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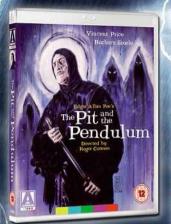
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INSIDE THE SECRET SUBCULTURE OF COSTUMED CRIME-FIGHTERS

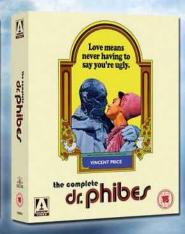




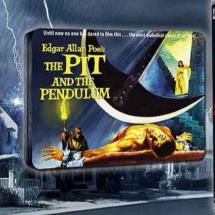
THE HERBURION

















It might be warming up outside but the chills keep coming thick and fast! From brooding gothic castles, murky Mississippi swamplands and – most horrific of all – small-town suburbia, we've got spooky settings to suit all tastes.

Tom Hanks suspects his new neighbours are cannibalistic ghouls in *The Burbs* and genre legend Vincent Price has a ball offing the snooty theatre critics of London in various gruesome ways in *Theatre of Blood*. Price continues his murderous exploits in *The Pit and the Pendulum, The Abominable Dr. Phibes* and *Dr. Phibes Rises Again!*, whilst *The Beast Within* sees a were-Cicada (yes, you read that right!) munching its way through the inhabitants of a small town with a dark past.

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ForteanTimes



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editoria

We could be heroes...

Superheroes are big business these days. After forming the basis of a modern pop mythology for more than half a century, the comic book characters created by Stan Lee, Steve Ditko, Jack Kirby and other writers and artists are now dominating the big screen: Captain America, Spider-Man and The X-Men will be all invading your local cinema this year in effects-laden, starstudded, multi-million dollar adaptations a long way from the characters' roots in the pulpy, fourcolour pages where they started life. (By the way, Spider-Man 2 supervillain and FT reader Paul Giamatti - whose Rhino rocks, by the way shares his 'It Happened to Me' on p73.)

In this issue we look at some of the unusual fall-out from this comic book explosion. While there's no denying the triumph of the superhero as a contemporary cultural icon

and on pp34-35 we ask some of today's hottest comics talents to ponder the reasons for this ascendancy - one of the odder side-effects has been the growth of the Real Life Superhero (RLSH) movement. It's a big step to go from reading about Batman or Spider-Man to donning a garish costume, taking on a silly name and hitting the streets to fight crime. Tea Krulos spent three years hanging out with RLSH all over the US, trying to understand their strange lifestyle and the motivations

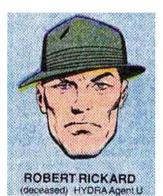
underlying it (pp28-35). Behind the masks, he found a surprisingly diverse group of people from all walks of life, often trying to change the world, in their own small way, for the better.

It doesn't always go according to plan. Seattle-based Phoenix Jones has found himself in court after his vigilante justice ran afoul of the law. He's had his nose broken in a street fight and his relationship with fellow costumed crusader Purple Reign seems to have bitten the dust; Peter Parker could have told him that the long-underwear gig wasn't always an easy one. Meanwhile, other RLSH have found themselves embroiled in very public fallings-out: it was reported recently that the Michigan Protectors had split into two factions after leader Bee Sting was arrested for discharging a shotgun while on patrol and Petoskey Batman had been busted for (of all things) trespassing on rooftops. The two former super-friends have since been trading insults in an unseemly slanging match (Detroit News, 6 Feb 2014).

CELEBRATING COMICS LEGENDS

Some of our own roots lie in the early days of British comic fandom; we recently lost our own comics legend with the sad passing of Steve Moore, known to aficionados the world over for his work on 2000AD and other titles. On pp24-27 we celebrate Steve's life, and his many achievements in the different, yet subtly interconnected worlds of comics, forteana and Eastern esoterica. Bob Rickard, Alan Moore and Luis Andrade look back at the life and times of this much-loved gentleman and scholar (who, as you'll see, even donned the odd superhero costume in his youth). We're also proud to present what has tragically turned out to be Steve's last piece for FT (pp42-45).

A further celebration of British comics and a reminder that they're not just about the exploits of the long underwear brigade - will be appearing at the British Library. 'Comics Unmasked', as co-curator and walking comic encyclopædia Paul Gravett reveals, will explore the subversive end of the comic book spectrum, presenting an alternative history of radicalism and rebellion that often saw comics creators in the dock (pp20-21).



BOB RICKARD: AGENT OF HYDRA

A story that our esteemed founder Bob Rickard doesn't mention in his reminiscences of pre-FT comic fandom days is the one about how he ended up in a Marvel comic...

When his pals Steve Parkhouse and Barry Windsor-Smith went off to the States to work for Marvel, one of their first assignments was Nick Fury: Agent of S.H.I.E.L.D #12. In a playful in-joke, they revealed the HYDRA mole who

had infiltrated S.H.I.E.L.D with the purpose of assassinating Fury to be none other than... Robert Rickard! He isn't the only one to find his name popping up in a Marvel comic; see the letters pages for details of a surprising alias adopted by Frank Castle, aka The Punisher.

And in a final footnote on the two-way street between comics and forteana, we have to report an amusing incident that took place during the photo shoot of the UK superhero team you'll find on p31. We've reported countless instances over the years of false alarms caused by film crews, advertising stunts, sex dolls and cuddly toys, but this was the first time we've unwittingly caused one ourselves. Spotting bizarrely clad and masked figures acting suspiciously, one resident of London's exclusive Primrose Hill decided to call the police... which is how LoneDon Knight and his team, along with our hapless art director Etienne Gilfillan, found themselves surrounded by unhappy officers having to explain that they weren't terrorists just superheroes and an innocent photographer.



UNDERWEAR FOR









THE INTERNATIONAL COLLECTION PART II
CANADIAN - IRISH - SWEDISH - JAMAICAN







strangedays

Photographing fairies up north

One of the Three Johns stirs debate as his snaps of fairies in the Rossendale Valley go on show

John Hyatt, 53, has taken photographs of what he claims are tiny winged creatures while out photographing the Rossendale Valley in Lancashire over the last two years. Mr Hyatt - a member of the Three Johns punk/ indie band in the 1980s and 1990s. and now Director of Manchester Institute for Research and Innovation in Art and Design (MIRIAD) at Manchester Metropolitan University - insists the photographs have not been altered in any way. They are certainly nothing like the illustrations from *Princess Mary's* Gift Book (1915) masquerading as "the Cottingley Fairies" that fooled Conan Doyle back in the 1920s [FT43:48-53].

"It was a bit of a shock when I blew them up, I did a double take," he said. "They're very small winged human forms dancing in the sunlight. I went out afterwards and took pictures of flies and gnats and they just don't look the same. People can decide for themselves what they are. The message to people is to approach them with an open mind. I think it's one of those situations where you need to believe to see. A lot of people who have seen them say they have brought a little bit of magic into their lives and there's not enough of that around. Everything gets stereotyped, whatever it is. But there are stranger things in life than fairies, and life grows everywhere."

John, who lives in Rawtenstall, has posted some of his images on social media and says they have sparked much debate. They attracted sceptical comment from some quarters. Entomologist Erica McLaughlin, writing in the British Natural History Museum's NaturePlus blog, suggested that the photos showed midges, writing that these tiny insects "form mating swarms where the males will 'dance' around trying to attract the opposite sex. They have delicate wings and long legs which dangle down."

Ben Hanson, former host and



investigator on Svfv Channel series Fact or Faked: Paranormal Files, argued that Hyatt was fully aware his photos didn't really show fairies and was simply doing what artists do - providing "a little bit of magic".

An exhibition, called Rossendale Fairies, will run at The Whitaker Museum in Whitaker Park, Rossendale, throughout the spring. mirror.co.uk, 2 April; Rossendale (Lancs) Free Press, 4 April; Huffington Post 7 April 2014.







FASTER, PUSSYCAT!

Mad moggies, rocket cats and phone-dialling feline fiends

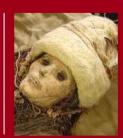
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GETTING STUCK IN

Is penis captivus an urban legend or a genuinely knotty problem?

PAGE 14



VINTAGE CRUMBS

Cheesy Chinese mummy yields world's oldest dairy product

PAGE 16

Fish hits plane

Is it a bird? No, not this time...

On 10 September 2013, a National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) jet was struck by a falling fish during takeoff at MacDill Air Force Base in Florida. The aircrew aborted the takeoff, assuming the plane had hit a bird - a common occurrence at the waterfront base. "We were nearing the point in the takeoff where we needed to rotate, or raise the nose of the airplane off the ground, when an osprey with something in its claws flew in front of our aircraft," recalled Lt. Cmdr. Nick Toth, the pilot of the NOAA Gulfstream G-IV. The crew heard a thud, and assuming that they had hit the osprey, aborted the takeoff. "We swept the runway, but we didn't find any remains of the bird," said Lindsey Garven, a bird aircraft strike hazard contractor. "We continued our search and were surprised to find a 9-inch [23cm] sheepshead [a medium-sized saltwater fish] lying near the end of the runway." Still sceptical, officials packed up the fish along with DNA from the aircraft and sent them to the Smithsonian Feather Identification Laboratory in Washington DC. Results confirmed NOAA's first-ever fish-strike. Tampa (FL) Tribune, 6 Mar 2014.



ABOVE: The sheepshead on the runway, shown alongside a biohazard bag and radio for scale.

EXTRALEXTRAL

FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

'ALIENS SWING VOTE'

Sun, 28 Aug 2013.

New sight-loss service

Hull Daily Mail, 11 Sept 2013.

Sexual health move is a step backwards, says MP

Hull Daily Mail, 14 Sept 2013.

Woman kept 88 rabbits to cope with losing boyfriend

D.Telegraph, 27 Oct 2012.

Family is killed by a crisp packet

D.Mail, 26 Sept 2013.

Labour councillor: 'My mother was a 9ft alien'

Hull Daily Mail, 10 Sept 2013.

Council calls in counsellors to counsel councillors

(Brighton) Argus, -Aug 2013.

Scarecrows in village invasion

Valley News (Dorset), Sept 2013.

Florida trains labradors to slug it out with giant snails

Guardian, 31 Aug 2013.

Rare fish caught with sausage

Mail on Sunday, 8 Sept 2013.

Wallonia and Flanders at odds over pandas

Guardian, 13 Sept 2013.





strangedays 👺

SIDELINES...

HOUSE SWAP

A family swapped homes to dodge ghosts. When Lisa Way, 38, saw faces at windows and floating limbs on her stairs, she asked the council to rehouse her, but they refused; so her cousin Kirsty Purcigo, 27, moved in. While spooky phenomena at the Cardiff property have subsided, Ms Purcigo said her family were "not scared" when the TV turns itself on at night. Metro, 5 Feb 2014.

OILY TEARS

During one week in February, some 2,000 people flocked to the town of Tarshiha in northern Israel to see a statue of the Virgin Mary in the living room of a Christian family that allegedly 'weeps' oil. Osama Khoury said that his wife Amira found the statue "covered with oil" recently. Amira said the statue "spoke to her" and told her not to be afraid. Parts of the statue appeared to be slick with moisture, even after it was wiped off. [AP] 12 Feb 2014.

GLOW OF GRACE

Hundreds have been flocking to a house in the southern Belgian town of Jalhay to see a 1ft (30cm)-high Virgin Mary statue that allegedly emits a dull glow in the dark, first noticed last January. Some visitors claim to have been cured of ailments. The statue represents the "Virgin of Banneux", from the name of a nearby village where a young girl witnessed an apparition of the BVM in 1933. The statue's owners have refused to allow it to be removed for examination. D.Mail. 15 Mar 2014.

AUTO SPECTRE

Drivers claim to have seen a phantom car late at night on the A458 between Foel and Mallwyd in mid-Wales, which vanished as they followed it round a bend. Paul Barron, 45, said he saw it for the second time on 2 August 2012, "under a full moon and clearly visible". Another witness, Christina Hale, said there were no side roads for it to turn into. Sun, 16 Aug 2012.

CAT CURIOSA

ROCKET CATS. PSYCHO-PUSSIES AND FELINE PHONE CALLS

 Images from Feuer Buech, a manual on artillery and siege warfare dating from about 1530 and recently digitised by the University of Pennsylvania, appear to show jet packs strapped to the backs of cats and doves. The German text helpfully advises military commanders to use them to "set fire to a castle or city which you can't get at otherwise". In brief: capture a cat from enemy territory, attach a bomb to its back, light the fuse and then hope it runs back home and starts a raging fire.

The treatise was

written by artillery

master Franz Helm of Cologne, who was believed to have fought in several skirmishes against the Turks in the Balkans at a time when gunpowder was changing warfare. Circulated widely and illustrated by multiple artists, Helm's manual is filled with all sorts of strange and terrible imagery, from bombs packed with shrapnel to missile-like explosive devices studded with spikes - and those weaponised cats and birds. There is no evidence that cats and birds were used in early modern warfare in the way prescribed by Helm. "It seems like a really terrible idea, and very unlikely the animals would run back to where they came from," said Penn researcher Mitch Fraas. "More likely they'd set your own camp on fire." [AP] Independent, 6 Mar 2014.

 In Portland, Oregon, on 9 March, Lux, a four-year-old black-and-white Himalavan cat, scratched seven-monthold Jessie in the face after the child pulled its tail. Lee Palmer,



Police officers arrived and saw **Lux scurry into** the kitchen...

LEFT: The Penn University 'rocket cat'. BELOW: Lux, the raging Portland cat with "a history of violence".

Jessie's father, kicked Lux in the backside, which sent it into a rage, so Palmer and his girlfriend Teresa Barker barricaded themselves. Jessie and the family dog in a bedroom for safety and Palmer called the police. Meanwhile, Lux - who at 22lb (10kg) is about twice the weight of a normal house cat - blocked the doorway and could be heard on the 911 call screeching loudly as Palmer said in a panicked voice: "He's charging us. He's at our bedroom door." When police officers arrived, they saw the cat scurry into the kitchen. After it scrambled atop the refrigerator, they captured it with a dog snare and locked it in a travel-style kennel. Palmer said Lux had a "history of violence" and

he planned to get the pet medical attention and therapy. "We're not getting rid of him right now," he said. "He's been part of our family for a long time." Jessie suffered some scratches to the face but was not seriously hurt. [R, AP] 11 Mar; Metro, 12 Mar; Sunday, 23 Mar 2014.



• On 17 October 2013, police

call. They found two pedigree

Singapura kittens and realised

broke into a flat in Kilburn, north London, after taking a 999

 Retired lecturer Howard Moss. 64, woke at 2.30am on 7 December 2010 to find two policemen on his doorstep answering an emergency call from his house in Brynmill, Swansea, South Wales, They found Ginger, one of Mr Moss's three cats, asleep on the telephone table in the hall. The phone was slightly off the hook and Ginger had one of his paws on the phone keyboard.

About a month later, police broke into a house in East Preston, West Sussex, in response to an emergency call, when owner Lauren O'Shea, 25, was out. Her cat, Watson, had been playing with the telephone buttons and had knocked the receiver off the hook. D.Telegraph, 10 Dec 2010; Metro, 21 Jan 2011.

• Along with drinking and dancing, a cat race in which the losers ended up in the pot was the highlight of the festival of Curruñao held every September in the small Peruvian town of San Luis, 90 miles (145km) south of Lima (or in the town of La Quebrada, according to one source). However, last October a provincial judge banned the eating of cats in response to a complaint by the animal rights commission at Lima's Law Society. Besides the cat race, events allegedly included cats being tied to fireworks and their drowning and skinning for a range of stews and other dishes. Local people said the animals were specially



ABOVE: Howard Moss found two policemen on his doorstep thanks to Ginger's call.

bred for the festival, which dated from colonial times and was an integral part of religious celebrations of Santa Efigena, a folk saint. It commemorated a time when the first settlers had to eat cats to survive. They said that cat meat was richer than rabbit or duck, and had long been consumed without any medical problems. MX News (Sydney), 16 Oct; Guardian, 19 Oct 2013.

- A 50-year-old man from Brianza in northern Italy posed as an animal lover to adopt cats from pet refuges, then cooked them in front of friends and served them for dinner. He took at least 15 cats in a few months, asking for 'plump' black animals around three years old. When he avoided routine checks on the animals. workers feared he might be part of a sect targeting black cats for sacrifice. Staff from AIDAA, Italy's animal welfare organisation, visited his house unannounced. They found the married father of two apparently preparing to kill a cat. He allegedly confessed and could face up to a year in jail. D.Mail, 28 Jan 2014.
- Authorities removed 67 dead cats and 99 living cats from a filthy home in Wright, near Albany

- in New York State, in January 2013. The dead cats were packed in plastic bags in the freezer and the live cats were in crates stacked floor-to-ceiling. Sheriff's deputies went to the property after a neighbour called to complain about the overpowering odour of feline urine and fæces. (Queensland) Courier-Mail, 28 Jan
- Margaret Foster, 65, and her daughter Kara, 20, kept 87 cats in their semi-detached house in Leicester, including in the ceiling. The RSPCA said 13 cats had to be put down after being rescued. The women were sentenced to 12 weeks in jail, suspended for 12 months, and banned from keeping animals for 10 years. D. Telegraph, 11 June 2013.
- Last November, Celestyna Grabowska, 42, faced two years in jail for performing experiments on cats, both dead and alive. Warsaw police found 72 injured cats and almost 100 feline corpses in freezers after complaints over the noise and smell from her house. They said Grabowska was already banned from owning dogs following her experiments to create a new breed. Sun, 1 Nov 2013.

SIDELINES...

SATANIC CHEESE

Polish exorcist Elzbieta Gas warned shoppers to avoid packets of goat's cheese priced at 6.66 zlotys (£1.32) in the Lidl supermarket chain, as 666 is, she claims, "the sign of the devil", enhanced by the horns of a goat that, not unreasonably, appears on the label. D.Telegraph, 1 Oct

MAGNETIC MONSTER

Beachgoers at Magnetic Island, off Townsville, North Queensland, saw a long curved 'neck' bobbing up and down in the sea, suggesting some kind of giant creature. James Cook University biology professor Glen Chilton thought it was "probably a piece of tree or a piece of a boat", while cryptozoologist Rex Gilroy reserved judgement. "It's hard to say from the photo," he said. Adelaide Advertiser, 27 Oct 2013.

HAIRY RIDE

A woman's taxi ride became alarming when the driver confided that he was prone to "changing into a werewolf". The passenger's husband reported the incident to police in Cheltenham, a Freedom of Information request has revealed. Metro, 6 Nov 2013.

WHAT A GAS!

Methane from 90 belching and farting dairy cows exploded in a farm shed in Rasdorf, central Germany, almost lifting the roof off. A static charge sparked the detonation, which left one cow with slight burns. [AP] 27 Jan 2014.



SIDELINES...

CONDUCT UNBECOMING

Joseph Small, 20, burst out of a storage cupboard at the Premier Inn in Leicester Square, London, on 31 October 2013. He was naked, masturbating. and had a fire extinguisher hose up his bottom. Guests saw him urinate in the lobby, shouting: "I come from Sheffield!" Later, he couldn't remember a thing and was fine £745. Metro, 13 Nov, 4 Dec 2013.

ISIS UNVEILED

Masked militants from the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) cut down the Tree of Chairs in Syria's Idlib province, because local people believed it brought good luck, while ISIS regarded it as idolatrous. A month earlier. ISIS zealots blew up the shrine of Sheikh Issa Abdel-Qader al-Rifai in the eastern Syrian city of Deir al-Zor. They have also demolished various statues and reburied in secret locations revered Muslim figures from the time of the Prophet. ISIS has been disowned by al-Qaeda for being too extreme. Times, 23 Nov 2013.

PERVERT ALERT

Children aged eight and nine were evacuated from a swimming pool's changing rooms after staff mistook a prosthetic leg for a paedophile. The leg was seen poking out of a cubicle. It belonged to a disabled man swimming at Larkfield Leisure Centre in Aylesford, Kent. D. Telegraph, 14 Dec 2013.



Museum of Witchcraft

Cornish collection reopens under new management



ABOVE: Some of the world's largest collection of witchcraft-related objects in the world on display in the Boscastle museum.

On 1 April 2014, the Museum of Witchcraft in the picturesque village of Boscastle in Cornwall was re-opened under the management of Peter and Judith Hewitt. It is being overseen by the Museum of British Folklore, which took over from Graham King, the previous owner, last Hallowe'en.

The world's largest collection of witchcraftrelated objects attracts more than 35,000 visitors annually. The museum was founded by Cecil Williamson on the Isle of Man in 1951. Gerald Gardner, often referred to as the father of modern wicca, was the "resident witch". although the two men later fell out. Williamson moved the museum to Windsor in 1954, then to Bourton-on-the-Water, and finally to Boscastle in 1961. Williamson, an ebullient

motormouth who exhausted Ian

Simmons and Paul Sieveking

when they visited him with a

view to buying the collection for Fortean Times in 1996, sold up to Graham King later that year and died in 1999 at the age of 80. On 16 August 2004, the museum was inundated by mud and water

Gerald Gardner was once the museum's 'resident witch'

in a flash flood, but most of the artefacts were saved [FT189:5]. A wooden plaque from the Wise Woman's Cottage turned up on a beach in South Wales. Collapsed walls were rebuilt, new floors laid and electrics replaced.

Peter Hewitt was previously Collections Researcher at the

> Shakespeare Birthplace Trust and Judith Hewitt was Head of History at a secondary school in Lincoln. "We are delighted to have been given the opportunity to become custodians of this incredible collection," said Simon Costin. Director of the Museum of British Folklore. "We are very much looking forward to nurturing and augmenting the collection and slowly introducing some exciting

new exhibits and exhibitions over the coming years along with introducing talks, education and touring exhibition opportunities." See www.museumofwitchcraft.com

Hitting hidden talents

Bangs on the head unleash unsuspected new abilities

• Pip Taylor, 49, from Birkenhead, Merseyside, hit her head when she fell down a flight of stone steps at Chester racecourse in May 2012 and subsequently discovered she had acquired artistic skill. People have now commissioned her to draw portraits for them, and she is completing four artworks a day. "It is just extraordinary and quite strange really," she said. "I have always loved drawing and had hopes of becoming an artist as a teenager but I was never any good. I used to draw cartoons and the only thing I could really manage was Snoopy. I studied art at school and wanted to take it as an O-level, but my teacher advised me not to, as I really wasn't very good. I dug out my old notepad from when I was 16 and cringe at my attempts at drawing people and faces."

Her fall had caused serious bruising to her brain. Told her recovery would take six months, she found herself at home and bored, so she bought a pencil and sketchpad and started sketching again. "I started doodling, but something felt different," she said. "It was more natural and I was amazed at the images I could draw. My sister jokes that she wants a bang on the head so she can wake up with a talent too." Pip is now compelled to draw every day in case her talent disappears as quickly as it came. D.Telegraph, Metro, 19 Mar 2014.

• Rob Ball, 23, was in a car park outside a nightclub in Southend, Essex, after a night out in 2009 when he was punched in the side of the head, causing lasting trauma to the left side of his brain. The 6ft 8in (2m) 'gentle giant' was in a coma for two weeks and his family thought he'd never recover. The former nightclub promoter lost most of his memory and had to learn basic skills such as walking all over again. Speaking soon after the devastating attack he said:



ABOVE: Pip Taylor of Birkenhead, with her before-and-after artistic endeavours.

"It feels like my head is going to blow up and I'm convinced I'm going to die all the time now, because it's had such an impact on my life. I get déjà vu all the time. I don't know if it's something to do with the head injury, but I keep thinking 'I remember this before', and think something is about to go wrong."

However, soon after leaving hospital Ball began to hear voices in his head that told him things about other people: "Soon they were so clear that I was telling people what popped into my head about them – often strangers in the street. I was getting messages predicting illness, love and death. People are shocked when I can tell them personal details."

Ball's mother, Chrissie Bacon, says he found her keys when she lost them in her own mother's house. He claims to have got more than 300 predictions right, including the sex of seven unborn babies – and says he now wants to be a professional psychic. Obviously unfamiliar with the extensive corpus of anecdotal evidence, the Brain Injury Rehabilitation Trust

charity said it has never heard of anyone claiming to be psychic following head trauma. *IB Times*, *Sun*, 16 Mar 2014.

• At the age of 12, Lachlan Connors from Denver, Colorado, got banged on the head playing lacrosse - and became a musical genius. Now seven years later, he plays 13 instruments effortlessly and "beautifully". He had grown up with no ability or interest in music and dreamed of becoming a professional lacrosse player. His mother Else Hamilton said: "He really had no talent. I'd say, 'Can't you hear what's next?' with something like 'Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star' and he'd say, 'No'." Days after the accident he found that he could hear music in a completely different way. He has taught himself to play piano, guitar, harmonica, ukulele and even bagpipes, entirely by ear. His doctor Spyridon Papadopoulos said: "The thinking is that this was a talent lying latent in his brain that was somehow uncovered by his brain rewiring." Sun, 24 Nov 2013. For another musical genius caused by head-banging, see FT292:8.

SIDELINES...

ALL-PURPOSE

Mary and Ivor Waite from Halesowen, West Midlands, are still using a vacuum cleaner made in 1925 that also paints, grinds coffee and minces meat. The German Piccolo machine was a wedding gift in 1976 from Ivor's aunt. "I remember neighbours popped in to have a look at it in action," said Mrs Waite, 61, a retired cleaner. "You name it, it can do it." D.Mirror, 28 Dec 2013.

GUMMY GAMER

A man with only two teeth who bit into his neighbour's penis has been jailed for seven years. Richard Henderson asked Jason Martin, 41, to turn down the volume on his Xbox. When the pair met outside their block of flats in Dover, Kent, Martin bit through his victim's pyjamas "like a sandwich". When the gummy gamer was arrested, he still had blood around his mouth. *Metro. 18 Oct 2013.*

THREE SHEETS TO THE WIND

An unnamed 42-year-old man from Trenton, New Jersey, slept soundly for about 10 hours with a knife stuck in the middle of his back before discovering he had been stabbed during a fistfight on his porch the previous evening. He awoke feeling a pain and his brother told him about the knife handle sticking out of his back. Apparently, our man had been drinking (who knew?) *Trenton (NJ) Times, 4 Dec 2013.*





SCIENCE

OLD FUSION QUEST HEATS UP

Is it time for hard-nosed capitalists to start investing in cold fusion? DAVID HAMBLING wouldn't necessarily recommend it - but recently the money has started pouring in

nless you're 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," concluded the Hierophant's Apprentice [FT311:53], summarising what critics have been saying for some time about the latest in alleged cold fusion reactors. However, in the last few months there has been an extraordinary shift. Money is starting to pour in.

Andrea Rossi is not the obvious leader of a scientific revolution; he is not a scientist, but an entrepreneur with a degree in philosophy. His E-Cat cold fusion reactor fits in a shipping container and supposedly generates one megawatt, yours for just \$1.5m. Rossi has an unusual method of addressing the world: the comments section of his grandly named website, the Journal of Nuclear Physics. ¹ After the latest paper on the physics of rotating black holes, there are questions and answers about progress on the "Energy Catalyser". Rossi writes in English, a language that he commands imperfectly, and his replies tend towards terseness: "1 - Yes 2 - Too soon to answer 3 - Maybe".

Anyone wishing to sell a cold fusion reactor might be well advised to give a detailed theoretical explanation of how it works, and a series of public demonstrations to prove that the technology really works as claimed. Rossi has done neither. He has promised that the theory will be published at some point; all we know is that it is based on a reaction between hydrogen gas and powdered nickel. The demonstrations (which ceased a couple of years ago) were never very satisfactory. He has long promised that there would be testing by independent third party scientists

To make things more suspicious, Rossi never says with whom he is doing business. After the supposedly successful demonstration in 2011, the first megawatt E-Cat was allegedly sold to an unnamed secret military customer. After that Rossi went



The E-Cat cold fusion reactor fits in a shipping container

into partnership with a mysterious US company and says he is bound by non-disclosure agreements not to give anything away about the continuing research and

As if this were not enough, Rossi spent four years in prison in his native Italy in connection with a company he founded called PetrolDragon. The company aimed to extract fuel from waste. but collapsed amidst allegations of toxic waste dumping. In a subsequent venture, Rossi produced thermoelectric devices that were supposed to convert waste heat into electricity, but these only produced a fraction of the power expected. Steven Krivit, editor of New Energy Times, is one of the best-informed people in the field of cold fusion research. He has had no hesitation in branding Rossi a fraud. 2

In spite of all this, Rossi has many ardent fans. He is a talented showman, and knows how to tease an audience and lead them along with promises of something wonderful just around the corner.



There are a number of websites devoted to following the E-Cat's progress, the most notable and durable being Frank Acland's E-Catworld.com.

The E-Cat might have been expected to slide into obscurity, but last year a third-party report was published supporting Rossi's claims. The report, "Indication of anomalous heat energy production in a reactor device", concludes that the E-Cat does indeed produce large amounts of excess energy. The testers had a new version of the E-Cat known as a Hot Cat, which produces enough energy to glow cherry-red, and they calculated its heat output using readings from thermographic cameras. "Even by the most conservative assumptions as to the errors in the measurements. the result is still one order of magnitude greater than conventional energy sources," says the report, which rules out hidden batteries or other power sources. 3

Then, in January, E-Catworld found a paper trail that led them

LEFT: Rossi demonstrates his invention. BELOW: Testing a hot cat..

to Rossi's mysterious backers. It turns out to be a real company called Industrial Heat LLC. After some hesitation, Industrial Heat's manager confirmed that they had bought the rights to the E-Cat after considerable 'due diligence' checking. They are funding research (Rossi mentions a team of 16) and preparing patents to protect the technology. Those behind Industrial Heat include Tom Darden, an entrepreneur with a background in various energy ventures.

