sympathetic Vibratory Physics page (www.svpvriil.com/), where we learn that “Achieving vibratory rotation has been and continues to be our chief scientific and engineering focus. In our replications of John Worrell Keely’s devices (the dynaspheres) we have already achieved intermittent rotation (and considerable other etheric/psi effects) but not yet *continuous rotation*.” Ah.

5 Jerome Clark once told us how, at a conference on UFOs, he witnessed a sober presentation by a ufologist who was also a US Patents Office attorney diverted by a lengthy harangue from an enraged inventor who’d had his patent application for a perpetual motion machine refused. The picture of one devotee of weird stuff having a noisy bust-up with a devotee of another species of strangeness is just too delicious. In dull reality, Donald E Simanek’s Museum of Unworkable Devices at www.lhup.edu/~dsimanek/museum/unwork.htm is a treasure house for anyone interested in learning how to dismantle the theory and practice of perpetual motion machines and their close relations. Those intrigued by anti-gravity devices may find it useful to read *Responding to Mechanical Anti-Gravity* by Marc G Willis and Nicholas E Thomas (NASA, 2006: www.nttrs.nasa.gov/archive/nasa/casi.ntrs.nasa.gov/20070004897_2007004127.pdf). The authors note, deadpan (p13), that correspondence with amateur inventors “can be emotionally charged” and that “a technical response will not provide the submitter with the kind of help they need and will only encourage more unproductive

correspondence.” Perhaps the last word on originators of implausible theories and impossible machines was given by a correspondent to *Fortean Times* [mid 1990s] who said he’d like to gather all these people in the same room together one day and get them to compare their “funny equations”.

6 Nikola Tesla (1856–1943), an undoubted genius, has been co-opted by the odder fringes of New Age thinkers (in reality, assertionists) and is today credited with things far more wondrous than his known inventions. Among them are: a means of time travel; a “death ray” (which he vehemently denied in a 1935 article), possibly a particle-beam weapon; communicating with Martians, and – although born on Venus – today being alive and well and living near the ‘face on Mars’; inventing a ‘fuelless generator’ (and thus becoming a precursor of ‘zero point energy’ research); an anti-gravity device; and of course being the intellectual father of the US Navy’s HAARP project, which all good conspiracists know is a weather-control device, or worse, even though it isn’t. All these amazements and more may be explored free of charge from www.bibliotecapleyades.net/esp_tesla.htm#Tesla_and_Life_in_The_Universe

7 For more on Hutchison, see: “John Hutchison, the Wild Scientist from Vancouver” (2002), which is replete with intriguing pictures of surplus maritime equipment, at: www.guns.connect.fi/innoplaza/energy/story/John/index.html; “John Kenneth Hutchison discovers what could prove to be the link between man and machine!” (which somehow

manages to tie man, mushroom, machine and Atlantis together) at: www.hutchisononeffect.ca/Atlantis.html. This piece is impossible to précis, but here is a taster: “Once a small band of the electrical magnetic spectrum was identified, it was then amplified and studied. What was noticed was that the crystal power converter which operates based on the Casimir [sic] effect had a relationship with the organic life that had grown around it. After much study, it has become apparent that the missing link between the mind and the machine has been observed in action. These mushroom coated bio chips send and receive things in an upper band of zero point spectrum. Welcome to the age of the cyborg, and telepathic interfaces for machines!” The fortran on the Clapham Omnibus may wonder: *How do they know all this?*

And for sceptical views, try the Skeptics Dictionary (www.skepdic.com/hutchisonhoax.html) and John Rimmer’s entertaining and trenchant criticism, “Mr Hutchinson’s Amazing Machine” [sic], *Magonia* 58 (Jan 1997), at: <http://magonia.haaran.com/2010/hutchinson/> [sic again].

8 Sources for this section (and required reading for everyone genuinely interested) include the comprehensive theoretical coverage at Ethan Siegal’s blog ‘Starts with a Bang’, at <http://scienceblogs.com/startswithabang/2011/12/05/the-nuclear-physics-of-why-we/>, and the practical, devastating, but by no means wholly unsympathetic analysis of the 2011 E-Cat demonstration by Steven B Krivit at <http://newenergytimes.com/v2/news/2011/37/3705report3.shtml>.

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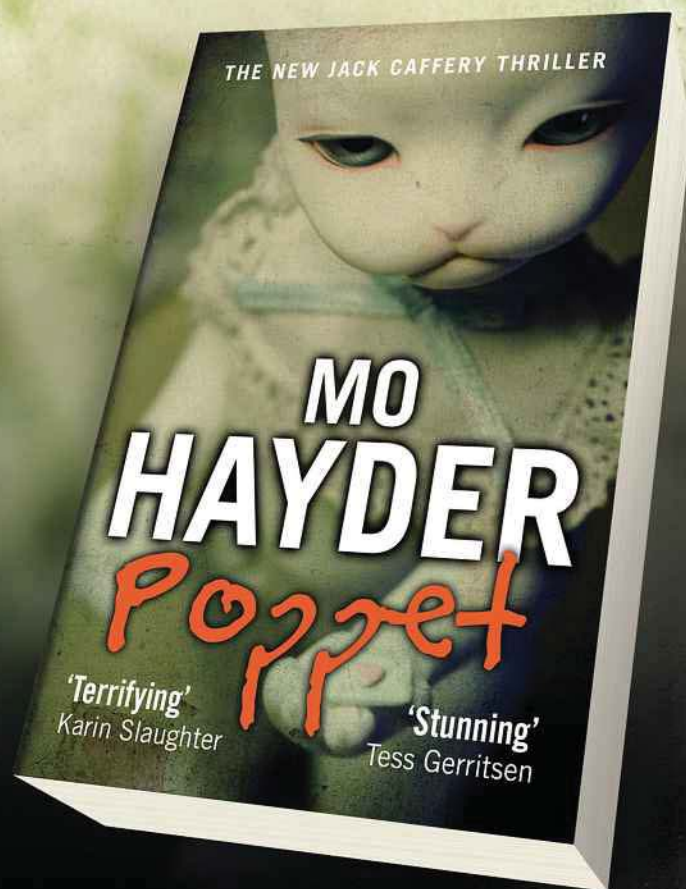
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