One swallow does not make a summer, nor does one investor. deciding to take a punt on cold fusion make a trend. But Rossi is not the only player.

Defkalion, rivals who formerly worked in partnership with Rossi and use similar technology, say their 'pre-industrial' reactor is being independently tested prior to sale in autumn of this year. Brillouin, a US cold fusion outfit also using nickel-hydrogen technology, has announced a multi-million dollar deal with a South Korean company. The Koreans will make reactors under licence and install them in a power station to replace existing boilers. They are expected to run at a third of the cost of other energy sources. And in December, Cyclone Power Technologies added Dr Yeong Kim, professor at Purdue University and a leading researcher in cold fusion, to its technical consulting team. His express aim is to understand and harness cold

Perhaps most tellingly, the US Department of Energy recently updated the list of innovative energy technologies that it was interested in developing. As well as solar and thermoelectrics, Low Energy Nuclear Reactions - aka Cold Fusion – are now included.

Investing in the E-Cat or any of the other cold fusion ventures would be premature. But if any of them should happen to pay off, it will be a bonanza bigger than Microsoft or Google. Hard-nosed capitalists will be watching very, very closely.

NOTES

- ${\bf 1} \ \ \text{http://www.journal-of-nuclear-physics.}$
- 2 http://newenergytimes.com/v2/ inthenews/2012/Q1/NBF-Steven-Krivitand-the-Troubling-Case-of-Andrea-Rossi.
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by Shelley Bowers

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GETTING STUCK IN

Are accounts of penis captivus just urban legends or can conscious uncoupling sometimes prove tricky?

Dr Aristomenis Exadaktylos, author of an 11-year study of admissions to his hospital in Bern, Switzerland, was asked on the BBC's Health Check radio programme recently if he had come across a case of a vagina clamping onto a penis. He said no, adding that the idea was probably an urban legend. Two listeners, however, wrote in to dispute this. "I must tell you it is no myth," wrote one woman who asked to remain anonymous. "It happened to my late husband and myself one night. He literally could not withdraw i.e. was 'stuck'. I attributed it to the intensity of the vaginal muscle response during orgasm."

Another correspondent,

who asked to be referred

to simply as John, grew up near an airport in southern England. "I remember hearing a story when I was 14 or 15 about an American airman who got stuck inside a lady and they had to get an ambulance and get them to a hospital to get them parted," he said. John eventually joined the merchant navy and started an on-off relationship with a woman in Japan. On one occasion he and his partner were having "very enjoyable sex" when he suddenly found that he couldn't withdraw. "Proceedings came to a halt and we decided that we'd better separate," he recalls. It took two or three minutes of fumbling and laughing - the experience wasn't painful for either of them. John, who is now 75, has never before spoken about the incident and it was never repeated.

Dr John Dean, a senior UKbased sexual physician, says that both accounts are credible examples of a rare phenomenon that doctors sometimes call nenis captivus (captive penis). "When the penis is in the vagina it becomes increasingly engorged," he says, giving his hypothesis of



what causes the problem. "The muscles of the woman's pelvic floor contract rhythmically at orgasm. While those muscles contract the penis becomes stuck and further engorged." Finally the vaginal muscles relax, the blood flows out of the penis and the man can withdraw. Many dogowners will have seen their pets getting stuck during copulation, which breeders refer to as a "tie". However, there are distinct anatomical reasons for this, according to the aptly named Peggy Root, an expert in animal reproduction at the University of Minnesota. A dog's penis has a compartment that fills with blood after intercourse has begun. effectively locking the male in

Dr Dean says that several of his patients have discussed with him their experience of getting stuck, more out of curiosity than because it was a major problem. He draws a distinction between penis captivus and the more common and serious condition of vaginismus, in which a woman's vaginal muscles contract involuntarily, preventing intercourse.

Two reviews of the history of penis captivus, published in 1935 and 1979, highlight the public's longstanding fascination with

ABOVE: 'Mars and Venus Surprised by the Gods' (1610-14) by Joachim Wtewael.

it. Besides Geoffrey de la Tour-Landry's 14th century account (see Classical Corner p17), captivus features in several other mediæval myths and stories, which F Kraupl Taylor believes may bear "only a tenuous connection with the actual facts" (British Medical Journal, 20 Oct 1979). He is similarly sceptical about an account from 1931 about an event in Warsaw in the 1920s, which ended with a double suicide. This time, penis captivus afflicted lovers trysting in a garden after closing time, and the couple were only separated when the woman was put under anæsthetic. But the real tragedy came after journalists published the story. "The next day two revolver shots put an end to the mental sufferings of the two lovers," the story goes.

In his 1908 book The Sexual Life of our Time, Iwan Bloch recounted

another case of penis captivus following on from a furtive meeting, this time in a quiet corner of the docks in Bremen, Germany. The woman underwent an "involuntary spasm", the man - a dock labourer - became trapped, and a great crowd gathered to watch. Eventually the couple were carted off to a hospital, chloroform was administered to the woman and they were freed.

In a 1933 manual of gynæcology, the author Walter Stoeckel speculated that penis captivus only affected couples engaged in illicit sex, the fear of detection presumably

contributing to the force of the woman's muscular spasm. Experts no longer hold this opinion, but the narrative of a clandestine meeting followed by public humiliation continues. Recent media reports of penis captivus – in Kenya, Malawi, Swaziland, Zimbabwe and the Philippines - all concern adulterous couples. The Kenyan incident in 2012 supposedly occurred after the cuckolded husband paid a visit to a witch doctor. It was reported that the couple regained their liberty after prayers - and after the cheating man promised to pay the husband 20,000 Kenyan shillings (£140). He was filmed going to an ATM to withdraw the money.

In 1992 a woman from Swaziland took advantage of her husband's absence to entertain her lover in the conjugal house. After making love, the couple fell victim to likhubalo ('lovelock'). Yells for help went unheeded; it was two days before they were discovered. Police were carting off the naked duo on a stretcher when the husband met them on the road. The news report explained that the likhubalo was caused by a *ulunyoka* spell he had cast, suspecting his wife's fidelity. He was persuaded to perform the releasing ritual. Earlier that year, an adulterous couple was reportedly found locked together and dead on the floor of the husband's shop in Lagos, Nigeria. Police believed that the woman had accidentally touched a live wire and been electrocuted, but rumour had it that blood and a worm were found oozing from her lover's mouth, the sign of a magum spell that fatally locks unfaithful lovers together (FT70:12).

The Zimbabwean media reported last year that a woman was bringing a law case against her long-term boyfriend for putting *runyoka* on her – a fidelity spell that caused another man to get stuck in her. As one report put it, she was demanding compensation from the jealous boyfriend "for humiliating her and trying to control how she should use her private part".

Two "secret lovers" were

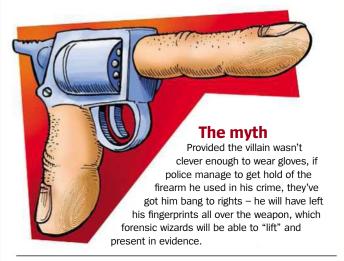
reportedly found stuck together in the southern Philippines town of Isulan on 11 August 2009. The man, 32, was described as married and connected with the Department of Public Works and Highways. The woman, 20, was working at a local department store. They got stuck together at about 10pm, and decided to seek medical help at about 3:30am the next morning. "Draped only in a blanket, the naked couple asked a tricycle driver outside the pension house to take them to a hospital," according to the report by GMA News. "At the hospital, doctors used a tranquilizer on the man to make his muscles contract, but still could not immediately separate the duo." They were uncoupled after 17 hours.

However, there are several accounts of penis captivus taking place within a marriage, including two unsensational case studies from 19th century German gynæcologists -Scanzoni (1870) and Hildebrandt (1872). Perhaps the best-verified example of the phenomenon also occurred during marriage. After the Kraupl Taylor review was published, the British Medical Journal (5 Jan 1980) received a letter from Dr Brendan Musgrave, recalling an incident in 1947, from his days as a house doctor at the Royal Isle of Wight County Hospital. "I can distinctly remember the ambulance drawing up and two young people, a honeymoon couple I believe, being carried on a single stretcher into the casualty department," he wrote. "An anæsthetic was given to the female and they were discharged later the same morning." This account was corroborated by Dr SW Wolfe, who had also been on duty at the time. Dr John Dean says that he can't explain this "very unusual" story, since people experiencing captivus generally have trouble disengaging for only a few seconds. But he adds: "If you're in that position that probably that feels like an eternity." BMJ, 20 Oct 1979, 5 Jan 1980; GMA News, 12 Aug 2009; William Kramer, "Can couples really get stuck together during sex?", BBC News Magazine, 2 Feb 2014.

Mythconceptions

ov Mat Coward

174. DABS ON THE SHOOTER



The "truth"

Latent fingerprints are very rarely recovered from firearms employed in crimes; useable prints are only found in about five per cent of cases (8 to 10 per cent, according to some sources, and less than half a percent according to others). There are various reasons for this: 1) Guns are deliberately designed not to have many smooth surfaces on them, so that they are easier to grip; 2) Recoil moves the shooter's hand, smudging the prints; 3) Guns are often oily, making their surfaces inhospitable to prints; 4) Shooters generally grip the weapon so hard that their prints are blurred; 5) Prints can easily be wiped or smudged when a gun is shoved into a waistband or a pocket.

Sources

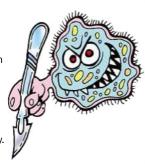
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Disclaimer

Despite the usually infallible testimony of every TV cop show ever made, it does seem that the dablessness of roscoes and gats is a truth accepted by all professionally involved in evidence-collection. On the other hand, most of the data originates in the USA, where anything to do with firearms is subject to partisan controversy – and it's not hard to imagine how wider acceptance of this particular "truth" could benefit prosecutors. If you'd like to speak for the defence, please do so via the letters page.

Mythchaser

A reader about to meet the scalpel wants to know whether it's true that, in some hospitals, surgeons are banned from showering immediately before operations, in the belief that showers can make your hands germier instead of cleaner – by redistributing bacteria onto them from elsewhere on the body.



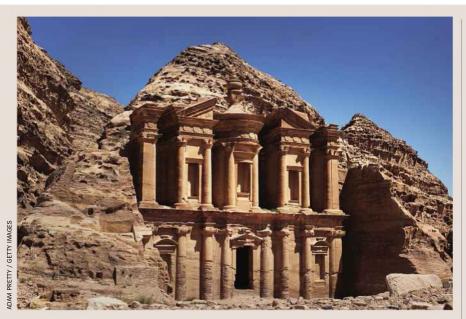
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ARCHÆOLOGY

Our archæological round-up is brought to you by **PAUL DEVEREUX**, Managing Editor of *Time & Mind – The Journal of Archæology, Consciousness and Culture* [www.bloomsbury.com/uk/journal/time-and-mind]



ABOVE: A new study suggests that the Petra complex in Jordan possesses astronomical significance.

HALF AS OLD AS TIME

Famously referred to as "a rose-red city half as old as time" in a poem by John Burgon, Petra, a complex of temples, tombs and monuments hewn out of pink cliffs in southern Jordan (probably most popularly known as a setting for scenes in the movie, Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade), has now been identified as having aspects of astronomical significance. A study conducted by archæoastronomer Juan Antonio Belmonte and his team, published in the Nexus Network Journal, involved statistical analysis of the dimensions and chronologically adjusted orientations of various key elements of the complex, which was built around the last century BC by a fairly obscure people known as the Nabatæans. It is still to some extent unexcavated.

The researchers' analysis indicates that horizon movements of the Sun through the year, in particular sunrises or sunsets at the solstices and equinoxes, seem related to the disposition of some of the Petra structures. For example, the monument there known as Ad Deir is caught like a spotlight in the rays of the setting winter solstice Sun (thought to symbolise the Nabataeans' main deity, Dushara), causing an intriguing play of light and shadow around a podium within the monument. "The effect is spectacular, and would have only been observable during the few days closest to this solstice," Belmonte remarks. He also notes how, just at that time, as observed from the podium or altar, the setting of the Sun creates a silhouette simulacrum of a lion's head, the animal symbol of the Nabatæan goddess Al Uzza, formed in the opposite rocks.

Or, again, the impressive (and later

Christianised) Urn Tomb at Petra displays "a series of suggestive solstitial and equinoctial alignments," Belmonte reports. Its main entrance is centred on equinox sunsets (the same alignment in March and September), and the solar rays during the summer and winter solstices (in June and December) establish the two interior corners of the building. "This amazing set of three alignments within the plan of the tomb, in combination with significant features on the distant horizon, can hardly be ascribed to chance," Belmonte goes on to say. "We consider that it is a deliberate attempt to convert the hall of the Urn Tomb into a type of time-keeping device.'

Despite slight angular changes since Nabatæan times, due to the wobble of the Earth's axis (precession), these plays of solar light and shadow at Petra are still recognisable, so it is odd that nobody in modern times seems to have noticed them previously. Sometimes, perhaps, certain things are too obvious to be seen. *Phys. Org, 6 Mar; National Geographic Daily News, 17 Mar; Independent, 20 Mar 2014.*

VINTAGE CHEESE

Never mind that chunk of mouldering old cheese at the back of the fridge, how about a bit of nicely aged Early Bronze Age cheese? Crumbs of the stuff were uncovered scattered around the neck and chest of a second-millennium BC mummified female body in the Xiahohe burial ground in western China's Taklamakan Desert. They had apparently been placed there as grave offerings, and had only survived because of the extreme aridity of the region. Analysis by scientists from Germany's Max Planck Institute showed that the crumbs were cheese fragments – indeed, the earliest milk product yet discovered. The cheese was like present-day kefir, made of milk with the addition of bacteria and yeast, and subsequently fermented. This type of cheese is not produced with rennet (a substance from the guts of a calf, lamb or kid that curdles milk) like most of the cheese we eat today, which means that no young animals have to be slaughtered a huge advantage for a nomadic herder people. Moreover, kefir cheese apparently does not go rancid quickly and is low in lactose, making it suitable for the lactoseintolerant inhabitants of Asia.



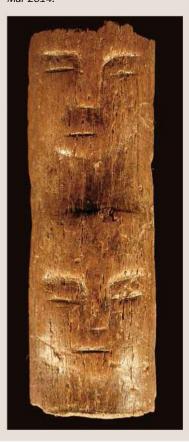
ABOVE: Crumbs of cheese were found on this 4,000-year-old mummy from China's Taklamakan Desert.

SNAV V III I

The mummified bodies buried at the Xiahohe site belong to a mysterious people who buried their dead underneath tightly wrapped wooden boat-like objects. This 'packaging' along with the desert's aridity and salty soil preserved the bodies exceedingly well, revealing their light-brown hair and non-Asian facial features. Strange. But whoever they were, they liked their cheese. USA Today, 25 Feb; Phys.Org, 12 Mar 2014.

LEFT BY AN ANCIENT HARRY POTTER?

A piece of happier news from Syria: it is being reported that what archæologists are considering to be the fragment of a 'wand' was found in a 2007-2009 excavation at Tell Qarassa, a very early Neolithic site. The item, made of cow bone and thought to date from the late ninth millennium BC, was uncovered from a funerary layer and has the depictions of two human faces engraved on it. It is a unique object, and the archæologists suspect that it "probably depicted powerful supernatural beings". Rather eerily, the wand was found near a burial site where 30 headless skeletons were discovered previously. scientificamerican.com, Haaretz, 17 Mar 2014.





FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

175: STUCK ON YOU

According to Theodore Dreiser, quoted in Jim Steinmeyer's Charles Fort: The Man Who Invented The Supernatural (2008, p124), apropos his one published novel (The Outcast Manufacturers), Fort "was never concerned with sex". But he'd surely have been intrigued by recent BBC tales of coupling couples who couldn't uncouple - sounds like goods train problems at Clapham Junction.

Correlated technical terms are penis captivus and vaginismus, sometimes embellished by the so-called vagina dentata, Agata Brewer's "Joyce's Vagina Dentata, Irish Nationalism, and the Colonial Dilemma of Manhood," Frontiers 34, 2013, 1-21 (online) a good example of such academic flapdoodle. On a lower verbal register, thanks to observance of canine copulatory conundrums, this incidence is also dubbed Dog-Clutch/Dog-Knotted/Dog-Locked.

Saxo Grammaticus (c. 1150-1216) set this onomastic pace, reporting the inhabitants of the German island of Rügen so "held in cœtus like dogs," that they could often not be disconnected, being then "hung up on poles to afford a mocking spectacle for the populace" (Opera Omnia 1, ch9 p22). Sir William Osler (see below) thought the earliest case was in the Old Testament, Numbers 25: 7-8, where Phinebas with his javelin "thrust both of them through, the man from Israel and the Midianite woman." This At A Stroke - not in the Edward Heath sense - transfixion certainly implies the pair were very closely entwined.

In Homer's Odyssey, bk8 vv251-366, Hephæstus catches wife Aphrodite having it off with wargod Ares - giving her a right Mars Bar - and entangles them in a golden net. This is perhaps a poetic allusion to his trapped organ. At the other end of antiquity, the historian Niketas Choniates (bk10 paras52-6) records: "While having conjugal relations, Anna Komnena tensed her muscles when Nikephoros Bryennios inserted his penis, causing him great pain"; cf. (ed.) Lynda Garland, Byzantine Women: Varieties of Experience 800-1200 (2006). Anna was punishing hubby for not assisting her attempted coup d'état, perhaps the first example of sexual politics - am sure Laurie Penny would approve.

Mediæval cases pullulate - would have livened up the period for Amis's Lucky Jim. The 13th-century Latin On The Secrets Of Women (doubtfully ascribed to Albertus Magnus) talks of women who damaged and entrapped men's penises by inserting pieces of iron in their privies - the original Iron Ladies.

The Nova Legenda Anglie (1, p198) reports that a couple became locked whilst lovemaking alfresco by a church, being rescued

by the intercession of the martyr Clitaucus. A hotter version has fellow-martyr Guignerus deliver a pair who went at it on a bishop's coffin. Carnality near or in any such location invariably led to this condition; cf. Dyan Elliot, 'Sex in Holy Places: An Exploration of a Medieval Anxiety,' Journal of Women's History 6 (1994), 6-34, online.

In 1372, says Geoffrey de la Tour-Landry (Book of the Knight, pp51-2), voluptuary Pers Lenard "delt fleshely with a woman," on top of an altar, whence an angry God "tyed hem faste togedre dat night," the whole town witnessing the couple bound "fast like a dogge and biche togedre," being exculpated only after a prayerfilled procession and three naked appearances before the congregation begging forgiveness.

Wonder if this ever happened to novelist Graham Greene and lover Catherine Walston, who boasted of copulating "behind every high altar in Italy". Pierre Borel (1620-1689) required a more secular remedy, being decoupled by frequent rectal injections, blaming his condition on excessive doses of the aphrodisiac Zybetus (civet): Historiarum et observationum medicarum-physicarum Centuria *IV*, p133. Christian Johann Lang (1619-1662) in his Opera Medica 2, ch23 p145, similarly blames this plant-arousal.

Both Daniel Ludwig (1625-1680) in Christianus Paulinus's Cynographia Curiosa, p54, and the 17th-century Dutch anatomist Diemerbroeck (adduced by JD Rolleston, "Penis Captivus: a historical note," Janus 35, 1935, 196-202, reprinted in Joyce Salisbury, Sex in the Middle Ages, 1991) report honeymoonnight complications. Diemerbroeck recalls: "I remember in Leyden a young Bridegroom that being overwanton with his Bride had so hamper'd himself in her Privities that he could not draw his Yard forth, till Delmehorst the Physician unty'd the knot by casting cold Water on the Part" – perfect script for Doc Martin.

Fort would have loved the hoax perpetrated in the Philadelphia Medical News 45 (13 Dec 1884, p673) by Canadian prankster Sir William Osler via a letter purportedly written by Mr Egerton Yorick Davis, inventing a case of penile servitude. For full details, see the online articles by Lawrence Altaffer and Charles G Roland. Osler's jape doubtless led FK Taylor to disbelieve in most reported episodes, immediately contested by Brendan Musgrave in the British Medical Journal (1979), 977-8; 1980, 51; cf. CG Loomis, 'Three Cases of Vaginism,' Bulletin of the History of Medicine 7, 1939, 97-8. To avoid superfœtation of references, see the massive bibliography in Roland's article. For more penis captivus, see p14.

"I'm gonna stick like glue, / Stick, because I'm / Stuck on you" - Elvis

GHOSTWATCH

ALAN MURDIE concludes his two-part look at the links between bad weather and ghosts

WEATHER-RELATED HAUNTINGS 2

It must be said the notion of links between the weather and psychic phenomena would have outraged many of the 20th century's Old Guard of psychical research. For example at a parapsychology conference in 1970 Dr Eric Dingwall (1890-1986; see FT299:44-49, 300:50-54) denounced as mediæval superstition any notion that psychic phenomena and the weather were connected, stating: "It might have been thought by some that influencing the weather by psychic means was an idea common in the Middle Ages but hardly one likely to be practised in the twentieth century. Far from it, I could refer you to a number of so-called parapsychologists who have claimed to do just this." (In 'Responsibility in Parapsychology' in Proceedings: A Century of Psychical Research: The Continuing Doubts and Affirmations, 1970, Parapsychology Foundation, New York.)

However, during the 1950s British psychical researcher Guy Lambert thought that extremes of weather were a principal cause of hauntings, particularly poltergeists. Lambert spent much time checking rainfall records, geology maps and tide tables, convincing himself (if few others) that physical rather than psychological factors were at work, implicating underground water as the key mechanism – generally flood water from rain which had fallen shortly before. He maintained that in a few cases, where dayby-day records of the occurrence of poltergeist phenomena were kept, "some remarkable correlations" were noticeable "showing that such happenings occur with particular violence soon after a heavy shower of rain or a sudden thaw, the lag being anything up to about 48 hours, according to the nature of the neighbouring watershed."

He also considered that in countries with a seaboard, poltergeist phenomena are much more liable to occur along the coast, including estuaries and the tidal reaches of rivers, than elsewhere, whilst inland places with poltergeist activity seemed to favour the sides of valleys with rivers at the bottom. He declared: "I myself look forward to the day when the poltergeist will be attacked neither with exorcism, nor with a sword, as Admiral Jervis, afterwards Lord St Vincent, attacked the ghost in his sister's house at Hinton Ampner (see FT309:28-32), but with much more prosaic weapons, namely, the Geological Survey map of the neighbourhood, and the relevant issue of the Monthly Weather Report of the Meteorological Office (H.M.S.O.)."

One case where Lambert applied his theory occurred at Hampton Terrace, Brighton, in February 1961, reported by the wife and daughter of an 88-year-old man who died at home. Both heard a loud thumping sound coming from the bedroom in which the man died. They compared this to the beating of a heart. However, Lambert attributed the strange noises to water in a local drain, despite the investigator who interviewed the women



ABOVE: Will the widespread and prolonged flooding in the Somerset Levels see a rise in ghost reports?

believing one of them had mediumistic powers. Certainly, if there is anything in Lambert's

theory, we should be expecting a dramatic increase in reports in areas that have suffered flooding in 2014, such as the Somerset Levels. (Sources: Lambert, Guy *Proceedings* of the Society for Psychical Research, vol.50 1953-56; 'Ghosts of London' *Journal* of the SPR Dec 1960. *Haunted Brighton*, 2006, by Alan Murdie.)

Undoubtedly, it is numerous anecdotal accounts of a seeming relationship between attempts to affect the weather by psychic means or prayer that keeps such ideas in circulation, even if they are all explicable as odd coincidences. These range from claims by the surrealist comedian and original 'Goon' Michael Bentine that he could psychokinetically disperse clouds through concentrated thought (see *Alpha* magazine March/April 1979) to worldwide stories of bad weather following spirit invocations and the breaking of taboos collected by Western visitors and scholars (for example *The Invisibles*, 1966, by Francis Huxley on Haitian experiences).

I remember seeing a rain dance ritual performed by a visiting party of Chicano Native Americans on the Mediterranean coast of North Africa, one evening in April 1987. It was conducted after they heard local complaints of a recent marked lack of rainfall, so much so, that their Arab hosts were willing to tolerate an invocation ceremony, despite Islamic injunctions against sorcery and magic. Their rain-making ritual appeared to consist of a great deal of loud chanting and the rhythmic raising of a blanket. Frankly, I and other observers were sceptical of any efficacy. But a few hours later, just after midnight, the coast was hit by a torrential downpour, which had all caught outside fleeing for shelter.

In other cases, such experiences may arise completely spontaneously and unexpectedly. Anthony Burgess, best known as the author A Clockwork Orange, related in the second volume of his autobiography, You've Had Your Time (1991), of his reading some of Keats's poems at the house in Rome where the poet died. Burgess became aware of "a kind of astral wind, a malevolent chill, of a soul chained to the place where the body died". Later, reciting the last sonnet in front of TV cameras on a cloudless summer day, Burgess describes how "within the space of fourteen lines... a storm arose, the rain teemed, I and the television crew were drenched, and the final couplet was drowned by thunder." Burgess stated he did not regard this as some kind of vindictiveness, but as "a fierce creative energy, forbidden its total fulfilment... hovering around the house where he died."

Such instances can even shake the most cynically minded, as shown in a vivid account by Casanova (1725-98), who performed a magical rite purporting to invoke gnomes to locate buried treasure, but really as part of a ruse to fool two women. Suddenly a violent thunderstorm broke out. "The cloud spreads with fearful rapidity, and soon the sky seems covered with a funeral pall, on which the most vivid flashes of lighting keep blazing every moment... far from being a magician I was only a poltroon. The violence of the wind, the claps of thunder, the piercing cold and above all fear, made me tremble all over like an aspen leaf. My system, which I thought proof against every accident, had vanished; I acknowledged an avenging God, who had awaited this opportunity of punishing me at one blow for all my sins and of annihilating me in order to put an end to my want of faith". (Casanova, Memoirs, trans. Arthur Machen).

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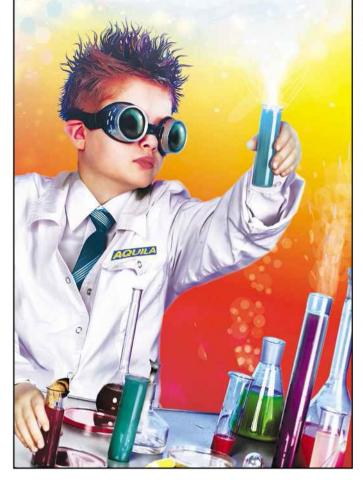
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COMICS UNMASKED

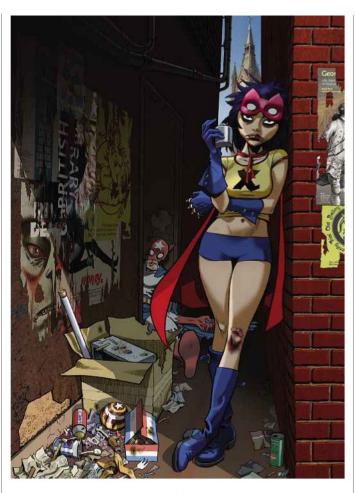
PAUL GRAVETT INTRODUCES A MAJOR NEW EXHIBITION EXPLORING THE SUBVERSIVE SIDE OF BRITISH COMICS

f vou're a comics collector, or historian-cum-hoarder like me, you may have invested in some rare collectors' items enshrined in their 'Mylar snugs' or stashed away some well-thumbed copies in the attic, but who has the biggest and best collection of British comics in the country? It may well be the British Library, headquartered near King's Cross in London, the official depository for all things published in the UK and Ireland. Made of 10 million bricks, it's the largest 20th century public building in Britain. And its surface buildings are merely the tip of an iceberg of printed matter, in five basements stretching down a subterranean 80ft (24.5m), like a multi-storey Batcave. Huge bound volumes of daily newspapers, weekly comics, monthly magazines and books of every description line the shelves here and in an even huger storage facility in Boston Spa, West Yorkshire. Somehow they have to find room for three million extra items every year.

of being allowed to explore these astonishing collections and the challenge of picking out which comics to present in the Library's first major exhibition on the subject this summer. Usually, the British Library calls on its own expert staff to look after their wide-ranging programme, recently covering propaganda, the Georgians and this autumn, Terror and Wonder: The Gothic Imagination. They had never highlighted comics before, partly because nobody in-house felt they had the breadth of knowledge. Two years ago, I joined my colleague John Harris Dunning, journalist, author of the graphic novel Salem Brownstone: All Along The Watchtowers and co-founder with me in 2003 of Comica, the **London International Comics** Festival, to propose a project - and we struck at just the right time. We were brought in to co-curate what has grown into the biggest exhibition of British comics this country has ever seen.

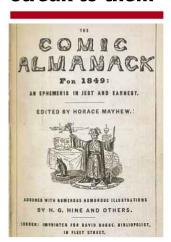
So you can imagine the thrill

Opening on 2 May and running



till 19 August, the British Library unveils Comics Unmasked: Art and Anarchy in the UK in the spacious PACCAR Gallery. It's been a complex process to define and refine this exhibition. Rather than attempting to put together some exhaustive, and exhausting, complete overview, we resolved to chart a less conventional course through the creative legacy and currency of the medium in Britain. This is not a feast of nostalgia devoted to all those favourite titles you enjoyed as a child. Some familiar characters will be included, of course, but not always in their overfamiliar forms. So we're including a few Beano terrors like Bervl the Peril but also her little-known, unauthorised adult version as the radical 'Beril' from International Times. Nor is it an earnest plea for comics to be elevated

Comics have always had a rebellious streak to them



LEFT: Jamie Hewlett's sassy superheroine on the 'Comics Unmasked' poster. BELOW: The Comic Almanac of 1849.

and legitimised primarily as graphic literature. Instead, our strongest focus and filter became subversion. We wanted to celebrate how a significant part of comics, since their earliest printed forms, have had a strongly rebellious streak to them, and to confront the controversies this has raised.

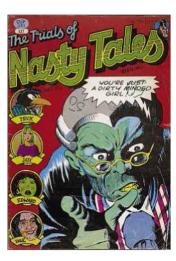
In Britain, this provocative quality has sparked complaints, censorship, campaigns for them to be banned, court cases and convictions, even parliamentary debate and legislation. It's easy to forget that only 40 years or so ago, comics were in the dock. The 'School Kids' issue of Oz and the first issue of Nasty Tales, sold on newsstands, were each the subject of trials at the Old Bailey. Both magazines for adults were accused of obscenity, particularly for reprinting the brazen underground comics of American provocateur Robert Crumb. What greater crime could there be than sticking Rupert the Bear's innocent head onto Crumb's X-rated sex-romp 'Eggs Ackley among the Vulture Demonesses' from Big Ass Comics #1? Especially if this collage was the handiwork of a guest editor - a 15-year-old schoolboy named Viv Berger? Shorn of their long hair, the Oz publishers were found guilty and sent to prison, only to have their conviction widely protested by supporters and quashed on

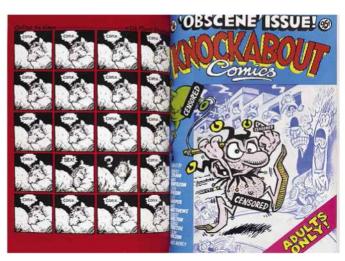
The Oz obscenity trial, the longest in Britain, exposed the generation chasm between the old-guard, reactionary Establishment and the young hippies of the 'sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll' counterculture and marked a turning point in social change. Most of the trial was recorded, and visitors to the exhibition will be able to listen to extracts from some 40 reels of tapes allegedly left on the British Library's doorstep. What's more,

on 14 July former Oz publisher (and current FT publisher) Felix Dennis will be meeting with comics legends Robert Crumb and Gilbert Shelton, of Furry Freak Brothers fame, and two of the original schoolboy coeditors, now grown up into rock critic Charles Shaar Murray and Design Museum director Deyan Sudjic, for what promises to be an extraordinary reunion. The legal arguments in court around Nasty Tales were no less surreal, and after the not guilty verdict were themselves adapted into comics in The Trials of Nasty Tales in 1973. This included testimony by feminist writer Germaine Greer in defence of Crumb's exuberant pornotopia 'Grand Opening of the Great Intercontinental Fuck-in and Orgy Riot'.

Only a few years later, the lurid and hugely popular boys' weekly Action was pilloried in the media, famously by Frank Bough on the BBC's Nationwide programme. Branded "the seven penny nightmare" by the Sun, the final straws were a front cover suggesting that a fallen policeman was about to be beaten by a chain-wielding youth and a football story inside that appeared to condone, or at least not condemn, a football fan throwing a bottle at a player. The publishers pulled Action from sale and reined in its excesses so much that readers soon abandoned its neutered makeover. But the lessons of Action's audacity led directly to 2000 AD, the sci-fi weekly and home of Judge Dredd, still going strong in 2014.

Looking back further still, to 60 years ago, the climate for comics was no better in Britain. It's ironic that the first exhibition devoted to comics was probably the touring display of so-called 'horror comics' - imports, reprints and imitations of uncensored American comic books like the notorious Tales from the Crypt organised by the National Union of Teachers. This display toured the country and was the basis of a filmstrip projected in schools. While these were intended as part of their campaign to raise alarm about the effects of this shocking material, it probably also gave many youngsters





ABOVE: The Nasty Tales trial becomes a 1973 comic, with cover art by Dave Gibbons and Richard Adams, while our own Hunt Emerson turns in an 'Obscene Issue' of Knockabout Comics in 1984

their first exposure to these tempting terrors. Pressures on the government to take action came from many sides, including the unlikely alliance of the Church of England, right up to the Archbishop of Canterbury himself, and the anti-American Communist Party, who discreetly ran the Comics Campaign Council. The result in 1955 was the Children and Young Persons (Harmful Publications) Act. Few prosecutions resulted but it is still in force and the stigma against comics has never quite gone away.

But nor have comics diminished in relevance. If anything, they are more a part of culture today than ever before. 'Comics Unmasked' sets out to re-evaluate how mainstream and underground comics have dealt with violence, sexuality, society, politics, heroes and altered states through dreams, drugs or magic. It spans the centuries, going back as early as mediæval representations of Bible stories and coming bang up-to-date with the boom in crosspollination with movies, games and more, as well as the 'infinite canvas' beyond the printed page offered by digital, interactive and gallery-installation comics. While the exhibition is principally made up of glorious print, we also wanted to demystify the creative process, so there are some revelatory examples of scripts. sketches and stunning original artwork also on loan from Neil Gaiman, Grant Morrison, Dave

Gibbons, Simon Bisley, David Lloyd, Frank Quitely and plenty more, as well as new videos of artists in their studios.

There are also some extraordinary 3D objects, such as Dave McKean's puppets and stage set for his Mr Punch graphic novel and a large ventriloquist's dummy of Ally Sloper, who in his Victorian heyday was the biggest selling comics character in the world. Reflecting the vital role that magic continues to play in the visionary writings of authors like Alan Moore and Grant Morrison, rare artefacts from John Dee and Aleistair Crowley are on display alongside the comics they have inspired. As the artistic director of the exhibition, Dave McKean has devised the striking design and decor, while Jamie Hewlett of Gorillaz has created a sassy new heroine to represent the spirit of British comics.

In the difficult selection process, whenever we requested a rarity we had never seen in the flesh, more often than not a copy would be located from The British Library's resources. Photocopied small press comics and zines would arrive, preserved in specially made archival boxes. Little-known full-colour Victorian comics, some based on the readers' own experiences and drawings, and Fifties erotica by the female pioneer Reina Bull are being shown for the first time in Britain. Star objects include what many Scots would argue

is the first comic, The Glasgow Looking Glass from 1825, a fortnightly full of topical cartoons and comics, a sort of illustrated version of Have I Got News For You. Equally surprising may be the comics conceived by figures as diverse as William Burroughs, Anita Roddick and Grayson Perry, or organisations like the Young National Front and the Anti-Nazi League. Who would have thought that a Guy Fawkes mask would become an international symbol of protest thanks to the graphic novel V for Vendetta?

'Comics Unmasked' sets out to prove that comics have never been confined exclusively to a children's audience and can tackle any subject. Rather than censoring its uncompromising content, parental guidance is advised for visitors under 16. Many of the best British writers and artists have been revolutionaries, for example in their interrogation and deconstruction of America's iconic superheroes or their evolution of graphic novels as reportage, autobiography or boundary-breaking experiments. Once demonised, burned and banned by parliament, comics are now being recognised as a unique medium, winning literary awards and art world acclaim and possessing the power to change people's minds and lives.

www.bl.uk/whatson/exhibitions/ comics-unmasked/

FORTEAN FOLLOW-UPS

Dead yogis on ice, gateway to Hell, Sherlock of the Sewers and attack of the monster knotweed

WAKEY WAKEY! [FT70:8]



Thakur Balak Bramachari was the guru of the Santan Dal sect, which claimed 50 to 70 million followers in West Bengal.

He was known as the "Marxist Godman" because he preached Vedic communism and spiritual equality. When he died in 1993, his disciples declared that he was not dead but in samadhi, and would return to them. This was widely accepted, as back in 1960, he had spent 21 days in samadhi with no detectable heartbeat or pulse and without food or water. This time, however, the guru's skin started to go black and flake. Hygiene finally overcame politics and the sect's ashram was stormed by 1,200 police after overcoming 4,000 devotees armed with tridents and throwing acid-filled light bulbs and fistfuls of chilli powder. Sixty police were injured and 950 disciples arrested. The flyblown swami was seized after 56 days on ice. and rushed off to an electric crematorium.

A similar scenario played out this year on 29 January when Ashutosh Maharaj, whose Divya Jyoti Jagriti Sansthaan (Divine Light Awakening Mission) claims more than 30 million followers, died of a heart attack in the northern Indian town of Nurmahal in the Punjab. Refusing to accept his passing, his devotees said he was in a state of samadhi and placed his body in a freezer. "He is not dead," said his spokesman, Swami Vishalanand, after the guru had been deep-frozen for nearly six weeks. "Medical science doesn't understand things like yogic science. We will wait and watch. We are confident that he will come back. Mahara-ji is still sending messages through followers in their meditative stage to protect his body until he returns." The police have yet to intervene; perhaps the refrigeration is more efficient than in 1993 and the health risk negligible. Canberra Times, D.Telegraph, 14 Mar 2014.



GATES TO HELL [FT307:20]



Back in March 2013, archæologists discovered the "Gates to Hell" in Hierapolis, an ancient Phrygian city in western Turkey.

Pluto's Gate - Ploutonion in Greek. Plutonium in Latin - was celebrated as the portal to the underworld in Greco-Roman mythology and tradition. The cavern below exudes lethal carbon dioxide as well as the thermal springs that produce the famous travertine terraces of modern-day Pamukkale. Now the guardians to Pluto's Gate have been found (pictured above). "The [two marble] statues represent two mythological creatures," said the excavation's director, Prof Francesco D'Andria. "One depicts a snake, a clear symbol of the underworld, the other shows Kerberos, or Cerberus, the threeheaded watchdog of hell in Greek mythology." Tightly coiled, the snake looks threateningly toward anybody trying to approach it, while the 4ft (1.2m)-tall Kerberos resembles the Kangal, the Anatolian shepherd dog. "It's a pretty scary statue," said Prof D'Andria.

The site was an important destination for pilgrims. People watched the sacred rites from steps above the cave opening, while priests sacrificed bulls to Pluto. The ceremony included leading the animals into the cave, and dragging them out dead. Pilgrims took the waters in the pool near the temple, slept near the cave and received visions and prophecies, like those received by the Pythian priestess, the Oracle of Delphi [FT127:21]. Indeed, the fumes coming from the depths of Hierapolis's phreatic groundwater produced hallucinations. Finally, in the 6th century AD, the site was obliterated by the Christians who covered it with soil. Discovery News, 30 Nov 2013.

KNOTTY PROBLEMS [FT138:14]



Dr Kenneth McRae, 52. a laboratory technician. bludgeoned his wife to death with a perfume bottle and then killed

himself after becoming convinced their home was being invaded by Japanese knotweed. In a suicide note he explained that the balance of his mind had become "disturbed" at the thought of the invasive plant spreading into his garden. He wrote that the fear over the impact the plant could have on his mortgage-free property had convinced him that he had no option but to take his life, and that he killed his wife as well as he didn't want to leave her a widow without an income. He became convinced the plant was spreading from the golf course behind his house in Rowley Regis, West Midlands, and claimed to be in a legal battle with the owners of the land. However, the coroner at the inquest into the deaths was told there was no evidence of knotweed in his plot and there had been no legal battle with the golf club.

Japanese knotweed (Fallopia

iaponica) – also known as fleeceflower, monkeyweed, Hancock's curse, elephant ears, donkey rhubarb and many other names - grows up to 4in (10cm) a day, with roots 15ft (4.5m) deep. It has hollow stems with distinct raised nodes that give it the appearance of bamboo, though it is not closely related. Imported from the Himalayas as an ornamental plant in the 1840s, it was first recorded in the wild in Britain at Maesteg, South Wales, in 1886 and is today one of the country's most invasive and destructive plants. It pushes through concrete and road surfaces, chokes riverbanks. weakens flood defences and railway embankments, invades houses, blights development sites, and crowds out all other vegetation. DNA tests have shown that all the knotweed in Britain is descended from a single plant. When knotweed is cleared it must be buried at least 16ft (5m) deep to stop it resurfacing. Under the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act, it is a criminal offence to spread the weed in the wild. Even a tiny amount under a fingernail is enough to start a new crop. Knotweed can be found in 39 of the 50 United States and in six Canadian provinces.

Thousands of UK house sales are being hit by the spread of knotweed: buvers are spending money on fees and surveys only to be told they can't get a mortgage on a blighted property. Homeowners are facing bills of up to £20,000 to remove the fearsome floral predator. Even those not directly affected, but who live within 23ft (7m) of a cluster, are seeing thousands taken off the value of their homes. In June 2013, a cluster was discovered in Hampstead, north London; the properties of footballer Thierry Henry, actor Tom Conti and TV presenters Esther Rantzen and Melanie Sykes all lav in the path of the green monster. "It's The Day of the Triffids in Hampstead," said Mr Conti.

The Department of Environment. Food and Rural Affairs reckons

A ALIEN ZOO

that a national eradication programme would be prohibitively expensive at £1.56 billion. In March 2010, it was decided to release into the UK countryside the psyllid Aphalara itadori small jumping lice that control knotweed in its native Japanese habitat by sucking its sap but no news of their progress has reached Fortean Towers. Knotweed is a member of the "many-kneed" family of plants that includes rhubarb, so it's important to establish that bio-controls attack only the target plant. Those responsible should bear in mind the dire consequences following the Australian sugar industry's introduction of cane toads from South America to control pest beetles in the 1930s. Observer. 19 July; Morning Star, 24 July 2009; Birmingham Mail, 10 Mar 2010; D.Mail, 7 June, 20 July 2013; D.Telegraph, 1 April 2014.

ODD COLLECTORS [FT279:22]



Road sweeper Archie Workman, a former foundry worker from Ulveston in Cumbria, made six calendars

featuring photographs of drain covers as a joke Christmas present for his colleagues on Colton Parish Council, but was amazed to receive 60 orders for the calendar from connoisseurs of dull chic across Britain. The calendar is available for £13 at www.coltonparishcouncil.org.uk

In March came news of Calvin Payne, 42, who claimed to be Britain's first drain spotter. He has spent six years chronicling all the drains in his home city of Sheffield. Dubbed the Sherlock of the Sewers, he hopes to persuade English Heritage to list the more interesting examples, some dating back two centuries. His passion was ignited when he noticed three metal grates across a drain embossed with "Sheffield Local Board". He discovered the lids were made in 1838 during a cholera outbreak, providing evidence of one of the first modern sanitation systems. Metro, Sun, 31 Jan; D.Express,



A FLAMINGO FROM THE DARK SIDE

Flamingos are well known for obtaining their plumage's characteristic pink hue from the pink crustaceans that they eat. During a trip to Eilat in Israel in February 2014, however, Californian holidaymaker Don Presser photographed on a salt pond what may be the only all-black flamingo in existence. The bird has been a visitor to Eilat for the past two years, and has been identified by ornithological experts as a melanistic specimen of the greater flamingo Phoenicopterus roseus, and its extremely eye-catching ebony-pigmented plumage will therefore have resulted from the expression of a mutant gene. This is also true with melanistic specimens of other animal species (though the precise gene responsible varies greatly between different species). www.montereyherald.com/news/ ci_25331293/carmel-man-snaps-photo-rare-blackflamingo; www.birdingisrael.com/blog/2013/03/10/ beginning-of-march-2013-update/

ALL WHITE AND ALL IN SIGHT

If a black flamingo seems conspicuous, how about a white marlin? The precise species involved was the blue marlin Makaira nigricans - a very large and extremely popular game fish, up to 5m (16ft) long, as much as 160kg (353lb) in weight, and armed with a long pointed bill. It performs energetic leaps out of the water, especially when hooked, so is hardly the most inconspicuous of fishes at the best of times; but the specimen landed off Costa Rica in early March 2014 by two New York anglers and crew aboard a sport-fishing yacht named the Spanish Fly was exceptionally spectacular. This was because instead of exhibiting its species' normal colour complement of blue-black on top, silvery-white underneath, and striped in pale cobalt on its flanks, it was entirely white. It was therefore either a bona fide albino or a leucistic individual (due to its dark eves, however, a leucistic identity is most likely). It put up such a spirited fight that it took 90 arduous minutes to land, but this pallid marlin was deemed so special by the anglers that they chose to release it unharmed back into the sea - a veritable marine unicorn freed to delight other anglers another day. http://www.petethomasoutdoors.com/2014/03/ rare-albino-blue-marlin-caught-and-releasedoff-costa-rica.html; http://sploid.gizmodo.com/ extremely-rare-albino-blue-marlin-cauaht-on-camerafor-1542665311, 12 Mar 2014.



KARL SHUKER presents his regular round-up from the cryptozoological garden

PERUVIAN CRYPTO-CATS

During the 1990s, Lima-based zoologist Dr Peter Hocking publicised the alleged existence in Peru of several different types of mystery cat. Two of the most intriguing were jaguar-like in basic shape and size, but their coat patterns were certainly not jaguarine. One of these, dubbed by Hocking the speckled tiger ('tiger' is a popular name for the jaguar throughout Latin America), eschewed the familiar orange background coloration and large ornate rosettes typifying the jaguar's normal pelage appearance in favour of an extremely pale, near-white pelage patterned all over with small black dots or speckles. Another was aptly dubbed by Hocking the Peruvian striped tiger, because instead of possessing rosettes its reddish coat was handsomely marked in white vertical stripes. Of particular interest, moreover, was that Hocking had been given by native hunters in Peru's Yanachaga National Park a skull allegedly from a speckled tiger and also a skull supposedly from a Peruvian striped tiger. Such physical evidence is rare indeed in cryptozoology, which therefore makes it all the more extraordinary that for many years these skulls attracted little interest from mainstream zoologists.

Happily, however, this situation was rectified a few years ago when a research team that included British palæontologist Dr Darren Naish as well as Hocking himself subjected the skulls to a detailed morphometric analysis, using comparative material in a database drawn from over 30 species of felid. including the jaguar. Their findings were formally published in March of this year, within the Open Access peer-reviewed academic journal PeerJ, and these revealed that both skulls fell within the range documented for the jaguar. In short, they were both jaguar skulls, but if they had indeed been derived from a speckled tiger and a Peruvian striped tiger respectively, then these two mystery cat types constitute jaguars exhibiting aberrant coat patterns and colour. Additionally, as I documented in my recent book Cats of Magic, Mythology, and Mystery (2012), similar crypto-cats to these speckled and striped 'tigers' have also been reported from other South American countries, including Ecuador, Brazil and Colombia. So it would seem that the mutant genes respectively responsible for these two abnormal jaguar morphologies might well be more widespread in South America than hitherto realised. http://dx.doi.org/10.7717/peerj.291 Mar 2014.

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NECROLOG

BOB RICKARD, ALAN MOORE and LUIS ANDRADE bid farewell to our friend Steve Moore gentleman, fortean, magician, comic book legend and respected scholar of the I Ching.

"I was born at the full moon atop a crescent-shaped hill, the main mineral found (t)here being selenite, and I have a slightly rough-edged crescent birthmark on my left forearm... so I was obviously destined to be either a werewolf or a lunatic." Steve Moore, 2011.

I have known Steve for 46 years and he has been with me through most of the big decisions of my life. The sounding board for too many notions – good and daft – to mention, his advice was sage, reliable and generously given. A true friend, whose absence I'm now reminded of daily.

I first met him though the comic writer-artists Steve Parkhouse and Barry Windsor Smith in the late 1960s. They had noticed a letter of mine printed in one of the Jack Kirby Marvel comics (I forget which one) and we entered into an utterly intense and madly creative correspondence. We did things like opening out envelopes and typing our missives on the inside before resealing and mailing them. It must have been in 1967, because I remember coming down from Birmingham to visit Steve P (then living in the Forest Gate area of London) and watching the first episode of Patrick McGoohan's The Prisoner. The following year, Steve P and Barry went over to New York to work on Daredevil, Nick Fury and, significantly for Barry, Conan.

Steve Moore - at this time working as an office junior at Odhams Press on such titles as Fantastic and Pow! was drawn into our crazy correspondence circle and he and I became - sometimes you just know from the start - lifelong friends. I'm not sure exactly when we first met in person. Doubtless Steve has a diary entry for it somewhere; he was a persistent diarist, logging dreams, Yijing (I Ching) castings, household accounts, Chinese films, and works-in-progress. He even kept a diary of his angina attacks; poignantly, it is very short.

I think our first meeting might have been at the UK's second comic convention in London in 1969. Steve had organised (with Phil Clarke and Mike Higgs) the very first con the previous year,





in Birmingham – and was on the committee of the second. It must have been quite stressful because thereafter he never organised a con again, rarely attending others, becoming, in Pádraig Ó Méalóid's words, "a self-professed recluse". Also at this con was a young Alan Moore, but we were not destined to meet until much later through our mutual friend.

In 1968, Odhams began to suffer financial problems, and their comics titles were pruned: some were closed and the rest transferred to IPC Magazines Ltd. Odhams itself closed down on 1 January 1969. Steve, having had his fill of office politics governed by economics over substance, reinvented himself

Dear Frantic Ones (and in particular John Ralfe),

Raife),

This is a letter from us saying how sorry we are that we slipped up for once (well, maybe TWICE or so!!) You see Reader Raife was not only one of the winners in our super-hero contest... he also went to all the trouble of making up the COSTUME for his creation himself. The whole caboodle! And sent it up here to the garret for us to see for ourselves. And mighty impressed we were, too.

He called his super-hero THE FLASH MAN, and to show you what the costume he made looked like we had Sunny Steve Moore climb into it . . . and here we are!!



So let's put the record straight. Please clude the name JOHN RALFE amongst e other lucky winners. Sorry, John Alf and Bart.

TOP LEFT: Steve Moore at Severndroog Castle, just across the road from his home on Shooters Hill. January 2012. LEFT: Young Steve, an office junior at Odhams Press, 1968. ABOVE: Trying out a costume for Flash Man sent in by a reader of Fantastic.

as a freelance writer and editor. He became a prodigious source of scripts for publisher Dez Skinn's raft of new titles, including House of Hammer, Tornado, 2000AD, Doctor Who Magazine, Hulk Comic and others. In particular, fans of Warrior, launched in 1982, hold that Steve's best work was creating the series for the characters of Father Shandor and Laser Eraser and Pressbutton, the latter under his pseudonym of Pedro Henry.

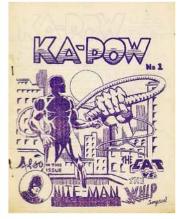
The two Steves went on to produce the fanzine *Aspect*, which morphed into *Orpheus* in 1971, acclaimed by those who knew it for its high production values. Most historians of comics fandom recognise that Steve played a significant role in raising the standards of art and storytelling of British comics and, indeed, in encouraging many of the artists and writers who have since become well known.

1971 was momentous for both of us, my discovery of Chinese martial arts films changing our lives significantly. Sometime that year, dining after working late at Birmingham Art College, our party was last to leave a Chinese eatery. I noticed some of the staff rushing away before all the guests and asked where they were going. They were off to the cinema, I learned; waiters all over the city would finish their shifts and hurry to major cinemas where they met up with friends for special late night showings of Hong Kong movies. Despite the bloody carnage that climaxed each film and showings at odd hours before dawn, whole families would turn up (including crying babies and unruly youngsters); I guess, for them, it was as much a social event as a vital taste of home.

I forget the names of the first few movies I saw and related to Steve, but he was intrigued. When, at last, he came up from London, we followed the flow of scurrying waiters – the venues were never known until the last minute, circulated by phone or amateurish ads (all in Chinese) posted on restaurant doors that evening. The film was *The Sword*, the latest vehicle for the then







ABOVE: Steve, aided by Phil Clarke and Mike Higgs, organised the UK's very first comics convention in Birmingham in 1968 – as announced here in the pages of Odhams comic *Pow!* TOP: The programme for the second UK convention in 1969, where Bob Rickard and Steve Moore first met in person. RIGHT: *Ka-Pow* #1, produced by Steve Moore and Phil Clarke in 1967, was possibly the UK's first comics fanzine.

28-year-old Taiwanese fighteractor Jimmy Wang Yu. Set in a fantasy heroic era, an arrogant young swordsman sought *Tai Ah*, the legendary 'First Sword', but had to battle an aged master in a snowstorm to find that its possession required maturity and sacrifice. This was also the year that Bruce Lee's light shone forth and when we were treated to *A Touch of Zen* and the original *Dragon Inn* (both by the auteur King Hu). This latter being the debut of the 22-yearold Shangguan Lingfeng, an energetic young actress who specialised in tomboyish roles and for whom Steve developed a devotion.

We were both utterly fascinated, hooked; it was, in modern terms, like discovering your favourite computer game had a fully developed backstory. For Steve, this introduction to the complex world of wu xia – the Chinese fantasy literature of

'knights errant' in a 'martial world' – led him deeper into Chinese and Japanese comics and films and even – as his knowledge of historical heroes developed – to his study of the famous military strategist of the Three Kingdoms period, Zhuge Liang (181–234), who based battle formations upon *Yijing* hexagrams... and thence to his deep study of the *Yijing* itself.

In order to do this, over time, Steve taught himself to read Mandarin characters (both simplified and traditional Pinyin); he couldn't speak it as a language but his pronunciation of words was perfect. It must have been about this time that he began to make daily consultations of the Yijing, keeping a faithful record of each casting up to a few days before he died. Only recently, I learned that Steve had been admitted as a Fellow of the Royal Asiatic Society: this was largely in recognition of his 1989 book The Trigrams of Han – which included his analysis of Zhuge Liang's strategies and other historic uses of the Yijing hexagrams. The 'Young Master' of Hill End was full of such surprises, but this demonstrates the extent to which he pursued interests that gripped him. I have seen sections of his (as yet unpublished) book on Selene - the Moon goddess to whom he dedicated his life and work - and I can say it is truly a feat of erudite scholarship, a perfect act of worship in itself.

In 1969, a year after discovering the books of Charles Fort, I noticed an ad in the 'underground' magazine Oz for INFO - the Fortean organisation founded by Ron and Paul Willis in America. My inquiry was answered by David Coxhead, a novelist and playwright who acted as the UK agent for the Willises. Within a short time, Coxhead passed management of INFO's UK mailing list to me and I began an intense correspondence with the Willis brothers, as exciting as the postal friendship with Parkhouse and Smith, but this time revolving around everything fortean. I began sending them UK news clippings for their INFO Journal. They suggested I make

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a UK fortean fanzine, a notion that grew on me after consulting Paul Screeton (then producing The Lev Hunter) and Peter Weston (then producing the leading sciencefiction fanzine Speculation). But it was Steve's enthusiasm and experience - and his willingness to stand by me for the duration that gave me the courage to jump into publishing. With the first issue of FT (then called The News) in November 1973, Steve came up to Birmingham where we collated the photocopied pages and handwrote addresses on envelopes over a weekend; a ritual continued for many an issue afterwards.

One of Steve's first contributions to FT was 'Uncle Chao's Glee Club' (which first appeared in issue two). Steve and I intended to develop Uncle Chao as a kind of stand-up Daoist sage-comedian who delighted in chaotic absurdity, but we quickly realised that this stance should apply to the whole canon and content. This profoundly shaped FT's unique mix of philosophy, fun and facts (as far as we can determine them), so that if we allow ourselves a little pomposity in places, we make fun of ourselves in others. Balance, ves?

Steve - with his decorous nature, laconic humour, spindly frame, all-knowing smile and central-casting wispy white beard embodied Uncle Chao, whose last appeared in issue 13. I had found a quotation from Professor Yuval Ne'eman of Tel Aviv University: "I would suggest that the universe is like a pair of trousers in which we and all visible stars are in one leg and the unknown parts, into which matter can collapse through a black hole, are in the other." Steve immediately countered with a story about Liu Ling, one of the 'Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove', famed for their perpetual inebriation. One day, the drunken master's habit of wandering around his hermitage naked was interrupted when a stuffy Confucian came to visit. When the visitor expressed dismay at the sage's lack of trousers, Liu replied "The whole universe is my house and this room is my trousers. What are you doing here inside my trousers?" To which we could both chant the appropriate fortean postscript: "Come unto me and I will make you fashionable. I conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy that is more than the proper thing to wear for

A glance at an index of Fortean Times will quickly reveal the extent and breadth of Steve's contributions to our content. Satisfyingly significant is that his unique "Taoist Interpretation of Fortean Phenomenology" was apparent in FT as early as 1976, when he presented his three-part "Notes on Greenwich Phenomena" (FT14:18-22; FT15:18-21; FT16:8-13). Later on, Steve would regularly compile oriental forteana under Hunt Emerson's delightful heading for 'Tales from the Yellow Emporium' (how we chuckled over that one).

The rest, as they say, is history. Steve contributed so much to make us vital and informed, silly and sage, and enduring while dealing with ephemera, from his regular attendance at our newsclipping sortings, to editing our 'spin-off' books, and contributing fortean articles elsewhere. For his Herculean labour indexing the first 105 issues of FT, alone, he deserves our equivalent of a 'Hall of Fame' entry. Over several vears he plodded through page after page listing dates, names,

articles and places; out of pity, I wrote a programme for him in dBase to compile the results, but he did all the work. For editing the first six volumes of Fortean Studies, he deserves another such entry, and so on. After 2000, he needed a break and to wind down; unfortunately this coincided with the terminal illness of his brother Chris. His care became Steve's priority - indeed he was the model of brotherly love - but it also gave him the opportunity to finish his novel Somnium and the final research for Selene.

It's a measure of Steve's serenity and humility that his huge body of work and its legacy is not better known. Perhaps the appreciation will grow in time. Not bad for a south London lad who left school at 16.

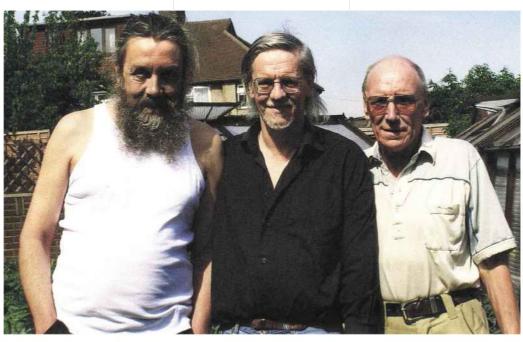
Well done, Young Master, and farewell. It was a privilege to live alongside you. **BOB RICKARD**

When Steve Moore's parents, Jim and Mary, bought their house on top of south-east London's Shooters Hill in the mid 1930s, the location was already mostly dream: an ancient chalk fault, the collapse of which had gouged out the Thames Valley; vantage from which Cæsar and Agricola had overlooked their territory; site

of the Armada beacon; of 8,000 year-old woodlands simmering with highwaymen who'd see the place renamed the Hill of Blood; of towering folly Severndroog, its single turret puncturing the forest canopy.

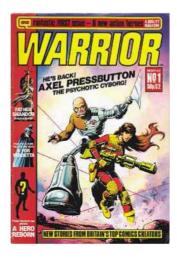
The 19th century would bring prestigious mansions, that of occultist and supernatural scribe Algernon Blackwood there amongst them. In the 1930s most of Shooters Hill's surviving Bronze Age burial mounds were bulldozed to accommodate the Lang estate, wherein the newlyweds would settle just before the outbreak of the Second World War when the hill attained unwelcome status as the highest ground between Berlin and London. Lent false confidence by the Battle of Britain's relatively swift cessation, the young couple had their first son, Christopher, just prior to the hail of V-bombs that would flatten every fifth house on the peak. Even with war's end, it was several years before the pair dared risk a second child.

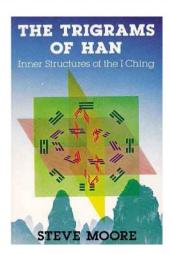
Stephen James Moore was born to a full moon upon the crescentcontoured hill on 11 June 1949, forearm discoloured by a crescent birthmark. Bookish and retiring, fascinated by mythology and the adventures of Dan Dare, he grew into an intellectual hothouse flower, passing his 'O'-levels a year



ABOVE: Steve (centre) with brother Chris (right) and Alan Moore (left) shortly before Chris's illness.

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ABOVE: The Three Faces of Steve: comic book writer, scholar of the I Ching and Eastern esoterica and, latterly, magical novelist.

early and becoming a laboratory assistant before realising that his interests lay in fiction rather than in science. Part of SF fandom, and associating with Charles Platt, Mike Moorcock and then-editor of *New Worlds* Ted Carnell, he rode the 1960s superhero comic boom to work for Odhams who were then reprinting early Marvel strips in their Stan Lee-inspired Power Comics line, commencing work as office-boy and before long assistant editor on Mayday 1967.

Representing Odhams's target audience, his ideas were listened to, and the derivative Power roster swiftly housed increasingly fan-friendly fare, such as Mike Higgs's fine Shadow parody The Cloak. At the same time, he was constructing British comics fandom from the ground up with Ka-Pow. the UK's earliest comic fanzine, and his co-organisation of the first British comic convention during 1968. This event, publicised in the Power Comics titles, brought many of those who'd later shape the comic field together for the first time. thus establishing a native comic scene.

Become a writer in the early 1970s, after his tenure as a co-proprietor of SF/Head Shop Bookends was concluded by a visit from the Obscene Publications Squad, he scripted an array of titles, notably his resurrection of Dan Dare and his invention of the Future Shock for newly-born 2000AD in 1976. In 1973, he had commenced his lifelong involvement with his

friend Bob Rickard's excellent compendium of oddities The News, soon to mutate into the Fortean Times, and also began his astonishing relationship with the Greek lunar deity Selene, of which much has been recounted elsewhere. In his work on Dr Who and Warrior and more he would provide the furniture for a whole generation's childhoods, but this is the merest fraction of the man. The I-Ching scholarship of his remarkable Trigrams of Han or his journal The Oracle, his Fortean Studies run, his 30-year dream archive, his jaw-dropping collection of Asian action movies, his achingly beautiful prosepoems or his Telquuth CA Smithinduced contes cruels, his status as a practising magician, his heroic three long years of care for his progressively immobilised and dying brother, his exquisite novel Somnium ... all this comes nowhere near exhausting the full retinue of his accomplishments. And least of all, he built me, out of paper, as a newsprint golem.

He'd developed recent problems with angina, and by Tuesday 18 March, we'd become concerned enough to contact the police in nearby Plumstead. Borrowing a ladder and ascending to the open office window... something that he'd dreamed about a night or two before... attending officers found him stretched on the study floor, face down, his fall unbroken, death most likely instantaneous. Inspecting his computer, we concluded that he'd died at some

point on the afternoon of Friday the 14th and had for four nights rested there in the full moonlight as it poured through his southfacing study window. I believe that this is what occurred, but I also believe the two close neighbours who claim, independently, to have seen him outside his front door on the balmy Sunday morning following. In my experience, that sounds like something he could manage. I've known him do stranger things.

That dear man whom the Moon loved, delicate and crystalline, has gone from view. Walking mythology, only his excellent corona is now visible, through pearly cloud. Goodnight, Endymion. Sweet dreams, forever. ALAN MOORE (no relation)

Before I knew of his connection with the comic books culture and his many achievements there, I met Steve Moore in the late 1990s through an obscure email mailing list dedicated to the study and advance of the I Ching (Yijing, in the more proper Pinyin Romanisation) called 'Hexagram-8'. The list has long been defunct but its archives have been saved for those who'd like to study the classic beyond its granted, and useful, oracular function.

Steve's contributions to Yixue (Yijing studies) in the West were important, both inside and outside formal academia. In 1989 he published *The Trigrams of Han, Inner Structures of the I Ching,* a seminal work that brought

the public at large closer to an understanding of how the Yijing is composed and synthesised, collecting in one place the corpus of academic information available in the West up to that time and with the addition of important conclusions that digested difficult-to-understand concepts.

In 2002, Steve collaborated with Professor Edward A Hacker and Lorraine Patsco, in the publication of I Ching: An Annotated Bibliography, an exhaustive, annotated and detailed compilation of books and articles about the Yijing in the West. Steve, again, collaborated with Prof Hacker in 2003, in the publication of the paper 'A brief note on the two-part division of the received order of the hexagrams in the Zhouyi' (Journal of Chinese Philosophy 30:2, June 2003; 219-221), an important article that detailed their discovery of a way to explain how the received sequence is traditionally split, which no one, even in contemporary China, was able to elucidate anymore. All of those, and many more recent articles and contributions to Yixue a list too long for this memorial - will continue to inform students.

Perhaps his real labour of love for the study of the Yijing was to edit The Oracle: the Journal of the I Ching Society. It ran for 12 issues, from Spring 1995 to January 2002 and was conceived as an outlet for articles by members of that society in the UK. It soon became a welcome outlet for all serious students of the Yijing and received contributions from scholars in the US, the Netherlands and Brazil. Many important contributions were disseminated thanks to The Oracle and the dedication of Steve behind it, the kind of dedication he later gave to the care of his ailing brother.

Steve will be missed by many in the Yixue community, but for me he was a dear friend and mentor, to whom I spent countless hours writing, as well as reading his always generous and witty replies. LUIS ANDRADE

Stephen James Moore, scholar and fortean, born Shooters Hill, London 11 June 1949; died Shooters Hill 14 Mar 2014, aged 64.

What makes someone want to dress in spandex and take to the streets to fight crime? TEA KRULOS spent three years getting to know the secretive subculture of Real Life Superheroes (RLSH). He found them to be alternately amusing, hysterical, inspirational, disappointing and occasionally terrifying.

e all have dual personalities. There is the side we show off, our public persona, and then there is the side of us we try to keep to ourselves.

Imagine this: you come home from work on a day that could be described as normal. You pull into the driveway of your house and carry a bag of groceries in through the kitchen door. Your spouse yells a greeting from the living room and says he has something to show you. His recent strange behaviour crosses your mind - he's always working late and seems to spend a lot of time absorbed in something online. There's been an air of secrecy surrounding him.

You walk into the living room and stare in confused silence. He's standing there, hands on hips clad from head to toe in bright blue plastic body armour, a utility belt, a cape, and a pair of goggles.

This is what happened to Zetaman's wife, Alison.

"I was like, wow, this is really weird," Alison recalled. "I didn't know what the costume was for. I figured it was probably just a phase." In hindsight, Alison realised Zetaman had been trying to drop hints for some time.

"He brought it up three or four times. He would bring it up randomly, saying, 'Did you know there is a guy in Great Britain [Angle Grinder Man] that dresses up and runs around?' And I was like, 'Huh, that's weird.' And then a week or two later he said, 'Did you know there is a lady in New York [Terrifica] that goes around to bars and makes sure women get home safe and



protects them from strange men?' and I was like, 'That's kind of cool."

Satisfied with Alison's reactions, Zetaman felt he was ready to take a step dubbed by some RLSH as "coming out of the phone booth." It doesn't always go well.

Once Alison realised that Zetaman hadn't been working late but was actually patrolling Portland, Oregon, looking for crime, she was upset.

"Truth be told, I was really pissed off," she told me. "I had all of these thoughts: Is he going to be accosted, mugged, beaten? Am I going to see him again if he goes out by himself? It made me nervous that he was doing this by himself and it made me

Alison describes what followed as a "big, big argument." Realising her husband was unwilling to abandon his superhero lifestyle, Alison decided, "If you can't beat 'em, join 'em." She dubbed herself Apocalypse Meow and began joining Zetaman on his patrols.

"I figured, well, if he's going to get knifed, then both of us will get knifed," Alison laughed. "This is certainly not how I thought I would spend time with my husband, but I suppose it's as good a way

The couple formed a team of RLSH from Portland and Seattle named the Alternates. The team raised money for charity walks, did foot patrols, and handed out food and "Zetapacks" – bags of supplies like toiletries and socks. Alison began to host a weekly RLSH-themed Internet radio show, Meow and Friends. For the moment, the two were happy building a RLSH life together.

But not every RLSH finds it so easy to come out of the phone booth. Take

ABOVE: A poster showing Zetaman in action. RIGHT: Phoenix Jones out on patrol in Seattle, Washington. PHOTO BY LUCIEN KNUTESON



Milwaukee RLSH, MoonDragon. Sporting a blue wooden dragon mask and a full-body spandex suit, MoonDragon's goal was to patrol his neighbourhood on Milwaukee's south side. He was no stranger to crime, he told me. He pointed out a McDonald's where he had worked as a teen and that had been robbed at gunpoint, and he recalled a tense shouting match he and his family had had with the Latin Kings gang, who were constantly tagging their garage and loitering in their yard.

"I'll be having a beer with my friends and I'll get frustrated with myself, and I think – I should be out there right now," MoonDragon told me as we walked through an alleyway. He said, to my surprise, that no one knew his secret – not even his fiancée. "I suppose I'll have to tell her someday, but I don't know how," he told me.

I imagined a scenario. MoonDragon's fiancée gives him a kiss, then heads out to the grocery store. But, oops, she forgot her list; so she returns home to find the man she will soon marry adjusting the utility belt of his bright blue supersuit, a dragon mask resting in his hand.

Awkward.

Although I couldn't see his face because of the ski mask, I could tell from his voice and body language that keeping the secret from his fiancée weighed on him.

MEETING THE WATCHMAN

My introduction to the Real Life Superhero (RLSH) movement was in February 2009 after I read a short blurb in Chuck Shepherd's syndicated "News of the Weird" column that said a growing number of men and women around the US were adopting their own superhero personæ. Excited about the possibility of finding a local Milwaukee RLSH, and perhaps freelancing a short article on the subject, I Googled "Milwaukee RLSH"

and soon turned up someone who had named himself "the Watchman". He had a MySpace page – which was my first clue that RLSH varied drastically from their comic book counterparts. I sent him a message, he replied, and we set up a late-night meeting at a city park near my house.

It was a freezing cold night. I rubbed my mitten-clad hands together to keep the feeling in them and wondered if the story was worth the frostbite. The streets were abandoned; only two people were crazy enough to be out in that weather, and one of them was me.

I forced my frozen hands to reach for my cell phone and stiffly dialed a number. The phone rang once, and a mysterious voice said: "This is the Watchman."

"Hi, Watchman, yeah, I'm in the park near the playground," I said in a frozen cloud of breath. A swing creaked behind me in the wind. The Watchman told me he was pulling into the parking lot.

He rolled up, not in a high-tech Batmobile but in a pretty normal-looking four-door tan Pontiac. He left his car and walked through the empty park toward me, and for a few strange moments I felt totally unprepared to interview a costumed crime fighter.

Wow, I thought to myself, he's real and wearing a costume and walking toward me. Now what do I do?

THE WATCHMAN WAS QUICK TO POINT OUT TO ME THAT HE HAD NO SUPERPOWERS



ABOVE: The Watchman, flanked by two of The Challengers (Blackbird and Night Vision), on patrol in Milwaukee.

He extended a motorcycle-gloved hand to me in greeting. The rest of his costume that night included a simple domino mask, a red hooded sweatshirt with the Watchman logo (a stylized letter W that resembles the tip of a clock hand) stencilled on it, army boots, and a black trench coat.

I had met my first Real Life Superhero.

SAYING THE WORLD IN SMALL WAYS

The RLSH are described as a "movement," a "community," and a "subculture," depending on who you talk to. They consist of mostly anonymous, costumed do-gooders trying to save the world in their own small ways. They have a wide range of missions – charity and humanitarian work, activism, and, most controversial, actual crime-fighting. Like in the comic books. But not really.

Although their looks are inspired by the comic books, RLSH have in almost all cases adopted their own unique superhero personæ, and this inventing process is often cited as the most personally empowering part of the experience.

RLSH should not be confused with other colourfully clad people. The term "cosplayers" refers to people who dress up, usually as already established comic or sci-fi characters, to attend a comic convention or similar event. RLSH sometimes use this term to insult someone they think is fake or posing – "that guy is just a cosplayer." Live-action role players, or LARPers, are in costume to act out a role-playing game. RLSH, as the Watchman informed me, are "trying to be the real deal."

The Watchman was also quick to point out to me that he did not have any superpowers. In fact, the RLSH who do believe they possess supernatural abilities are a very small minority. These claimants – delightfully eccentric or completely crazy – are mostly shunned by their embarrassed peers. RLSH say the movement is not about superpowers but rather embracing bravery and the willingness to make the world a better place, ideals that have made comic book superheroes so iconic.

My research eventually uncovered several early prototypes of the concept, a secret history dating to at least the 1970s. But the modern population explosion of superheroes didn't begin until the mid-2000s. It was then that the RLSH seemed to become an almost overnight phenomenon, as though a radioactive cloud had rolled through the night, entering people's heads in a collective dream, telling them they should heed the call of the superhero. Or perhaps it had more to do with the viral nature of the Internet. The spread of the RLSH owes a lot to our social networking, meme-based culture.

As we walked around that night, the Watchman began to paint an honest-sounding picture of what his life as an RLSH was like. Patrols were long, he said, and rarely adventurous or action-packed; crime is a random thing, even when you're looking for it.

"Most nights are uneventful," he told me.
"But from time to time, something comes
up." The Watchman told me of some small
victories. One night he chased away a group
of kids who were tagging a building with
graffiti and trying to break into a shed. When

PAUL KJELLAND

he encountered a woman suffering from a heart condition, he called for help. He mentioned his annual Christmas toy charity drive, when he collects toys and delivers them in person to a local charity. Another time he staked out an underage party. He saw some guys leading a drunken teenage girl to a dark corner of the backyard. The Watchman could tell the men wanted to take advantage of the intoxicated victim, so he sprang out of his car and caused a commotion. The girl's brother came out of the party and, despite some confusion – he thought the Watchman was the guilty party and pulled a knife on him – he got his sister into a car and drove her home.

"Real life isn't like a comic book," the Watchman admitted.

I asked him what message he hopes people take away from him and from the RLSH movement.

"What I hope and what I expect are two different things," the Watchman answered. "What I expect is what we hear from the public a lot. There are plenty of people out there who think it is a great thing, but a lot of people don't understand. They think that we are out there looking for personal gratification or some kind of attention – that we're bored comic book geeks or a bunch of nuts."

The ice crunched as we passed under a street lamp. The light cast strange shadows on the Watchman's masked face.

"What I hope people think is that we're actually out there trying to do something good, and we're trying to make a difference. Yes, we're trying to get attention. But we're not trying to get personal attention. If I were out for personal attention, I wouldn't be wearing a mask. I wouldn't hide my identity. We're looking for attention for our various causes. That is what I would like the public to think about – maybe these people are doing some good – and hopefully get a little bit of inspiration from. Not exactly to dress funny and go out the way we're doing it, but to do something."

The Watchman stopped walking for a moment. He turned to me and gestured broadly. "You know, if everyone made little changes in what they did – gave a little more to charity, watched out for their neighbours – we wouldn't have the problems that we have. That's really what we are trying to accomplish."

A SUPERHERO EXPLOSION

As I walked around the park with the Watchman that cold evening, he told me that he had first adopted his costumed alter ego in the mid-1990s. At the time, he wasn't aware of anyone else who had explored the Real Life Superhero concept. He would mask up and sweep the streets in his car, all alone. And in 1997, feeling generally burned out on the superhero idea, he hung up his cape and called it a day.

What encouraged him to re-enter the arena of real life heroics was the incredible discovery that he wasn't alone in his vision. In fact, he found, a whole superhero movement was quickly developing. He returned to costumed patrols in 2008 after deciding that: "Wisconsin needed the Watchman again."

By 2008, the RLSH had grown to at least a couple of hundred people; it's a hard group to get a head count on, due to its mysterious nature. Often an RLSH will set up an online profile, interact for a few weeks, then, out of boredom or disappointment or whatever other reasons, disappear, his or her online profile

BRITISH SUPER HEROES

Although the majority of RLSH are American, a small but dedicated number have been found in the United Kingdom over the last few years. One of the more recent costumed crusaders to show up on the scene is LoneDon Knight, who was inspired by Seattle superhero Phoenix Jones to start his own team, the UK RCSM. LoneDon Knight answered a few questions about his secret lifestyle...

Why did you decide to start a branch of Phoenix Jones's team (the Rain City Superhero Movement) instead of inventing your own team brand?

We decided to form a UK **RCSM** because it was needed here. I asked PJ if there was anything happening here and he responded that someone was meant to be leading a British based RCSM team but simply had done nothing with it. I asked him if he was willing to let me have a shot, and he thought I was level-headed enough to take this task on. I also believe that having an established name like RCSM, and PJ as our mentor, we would be taken more seriously. We

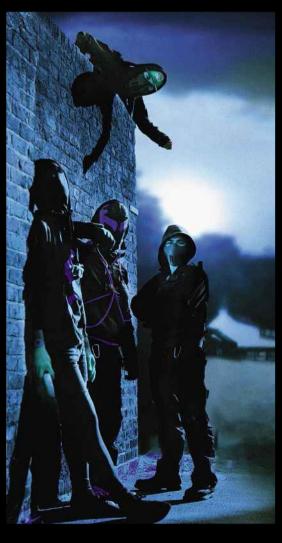
buy into name brands because we trust their quality and we know what standards to expect. The same applies to RCSM.

So did you meet Phoenix Jones in person?

Yes, I did. I met him at the London Superpowers Symposium [a 'conference' sponsored by the promoters of a new mobile phone] where we spoke, laughed, and exchanged numbers. Then, he called me asking if I wanted to join him on patrol with Purple Reign and a few other guys. We met up in Piccadilly Circus and ended up hanging out until 4.30am.

Tell us more about your current team

There are six members in our UK chapter. Myself, second in command Lil Rambo, and Strobe, our latest addition. We have a martial arts instructor (Mr White,) a medical officer (Mr Indigo,) and a fitness trainer (Mr Black.) The last three members will receive their names after their probation period, as with all RCSM members. We also have two "super friends" who help with the legal aspects and wish to remain anonymous.



What types of activities has the group done so far?

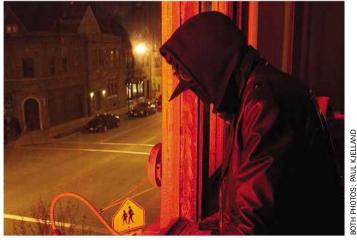
Our first official act was at the beginning of the year, we helped a local primary school with a Philippines tsunami clothes appeal. After the appeal was done, we washed and dried the clothes, packed them into boxes, and transported them to be shipped.

We take part in handouts once a month. We are yet to do proper neighbourhood patrols in uniform, since a prerequisite for all RCSM members is to have ballistics vests – which are coming very soon.

What do you hope to see happen with the team in the future?

I hope we can bridge the gap between the police and the people. There is very little trust between the two, especially after what happened to Mark Duggan in Tottenham 2011 [the police shooting that sparked a series of riots]. We as a species have fought each other long enough. In order to progress, we must learn to love each other.





ABOVE LEFT: The green skull mask of Thanatos - a familiar sight among the homeless living on the streets of Vancouver. ABOVE RIGHT: Blackbird keeps a watchful eye on the neighbourhood in Milwaukee. BELOW: Real Life Superheroes assemble at a charity event in San Diego.

falling dormant. Others "retire" and then return, sometimes switching their superhero personæ.

All of this confusion leads to a somewhat shaky current estimate of between 200 and 500 active RLSH. The majority are Americans, but there are a small number of foreign RLSH, too, in locations ranging from London to São Paulo. The biggest RLSH populations are found in New York, San Francisco, Seattle, Minneapolis, San Diego, and Salt Lake City. Some RLSH are the sole defenders of their city or even their whole state.

The first reaction many have to RLSH is to assume they are all dorky, squeaky-voiced, white male virgins in ill-fitting spandex, living in their parents' basements. Some people think of the title character of the movie and comic book Kick-Ass, an overthe-top, violent interpretation of the RLSH concept. In reality, RLSH span a diverse demographic. Most of them look like average people - the kind who might sit next to you on the bus or stand in line in front of you at the grocery store. They include people from their early teens to early 60s and come from all ethnic backgrounds. There are a rapidly growing number of women - so many that they have developed their own web magazine, STAND (Superheroine Tips and Networking Department).

The day jobs RLSH hold run the full gamut of American society. I've met caterers, graphic designers, pencil pushers, mechanics, radio DJs, and security guards. Some were college grads, others high school dropouts. I met RLSH who had former military training and others who had been in iail.

Their personal situations and wealth vary vastly. The simple-living Catman walks around McMinnville, Tennessee, offering to do good deeds dressed in a samurai-style outfit with cat ears perched on his hood. He worked for a long time as a dishwasher at Waffle House and lived at various times in a tent and in someone's basement. On the other end of the scale, Citizen Prime, who lives in the suburbs of Salt Lake City, has a prominent position with a Fortune 500 company. He built an elaborate super-suit of armour that cost something in the region of \$7,000.

The religious beliefs of RLSH are also an

eclectic mix. I've met quite a few Christian superheroes of all denominations, Protestant and Catholic. There are pagan superheroes, and Jewish superheroes who are careful to observe Shabbat. There are atheists and agnostics and those who have made up their own beliefs. Likewise, the RLSH concept has been interpreted by people of all political stripes, from radical liberals to extreme conservatives. I have had RLSH tell me they are anarchists; others are Tea Party supporters.

As time went on, I slowly learned more details about the Watchman's life. The more I found out, the less crazy he seemed. despite his odd hobby. I found out he had been married for more than 10 years. He met his wife while he was still enlisted in the army; they now have three young children. They both have jobs, and on top of that the

Watchman was going to night school for a while to pursue an interest in graphic design and filmmaking.

The Watchman and his family live in a city outside of Milwaukee in a nice, modest home on a quiet suburban street. There's a basketball hoop above the garage door, a grill, and a yard with playground equipment. Inside, the kids have their artwork hanging up on the fridge and the living room has a wraparound couch and a pile of toys - superhero action figures, of course - on the floor.

They are the average American suburban family - except for one thing. Instead of going to sleep or watching the game after work, the Watchman goes down to the "man cave" in his basement and carefully puts on his red rubber cowl, red leather gloves, spandex shirt, utility belt, and trench coat. His dog, known as the





ABOVE: Phoenix Jones (centre) and Purple Reign (second from left) gather a team together at the Huawei Superpowers Symposium, organised to celebrate the launch of the world's fastest smartphone, the Huawei Ascend P2 on 10 July 2013.

Watchdog, sometimes joins him. And while his wife and kids are sound asleep, the Watchman cruises the streets, keeping a watchful eye out for the safety of his neighbours.

ME AND MR JONES

I had travelled to Seattle, Washington State, to meet Phoenix Jones, leader of the Rain City Superhero Movement and self-proclaimed "Guardian of Seattle". Before going out to patrol the city that night we decided to meet Jones's wife, Purple Reign, at a local café.

I asked Phoenix if he'd like anything to drink. "Anything with lots of caramel!" he declared. The baristas were watching the costumed hero with a mix of amusement and concern.

Purple gave us a crime report based on crime stats she found online, trying to pinpoint criminal hotspots. Phoenix showed me some bulletproof shields and a duffle bag full of weaponry. He had a couple of collapsible batons, which he unfurled with a loud *snik*. It raised a few eyebrows in the café. In the bag he also had a flash grenade, the type used by police to disperse rioters, and a roll of duct tape, which he said was for binding criminals' hands after placing them under citizen's arrest.

He also handed me his bottle of pepper spray to examine; I handled it carefully, afraid it might discharge accidentally. It comes in a one-pound, pistol grip—style canister that looks like a mini fire-extinguisher and is made by a company that caters for law enforcement.

"Check this out," Phoenix said, pointing to the side of the canister. There was a number followed by the letters SHU. "I'm not sure what the SHU stands for," he admitted.

SHU stands for Scoville heat units, based on the Scoville scale, which is used to measure the spice heat of peppers. Your average jalapeño pepper weighs in at about 2,500 to 8,000 Scoville heat units. A cayenne will really get the blood flowing at 30,000 to 50,000 SHU, and a raw habanero pepper can max out at 350,000 on the SHU scale. And Phoenix's pepper spray? A whopping 2 million SHU.

We said good-bye to Purple and headed out to patrol around Pioneer Square, an area I gathered was known to have problems with brawling outside of bars.

We encountered our first incident of the night pretty quickly. Lucien was shooting pictures of Phoenix in one of his natural habitats: an alleyway. We were giving them plenty of room to work when we saw a commotion in front of the bar next door.

I yelled to Jones that there was a fight, and he immediately ran over and barrelled into the crowd where two men were fighting. I lost him for a few moments, so it wasn't clear to me what happened, but apparently Phoenix and the club bouncers had sprayed the fighting men with pepper spray. I pushed my way through the crowd and found Phoenix. He was leading one of the men, who had been sprayed in the face, to a nearby food stand. He

bought a bottle of water and poured it on the man's eyes, instructing him to blink.

The other man had removed his peppersprayed shirt and was extremely irate at Jones. He was walking back and forth across the street yelling: "You ain't no real nigga! You will never be a real nigga! You ain't no nigga! You ain't no superhero and you ain't no real nigga!" He walked into the street and yelled at Phoenix, then back to the sidewalk to yell some more.

After repeating this mantra several times, he suddenly changed tack, incorporating the Image Comics superhero Spawn into his diatribe. "Get out of here you wannabe Spawn-ass motherfucker!"

Phoenix Jones stood across the street, arms folded, studying the man carefully but not saying anything.

"You wannabe Spawn! You ain't Spawn, motherfucker!"

Then a new observation occurred to the man. "Stan Lee never drew your black ass, you fake-ass superhero! Stan Lee never drew you! Stan Lee did not draw your black ass, motherfucker!"

Phoenix Jones, arms still crossed, glanced sideways at me. "Stan Lee didn't even draw comics – he wrote them," he told me.

The police arrived. They were clearly familiar with my costumed companion. It was another night in Pioneer Square, and here was Jones again. They detained the shirtless man for questioning.

WITH GREAT POWER....

What's the appeal of superheroes? Why have costumed do-gooders leapt from the pages of comic books to dominate cinema screens as well? If they are enjoying not just enduring but increasing popularity, what does it tell us about contemporary culture? Our friend Alan Moore recently suggested that it was a case of arrested mental development on the part of fans, but perhaps there's more to it... We asked five of today's top British comic book creators to share their thoughts...

PAUL CORNELL

The superhero gets more culturally relevant all the time, as social media bring other peoples' personalities into our faces. Superheroes are personalities that have been extruded into the world, their powers enormous signs saying who they are. Real-life superheroes seem to be saying they want the world to be a particular way, so they're putting their personalities out there to try and change things.

Superheroes are an idea whose time has come, partly because special effects have caught up with the comics. Previously, it wasn't possible for movies to duplicate the effects in the comics on any sort of budget. They're here because they're now possible.

I'm an enormous fan of Stan Lee, who first connected the superhero to complex personality types – the earlier heroes had been exemplars, more like classical gods than people. He's one of the great children's storytellers, someone who taught me to read. I find writing superhero stories lets me get deep into personality.

Comic fans all have favourite moments that can be summed up as: "Yeah, Batman would do that, and I never realised that before". These stories let us explore what people are by opening them up onto huge neon backgrounds.



Paul Cornell writes *Wolverine*, and has previously written *Young Avengers*, *Black Widow* and *Captain Britain and MI:13*

AL EWING

Spectacle is something that's been locked into the genre from the start. If you go and see a superhero film, you know for a fact there are going to be a couple of gripping setpieces and some fun CGI. If you pick up a superhero comic, you're going to get at least one fight, maybe a death ray, maybe some formalist experimentation; maybe they'll put a gorilla on the cover... there will be *something* fun or awesome or badass or whatever you want to

Superheroes are all about soap and spectacle.

And that spectacle is mixed with the soap

opera element, introduced in the Sixties with books like Lee and Ditko's *Spider-Man*. Superhero comics have been endlessly continuing stories for a while now, in the manner of *Eastenders* or *Coronation Street* – little dramas you can get lost in for a while, that put their hooks into you a little bit. Doctor Octopus swaps brains with Spider-Man, and in a significant percentage of readers there are two reactions: one is, "what a cool thing!" (the spectacle) and the other is "I wonder what happens next" (the soap).

That mixture is something people obviously want at the moment. That's why the Marvel films have captured the popular and critical acclaim out of all the superhero stuff hitting us right now: because they've introduced the continuation element, the soap opera, to a medium where it traditionally doesn't belong.



Al Ewing writes Mighty Avengers and Loki: Agent of Asgard and has previously written Iron Man and Judge Dredd

KIERON GILLEN

There's a tendency in thinking about superheroes to look for similarities. As in what doesn't change, what remains the same. That doesn't interest me. I'm interested in what does change: what warps; what superheroes say about the moment they're in. As far as cultural barometers go, they're not bad ones. But that's true of any pulp fiction. You want to see the fears and hopes of a society spurting all over the place – you go to the pulps.

But superheroes specifically? Let's go to an outlier and work in. 1990s *Buffy* is Joss Whedon processing his love of 1980s *X-Men*, stripping away awkward tropes and inspiring a whole generation of girls (and boys, but the girls are the relevant bit). It's a heightened metaphor for the teenage condition, one that dramatises all those teenage feelings and woes while still giving its lead – its you – agency. Yeah, they're a power fantasy, but as the dull, slow calculus of economics crushes us all, a little fantasy that you can make a difference can make a

I'll use Kurk Busiek's definition of superhero comics that separates it from science fiction: which is basically that the magic of the genre is that you introduce all this crap into the world and the world remains recognisably like ours. As such, the superhero becomes a device for re-processing the world outside your window, like the first French Parkour looking at the concrete estates that were basically built as prisons and transforming them into a fun-park. We get to decide what the world means.

Yes, there are conservative elements growing from the perpetual status quo (though I'd argue they're not necessary parts of the genre), which – as Warren Ellis noted – suggest that we need superhuman efforts just to keep the world exactly the way it is, let alone to

change it. However, as a perpetual hymn to an individual's agency, there is a power there, and that power can be turned to pretty much any use.



Kieron Gillen writes *Iron Man*, and has previously written *Thor*, *Uncanny X-Men* and the creator-owned *Phonogram*

SIMON SPURRIER

Superheroes weren't always the ubiquitous mainstay of Western comics that they've become. In the Golden Age of our splendid medium publishers cheerfully spaffed out stories belonging to a riotous host of different genres, following narrative trends borrowed from the illustrated pulps that had preceded them. Westerns, war-stories, horrors, pirate-tales, space adventures, masked crime-yarns... all well-stocked larders for the fermentation and promulgation of raw ideas, and all eminently capable of firing the imaginations of the funnybooks' earliest demographic: young boys. But of course market forces did what they do, most influentially and boringly via the evolution of a distribution system based upon predicting how many copies a comic would sell months before its release. I suspect it was such crazy but depressingly prosaic economic details, more than anything else, which drove the wild, fertile forest of comic book genres towards an intensively farmed one-core-crop

Think about it: it's not hard to see how a "Predictable Sale" model will tend towards the dominance of a single carefully-homogenised brand-type, not to mention birthing the very set of narrative tropes which are today so closely associated with superheroes: the never-ending second-act story, the shared worlds, the crossovers, the temporary deaths. All of them are perfectly sensible strategies for the domination of a market far more interested in Next Month than This One. It could've been any one of those early genres that achieved ubiquity in this way (that's something Alan Moore played with in Watchmen). So perhaps the more apt question isn't "Why have superheroes endured?" but "How did they grab that stranglehold in the first place?" I'd like to think it has something to do with the innate aspirational quality of the "hero" trope, but I'm also nervous about ascribing too much moral importance to characters whose usual approach to problems is

At their best, spandex comics *are* aspirational; at their basest, they're about reductively redefining life into two-tone Us vs Themism. In most superhero comics, after all, the world is improved through acts of destruction – beating the bad guys – rather than acts of creation. Whether they're at their best or their worst, these stories present a exceedingly simple, understandable world, full of boldness and unambiguity, which is oh-sovery seductive to anyone bewildered by our own complicated and exhausting one.

That is to say: pretty much everyone.

Superheroes hence present Universal Appeal at its most luminous, and when you add the cultural value that comes from all those visually distinct characters with brandcentric names – all from the "does-what-it-says-on-the-tin" school of nominative description – you can see why Hollywood is wanking itself into a delighted fugue over all these

call it going on.

recognisable spandex properties.

Ultimately, I think the great strength of the superhero genre is that it's not really a genre at all: it's an amazingly versatile set of tropes, which - through the simple agency of a mask, a costume or a codename – can be bolted onto any other genre to distil down all its inconvenient complexities into something bolder, tidier, less morally ambiguous and more instantly entertaining. Thus, many of the stories we're discussing are actually sci-fi tales, or crime sagas, or political thrillers, which become parasitically classified as belonging to the superhero genre by association. Seen in that light, it was never really about one type of story rising to the top after all, or even about wondering why one genre has endured where others haven't: it was simply an ingenious illusionist's trick to rebrand them all under the same comfortable, unthreatening label, and take control of the whole lot.



Simon Spurrier writes X-Force and has previously written X-Men Legacy, Ghost Rider and Silver Surfer: In thy Name

ROB WILLIAMS

I think a lot of the more successful comic series are basically aspirational. You look at the brilliance of the initial Spider-Man concept by Stan Lee and Steve Ditko: the class science nerd who is, of course, heavily bullied, gets these amazing abilities which set him apart and open up this magical world to him. At its most basic, that's the superhero myth right there. It also shows the empathic appeal of the concept. If done right, the protagonist is an easily relatable underdog who gets the Wonka golden ticket of life – but pays a heavy price for it, of course. Hence: drama.

It's something I played on with *Ordinary*, my and D'israeli's new creator-owned comic. Every superhero origin tale starts with the basic premise of "in an ordinary world, one person becomes extraordinary". We thought it would be fun to tip that on its head, so a plague gives every person on Earth superpowers, apart from one man – a divorced plumber. In an extraordinary world, one man is ordinary. Again, that makes our lead, Michael, an easily relatable underdog.

The aspirational aspect of superheroes is something you see in many modern successful superhero books. Take Warren Ellis's work through *Excalibur*, *The Authority*, *Planetary* and so on – they all feature the smart, sassy, allattitude leads (usually with a cigarette in hand). That takes away the underdog idea but, again, that's giving the readers a lead character they probably wish that they were.

Superheroes are a pretty primal form of wish fulfillment, ultimately. At its core, it all comes down to a primitive man or woman on a hillside watching birds fly and wishing they could be similarly weightless.



Rob Williams is the writer of the upcoming creator-owned series *Ordinary*, and has previously written *Ghost Rider* "I hate these superheroes! He is not a superhero! I fucking hate these superheroes!" the man shouted toward Phoenix as the officers ordered him to put his hands on the back of their squad car while they frisked him.

SUPERHERO LIFE LESSONS

I ended up spending more than three years interviewing, researching, and running down the street after these people who call themselves Real Life Superheroes.

I learned a lot during this time, but here are five fundemental things I discovered about how superheroes in real life differ from their comic book counterparts.

1. Finding a comfortable, functioning costume can be a challenge

In the comic books, superheroes leap gracefully from building to building without even messing up their hair. In real life, it's harder to get costumes to co-operate.

The number one problem with masks is getting something that will stay in place, look cool, and not block your vision. I've witnessed more than one RLSH having difficulties trying to adjust their mask. For the body, mobility is a main concern. If you're patrolling for crime you want to wear something that offers protection but doesn't weigh 100 pounds. Too much gear and fabrics that don't breathe have left more than one RLSH suffering from the heat.

And a couple of RLSH have discovered a problem with their costume design on a long patrol: forgetting to build an access flap so they can urinate.

2. Real-life Superheroes spend too much time on the Internet

Do you remember that comic book storyline where the X-Men are trolled mercilessly by Magneto on Facebook? No? This was a disappointing discovery I made about RLSH – some spend an inordinate amount of time arguing online.

"I don't think you can find a RLSH who can honestly deny the high volume of Internet drama in the community," the Watchman told me in an interview.

Despite determined efforts by members of the movement to call truces and put sharp opinions aside, I'm disheartened to say that Internet drama will probably continue to plague the heroes.

"We are called 'real life superheroes," the Watchman says. "As such, there are certain expectations about how we should behave and present ourselves. Internet drama undoes all the hard work many of us have put into presenting ourselves, our ideas, and our goals to the public."

I couldn't agree more.

3. Like any subculture, RLSH have their own lingo

I love learning about the slang different groups of people have adopted. Like any group, RLSH have their own jargon, inside jokes, and references that you won't get if you're not down. What do you call a person who's pursuing a relationship with someone

just because of their RLSH status? A "cape chaser." When you give up the lifestyle, it's called "hanging up the cape." And when you reveal your superhero lifestyle to your family and friends – that's "coming out of the phone booth."

4. RLSH break through the boundaries which prevent us from getting to know one another The diversity of people drawn to the RLSH concept transcends a lot of lines. I talked to liberals, conservatives, atheists, Baptists, males and females, dishwashers and corporate executives. They live in bustling metropolises like Chicago and New York, and all the small burbs in between.

All of these people are living such different lives that you would assume they'd want nothing to do with each other. But they have one very specific thing in common: they love to dress in superhero apparel and fight injustice – and this brings them together.

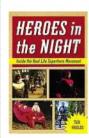
5. The things RLSH do that sound the least super-heroic are in fact the most heroic

At first, I wasn't at all impressed with the idea of superheroes taking on a mission of handing out sandwiches and clean socks to homeless people.

I mean, give me a break – what kind of lame superhero does that? Superheroes are supposed to be headbutting bad guys in the face or saving orphans from a burning building.

After I joined a RLSH named Thanatos in Vancouver, I changed my mind. Thanatos showed me that he had become something of a street legend among the homeless in Vancouver. They all knew who the guy in the green skull mask was and were glad to see him. He would hand them granola bars, bottles of water and blankets. And he'd talk to them – ask them how they were doing and what they were in need of.

It's not the type of mission that would sell many issues of a comic book, but after seeing Thanatos at work, I was convinced it was a worthy one. I would even call it heroic.



Adapted and extracted from Heroes in the Night: Inside the Real Life Superhero Movement by Tea Krulos, Chicago Review Press, 2013.

heroesinthenight. blogspot.co.uk/

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



TEA KRULOS is a freelance journalist from Milwaukee, Wisconsin. As a lifelong fan of comic books and unusual subcultures, he became hooked on RLSH in 2009 and spent three years blogging and writing a book about them.

AFP / GETTY IMAGES

MIRACLE MEN

John Paul II once declared 123 new saints in a single day. Now the pope who was accused of 'canonisation inflation' is himself to be declared a saint by Pope Francis, who has already broken his predecessor's record. **TED HARRISON** examines the road to sainthood in the 21st century.

n the course of his 27 years as pope, John Paul II held 38 canonisation ceremonies and elevated 482 men, women and children to the ranks of sainthood.

On 27 April, the church's Feast of the Divine Mercy, John Paul (along with John XXIII, pope from 1958 to 1963) will be elevated to the canon of saints by a new pope who has already broken his predecessor's record. At his first canonisation on 12 May 2013, Pope Francis promoted over 800 new candidates to the heavenly roll call of the holy and virtuous.

Once upon a time, to be declared a saint was a long, slow process and a rare occurrence. To qualify for the posthumous honour the candidate had both to lead an exceptional life and, after death, it needed to be shown that he or she had miraculously interceded in Heaven in response to the prayers of the faithful. There are only two ways to leapfrog the system. A saint can be proclaimed by acclamation, simply through the strength of public opinion, but this hasn't happened for at least 500 years. Not even the crowds' chant of 'Santo subito' in St Peter's Square shortly after Pope John Paul's death was sufficient to revive the custom. The other method of circumventing the system is through martyrdom.

MAKING SAINTS

The process of approving potential saints is the responsibility of a Vatican body known since 1988 as the Congregation for the Causes of Saints. It has 34 members, is headed by a cardinal, has an archbishop as secretary and is staffed by a secretariat of 23.

The procedures were formalised in 1588 by Pope Sixtus V and revised in the 20th century in response to, and in anticipation of, an increased demand for the

MONICA SAID THAT HER STOMACH TUMOUR WAS HEALED OVERNIGHT



ABOVE: Pope Francis waves to the crowds at his first canonisation, on 12 May 2013, of over new 800 candidates.

examination of 'causes'.

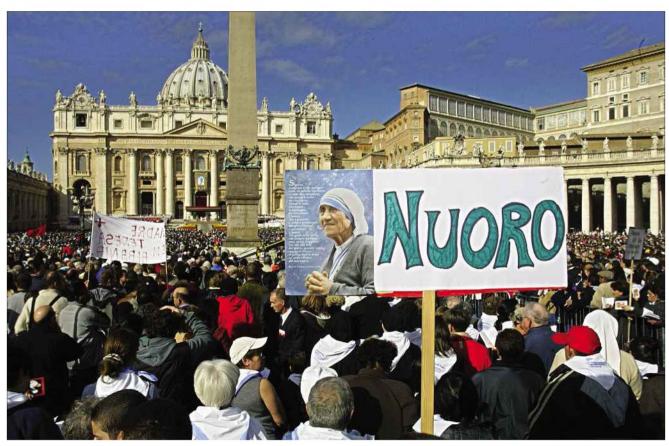
The congregation's role is to prepare reports for the pope, setting out a detailed case for an individual to be recommended as an exceptional example of holiness. It prepares each year "everything necessary for the pope to be able to set forth new examples of holiness. After approving results on miracles, martyrdom and heroic virtues of various Servants of God, the Holy Father proceeds to a series of canonisations and beatifications". Nominations come from local bishops. Initially someone of special merit is declared a 'Servant of God'. The

next rung up the ladder of sanctity is to be named 'Venerable'. A beatification might follow when the title 'The Blessed' is bestowed. The highest accolade of all is 'Saint'.

The first examination of a case is set out in a *positio* – a preliminary, though often quite detailed document, that will be discussed, examined and studied further. Historians are involved when an historical case is under discussion, theologians examine questions of virtue, and medical specialists study evidence for alleged miracles.

In general, a single 'proven' miracle leads to beatification; two or more justify canonisation. The congregation is under strict instructions to pursue its inquiries as two separate investigations: miracles on the one hand, holy virtues or martyrdom on the other.

Most commonly a miracle comes in the form of an unexpected and unpredicted healing. Witness statements have to be taken both from family and physicians. And until all the process is complete and the pope has pronounced on the case, all "solemn celebrations or panegyric speeches about Servants of God... are prohibited in Churches". It normally takes decades for the exhaustive inquiries to be completed.



ABOVE: A Mass celebrated by Pope John Paul II for the Beatification of Mother Teresa in 2003. BELOW: Pope John Paul II at the canonisation of Padre Pio in 2002.

FAST-TRACKED FAVOURITES

Despite this cumbersome procedure, Pope John Paul II found ways to fast-track his favourites. Mother Teresa and Padre Pio were canonised with unusual rapidity. Mother Teresa was beatified only six years after she died. Pope John Paul II had little hesitation in accepting that the healing of an Indian woman, Monica Bersa, was the result of the supernatural intervention of the Albanian-born nun.

Probir Ghosh, general-secretary of the Science and Rationalists Association of India, expressed public scepticism, telling Reuters' newsagency in 2002: "There's no such thing as a miracle cure". He did not dispute the recovery but claimed that the patient had responded to conventional medical treatment. However Monica Bersa told the newsagency that her stomach tumour was healed overnight after she held a medallion blessed by Mother Teresa and prayed to her.

When Mother Teresa was beatified, Bersa was flown to Rome as a living exhibit of the holy nun's heavenly intervention; although four years later, as the upgrade to sainthood was being planned, she complained that after her moment of fame she was abandoned by the Sisters of Charity to a life of penury.

Martyrdom is the painful but sure-fire route to saintly promotion. And a martyr saint does not even have to have lived a holy life. He or she has simply to have been killed for their faith. At the final canonisation ceremony, it is not necessary for the martyr to be individually named.



Only one of the 800 plus men and women canonised by Pope Francis in 2013 could be personally identified. They are known as St Antonio Primaldo and his companions, and collectively referred to as the Martyrs of Otranto. They were the inhabitants of a town in southern Italy beheaded in 1480 for refusing to convert to Islam. Their relics are preserved in the town's cathedral, stacked in tiers around the high altar.

Of the 1,340 new saints approved by the last three popes, the majority have been martyrs. Nevertheless, a substantial minority died of natural causes and miracles have been required as part of the authentication process.

JOHN PAUL'S MIRACLES

Many miracles have been claimed for John Paul II, but only two had to be examined by the Vatican prior to April's canonisation. The one that promoted him from 'The Blessed' to 'Saint' is said to have happened in Costa Rica, which John Paul, history's most widely travelled pope, visited briefly in March 1983 on a whirlwind tour of Central America. At the centre of the miraculous claim is Floribeth Mora Díaz from the small town of Tres Rios. Back in 1983 she was a young woman excited by the first papal visit to her country. Twenty-eight years later, by now a mother of four children, she was suffering from severe, persistent headaches. Hospital tests pinpointed the cause - an aneurysm in the brain, a weak spot in a blood vessel causing it to bulge or balloon. Should it burst, the results would be fatal.

On hearing her diagnosis Mora returned home to face a worrying future. "I was terribly frightened of leaving my children," she said. "I was very scared of my illness but I always kept my faith. I have always been a firm believer, and I have a deep love of God."

Like many devout Catholics in her country Mora had a small shrine at home where she would go to pray. It was decorated with flowers; there were candles to light, a crucifix and a rosary. Mora kept a picture there of Pope John Paul. She called him "my saint".

On 1 May 2011, she was reminded of the pope's visit to her country as she watched television pictures from Rome of John Paul's beatification. So she prayed to him for strength. As she prayed, she believes

GETTY IMAGES



ABOVE: Floribeth Mora, who said she was cured of a serious brain condition by a miracle attributed to late Pope John Paul II, at her home in Costa Rica, BELOW: Sister Marie Simon-Pierre, the French nun who was found to be miraculously cured of Parkinson's Disease through the intercession of John Paul II.

she heard the voice of John Paul II speaking to her, saying: "Arise, do not be afraid". Afterwards, she surprised her husband by saying "I feel better." From that moment her condition rapidly improved.

Within six months, hospital tests could find no indication that she had ever had an aneurysm. Alejandro Vargas Román, her neurosurgeon, was convinced that her recovery was the result of divine intervention. "I am a Catholic, and as a doctor with many years of experience I do believe in miracles. No one has been able to provide a medical explanation for what happened."

The miracle that had led to the former pope's beatification had been that involving a French nun, Sister Marie Simon-Pierre, a maternity hospital nurse in her late 30s who had been diagnosed with Parkinson's Disease. Her muscular control and energy went into steady decline. John Paul was still pope at the time, but was in failing health as a result of the same condition. Watching the pope on television, said Sister Marie, was very difficult, "because I was thinking of how I would face that same situation in the coming years."

John Paul died on 2 April 2005, and only six weeks later the new pope, Benedict XVI, announced the beginning of the process that would lead towards the beatification of his predecessor.

Sister Marie Simon-Pierre's condition meanwhile had declined sharply. She had been forced to stop work. In their prayers, fellow members of the Little Sisters of Catholic Motherhood decided to ask John



Paul to intercede. At the beginning of June that year, she said:

"Mother Superior gave me a pen and told me to write: 'John Paul II'. It was 5 o'clock in the afternoon. With effort, I wrote: 'John Paul II'. We remained in silence before the illegible letters.

"At the end of the evening prayer, at 9 o'clock at night, I felt the need to pick up a pen and write. To my great surprise I saw that the writing was clearly legible. Not understanding anything, I went to bed. Two months exactly had gone by since John Paul II's departure to the House of the Father. I woke up at 4.30am, surprised that I was able to sleep, and I leapt out of bed: my body was no longer insensitive, rigid, and I was not the same. I felt a profound peace and a sensation of wellbeing; too great an experience, a mystery difficult to explain with words.

"Later, I meditated on John Paul II's Mysteries of Light. At 6 o'clock in the morning, I went out to meet the sisters in the chapel for a time of prayer, which was followed by the Eucharistic celebration. I had to walk some 50 metres and at that very moment I realised that, as I walked, my left arm was moving, it was not immobile next to my body. I also felt a physical lightness and agility that I had not felt for a long time.

Coming out from Holy Mass, I was sure of my cure; my hand did not shake any more. I went to write again and at midday I stopped taking my medicines.

"I went to my neurologist, who was surprised to see the disappearance of all the symptoms of the disease. The entire congregation began a thanksgiving novena to Iohn Paul II." 2

MEDICINE AND MIRACLES

Doctors advising the Vatican never attempt to explain a miracle. They describe and confirm events and determine whether a cure could have had a medical explanation. If a cure cannot be attributed to treatment or the accepted natural course of the condition, they report back.

Others then need to assess whether the patient, or someone on their behalf, called upon the intercession of the saintly candidate. Even then, the best the Church can hope to do is demonstrate two parallel events. It is accepted that there is no way of demonstrating that a specific prayer at a specific time to a specific person resulted in

A typical case is that of Jake Finkbonner





ABOVE: Jake Finkbonner and his father attend a special Mass to name seven new saints in St Peter's Square at the Vatican on 21 October 2012. One of these was the Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha, the first Native American saint, seen in an icon held by one of the (headdress-wearing) faithful at the ceremony,

from Ferndale, Washington State, USA, In February 2006, he was only five years old when he cut his lip playing junior basketball. The cut became infected and necrotising fasciitis developed, an often fatal condition caused by a flesh-eating bacteria. Jake came so close to death that the family's priest performed the last rites and there was talk of the little boy's organs being donated.

It was the priest, Father Tim Sauer, who suggested that Jake's parents, Elsa and Don Finkbonner, pray to The Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha, a 17th century Native American and Catholic convert also known as Lily of the Mohawks who had been beatified in 1980 (see FT286:21). Legend tells of her holiness, but also that she was badly scarred on the face as a result of smallpox; yet minutes after she died, all the scars on her face vanished revealing her true beauty. It was felt that she might be a sympathetic and appropriate person to call on in the circumstances.

A relic of Kateri Tekakwitha was brought to the Seattle Children's Hospital where Jake was being cared for and placed next to him. On the ninth day, Jake began to improve and over the next weeks recovered totally.

Father Sauer told his local archbishop of a possible miracle. Investigators from Rome arrived and took detailed evidence. They interviewed hospital doctors and followed up on the claims. Five years later the Congregation for the Causes of Saints confirmed the second miracle required for Lily to move up from 'The Blessed' to Saint Kateri. On 21 October 2012 she was canonised by Pope Benedict.

By then, according to Mrs Finkbonner,

THE PRIEST **SUGGESTED** THEY PRAY TO THE BLESSED **KATERI** TEKAKWITHA

"Jake was a typical, happy 11-year-old-boy who plays video games and punches his sister in the head and makes her cry." 3

It was "unexplainable" how Jake survived his illness, she said. While the medical intervention had been essential, "even doctors are baffled as to Jake's recovery."

The family travelled to Rome to witness the canonisation. "I believe everybody has a purpose on this Earth," Jake's mother said "I think the ceremony will define Jake's purpose, and that's to make Kateri a saint." 4

Underpinning all of the official Church investigations into miracles is the belief that miracles are possible. Roman Catholics are taught the literal and historical truth of the miracles as described in the Bible and that God continues to intervene from time to time in the lives of the faithful. The implication of the teaching is that God can circumvent or temporally suspend the laws of nature.

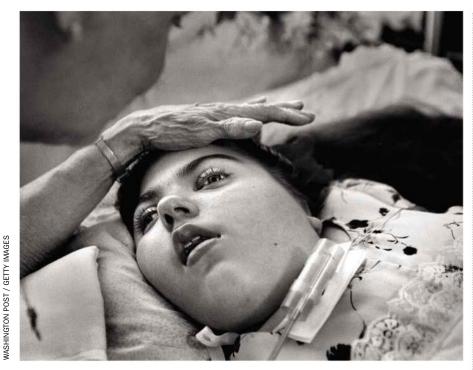
Whether a person believes in the possibility of supernatural miracles depends on their faith, or - as sceptics might argue their predisposition to gullibility.

Medicine is not, of course, an exact science. Often the outcome of a serious illness is unpredictable. Some people pull through, others do not. A doctor with a strong faith might attribute the unexpected recovery of a patient both to the treatment and the will, or intervention, of God. A non-believing doctor will confine his or her observations to the treatment, acknowledging perhaps some unidentified additional, but natural, factor. In today's secular world, the term 'miraculous' may be used without implying supernatural involvement. When someone is described as having made a 'miraculous recovery' it may mean no more than that the person survived an illness or injury against the odds.

DIVINE FAVOURS

For all the evidence gathered, the Church can never prove that a saint intervened to express-deliver a prayer to God. All that can ever be shown is a coincidence between a petitioner asking for a saint's intervention and an inexplicable event occurring. The case is strengthened, in the eyes of the official examiners, if in addition to prayers, relics are involved and there are witness statements of visions, or auditory or tangible apparitions, of the saint being sensed.

Indeed the whole idea that a human being, after death, can intercede to ask divine favours is far from universally accepted within the Christian religion. The debate



ABOVE: The comatose Audrey Santo, seen in 1998. There is a lobby calling for her canonisation since her death in 2007 and miracles were attributed to her during her lifetime.

over the issue was one of the triggers of the Reformation, which brought the Protestant churches into existence. Even the Anglican Church, which embraces both reformed theology and Catholic tradition, formally repudiates the notion. In article 22 of the Articles of Faith it specifically describes the invocation of saints, along with the adoration of relics, as "a found thing vainly invented and grounded upon no warranty of scripture" which is "repugnant to the Word of God".

Many Protestants will argue that the saints in Heaven do not respond to the prayers of those on Earth. It is therefore pointless to direct prayers through them. Catholics however respond by pointing to passages in the Bible that specifically endorse their view that saints are aware of events on Earth. In his Epistle to the Hebrews, St Paul writes of "a cloud of witnesses", a reference taken to mean the saints of history (Hebrews, 12:1). And the Epistle attributed to St James confirms that prayer works. "Pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (James 5:16). In the Book of Revelation (5:8), the offering of the prayers of the saints is specifically mentioned.

But are these saintly prayers mentioned in the Bible really those received by the saints from earthly petitioners? In other passages, communicating with the dead is prohibited. The Old Testament penalty for talking to the spirits of the dead is stoning (Leviticus 20:27).

And if the saints can hear the prayers of those on Earth, how do they cope with the volume? Individually, the 800 Ortranto martyrs might not be too busy, but the Virgin Mary must be inundated with petitions.

A Catholic is allowed to pray to someone who is not a declared saint in the hope of intercession. For instance, many miracles have been attributed to Audrey Santo, an

American girl who survived 20 years in a coma, following an accident when she was three years old, and around whom a cult has grown (see FT111:12, 117:40-41). She died in April 2007. Two bishops and several priests attended her funeral mass and memorial service along with hundreds of the faithful. "She won't be a saint unless the Catholic Church declares her a Saint," one of Audrey's supporters said afterwards. "But it surely won't hurt to ask her to pray in intercession for us! I think she is very busy in Heaven." ⁵

There is a strong lobby calling for Audrey to be canonised. Indeed, if prayers were not offered to those not officially recognised as saints, no new candidates would ever be recognised. John Paul II was not yet a saint when Sister Marie Simon-Pierre called on his aid. It was through her prayers and miraculous recovery, say believers, that he was revealed as a saint.

Strictly speaking, canonisation is not a process by which a saint is made and declaring someone a saint doesn't give him or her any special status in Heaven; it is recognition of that person's existing status, acquired through their virtue or martyrdom. The Church teaches that canonisation is an earthly recognition of what Heaven already knows. When the French nun prayed to John Paul, he was already a saint – but the miracle had to be verified for the faithful on Earth to know this for themselves. And once the sainthood is endorsed, then the faithful are not only permitted, but also encouraged, to seek the saint's intercession.

Once canonised, saints are rarely removed from the role of honour. In Sister Marie Simon-Pierre's case, after her beatification one of the doctors charged with scrutinising the nun's case believed it was not all that it had appeared to be. She might have been suffering from a similar nervous disease to Parkinson's, but one that could go

naturally into sudden, but limited, periods of remission. There was a report on a Polish website suggesting the 49-year-old nun had become sick again with the same illness, but this did not impede the canonisation. ⁶

Only if a saint is shown to have been entirely mythical might he or she be demoted. In 2001, the Vatican has dropped several saints from its officially approved list because they were considered bogus. "To the distress of many Catholics, the discarded saints include Philomena, a virgin who is supposed to have resisted the advances of the Emperor Diocletian and is revered as the unofficial patron saint of young mothers." ⁷

In 1969, St Christopher was downgraded on the grounds that he may never have existed, although this has not stopped the sale of St Christopher medallions.

It will be seen as extraordinary that, in 2014, the belief persists that supernatural events occur and can be attributed to prayer directed at holy but dead people. Sceptics will find it hard to believe that such superstition persists in a modern age. What they will find even harder to understand is that, far from being a declining leftover from the past, proving miracles is a vibrant modern practice. Leading mainstream academics and medical practitioners are involved. They give their services willingly. Over a single generation, the miracle industry based on the Vatican Curia has increased hugely. From being a minor concern of Vatican officials, saints are now one of the Vatican's main products.

It should not be forgotten that declaring a saint often has a political purpose. It can be used as a way of recognising the significance of minorities within the Church. It was a good move to canonise a Native American, for instance. In 1984, the mass canonisation of 103 Korean martyrs had strong political undertones in the context of Pope John Paul's anti-Communist sympathies.

And in a confusing world, where medical science cannot supply all the answers and solutions to sufferings, the Church finds its teaching on saints a very effective way of reassuring the faithful that with God, through the saints, anything is possible. And it shouldn't be overlooked that when a popular saint is declared, it is often a great excuse for a party.

NOTES

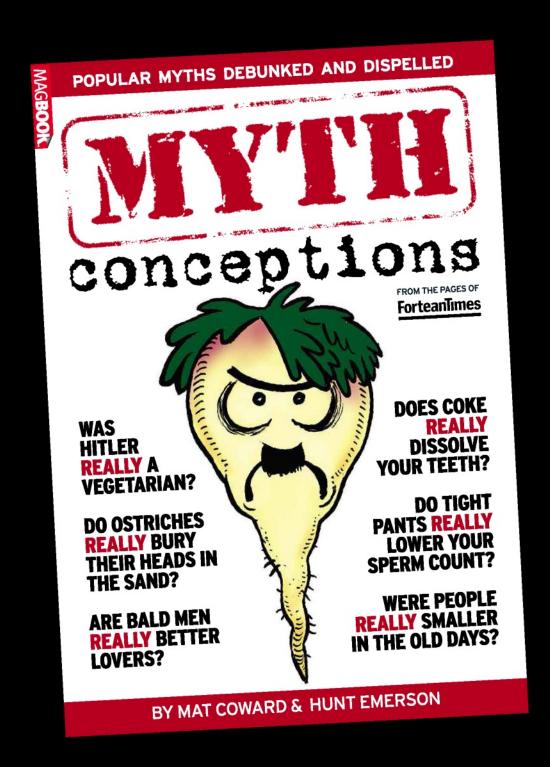
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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



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THE EMPEROR'S WITCH-FINDER

Witch-hunts and social panics are nothing new, nor are they restricted to western culture. In his last piece for *Fortean Times*, the late **STEVE MOORE** looks at a violent Chinese incident from 2,000 years ago, where magic and politics intertwined, and explores some techniques of ancient eastern sorcery.

itchcraft, sorcery and poisoning; torture, burning and tens of thousands dead... but no, it's not 17th century Europe. Instead we're talking about events in a single city in what was, at the time, the most civilised nation on Earth: Changan, capital of Han dynasty China in 91 BC... an unpleasant and blood-drenched affair but one which, alas, can be taken as a fairly typical example of something that happened all too often throughout imperial history.

China is an ancient and sorcery-soaked land and to encompass its occult lore in a few pages would be impossible, yet this incident gives a flavour of the whole. It also demonstrates the ulterior motives, both political and personal, which drive such panics. First, though, we need to take in a little background detail.

HAN OCCULT SCIENCES

The notion of imperial rule was still a fairly recent development at this time. Despite the claims of early dynasties, based mainly in the north, that they ruled the whole of what we know as China, during the first millennium BC the country had fragmented into a number of small kingdoms; and the empire was only actually united by the Qin dynasty in 221 BC. Yet their fragile imperium lasted a mere 15 years. Then, after a prolonged and vicious civil war, it was replaced by the Han dynasty, which endured, with a slight interruption, from 202 BC to AD 220. At the time of the great witch-hunt, the Han emperor was Wudi (reigned 141-87 BC), so when he came to the throne the dynasty had lasted only 60 years, the imperial concept less than a century. Not surprisingly, there were still some problems with the organisation of the state at this period and some of these problems have a bearing on the matter at hand.

MAGIC WAS THOUGHT TO WORK AND WITCHCRAFT WAS FFARED

In the Han dynasty, the practitioners of magic and the 'occult sciences' could be generally divided into two main classes: the fangshi and the wu. Fangshi means 'Master of Methods', and these methods included such disciplines as alchemy, medicine, cosmology, astrology, divination, yin-yang theory and the workings of the Five Elements. In the West, a nearly parallel figure to a fangshi might be the Elizabethan sage Dr John Dee: a learned man who could achieve some social status as a minor member of the royal court, whose interests included both magic and science... although to a fangshi magic and science were largely indistinguishable. It's perhaps worth emphasising that at this period the fangshi were leading members of an intellectual renaissance, using a common language and terminology with philosophers, doctors and politicians, and sharing the same world-view. The fangshi were the forerunners of the later professors of geomancy (fengshui), and were also influential in the formation of religious Daoism at the end of the Han dynasty. 1

Wudi was something of a patron of fangshi, and in particular of the alchemists, as he was exceptionally interested in obtaining the elixir of immortality. At their suggestion he sent naval expeditions to

search the Pacific Ocean for the Isles of the Blest, where the Immortals were supposed to dwell. Similarly, he organised an exploration of the western regions, which reached Persia and led to the opening up of the Silk Road from China to the Roman Empire. There may also have been an additional purpose to this expedition: to contact the goddess Xiwangmu, the Royal Mother of the West, who was believed to have the peaches of immortality in her possession. ²

Some of the stories are stranger still. One fangshi reported that he'd heard a voice echoing in the mountains, saying "ten thousand years". The emperor took this as an omen that he'd achieve immortality, and for the next 20 centuries it became customary to greet the emperor with a cry of "ten thousand years", or wansui. The Japanese pronunciation of wansui is probably more familiar today: it's banzai. Again, one of the fangshi recommended building a tower for the emperor to get closer to heaven, so he could communicate with the spirits more easily. There are many more similar tales. 3

It might be thought from this that Wudi was intensely credulous, but that would be to miss the point. He lived in a time when magic was thought to work and witchcraft was to be feared, and when communication with the spirits was an everyday occurrence.

Spirit-communication was more properly the province of the wu, who were, very roughly, equivalent to north-Asiatic shamans. They would dress in animal skins or brightly-coloured clothing, dance to the sound of drums and flutes, go into trance and become possessed by ghosts, spirits and gods, perform rain-dances and exorcisms, and give prophecies. As we'll see, they also practised sorcery. 4

The *fangshi* were almost always men and what might be called 'middle-class'.

On the other hand, although there were male wu, the majority appear to have been women, and their practices were very much of the common people. A typical wu might be the local village shamaness. Although it seems possible that the wu were the original priesthood of China, by this time they'd come to be regarded as more or less low-status witches.

The best wu were thought to come either from the south of China, which had only recently been conquered and was home to a number of racial minorities, or from the north, among the barbarian Xiongnu (known in later centuries, when they migrated westwards, as the Huns). Regardless of whether the wu came from the north or the south, it is possible to recognise a common trend here, where strangers and foreigners are regarded as much more magically powerful than the locals. Even so, to the Chinese they were still just barbarians, which reduced their social status even

Nonetheless, Wudi wasn't above resorting to the wu when their special talents were useful. One shamaness, Shen Jun, who appears to have acted mainly as a spirit medium, was brought into the palace and given her own apartments; the emperor keeping a record of her pronouncements and treasuring them above any common advice. The wu also took part in major state rituals on occasion, as a sort of assisting priesthood.

As mentioned earlier, there were still problems in running the empire at this time, and one of the biggest lay in the imperial family itself. Wudi had six major wives at the same time, and any number of concubines; and there was no rigid system for fixing the succession to the throne. The emperor could name the heir apparent on whatever grounds he chose; it was usually the eldest son, but it didn't have to be. Once he'd named a particular son as the heir, that son's mother would be promoted to the position of empress. The problem was that all the emperor's wives came from large families or clans, so they all had a multitude of relatives who wanted to exploit their position by gaining posts at court, or by marrying into the royal family. There was thus a constant power-struggle at the court between various families and factions, and this has some bearing on the witchcraft case under discussion. At the time, the heir and the empress came from the Wei family, and the Wei clan thus had a strong and consolidated position. 6

WUDI'S WITCH-HUNT

The witchcraft scare really got underway in February 91 BC, at which time emperor Wudi was 66 years old. Apart from being aged he was prone to illness and, in modern terminology, more than a little paranoid. The story begins with a simple corruption scandal: the prime minister's son, Gongsun Jingsheng, was imprisoned for embezzling 19 million coins that were supposed to have been used for the army. The prime minister himself, Gongsun Ho, was married to a sister of the empress, but even this connection with



ABOVE: A traditional portrait of Emperor Wudi of Han from an ancient Chinese book.

the Wei family was unlikely to extricate his son from such a serious charge. Gongsun Ho thus offered to ransom his son by catching another notorious criminal, Zhu Anshi, and in due course managed to do so. Then the plan misfired, as Zhu Anshi wrote to the emperor from prison, accusing Gongsun Jingsheng of incest with the Princess Yangshi, and of having used wu to work magic against the emperor. The wu were said to have made sacrifices to evil spirits and to have called down curses on the emperor, and to have buried wooden manikins near the road to Wudi's summer retreat at Sweet Springs (Ganquan), empowering them with spells and curses. Obviously, Zhu Anshi's main motivation was vengeance, and it's impossible to judge the veracity of his charges; but he was believed. Gongsun Ho and his son were executed for treason, and their entire clan was exterminated. Later, in July, the previously mentioned Princess Yangshi and her sister, Princess Zhuyi, were also accused of witchcraft; and they too were put to death.

These events were mere forerunners, however. Soon after, Wudi decided to escape the heat in the capital, Changan (modern Xi'an), and went to his summer retreat at Sweet Springs. While he was there he fell ill, although we don't know the nature of the ailment. This brought the main villain of the piece to centre stage: a certain Jiang Chong.

Jiang Chong had been used before by the emperor to carry out a number of delicate investigations, mostly into minor misdemeanours by members of the royal family. He'd carried these out efficiently and gained the emperor's trust, and had been rewarded with an official post. However, one of these investigations had involved the retinue of the heir apparent, Liu Ju.

Jiang Chong now found himself in a rather vulnerable position. Wudi was old and ill, and his chances of recovery were uncertain. If Liu Ju came to the throne, it seemed likely that he'd take reprisals for the previous incident.

What appears to have happened is that Jiang Chong suggested to the emperor that his illness was caused by someone in the capital working witchcraft against him; in particular, that they were using a type of sorcery known as gu. There are various types of gu, mostly to do with sorcerous poisoning; it can also mean 'black magic' in general. In the official histories of the incident it's referred to as wugu, which probably means black magic using shamans (see panel).

MURDER BY MAGIC

Chinese sorcery has its own peculiar methods. Here's a brief roundup of Han dynasty wugu.

Although other sorceries were known, in the case involving Han Wudi we have three major techniques: cursing, manikins and gu. Every single one of these was punishable by death.

CURSING

Obviously, there's more involved here than simply calling the emperor nasty names and wishing him dead, though even that was harshly punished. Usually the curses were made in a ritual context, by the wu. There's not a lot of detail for this period, but we know that the practice included the sacrifice of animals, usually cattle. These were offered either to 'evil spirits' or to the Earth God. The Earth God was a local deity of place, a sort of *genius loci*, and it was standard practice in most forms of magic to propitiate him before going ahead with the ritual itself: his consent would help to empower any curse that was made. In another story from just after Wudi's death, the wu became possessed by spirits, and it was these spirits who were the ones who then carried out the actual cursing.

MANIKINS

In later times the Chinese practised a form of sorcery similar to Western doll-magic, where the manikin is named as a substitute for the victim and then stabbed, strangled, and so on; the effects being transferred to the victim by sympathetic magic. Yet there seems no evidence for its use as early as the Han dynasty, and it is noticeable that the manikins were just that: simple wooden manikins, not named or violated. Parallels with Western doll-magic thus seem inappropriate. Instead, there's a clue to be found in the quotation from the Han Shu: the wu dug up the images and saw the spectres. This suggests that we're dealing with another practice entirely, known as yanmei, or 'spectres in submission'.

Here, one makes a manikin, then charges it with rituals, spells, charms and so on. Then it's hidden in the victim's house, or buried by a road along which he passes, and the



ABOVE: A later form of Chinese doll magic in the form of burying mannikins. BELOW: The written Chinese character for gu, a form of poisoning magic.

manikin proceeds to haunt him. Sometimes the manikin may just bear a curse that will bring misfortune to the household for vears to come. Alternatively it may give rise to a poltergeist-like haunting, or carry a spectre that causes illness. Or, in its most extreme form, the manikin will transform itself into a life-size human or demonic being, which will then physically attack the victim.

So, instead of being a substitute for the victim, the manikin is actually empowered with its own spirit, which does the work independently for the magician. This sort of sorcery continued in use until at least the 19th century, although in latter days the manikin was usually replaced by a paper cut-out in human shape, with charms written on it.

The word qu has many different meanings, including black magic, emanations of evil. casting spells, or even the evil spirits of criminals whose decapitated heads have been



placed on poles. But the classic meaning is that of a form of poisoning magic.

The written Chinese character for au is found among the earliest Chinese writing, on the oracle bones of the Shang period, from the 18th to 12th centuries BC. The sorcery is probably equally as old. At the top, the same sign is repeated three times, and this is a very schematic representation of a winged insect. This sign basically signifies 'crawling things', including insects and reptiles. At the bottom, very stylised, is a picture of a pot. This is exactly how qu works. First, one collects up a number of poisonous animals: the classical set of 'Five Poisonous Animals' is the snake, scorpion, toad, spider and centipede.

The animals are then put in a pot together, the lid is placed in position, and the pot buried for a year. When it is opened again, say the texts, the animals will have eaten each other and only one will remain, which is believed to have absorbed the poisons of all the other animals. by eating them. If the survivor is a centipede, the gu is known as 'centipede-gu'; if a snake, 'snake-qu', and so on.

Whether this precise method was alleged to have been used in the Han sorcery scare isn't certain, but the fact that 'breeders of qu' are mentioned certainly seems to suggest that the end result was some sort of living animal. And a very powerful poison-animal it was supposed to be. It could be killed, so that the venom could be extracted and used as normal poison. Or the poisonanimal could be sent out to attack the victim directly: it might haunt him, or it might make him ill. Usually, though, it was thought to enter the victim's body, either through one of his orifices or by biting its way through his skin. Then it would proceed to eat the victim's entrails while he was still alive. It's easy to see why gu was considered to be the very worst possible form of black magic in the Chinese sorcerer's arsenal.

Strangely, it was thought that if gu was used to kill someone, then after the victim's death all his money would come to the practitioner; but how this was achieved is far from clear. To discover whether one had been poisoned with au. one spat into water: if the spittle floated, no problem; if it sank, you might as well buy a coffin, because gu was very hard to defend against. A couple of minor pseudo-medical treatments are mentioned, but the only real defence was to find out who had worked the sorcery against you, and then persuade them to call it off. This, of course, was not necessarily an easy task. Gu continued to be practised, or at least feared, for centuries, and the legal code of the last imperial dynasty (which only fell to the revolution of 1911) still continued to prescribe the death penalty for it.

The emperor ordered Jiang Chong to make an investigation, and he returned to the capital. He took his own wu with him, doubtless working on the principle that it takes a thief to catch a thief; these wu were Xiongnu, or Huns. The Official History of the Han Dynasty (Han Shu) gives a succinct account of what happened next:

"Now Jiang Chong had the ground dug up by his Hunnish wu, to seek for human images; those men seized breeders of gu and nocturnal sacrificers; they saw the spectres; they defiled the ground so as to make suspicious places. They continuously arrested people, examined them, belaboured them with hot iron tongs, and roasted them to extort confessions; and those people consequently falsely accused each other of using wugu; officials were continually incriminated with rebellion; those who fled or were condemned and put to death amounted, from the beginning to the end of that period, to tens of thousands."

What are we to make of this? Let's begin with the casualty figures. They may refer to the entire witch-hunt, which has yet to run its course, and they may be exaggerated, although Chinese histories are generally taken as fairly accurate. 'Tens of thousands' is also used, though, on occasion, to simply mean an uncountably large number, in the same way that we use 'zillions'. Yet anyway you look at it, an awful lot of people got killed.

It's always possible that some sort of witchcraft was actually being practised, but it's noticeable from the phrasing of the history that the general opinion of its author seems to have been that Jiang Chong was responsible for the whole scare. It's thought that he buried manikins and prepared the ground in advance, and that he then brought his wu along later to 'discover' the evidence. Even so, if people were to be executed, the evidence would obviously have had to be convincing. So if, for example, Jiang Chong was claiming to have found manikins, we can at least be certain that the use of manikins was one of the methods by which sorcery was performed at the time. Thus the evidence remains valuable for the study of Chinese magical techniques, while the witch-hunt, hoax or not, allows us to study the psychology of such events.

THE DANGERS OF MAGIC

After that, things ran their usual course: accuse someone and ask them who their confederates are, then torture them till they have no alternative but to give you some names. Then round up those people and torture them till they tell you who was supposed to have helped them... and the more the hysteria grows, the more the stories go around. Most of the victims were executed on charges of "gross immorality and great impiety", and the tentacles of the conspiracy even reached up to engulf a couple of generals.

This, however, was only the beginning. Thus far, Jiang Chong had succeeded in creating a reign of terror, but he'd not yet moved against the nobles at court. He did that next, starting by investigating the women in the emperor's harem. In particular, he examined those who were no longer the emperor's



ABOVE: Wudi's tomb, known as the Maoling Mausoleum, in Xingping, took 53 years to complete.

favourites, who could logically be expected to practise witchcraft, if only to regain Wudi's affections. Eventually, he claimed to have found manikins in the apartments of the heir apparent, Liu Ju, who'd almost certainly been his prime target from the beginning. And that's where Jiang Chong overplayed his hand.

Liu Ju knew he was a dead man if Jiang Chong convinced Wudi of the charges, so he issued a decree, on his own authority and on that of the empress Wei, accusing Jiang of treason and rebellion. He then arrested Jiang and immediately executed him, and burned his shamans alive.

Unfortunately, word got back to Wudi, who immediately decided that it was the heir himself who was guilty of treason and rebellion. He called in the army and returned to Changan at the beginning of September. Liu Ju raised troops inside the city, and five days of bloody fighting followed. Again, the histories tell us that tens of thousands were killed, and this time they may not be exaggerating. Changan was certainly one of the biggest cities in the world at that time, and the chances of surviving capture by the opposition were not high. At the end of the fighting, the empress Wei committed suicide and Liu Ju fled. He committed suicide, in turn, at the end of the month, and by that time virtually the whole of the Wei clan had been wiped out.

Even so, that wasn't the end of it. When the Wei clan were overthrown, the main beneficiaries were the Li family, and it was a Li who became the next prime minister. One cannot discount the possibility, of course, that Jiang Chong may have been an agent of the Li family all along, but there is no evidence to suggest this. And the witch paranoia continued. In July of the following year the new prime minister was accused of treason, while his wife was accused of using wu to make sacrifices to the Earth Gods and utter spells and imprecations against the emperor. The prime minister was cut in half in the market place, and the heads of his wife and son were exposed on stakes.

Eventually, Wudi was persuaded that Jiang Chong might have been lying about the whole

affair, but by then Jiang was already dead and beyond revenge. So the emperor had his entire family exterminated instead.

It might be thought this was sufficient warning of the dangers of magic, but the wu continued to operate right up until the Communist revolution and, despite numerous 'anti-superstition campaigns', have made something of a comeback in recent times. FT has occasionally mentioned Chinese sorceresses performing rain-dances or leading strange cults, and these are direct descendants of the wu, continuing a tradition that's been well documented for at least 3,000 years, and probably more. **II**

NOTES

- 1 For a detailed discussion of the fangshi, see Kenneth J. DeWoskin: Doctors, Diviners and Magicians of Ancient China: Biographies of Fang-shih, Columbia UP. NY. 1983. passim.
- 2 Steve Moore: The Trigrams of Han, Aquarian, Wellingborough, 1989, pp.76-77.
- 3 J. MacGowan: The Imperial History of China, Curzon Press, London, 1973, pp99-100.
- 4 A general treatment of the wu in the Han period is given in JJM, de Groot: The Religious System of China. Literature House, Taiwan, 1964, Vol. 6, pp1187-1211. Wu are usually thought to be rather more mediumistic than typical Siberian shamans.
- 5 De Groot: ibid., Vol. 6, pp.1201-1202. De Groot reads this passage as if an anonymous wu was 'channelling' a deceased 'princess Shen' (Shen-jun), a former lover of Wudi. As the medium is said to channel a number of deities, I suspect that Shen Jun is actually the name of the shamaness.
- 6 Extensive treatments of the witch-hunt are to be found in Michael Loewe: Crisis and Conflict in Han China, Allen & Unwin, London, 1974, pp37-90, and De Groot, op. cit., Vol. 5, pp828-844. Both authors draw on the official histories. Han Shu and Shih Chi. Loewe is valuable for political context. De Groot for sorcery details. See also: H.Y. Feng & J.K. Shryock: "The Black Magic in China Known as Ku" (Journal of the American Oriental Society, Vol. 55, 1935).

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STEVE MOORE was a long-time FT contributor, often on oriental subjects, and also edited Fortean Studies. He was a prolific comics writer, and his novel Somnium was published in 2011.



compiled by the Hierophant's Apprentice



No 55: LITTLE PEOPLE

n Chapter XII of *Book of the Damned*, Charles Fort floats his famous, oft-quoted apothegm that "we are property" – the property, which Fort presumes to be of some usefulness, of an alien race, which has "paid out analogues of beads for us to former, more primitive, owners of us". Fort rarely gets credit as a conspiracist, but what follows this assertion should provide a fairly intense flash of *déjà vu* to anyone familiar with the Illuminati, Bilderburgers, 'international bankers' and all that lot: "All this has been known, perhaps for ages, to certain ones upon this earth, a cult or order, members of which function like bellwethers to the

rest of us, or as superior slaves or overseers, directing us in accordance with instructions received – from Somewhere else – in our mysterious usefulness." ¹

Fort doesn't develop this paranoid whimsy thankfully - but proceeds to adduce indications that such items as miniature stone tools - 'pigmy flints' - and 'fairy crosses' to be evidence that some of these previous owner-occupiers of our planet were very small persons, which we now call fairies. Some were "about the size of pickles", he says, which as measures go is about as helpful as saying that a coypu is about the size of a small pig. So we note that Fort may have kicked off or picked up on

an early version of ancient astronautics, and that he accepted that giants and fairies existed in the past. But he has nothing to say about miniature humanoids in the present.

Actually – we may as well get this out of the way – not all otherworldy creatures that people call (or identify with) what we call fairies are small, and not all are friendly. We discussed this once with an old (now late) Greek villager years ago. *Neréidhes*, as she called them – obviously some relation to the sea nymphs of Classical lore (our informant was an islander) – are tall and malevolent; and she shuddered. We haven't done a global survey

of the matter, but it seems unlikely that tall 'fairies' are exclusive to Greek folklore. Indeed WB Yeats's remarks in *The Celtic Twilight* (AH Bullen, 1902, pp84-5*n*) that the "faeries in Ireland are sometimes as big as we are, sometimes bigger, and sometimes... about three feet high." An old woman of Co Mayo told Yeats that she thought "it is something in our eyes that makes them seem big or little."

But then not all the Little People of whom there is report much resemble our current idea of fairies, either. By that, we mean the twee winged tinkerbellish creatures of the kind that Elsie Wright and Frances Griffiths photographed at Cottingley. Their photos were



ABOVE: Illustration by Gertrude Thomson for William Allingham's *The Fairies* (1886).



ABOVE: A Midsummer Night's Dream inspired countless fairy paintings, such as 'The Quarrel of Oberon and Titania' by Sir Joseph Noel Paton, 1849.

accepted as genuine by some who should have known better partly because they so resembled – indeed, it turned out, replicated – the prancing nymphets of late Victorian and Edwardian children's book illustrations. Looking at these en masse, one gets the uncomfortable impression that fairy stories of the era presented a dubious excuse to depict pretty pubescent girls with few or no clothes on. The winged fictitious fairies of today are often more modestly attired, if also more developed, but far less subtly erotic.

It's not just fairies

Little people in the European tradition include dwarves, gnomes, leprechauns, pixies and goblins. Elves are rather more varied in stature: some are reported as tall, others diminutive. They are, however, big in Iceland, where in December 2013 a group called Friends of Lava raised objections to building two roads on the grounds that the elves (who live in the rocks) would be disturbed. According to the Associated Press, 2 "Elf advocates have joined forces with environmentalists to urge the Icelandic Road and Coastal Commission and local authorities to abandon a highway project building a direct route from to the tip of the Alftanes peninsula, where the president has a home, to the Reykjavik suburb of Gardabaer (see FT311:14-15). They fear disturbing elf habitat and claim the area is particularly important because it contains an elf church." The Supreme Court would decide the issue. This wasn't a matter of a few local, vocal eccentrics. A 2007 survey, says the AP report, showed that 62 per cent of Icelanders (that is, about 198,000 people) found the existence of elves credible. An earlier survey gave that figure as 54 per cent, breaking down as 32 per cent "possible", 16 per cent "probable" and 8 per cent "certain" (see FT201:42-47). So belief in elves seems to be waxing there. In contrast, only 32 per cent of Icelanders believe in God, so don't naysay the power of folklore.

David Hufford showed in his study of the Night Hag, *The Terror That Comes in the Night* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982), what may seem to be 'folk tales' of entities so strange as to seem, *prima facie*, impossible, may be based in actual experience. This is not to say that the Night Hag actually exists in a physically objective sense. But it does appear to be so to anyone unfortunate

enough to meet it, while it would be imperceptible to anyone else.

Our-sized people who meet little people seem often to be in the same awkward position, but not always. In the chapter "Regina, Regina, Pigmeorum Veni" of *The Celtic Twilight* (pp83–8), Yeats describes how he, a middle-aged man and a young female relative with a slight reputation as a seer, "were walking along a far western sandy shore" one night when Yeats decided he wanted the answers to some questions he had for the 'Forgetful People'. First the girl, then her middle-aged relative, then Yeats himself went into "a kind of trance, in which what we call the unreal had become to take upon itself a masterful reality." Yeats conversed with a tall faery queen, who at his request called forth her followers from her cave, and they emerged in four bands.

I then asked her whether it was true that she and her people carried away mortals, and if so, whether they put another soul in the place of the one they had taken? 'We change the bodies,' was her answer... I then asked whether she and her people were not 'dramatizations of our moods'? 'She does not understand,' said my friend, 'but says that her people are much like human beings, and do most of the things human beings do.'

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Yeats's further questions seemed to puzzle or irritate the faery queen, and before she left she wrote a message in the sand: "Be careful, and do not seek to know too much about us."

One can dismiss this as the fantasy or hallucination of people in an altered state of consciousness, but these terms don't really explain anything – they seem to, but only provided one doesn't think too long. "I tell these things as accurately as I can," wrote Yeats, "and with no theories to blur the history." And in particular they don't account for the shared nature of the experience. It is difficult to produce a materialist explanation, and this instance is by no means unique. We know two people who were visited by what they called a werewolf, two stories high, who peered into their windows from the garden of their suburban London house. We know another two who observed a very large, long-haired blackand-ginger tortoiseshell cat sitting on a young lady's knee on the upper deck of a big red London bus. When they looked again, the

lady had nothing more than a nondescript blue duffle bag on her knee. Peter Brookesmith, as unregenerate a sceptic as any known to the degenerate staff of this journal, and not generally regarded (yet, anyway) as mentally unbalanced, has written in these pages of his encounter with a leprechaun at Glendalough, Co. Wicklow (see FT202:56). But if you want to know about two people seeing a leprechaun (strikingly similar, as it happens, in key details, to the little person of Glendalough) in Ireland, perhaps you should approach the probably more sane Paul Devereux and his spousal associate Charla and see what they have to say. Of related interest is Mrs Ann Atkin, who first saw a gnome strolling on her Devon property in 1977:



ABOVE: Ann Atkin has probably seen more live gnomes than anyone else in England.

later, she and her husband saw them together, when "hundreds" of gnomes arrived for an "international convention".

Sanity and the subconscious

As we've remarked before in these entries, 'hallucinating' doesn't imply mental instability of some kind, despite popular misconception. Psychotics, the ferociously stoned, people with degenerating brains or the DTs, or who are otherwise mentally or psychologically challenged, do indeed 'hallucinate'. But in this context it's as well to remember that while some bank robbers may be red-haired, not all red-haired people are bank robbers. We used scare quotes above, too, because 'hallucination' implies something fundamentally unreal. No matter how veridical the experience itself may seem, the term none too subtly connotes a perception that's trapped inside the experient's head. We prefer to think of these as visionary events (see Dictionary entries 18-21, q.v.), to which some of us may be trained up and some may be naturally inclined, while to others such experiences become accessible only when their 'normal' ratiocinative processes are suppressed or compromised.

That said, one should consider the context in which Messrs

Yeats, Brookesmith, and Devereux (and how many hundreds of others?) saw what they saw. Yeats makes no bones about being in a mild trance. The other three were merely going about their lawful occasions. But they were all in Ireland. Yeats was as steeped in his country's traditional lore as a sheepskin soaked a year in poteen. He was also no stranger to the realms of the paranormal and spiritual. He would have a chat with a faery queen, wouldn't he? you might say. But it would be difficult to imagine anyone trundling around Ireland, especially its magical Atlantic coast, without at least a subconscious awareness of the lurking leprechauns, maybe even hoping to grab one and riddle with it till it led them in a monstrous sulk to the crocks of gold. But they don't report meeting the Fair Folk every time they set foot on the Emerald Isle. So, from one angle, context is all. On the other hand. Devon, where the Atkin couple saw hundreds of gnomes, is not, as far as we know, traditionally notorious

as a gnome habitat. The shared nature of

some of these visionary experiences may provide

a better clue to what is going on. For this suggests that there is perhaps an environmental trigger or stimulus of some kind. some exterior factor, that generates a perhaps culturally or contextually framed, ostensibly authentic, walking, talking or singing - or mounted on miniature horses - image. That such apparently objective visions can be had by two (or more) people simultaneously, in turn suggests that there may be some set of hard-wired neuronal circuits that come in to play, given the right set of circumstances. But the trigger is surely the key to the enigma. What is it? No one knows.

This line of enquiry (we claim no authority) has seemed more fruitful than giving readers a catalogue of sightings of Little People, or of every culture

whose traditions include one form or another of these creatures. Not least because every culture we have nosed into seems to have some kind of miniature humanoid in its lore, and we don't have space even to list them, let alone to characterise them all. Likewise it seems fruitless to examine at length the various hypotheses that have been let loose upon these innocent entities; whether they're 'racial memories' of previous natives of the given habitat, either of pigmy stature or diminished by the passing of time into (more or less contemptible) minor, dismissable beings; or denizens of the land of the dead; or fallen angels; or tulpoid projections from the collective unconscious. Or creatures from other dimensions. Or olde-worlde manifestations or disguises of the ghastly anæmic Greys of ufolore. Mrs Atkin, who has probably seen more live gnomes than anyone else in England, considers her brand of little people to be 'earth spirits' who implore us to live "in harmony with nature".

Mind where you put your foot

What does seem to be a common thread running through notions of Little People in many, if not all, cultures is their capriciousness. Little People will do folk a good turn (curing usually-fatal illness, for instance) as easily as stealing your scissors or, more usefully if you value your wine cellar, your children. Some cultures rationalise this by creating mythic histories. Thus in some stories the Pukwudgie known to the Massachusetts Wampanoag tribe initially tried to help them,

but their efforts always backfired until they eventually decided to torment them instead. They became mischievous and aggravated the Natives until they asked Granny Squanit, Maushop's wife, for help. Maushop [a Wampanoag creation giant] collected as many [Pukwudgies] as he could. He shook them until they were confused and tossed them around New England. Some died, but others landed, regained their minds

and made their way back to Massachusetts. Satisfied he had done his job... Maushop went away for a while. In his absence, the Pukwudgies had returned. They again changed their relationship with the Wampanoags. They were no longer a nuisance, but began kidnapping children, burning villages and forcing the Wampanoag deep into the woods and killing them.

ECCUSIONES SINCES COCONONIA



ABOVE: WB Yeats and Arthur Machen each added to the literary lore of the Little People, Machen drawing on the 'racial memory' concept in some of his tales.

And after that, as they say, it was downhill all the way for the tribespeople. ⁵ Another source ⁶ tells us that

Pukwudgies are magical little people of the forest in Algonquian folklore, similar to European gnomes or fairies. ... [They] are usually described as being knee-high or even smaller. Their name literally means 'person of the wilderness' and they are usually considered to be spirits of the forest. In some traditions, they have a sweet smell and are associated with flowers. Pukwudgies have magical powers which vary from tribe to tribe but may include the ability to turn invisible, confuse people or make them forget things, shapeshift into cougars or other dangerous animals, or bring harm to people by staring at them.

Shakespeare's Puck was a fairy, and so the word 'trickster' comes to mind – as it does when reading of the contradictory, mischievous or riddling habits of many of the world's Little Peoples. The Abatwa of southern Africa, for instance, are the world's tiniest 'humans' at 5mm tall (they ride on ant-back, as pictured on the facing page) and famously sensitive about their size; on meeting you, they will demand: "From where did you first see me?" The correct answer is something like "From miles out to sea", or anything that implies that they are mega-rather than micro-persons and easily discerned from afar. Get the answer wrong and they'll jab you with a fatal, poisoned dart. Among Europeans (including those in North America), at least, such dangerous, even vengeful, aspects of Little People seems to have faded from modern accounts of meetings with them - indeed these have largely become sighting reports, and often not of creatures we would recognise as 'fairies', arather than interactive encounters. This diminution of power (and among Europeans, size) is surely a reflection of a loss of cultural power, a thought reinforced by 20th-century reports of seeing dainty little fairies who, most untraditionally, sport wings.

Yet even these reduced creatures have a tricksterish meaning that we should heed. From this point of view it matters less whether fairies are 'real' or not, or what they do or say, than that they are perceived at all. The meta-message (as a po-mo might say) is that reality is booby-trapped. Things are not always quite as they seem. And that surely makes Little People and their many friends and relations very fortean indeed.

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- 3 Damian Whitworth, "Like paradise—but more boring" (review of Michael Booth, *The Almost Nearly Perfect People*), *Times* 1 Feb 2014, Saturday Review p15
- **4** "Creatures from Elsewhere". *The Unexplained* No 28, Orbis, 1982, p543
- **5** Anon, "Pukwudgie Origins", http://pukwudgie.com/history.html
- **6** Anon, "Legendary Native American Figures", www.nativelanguages.org/pukwudgie.htm

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- 8 See Jerome Clark, Unexplained!, Visible Ink, 1993, pp114–22, for some 20th-century reports of Little People whom one would not call 'fairies'.
- 9 Janet Bord (Fairies: Real Encounters with Little People, Michael O'Mara Books 1997) recounts two encounters, one in 1977 (p52) and another in 1993 (p74), in which the witnesses report "a little figure about six inches high, in the perfect shape of a woman and with brilliantly coloured diaphanous wings' seen in Somerset, UK and, from Mt Shasta, CA, "11 tiny blue fairies, perhaps one foot tall, and seemingly transparent...the blue color was electric...." These are unmistakably post-Victorian perceptions, and culturally determined.

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THE FIRST FORTEANS

5. ERIC FRANK RUSSELL: PART THREE

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.

The more we learn about Eric Frank Russell, the more it is clear he was a complex character with a contradictory nature. When he wanted to, he could turn on the charm and was even described as a ladies' man witty, attentive and physically imposing. A typical anecdote was told by Irish fan Walt Willis of the visit to the 1953 British National SF Convention in London by American Bea Mahaffey, editor of the US zine Other Worlds. During her trip, Mahaffey stopped off in Liverpool and attended an evening gathering hosted by the Liverpool fans, during which EFR made his entrance. "He stepped immediately into his natural niche as life and soul of the party... and proceeded thus outrageously to skate on the thin ice on the brink of bad taste without once putting his foot in it. Larger than life and a great deal more interesting, he manages to set the standards in any company in which he finds himself."

He could be helpful too: seeking out books for people, donating manuscripts for auction at conventions, and refusing to criticise the writings of others when he couldn't know the circumstances or hardships under which they were written. "[That] says much for his character," declares his biographer John Ingham. EFR was also described as a great correspondent, who enjoyed "the cut and thrust of postal debate" and loved writing letters "full of wry humour, thought-provoking comments and gentle banter".

However, when the mood took him, he could be deliberately offensive or brusque, especially to repel sycophants and pests when they got too close to his home and family. When asked by Bea Mahaffey for a biographical note, EFR replied that he had a pathological dislike of them. "The dreary humour, the inane photograph of anybody who might be anybody but is striving



ABOVE: EFR with American Bea Mahaffey, editor of Other Worlds Science Fiction, at Russell's Wirral home during her visit in 1953.

"SO IF ANYONE ASKS HOW I PART MY HAIR... MY INSTINCTIVE REACTION IS TO DEMAND 'WHAT EFFING BUSINESS IS IT OF YOURS?'"

to be somebody, the pathetic straining to ingratiate oneself with cold-eyed fast-shooting readers, the desperate juggling with words and phrases to make a quite ordinary person seem at least extraordinary". ² He remained inflexible to the end. In the 1970s, he explained to the

British SF Association's Malcolm Edwards: "This is not because I have anything to conceal, such as an address at the local asylum. It is simply because ever since childhood I've been a firm believer in the... right to privacy. So if anyone asks [how] I part my hair... my instinctive

reaction is to demand 'What effing business is it of yours?'" ³

EFR gave out private information only rarely and grudgingly; even then often contradicting himself. For example, in the only full interview he ever allowed – in 1937, to SF editor Walter Gillings – he boasted that "being a commercial traveller" gave him the edge in writing SF, "for I can tell thumping whoppers with complete gusto and get away with it". ⁴ Yet, to others – including the American editor

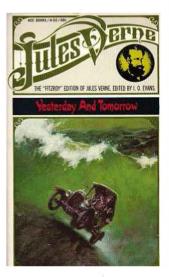
PETER WESTON COLLECTION

and fan-historian Sam Moskowitz - he firmly denied ever being a commercial traveller.

My own correspondence with EFR was sporadic and brief, coming towards the end of his life when, by all accounts, he had already withdrawn from the activities that had shaped his earlier years. In late 1971, when I began mulling the notion of starting this magazine, I invited EFR to write something for us. His reply, in January 1972, took me by surprise as he diffidently declined. This was not the tone I had anticipated from the writer of such vitally subversive and satirical stories. Having turned down requests "from half a dozen off-trail outfits, including INFO," he said, "I cannot join in a seventh one without offending everyone in sight."

Behind that disappointing brush-off, the real reason, he said, was that he was tired. "I was buried up to my neck in the original Fortean Society for 35 years and, inevitably, the time came when I'd had e-bloody-nuff." 6 Enlarging on that, he said "it took up far too much time to far little avail' and - as Fort had so memorably predicted 7 - attracted too many of "the 'wrong sort of people' as Tiffany Thayer and I found to our cost". He also blamed "too few objective minds and too many nutheads, some of whom verge on the certifiable."

When I tried again, in September 1973, EFR was again adamant: "Your mag would be wasted on me. Present-day data is of no interest to me because, in my opinion, it is no longer possible to extract genuine material from a mountain of imagined or invented crap. I no longer swim in the Mediterranean for the same



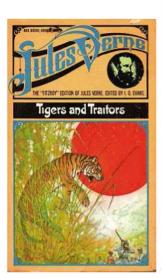




ABOVE LEFT: Sam Moscowitz speaking at the 1957 World SF Convention, in London. ABOVE RIGHT: Christine Moskowitz, Pam Bulmer, Peggy Campbell and EFR at the same convention. BELOW: The Jules Verne Fitzroy Edition Ace paperbacks.

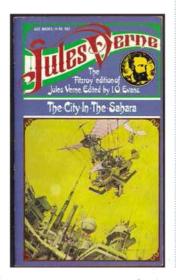
reason." For the centenary of Fort's birth, 1974, I asked if he would like to commemorate Fort's legacy; this time there was only silence. Harold Chibbett later told me he was not surprised to learn of EFR's bluff reaction. "He seems to have withdrawn into his shell, so to speak, as regards fortean matters... but still writes to me. He was one of the original NL-ites in the thirties, but like Arthur Clarke, has other interests now." 8

Sometimes, EFR went too far. He was, in this respect, Ingham notes, his own worst enemy. It was not so much what Russell said that upset people, as the language he often used. "In the long run it did him no favours, causing genuine despair, amongst friends and fans." A conversation with him "was not for the fainthearted, replete, as it often was, with coarse humour and profanity." Many a correspondent complained about "typical EFR fulminations", as William Temple once wearily wrote to Harold Chibbett.



Sam Moscowitz - who met him on the New York trip in 1939 - had a soft spot for Russell, describing him as "talkative and likable," adding "but he would thread his conversation with four-letter words". Such open vulgarity seems quite commonplace these days (sadly), but back then EFR seemed insensitive to the effect of his offensive language. This was not simply a case of barrack-room behaviour acquired during his youthful stint in the King's Regiment; what disturbed Moscowitz was that "the shock value... appeared to amuse him". On occasion, EFR could also be direct to the point of rudeness. Moskowitz recalls that, during that trip, EFR's startlingly blunt first words to one person were "You're a Jew aren't you?"

EFR conducted a long and vigorous correspondence with author and anthologist Idrisyn O Evans (1894-1977) - who had published the Fitzroy Edition of Jules Verne and also translated Verne's stories for the first time for Fantasy and Science Fiction



magazine in 1958-1959. In it. Ingham writes, EFR's rants ranged from "homosexuals (for whom EFR had no sympathy whatever), and the nudism movement (full of "strange types") to religion in general ("ideological sewage"). Echoing, perhaps' Thayer's attacks on iodine additives as the source of modern ills, EFR also complained about the "increasingly anti-social behaviour of British youth which Russell thought was due to pollutants from car exhausts or the over use of synthetic fertilizers and detergents."

Evans, too, found EFR's use of four-letter words "more than distasteful" which, as he wrote to EFR "jar on me. When they appear in your own letters my first feeling is that they are incongruous with your brilliance as a writer." In another letter he asks EFR "when you write to me again, 'play down' on the four-letter words".

EFR AND CROWLEY

While writing a review of EFR's best known stories, the US writer and blogger Steve Dandois told me that there was a bit he had to leave out because he "couldn't figure a way to shoehorn that factoid into the piece". While not relevant to his writing, this 'factoid' certainly illuminates the curious belligerence in EFR's personality.

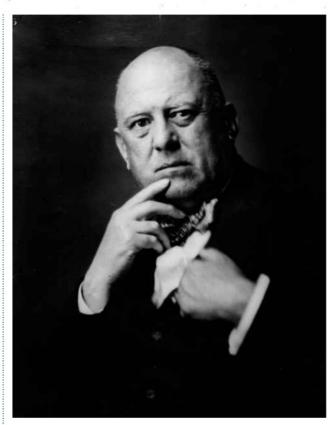
We are referring to Russell's apparent feud with Aleister Crowley (1875-1947), the occult practitioner, scholar and selfprofessed 'Great Beast'. As Ingham's biography of EFR records, in one of Russell's typically self-deprecating descriptions, which first

30TH PIX: PETER WESTON

appeared in print in the Penguin edition of EFR's novel Three To Conquer (1963), he makes this odd boast: "Am 6'2" tall with grey-brown hair, green eyes and look as if I should have been hanged at Nuremberg... My best enemy was the late Aleister Crowley whom I put in his grave by bone-pointing." ⁹

References to Russell are practically nonexistent in Crowleyan biographical works. The only one of any relevance that we could find is an interpolation by Marcelo Motta in his annotated version of Crowley's Magick Without Tears, in which Motta describes Crowley as "... slandered, libelled and defamed all over the world, murderously hated by charlatans and fanatics, butt of continuous 'masses for his soul' and other hostile magical rituals (Eric Frank Russell, a science-fiction writer now deceased, once stated in print that every night, while Crowley was alive, he prayed for Crowley's death. Mr Russell was a Roman Catholic Irishman)." 10

As Steve Dandois notes: "It's unclear whether Motta had any additional information, or if his reference to Russell having 'stated in print' simply refers



to the very same quip from EFR's own hand [cited above]".

¹¹ Dandois also asks: "Why would EFR make this bold and inflammatory statement without having ever even met the man?" We are not quite sure how 'bone-pointing' becomes

a nightly prayer; nor are we certain that EFR ever claimed to be Irish or Catholic. ¹²

However, there is a distinct possibility that EFR could actually have met Crowley. We know that Harold Chibbett met or interviewed Crowley **LEFT:** Aleister Crowley, photographed around 1930.

at least once, and we also know that EFR sometimes accompanied his friend Chibbett on his 'investigations'. My conjecture - which cannot now be confirmed - is that Russell was with Chibbett when he interviewed Crowley, and this most likely occurred sometime in the mid-to-late-1940s. This period includes London's Blitz, when Crowley moved down to Devon. In 1944, Crowley moved again, first to Buckinghamshire, and then to Hastings, Sussex, where he stayed until his death three vears later.

Crowley was not at his best in this period, ill with asthma and addicted to heroin; and EFR, in one of his prickly moods, would have viewed Crowley as an effete poseur. If EFR and Crowley had met and antagonised one another during one of Chibbett's investigations, I'm certain Chibbett would have recorded it in the files of the Probe group. These records were our last, best hope for some insight into whether this feud was imagined or actual; but, alas, they are now well and truly lost to us. 13

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I could not have made this instalment 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/); Peter Weston for permission to use images from the various photographs he has collected, and for his Relapse (http://efanzines com/Prolapse/); and Jill Godfrey for permission to use Harold Gottliffe's photos from several of these sites; and EFR's biographer John Ingham, of course. NB: For ease of reading, I omit many references here - but a fully referenced and linked version will follow (eventually) on my CFI blogsite: http:// blogs.forteana.org/bob

REFERENCES

1 Nearly all the biographical details (and unreferenced citations) are drawn from John L Ingham's biography of Eric Frank Russell, Into Your Tent (2010), the result of decades of patient detective work. It is available from coldtonnage.com.

2 This truculence is referred to throughout Ingham's biography. Oddly, FFR's friend and mentor Tiffany Thayer was equally diffident. As Dennis Wepman described 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." 'Thayer, Tiffany' in American National Biography Online, February 2000. This might well have described EFR also. According to Doug Skinner's article 2005 FT article 'Doubting Tiffany' (FT200:48-52), Thayer even uttered a boast that could have come from EFR: "This facetiousness of mine has kept me from being appraised on my skill with words."

3 In EFR's 1951 novella 'And Then There Were None' – expanded in 1962 into the novel *The Great Explosion* – his aliens are fond of the acronym MYOB (for 'mind your own business'; it even has its own wiki page (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mind_your_own_business). Was EFR telegraphing his resistance to invasion of his privacy?

4 EFR Interviewed for Walter Gillings's fanzine *Scientifiction* (June & August 1937) ; cited in *Into Your Tent* p.64

5 EFR Letter to BR, 28 Jan 1972. The reference to INFO is clarified on p302 of *Into Your Tent*. The brothers Paul and Ron Willis – who

had published Anubis, their SF and horror fanzine, between 1966-1968 (see http://zinewiki.com/ Anubis) wrote to EFR in 1966, offering EFR life membership in their newly founded International Fortean Organisation (INFO) if he would agree to be their British Representative. The Willises were credited as successors to the defunct Fortean Society after their acquisition of some of the old FS files (according to Doug Skinner). It is ironic that Thayer also, in setting up the Fortean Society, asked Theodore Dreiser to be its figurehead, only to be rebuffed. Cited by Damon Knight, Charles Fort: Prophet of the Unexplained (1970) p186. Fort, too, "wouldn't join it, any more than I'd be an Elk." Knight, Charles Fort p181. Anyone spot a

6 EFR Letter to BR, 17 Sept. 1973.

7 In a letter to Edmund Hamilton, dated 27 May 1926, Fort wrote: "...that we shall ever organize does not seem likely to me... The great trouble is that the majority

great trouble is that the majority of persons who are attracted are the ones that we do not want; Spiritualists, Fundamentalists, persons who are revolting against Science, not in the least because they are affronted by the mythstuff of the sciences, but because scientists either oppose or do not encourage them." Knight, p172.

8 Harold Chibbett Letter to BR, 27 Oct 1975.

9 Cited by Narrelle Harris on his website 'Shadow Man: The Life and Works of Eric Frank Russell': http://members.iinet.net.au/~parallax/efr/biography.html

10 'Letter 45: 'Unserious' conduct of a pupil', in *Magick Without Tears* (1954); reprinted in *The Oriflamme* vol.VI, No.3, 1983; 2nd edition with commentary by Marcelo Motta, edited by David Bersson, 2009 online at www.castletower.org/mwt.

11 Steve Dandois email to BR, 15 Sept 2013.

12 EFR was born in Berkshire. Ingham investigated this 'Irish' question but could find no written or printed evidence to this effect, except several similar statements in fan literature suggesting that EFR was "descended from Irish stock" (possibly due to his 'gift of the gab'). Nor could any evidence be found in EFR's genealogy, which Ingham diligently traces back to 1800; ditto for any hint of religious persuasion. On the contrary, it seems that Russell's family "disliked Irish goods as a protest at the activities of the IRA. Into Your Tent p.7

13 See First Forteans #3, 'Roundrobins of the Damned' (**FT310:50-51**).

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forum



On Electric Bridge

ANDY DUNCAN pays a visit to Nebraska, lightbulb in hand, and conducts a late-night experiment in harnessing an unusual energy source.



ANDY DUNCAN is a two-time World Fantasy Award winner whose latest book is the fiction collection *The Pottawatomie Giant and Other Stories* (PS Publishing, 2012).

e'll cross seven bridges on the way," Bill said, "and only one has a name. The locals call it Electric Bridge, because supposedly, if you stand on it at night holding a light bulb, the bulb will glow."

This was during my September 2012 visit to Nebraska's southeast corner. My friend Bill Clemente was driving me along his daily route to Peru State College. The town of Peru, Nebraska, has only one paved street, which turns to gravel at the outskirts, so most of Bill's commute through pasture, cropland, and scrub is along a gravel road so narrow that two vehicles can pass one another only if each skirts disaster along the shoulder, something the locals tend to do at top speed.

Now I had something to think about other than oncoming traffic: a possible fortean anomaly. "Is that true?" I asked.

"I've never tried it," Bill replied.

I stared at him, smiling, from the passenger seat, until he met my gaze.

Without speaking, we were in immediate accord – and so, later that afternoon, we stopped at a convenience store and bought a box of incandescent 60-watt light bulbs.

That night, we careened back along that gravel road between Peru and Nebraska City. We saw no other vehicles, but dodged fresh obstacles: a raccoon family that loped single file along the shoulder; a ghost-faced barn owl that swooped toward our windshield and pulled up just in time to avoid a collision. We scarcely needed headlights, as we were only two nights before a full moon. Even so, when we pulled off the road about 9pm, turned off the engine and doused the lamps, the darkness beneath Electric Bridge – about a kilometre west

of the Missouri River – was profound, a tangible thing.

The first sound I heard, after the SUV's engine shut off, was an eerie hum directly overhead: a high-voltage power line that I hadn't noticed by day. My arm and neck hairs prickled as Bill and I groped our way to the middle of the bridge, peering at the bulb Bill held aloft. Sure enough, it seemed to be glowing – or was that just reflected moonlight?

Bill swept off his outback hat and nestled the bulb inside, to shield it. We butted heads, staring into the impromptu niche Bill had made in the air. The bulb emitted a feeble glow, like the last dying glimmer of a long-neglected flashlight. It barely illuminated the hat's stitching, an inch

In a later conversation with a store clerk, Bill learned some additional lore: If you touch Electric Bridge with your tongue, you supposedly get a shock. Bill bravely tried this at first opportunity, with no result but a nasty metallic taste and a bit of road grit in his mouth.

Though we congratulated ourselves

BELOW:Electric Bridge, near Peru, Nebraska.



at the time, I wish in hindsight that our small experiment had been more systematic. We might have tried various sizes and wattages of bulbs, and carried them a distance from the power line. Mindful of the European Union phase-out of incandescents, we might have tried CFLs and LEDs. We also might have attempted to capture our evanescent phenomenon on photos or video (without a flash, of course) to confirm that we weren't imagining things. I'm curious, too, to know whether the glow is more visible beneath a new moon.

Still, I saw enough to understand how the bridge got its name. It's the only place where the power line crosses the road, therefore the only place where locals are likely to register the line's effects, if any. To follow the line in either direction means hacking through brush and stumbling through fields.

But the bridge has added distinctions. It's the largest and most well-built bridge for miles; most of the others on this "seven bridges road" are little more than raised culverts. Moreover, the bridge marks the point where northbound Otoe County Road 72 abruptly becomes westbound R Road; in other words, just past the north end of the bridge, the road takes a 90-degree turn to the west, so drivers are forced to cross the bridge slowly. Finally, the grassy spot at the north end is a rare opportunity, on that road, for a car to pull over safely. Only a few yards away are a copse of trees and a walking trail into nearby woods, so generations of local youth likely know the place well.

That power line, I since have learned, carries about 345,000 volts of electricity. The US Environmental Protection Agency website states: "A person standing directly under a high-voltage transmission line may feel a mild shock when touching something that conducts electricity. These sensations are caused by the strong electric fields from the high-voltage electricity in the lines. They occur only at close range because the electric fields rapidly become weaker as the distance from the line increases."

Whether this field is strong enough to heat the filament of an unconnected incandescent light bulb held directly beneath the line is another matter \dots but maybe other FT readers can illuminate me. \blacksquare

forum

In the shadow of the Shard

Could one of London's most famous bridges stand on an offering of human blood? **DAVID HAMBLING** investigates the tradition of foundation sacrifice.



DAVID HAMBLING is a science writer for the *Guardian*, *Wired* and *New Scientist* as well as a frequent contributor to *FT* and its regular science columnist.

housands of commuters pour over London Bridge every day, making it one of the busiest spots in Britain and beloved of documentary crews wanting to film crowds. Could this icon of the modern City really be founded on human sacrifice?

The notion that a structure will only stand firm if it is built on a blood sacrifice is an ancient one. There are numerous examples in European folklore, collected in the 1996 book *The Walled-Up Wife* edited by Alan Dundes. This describes how, even today, builders in Greece and the Balkans will sprinkle the blood of a chicken over the foundation stone for good luck before roasting the bird for a celebratory meal.

In most versions of the traditional story, a bridge or castle collapses repeatedly during construction until the builders realise they must pacify supernatural forces with a sacrifice. In all the stories it is the masons, the 'operative' forerunners of modern

Supernatural forces must be pacified with a human sacrifice

BELOW: The heads of traitors are displayed on pikes over the Stone Gateway of Old London Bridge, circa 1600.

BOTTOM: Children play 'London Bridge is Falling Down'.





'speculative' freemasons, who make the sacrifice – generally a female member of their family.

In Joshua 6:26 the prophet declares: "Cursed before the Lord be the man that rises up and rebuilds this city, Jericho. At the cost of his first-born shall he lay its foundation, and at the cost of his youngest son shall he set up its gates". Undeterred, the Bethelite ruler Hiel rebuilds the city in 1 Kings 16:34: "He laid the foundation thereof in Abiram his firstborn, and set up the gates thereof in his youngest son Segub". Jericho is one of the oldest cities known, suggesting a tradition of some antiquity.

Foundation sacrifice was widespread across Europe, including Britain. What is surprising is that the practice extended well into the supposedly Christian mediæval period. When Holsworthy Church in Devon was restored in 1884, the original Norman tower was found to have been built over a human body. The sacrifice may have been alive at the time, as in many of the tales: the skeleton's mouth was stuffed with mortar. Various other examples have been found.

However, the suggestions that the nursery rhyme 'London Bridge is falling down' is connected with this foundation sacrifice still seems hard to credit.

Nursery rhymes are an unreliable source of hidden messages. The idea that 'Ring a ring o' roses' is about the plague has long since been debunked, and the idea that 'Sing a song of sixpence' was a covert recruiting signal for pirates was a deliberate hoax to trap careless researchers. ²

The rhyme, and the children's game that goes with it, were investigated extensively by folklorist Alice Gomme in *The Traditional Games of England*, *Scotland and Ireland* in 1894. Two children form an arch, and the others dance through it; when the rhyme ends, the 'arch' lower their arms to catch the last one through. Gomme traced several other versions, and found that only in those close to London does the rhyme reflect an actual building, and only in this version is a prisoner is taken at the end.

In the rhyme, the bridge cannot be made to stay up by ordinary means: "Wood and clay will wash away", "bricks and mortar will not stay" and "iron and steel will bend and bow." Gomme says this implies that extraordinary means are needed, and these are connected with the taking of a captive.

The first stone bridge certainly had at least one body in it. Peter de Colechurch, the priest and architect responsible for seeing the bridge completed, died before it opened in 1207. His remains were interred in the crypt of a chapel built in the middle of the bridge – the first building on what was to become the most built-upon bridge in the world.

The sacrifice theory is supported by other folklore which holds that London Bridge was "sanctified" or "insured" by the blood of children. ⁴ Other sources mention that a previous wooden bridge was built on the bones of virgins. ⁵ Archæology has yet to confirm the theory; no human remains were found during excavations the last time the bridge was replaced. However, when Blackfriars Bridge was rebuilt in 1867, human remains were found beneath it, even though the old bridge had been built as recently as 1769.

Human sacrifice is assumed to have died out in more recent centuries, but may have persisted. In 1871, Lord Leigh was suspected of entombing "an obnoxious persion" in his new bridge at Stoneleigh in Warwickshire. This may have less to do with foundation sacrifice than the urban-mythical practice of gangsters burying rivals in the concrete supports of motorway bridges in the 1960s and 1970s. The fear still persists in some parts of the world. In Stranger in the Forest: On Foot Across Borneo Eric Hansen found that as a white man he was a source of suspicion in rural areas because oil companies were said to kidnap children for the foundations of new buildings. Foundation sacrifice, it should be added, also has a long history in Borneo.

HULTON ARCHIVE / GETTY IMAGES

The London Bridge story has a grisly modern footnote. The body of a young Nigerian boy was found in the Thames in 2001; his arms, legs and head had been cut off, and the body bore the signs of having been a 'muti' ritual sacrifice (see FT155:29, 277:22). The police called the boy 'Adam'; in 2008, a woman who had looked after him said his name was Ikpomwosa. His killers have never been found.

Possibly by coincidence, Ikpomwosa's body was found floating underneath London Bridge.

NOTES

- 1 See www.holsworthychurch.org.uk/history. shtml. It is especially odd for a pagan practice to be associated with a Christian religious building, but this is not a unique example.
- 2 www.snopes.com/humor/mediagoofs/sixpence.asp.
- **3** www.gutenberg.org/files/41727/41727-h/41727-h.htm.
- **4** Myth and Ritual in Dance, Game, and Rhyme, Lewis Spence, Watts & Co, 1947.
- **5** Eccentric London, Benedict le Vay, Bradt Travel Guides. 2007.

THE END OF THE BRIDGE: THE SOUTHWARK GATEWAY NEEDLE





DAVID HAMBLING

At the southern end of London Bridge is a peculiar piece of sculpture, a stone spike some 16m (52ft) long. It is set at a sharp angle, and points in a southwesterly direction. There is no marker or sign explaining what it is, and the busy thousands who hurry past every day probably do not even notice it.

A little research reveals that this is the Southwark Gateway Needle, built in 1999 by Eric Parry Architects, but further details are notably absent.

Many guides to London suggest that the Needle is a reminder of the spikes which used to adorn the southern end of the old London Bridge, and which were used to display the heads of those convicted of treason. William Wallace (above), a pioneer of Scottish independence, was honoured in this way in 1305 after being hanged drawn and quartered. The heads were treated with tar and could remain in place for many years as a warning to others.

The other readily apparent explanation is that the Needle is the spike or gnomon of a sundial. This cannot be the case, though, because the angle is much too shallow. For technical reasons, the gnomon must be parallel with the Earth's axis, so in the latitude of London it needs to be at an angle of about 51 degrees. According to Albion Stone, who made the Needle, the Portland stone pieces require steel reinforcing rods to achieve the design angle of 19.5 degrees.

Why 19.5? It is a popular angle in sacred geometry and is claimed to have great significance in the Solar System – the Red Spot on Jupiter is said to lie at 19.5 degrees, Olympus Mons on Mars, biggest mountain in the Solar System, is at the same latitude, and it's the most active latitude on the Sun for sunspots. Moreover,

the Pyramid of the Sun in Mexico City is at 19.5 degrees, not to mention the sacred volcano of Mount Yasur on the island of Tanna. (1)

Does this mean the needle is some sort of esoteric marker whose significance can only be understood by the initiated? In quest of the truth, I contacted Eric Parry Architects.

There is no implied esoteric reference, as it were, or any literal symbolism to Eric Parry Architects' work for Southwark Gateway, architect José de Paiva told me. "The nature and richness of the stonework is in fact much closer to what the project is about in architectural terms proper – the needle itself, really a form of tilted obelisk, working as a marker to one of London's oldest historical gates through London Bridge."

But why would an obelisk be tilted, and why at that particular angle? The answer comes in a video about the Needle on the architects' website. Eric Parry himself describes the reason for it: "The marker is a marker that, if you follow its trajectory, pierces the ground around the point of the termination of the old London Bridge."

The old bridge was just a few metres downstream from the new bridge, and the needle is located some height above ground level, so only a slight tilt is needed. But is there any symbolic significance in the fact that it is a spike or needle?

"Our work has hardly anything to do with iconology, i.e. meaning, whereby one thing means another," says de Paiva. "It is rather the case that in our work architecture proper is understood ontologically, i.e. in the terms of what things are, as they can be understood in their own terms."

Sometimes, then, a stone needle is just a needle; unless, of course, you are convinced that there is an occult conspiracy behind everything.

HAVE A READ... IF YOU DARE!

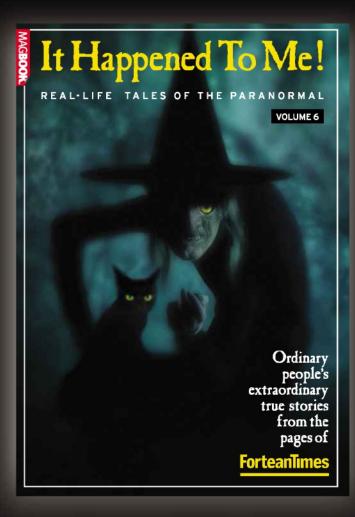
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This month's books, films and games

reviews

everybody?': if there is intelligent



Established religion and SETI

The 'religion' in the title refers to mainstream Christianity, in the main, with brief forays into other world religions and only cursory mention of the Raelians and their ilk



Science, Religion and the Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence

David Wilkinson

Oxford University Press 2013

Hb 227nn hih ind £25.00 ISBN 9780199680207

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £22.50

David Wilkinson, a professor of theology with a PhD in astrophysics, is well positioned to look at religions' attitudes to the search for extraterrestrial intelligence (SETI). Even among people with faith, it is assumed that the discovery of intelligent life on other planets might challenge established religion; many atheists suppose religion would collapse in the face of insurmountable contradiction. Things are more complicated.

Wilkinson summarises the background to and origins of the current efforts to discover extraterrestrial intelligence, exploring the cultural context as well as the underlying science. Someone approaching this from the religious direction with little knowledge of the science would have a reasonable chance of understanding where things stand. The author considers the discovery of extrasolar planets over the last 20 or so years, which usefully emphasises how large the Universe is.

Wilkinson also highlights the Fermi Paradox, which can be summed up as 'Where is

life elsewhere in our galaxy, we ought to have been visited by now. There are those who say we have, but their view is not commonly accepted by science. The Fermi Paradox is among the most interesting questions raised by SETI. Given the size of our galaxy, never mind the Universe, and the length of time it has existed compared to the length of time we have, it is quite possible we aren't overlapping with many other intelligent civilisations. In addition, we have yet to find a practical way of travelling any distance (it's taken Voyager 1.35 years to leave our Solar System, and by some counts it won't actually do so for another 17,000 years, when it finally escapes the influence of the Sun's gravity) and it is possible that there may be no method that is practical and financially viable. Which brings up another point: any intelligent civilisations remotely like us will probably have an economy, and we've seen economics pretty much strangle space exploration before we've even got out of our own gravity well, so why would they be any different? They may not be here because they can't afford to be, even if the technology to do so is possible. The same applies to alien signals: it's far cheaper to listen than broadcast, which is what we are doing. Apart from a couple of token broadcasts sent in limited directions, we've sent nothing out to signal our presence, just listened for others, mainly because sending a strong enough signal in all directions for long enough would be energy-intensive and expensive. This is likely to apply to most civilisations out there as well. It is true that we have been spewing an ever-

"There's an assumption that if aliens could come here, they would do: would they?"

expanding halo of radio and TV signals into space for almost a century, which could, in theory, be detected. However, as technology develops, this is being choked off as more and more is transmitted by fibre optic cable, so this too will only be detectable for a very narrow window in time. Plus SETI wouldn't recognise it: it is looking for a clear signal that repeats several times, not a jumble of radio frequency noise. There's also an assumption that if aliens could come here, they would do: would they? The narrative of space exploration that underpins the assumption upon which the Fermi Paradox is based was forged in the days of colonial expansion and exploration, an era long past. Exploring the Universe, even if technologically possible, will still be unbelievably expensive, and unless civilisations were actively seeking to escape their current planet, the motivation for spending all that resource may not exist. As a result, it is, I feel, fairly likely that even if there are alien civilisations, they are quite likely to be passively listening for others at best, and that's why they aren't here.

Curiously, I found the religious side of the discussion a disappointment. I did not feel that Wilkinson truly gets to grips with the implications of extraterrestrial life for religions. One reason

for this is that in reality he isn't really writing about religions, plural; he is writing primarily about Christianity, and essentially mainstream Anglo-Catholic Christianity at that. There are some brief diversions into the views of Islam, Scientology, Swedenborgians and others, but nothing that could be considered in-depth analysis, and there is no sign at all of any of the religions that actually incorporate aliens into their belief system, no Raeliens, no Ætherius Society beyond a brief reference to them as objects of fun, and a page or so narrating the fates of the Heaven's Gate and Solar Temple groups. Looking back at Christian beliefs, he finds considerable theological underpinning for the idea that God has created other inhabited worlds, and that discovering them wouldn't be so much of a blow as is often assumed, as most theologies have the material to comfortably assimilate them (evangelical creationists might find it difficult, but then they find most new things difficult) and that there is even the possibility that other worlds might have their own messiahs, equivalent to Jesus, sent by God for the same redemptive purpose, and that these too could be assimilated by Christian theology. This book explores fertile ground, but at a relatively short 200 or so pages, it doesn't have the space to be as in-depth or comprehensive as it should be, and I found this a frustrating experience. The definitive book on SETI and religion remains to be written.

Ian Simmons

Fortean Times Verdict INTERESTING BUT NOT THE DEFINITIVE STUDY

Nature morte

Gorgeous photos of what could be seen as an outmoded form of entertainment



Taxidermy

Alexis Turner

Thames & Hudson 2013

Hb, 256pp, illus, ind, £19.95 ISBN 9780500516706

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £17.95

Paying to see a museum full of Walter Potter's tableaux of stuffed prize-fighting pugilist squirrels seemed to make perfect sense in an age before mass market photography, when alternative forms of entertainment were pretty much limited to singing hymns around the piano, morris dancing or dogfighting.

But today taxidermy - suddenly fashionable again - strikes this reviewer not so much as grisly and cruel (which it also is) as pointless. We've had moving images of animals in the wild for a century now, while current materials technology can replicate animals better and more durably than taxidermy ever could. One of Taxidermy's more stunning featured modern art installations, Cai Guo-Qiang's Head On, shows a pack of 99 hyper-realistic wolves taking flight, but they are replicas (albeit incorporating sheepskin) not stuffed animals. The book observes that being photographed with taxidermy props in period settings during corporate bashes has recently become popular, but I take this more as a critique of current corporate hubris than a defence of taxidermy as the new cool.

That having been said, even this non-aficionado of the craft freely admits that *Taxidermy*'s production values are very high indeed. In particular, its numerous colour photographs (well over 300 of them, mostly lit by natural light) are of such astonishingly high quality as to take my breath away. From museums to eccentric stately homes to specialist shops one shown before and after a devastating fire - to a strangely eerie bunch of rearing stuffed cobras seized by Austrian customs and now in storage, photographed among the lockers of Vienna's Natural History Museum, these are among some of the best executed still life photos you'll likely to see on any subject.

Forteans will marvel especially at the "Freaks and Fakes" section on taxidermic conjoined twins. A perfect axis of symmetry is apparently a tell-tale sign that your stuffed double-headed animal prodigy isn't the genuine article. There are other morbidly fascinating and (thankfully) lost sub-genres of taxidermy on display, such as miniature horses and dogs - made from the skins of near-term stillborn foetuses stretched over scaleddown armatures made to adult proportions.

There's also a sort of "lives of the great taxidermists". Alongside the usual suspects like Walter Potter, there's coverage of once famous but now forgotten figures like "big game" specialist Rowland Ward, his works often identifiable by little touches like the bamboo frames on the glass display cases they were presented in. And there's even a "Places to Visit" listing at the back.

Taxidermy is most handsomely presented and sumptuously bound, with generous pagination and is very reasonably priced indeed. Down to the layout of its columns and its typography, it is all strikingly pleasing to the eye. Matt Salusbury

Fortean Times Verdict
DEFINITE VISUAL RECORD OF A
DIFFICULT SUBJECT

Forged

Why Fakes are the Great Art of Our Age

Jonathon Keats

Oxford University Press 2013

Hb, 224pp, £14.99 ISBN 9780199928354

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £13.49



This book is a surprising fortean treat. At a basic level, it is art history telling the story of prominent forgers

throughout Western culture, but there is a much deeper argument being made and one which I think would have had Fort chuckling to himself. It asks a most fundamental fortean question: what is real? The famed forger Eric Hebborn is quoted as observing that there is no such thing as a fake drawing: there are only false attributions. Thus the proposition arises that if a work of art is valuable when it is believed to be by a certain artist, then how is the same work less valuable when it is ascribed to someone else? After all, not a brushstroke has been changed; the only alteration is in the perception.

Furthermore, if the purpose of great art is to challenge perceptions about the world and society, then surely this is something which the forgers are achieving. For the fortean, questions are being asked concerning the way in which damned data is disposed of. Stories are told of experts willing to adopt the most outrageous contortions of logic in order to defend the legitimacy of work which is clearly not what it is believed to be. It was not ever thus, Keats explains; during Hadrian's reign, great art was accepted for what it was, not who made it. He argues that the present view is derived from a cult of personality in the 16th century.

There are many wonderful stories to be found here concerning the art of the forger but there is also a distinctly fortean argument about the interpretation of objects and what makes them real.

Andrew Brearley

Fortean Times Verdict
A ROSE BY ANY OTHER NAME
WOULD SMELL AS SWEET

The Burglar Caught by a Skeleton

And Other Singular Tales from the Victorian Press

Jeremy Clay

Icon Books 2013

Hb, 304pp, illus, ind, £12.99, ISBN 9781848316003

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £10.99



Jeremy Clay has trawled through the archives of 19th century newspapers so you don't have to. You can, of course, browse

the British Newspaper Archive, an online resource created by scanning millions of newspaper pages. It sounds like an excellent way to spend an afternoon or two. Jeremy Clay has managed to distil the funny, the disturbing and the downright heartbreaking.

There is little commentary. Clay provides an introduction which puts the newspaper industry of the time in context. He also, rightly, discusses the accuracy, or lack of it, of reporting at the time. The book is arranged thematically, with each section introduced with a preface. Apart from that small amount of context-setting, the articles are allowed to stand on their own merit, a format familiar to readers of this magazine.

Sections I expect will be of particular interest to forteans include Animals, the articles providing context for escaped exotic species in the 19th century, Life and Death, and Superstition, Belief and the Supernatural.

The little details in the articles are a goldmine. For example, in a 1900 report on an escaped elephant at the Crystal Palace the writer mentions a roller skating rink, something I've always associated with the later 20th century.

The stories that stayed with me included a fight between a wolf and a baboon in a Chicago shop window and the headless ghost of a large white turkey. The most affecting article was the incredibly sad story of a child playing hide and seek, hiding in a large churn killed when its mother poured scalding water in.

While the book is perfect for dipping in and out of, each section lends itself to being read in one go, allowing the reader to

get a feel for the concerns and preoccupations of 19th century publishers.

Steve Toase

Fortean Times Verdict

AN EXCELLENT AND EYE-OPENING BOOK

Life Beyond Earth

The Search for Habitable Worlds in the Universe

Athena Coustenis & Thérèse Encrenaz

Cambridge University Press 2013

Hb, 320pp, illus, bib, ind, £19.99, ISBN 9781107026179

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £17.99



Simple life-forms made their first appearance at a very early stage in the Earth's history almost

as soon as suitable conditions arose. Four billion years later, their descendants have a tenacious grip on even the most inhospitable corners of the planet. If life evolved here with such apparent ease, could the same thing happen elsewhere?

For many people, the subject of extraterrestrial life is synonymous with science fiction. But science fiction is all about speculation, and real science deals less with speculation than with the gathering of evidence and the testing of theories. What were the essential conditions for life to evolve on Earth? If similar conditions existed on Mars, or on outer moons like Titan or Europa, what evidence would we expect to see? If we want to discover Earth-like planets around other stars, what clues should we look for? The result is closer to a tightly plotted detective novel than to a Hollywood sci-fi movie.

Astrobiology is a rapidly growing subject, and this is probably the best introductory account I've come across to date. The authors are professional scientists, not professional science communicators, so the writing isn't as slick as some of the other books that are available - but if you prefer substance over style, this is the one to go for. Andrew May

Fortean Times Verdict

SUBSTANTIAL AND READABLE **GUIDE TO ASTROBIOLOGY**

The evolution of a hill

Everything you could possibly want to know about Europe's largest earthen mound – and it's a bibliophile's delight too



Silbury Hill

The Largest Prehistoric Mound in

Eds: Jim Leary, David Field and Gill Campbell English Heritage 2013

Hb, 384pp, illus, notes, bib, ind, £100.00, ISBN 9781848020450

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £100.00

In May 2000 a hole appeared in Silbury Hill, threatening its collapse. A vertical shaft dug in 1776 and not backfilled was just one part of the problem; inside the chalk mound were more tunnels and voids, abandoned by disappointed treasure-hunters over the centuries. Repair work started in 2007 when specialist mining company Skanska began to fill all known voids inside the mound with chalk. Working alongside the miners were archæologists who recorded and collected so much data that it has taken until now to organise it into this monograph.

I like to claim that I only review posh and expensive archæology books for Fortean Times. Silbury Hill is a hefty and substantial hardback, in full colour, that was five years in the making; the list of contributors reads like a Who's Who of British archæology and it costs a hundred quid. But what a book! Elegant and beautifully designed, Silbury Hill is brimming with photographs and drawings, maps and diagrams. It is a bibliophile's delight. Particularly lovely is a set of tunnel sections, reproduced on folded sheets that are each five times the width of a standard page.

Preserved deep inside Silbury were plant remains and seeds that help paint a picture of what the landscape was like more than 4,000 years ago. Gill Campbell's

reporting of this is a pleasure to read, partly because as well as the usual Linnæan names of the plant taxa, the English common names are included. Silly as it sounds, this is unusual in an archæological report. Having to painstakingly translate the Latin is, for most people, like wading through treacle: what a difference it makes to see names we recognise.

An important part of the book is concerned with dating. The now familiar Bayesian analysis is used to produce spreads of dates expressed by probability; four different dating models were produced. The preferred model gives a date for completion of the first stage of Silbury, the Lower Organic Mound/Minimound, of 2450-2410 cal BC (68 per cent probability). The date of completion of the mound is probably 2335-2285 cal BC (68 per cent probability). Construction is thought to have taken 55-155 years (68 per cent probability).

Why was Silbury built? The latest interpretation is that the mound was not 'designed' or built to some conceived plan with an end goal: it simply evolved. This idea scotches the various 'sightline' theories that depend on Silbury's final form having been precisely engineered to match features in the landscape.

Perhaps the strongest clue to Silbury's purpose comes with the story of Ngundeng's Mound. In 19th century Southern Sudan lived Ngundeng Bong - a charismatic prophet, regarded as the conduit of Deng, a divinity of the air, who instigated and supervised the building of a great

earthen mound. Over 18m (60ft) high and 30m (100ft) across, the mound was built as a response to twin epidemics of smallpox and rinderpest that struck in the drought years of 1888-89. Known and respected for his prophecy and ability to cure barrenness in women, Ngundeng ordered cattle to be killed and left to rot in a zone between the disease and the main herds. The people of his own village were told to sacrifice and eat cattle daily. This improved their health, as did the instruction to sleep outside of their huts and not socialise by holding dances. The smallpox and rinderpest epidemics were halted, and the mound built in honour of Deng, to prevent a recurrence. The mound was seen as neutralising death and disease, both of which were attributed to earth divinities; it contained and buried magic, epidemics and evil.

Since a full-blown academic monograph takes so long to produce, it makes good sense to first release a smaller book aimed at a popular readership. Jim Leary and David Field have already done this: their short, accessible The Story of Silbury Hill was published with great success in 2010 (reviewed in FT270:58). So why buy the monograph? The difference is the sheer amount of information contained within. If you need to know all that is known about Silbury Hill, you need this book.

Steve Marshall

Fortean Times Verdict

A MUST-HAVE SPLURGE FOR SILBURY HILL COMPLETISTS

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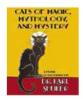
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<u>reviews</u>

Nice pussycat

Compendium of feline anomalies and cat-related lore – shame about the layout



Cats of Magic, Mythology and Mvsterv

A Feline Phantasmagoria

Dr Karl Shuker

Pb, 324pp, illus, bib, ind, £24.99, ISBN 9781909488038

Many years ago, I picked up a copy of Karl Shuker's Extraordinary Animals Worldwide and, to this day, it remains one of my favourite books. Even for someone with an avid interest in both zoology and cryptozoology, the wealth of eclectic and unusual creatures - from carnivorous bees to crested cobras - surprised and intrigued me.

Cats of Magic, Mythology and Mystery immediately reignited that sense of wonder. This large-format, 320-page book is a treasure trove of feline anomalies

and curious cat lore, with a huge selection of photos to illustrate even the most obscure entries. The scope of the

Winged cat

book is a

little mind-boggling: melanistic tigers, cobweb panthers, blue spotted cheetahs, remarkable cat hybrids - including a tigerlion hybrid that could meow in two languages - anomalous antipodean felines, winged moggies (illustrated with some amazing photographs), a whole chapter on extraordinary stories of pets travelling long distances

to reunite with their owners, cats sensing death and birth, the lore of the Siamese, a peculiar breed of Manx cat in Jersey, some tantalising insights into the origins of Lewis Carroll's Cheshire Cat... and honestly, this list covers only a fraction of the material contained in this volume. As ever, Dr Shuker's insights into the subject reveal a barely restrained, fannish zeal for the subject matter, but it's his expert scientific acumen that makes it possible for the reader to believe, even if only momentarily, that some of the crazier sounding creatures covered in this book might actually turn out to exist. And when, as you read and try to digest so much new information, a question suggests itself, the author usually pre-empts it by addressing precisely such a concern in his next paragraph.

My only reservation about the book is its format and design. Though lavishly illustrated, the text - laid out over full A4 pages rather than in columns and often set over background images - isn't always easy to read and makes reading the thing from start to finish something of a challenge.

> But in a peculiar way, delving into this giant volume in the manner of a lucky dip actually becomes

pleasurable way to discover the remarkable riches catalogued within its pages; you feel that there will always be some previously undiscovered and incredible fact waiting there to be found next time you open it... Etienne Gilfillan

Fortean Times Verdict THE PURRFECT TOME FOR THE FORTEAN FELINE FANCIER

New Dimensions of Doctor Who

Adventures in Space, Time and Television

Ed: Matt Hills

IB Tauris 2013

Pb, ix + 240pp, bib, £12.99, ISBN9781845118662

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £12.99



Editor and long-time Who bandwaggoneer Mat Hills assembled a team of academic Daleks to baffle-gab over a wide range of

pseudo-topics ostensibly geared to the 50th anniversary. If you're minded to be moved by the claim that "The Doctor is incrementally losing his particular cultural perspectivism" or thrilled that "Cardiff's semiotic thickness" has caused "commodification of the fan experience" or grieve over Elisabeth Sladen's post-Sarah Jane incarnation death as "an intradiegetic allusion", this is the book for you.

We simple souls who see it as a programme originally designed for children with Dad peeking in, and now the reverse, will consign this rubbish to Pseud's Corner and stick with Sladen's breezy assessment of Sarah Jane as "a bit of a cardboard cut-out", while regretting that neither Fort nor Orwell could be alive to review it. The only time I laughed with this book rather than at it was its levitating remark that "The Daleks have been spectacularly liberated from the frustration of a cosmos full of staircases".

Stripped of its academic Newspeak, this compilation endorses the old opinion that "Cultural Studies is just saying really obvious things and pretending they mean something." You'd do better with Marcus Hearn's straightforward Doctor Who. The Vault. Treasures From The First Fifty Years (BBC Books 2013), even more so by watching interviews with the people who made the programmes, where you'll hear no arcane theoretics.

There's a massive bibliography. It's a pity nobody bothered to provide an index.

Barry Baldwin

Fortean Times Verdict EXTERMINATE (ALL LIT-CRIT SHIT)! 1 IS FOR THE DALEK EPIGRAM

Earth

An Alien Enterprise

Timothy Good

Pegasus Books 2013

Hb, 352pp, \$28.95, ISBN 9781605984865

AVAILABLE FROM PEGASUSBOOKS.US



Timothy Good is an articulate UFO researcher who supports the extraterrestrial hypothesis. His latest

book cites a mass of intriguing testimony, including reports that during the first Moon landing (in 1969), Apollo 11 astronauts observed alien craft. He appears to believe that some UFOs seen over recent decades have been secretly constructed manmade craft, based on alien science and technology.

Good mentions the late Lt Col Philip J Corso, author of The Day After Roswell (1997). He explains that the book "caused a sensation with the revelation that [Corso] had been instructed [..] to steward alien artefacts from the Roswell incident in a reverse-engineering project that led to today's integrated circuit chips, fiber optics, lasers, and super-tenacity fibers". Corso's claims have been subjected to a detailed critique by former US Army colonel John B Alexander in UFOs: Myths, Conspiracies, and Realities (2011), which Good references, but he doesn't mention that Alexander questioned Corso's assertions.

Although Good's writing is mainly lucid, a few passages were confusing. Endnotes are linked to items in the text with superscript numbers which should, of course, correspond to those of the relevant endnotes. But in Chapter 15, this concordance has largely broken down. I noticed a couple of slight errors. The late Donald Keyhoe (a vociferous proponent of the view that the US authorities have tried to cover up the UFO phenomenon) is described as having been an "Air Force Major"; he served with the US Marine Corps. Despite the mostly minor problems, this is a substantial and interesting book. Peter A McCue

Fortean Times Verdict A PARSON'S EGG: INTERESTING BUT WITH SOME ODDITIES



BOOKS

ALSO RECEIVED

We leaf through a selection of recent fortean books...

The Universe Within

Neil Shuhii

Allen Lane 2013

Hb. 240nn. £20.00. ISBN 9781846142208

Satisfyingly suitable for this Steve Moore memorial issue is a lunar connection to this book. Shubin – a palæontologist with a gift for absorbing narratives and clear explanations – lays bare the influence of the Moon upon our bodies: it has to do with water, atoms and fluctuations. From planetary oceans down to the tiny blobs of water in our cells, all terrestrial life is throbbing (as Leary liked to say) to the pull and release of the Moon's orbital dance. Shubin's literary pilgrimage follows the building blocks of living organisms from promptly after the Big Bang to the present, where they combine to form bodies and even minds. Fascinating. **Bob Rickard**

For Nobody's Eyes Only

Nick Redfern

New Page Books 2014

Pb, 215pp, illus, bib, ind, \$15.99, ISBN 9781601632883

Despite the daft title, the reliable Redfern dissects modern tropes of secrecy and conspiracy. It's all here - or probably only the bits Redfern was allowed to talk about: Diana's death; UFOs, crashed saucers and alien bodies: Marilyn Monroe: 'Squidgy' and other dubious '-gates'; Ultra, the Moon, Reich, David Kelly and experiments upon humans; Assange and Snowdon etc. Maybe not in many of these topics, but yes, Virginia, there is censorship by powerful forces and their methods are evolving, says Redfern. "In the electronic age, we see a new and disturbing way in which data is withheld. Not by shredding or burning it, but actively preventing people from accessing it on the internet." **Bob Rickard**

Monster Files

Nick Redfern

New Page Books 2013

Pb, 215pp, illus, bib, ind, \$15.99, ISBN 9781601633630

If Redfern on secrecy is not to your liking, try Redfern on cryptozoology and government. These bedfellows seem unlikely, but even if these tales are untrue, Redfern should be congratulated for uncovering a new strand of fortean folklore. If a fraction of these tales are true, this is a very weird world. He shows how through centuries, governments have taken a surprising interest in cryptozoological mysteries: Bigfoots, mermaids, sea serpents,

animal ESP, the Tasmanian Tiger, ABCs, lake monsters and sightings of winged people. Valuable remains have vanished; witnesses bothered by MIBs; rumours of secret menageries, experimentation and breeding for military use and so on, are one thing. Another is the indisputable fact that expeditions to find yetis or heaven knows what mystery beast have routinely been infiltrated by agents on 'official' business, or used as cover for clandestine operations (think Tom Slick's yeti hunt vs the CIA). Fascinating. **Bob Rickard**

How the Ray Gun Got its Zap Stephen R Wilk

Otophen k vink

Oxford University Press 2013

Hb, 256pp, illus, ind, £18.99, ISBN 9780199948017

How the Ray Gun Got its Zap is a collection of essays originally published in the rather specialised journal Optics and Photonics News. They have been expanded and updated and presumably selected for their accessibility and general interest, although some of this is still rather heavy going.

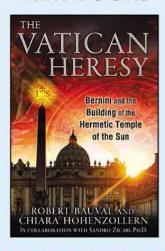
The essays are grouped under the three broad headings of history, weird science and pop culture. There are a few fortean gems in here: Archimedes's famed solar death ray and the many attempts to replicate it, the possible uses of pinhole lenses by the ancients, the magic lantern of Omar Khayyam, and references to glowing gems in classical literature, are all studied with scholarly exactness and full references.

As you might expect, Wilkins is strong on science, but does not always rest content with explaining things in plain language. His piece on why the Sun appears yellow rather than white degenerates into equations which simply demonstrate (apparently) what he has already said – that a white Sun minus the blue light lost through scattering looks yellow. There are many lapses into the highly technical which may be off-putting for the general reader – or in fact anyone whose PhD is not related to the field of optics.

There is an interesting history of ray guns in science fiction, but not ray guns in real life, a curious omission, as these are rapidly becoming a reality. His pieces on exotic science laser science (using jelly and tonic water as lasing media) are towards the specialist end of the field.

The tone is enquiring and interested, but still smells of the senior common room and an insistence on academic precision which sits awkwardly with his attempts to reach a popular audience. **David Hambling**

NEW BOOKS



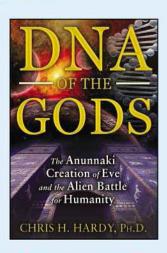
THE VATICAN HERESY

Bernini and the Building of the Hermetic Temple of the Sun

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DNA OF THE GODS

The Anunnaki Creation of Eve and the Alien Battle for Humanity

CHRIS H. HARDY, Ph.D.

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The Amazing Spider-Man 2

Dir Marc Webb, US 2014

On UK release

The man from Sony, taking the stage before the screening, implored us all not to give away any of the surprises that The Amazing Spider-Man 2 held in store for us. After a saturation bombing campaign of trailers, I was surprised to learn that there were any surprises. Could there really be anything in the film that hadn't been revealed, or at least hinted at, already?

Two and a half hours later, I was still wondering what the chap was on about: TASM2 must be one of the most by-the-numbers and least surprising superhero films yet made.

When Sony rebooted the franchise a couple of years ago, following the abandonment of the fourth instalment in Sam Raimi's Spider-Man series, there was a feeling in some quarters that there was something a little redundant about the whole thing: this was a shockingly quick recourse to the reset button, even in a Hollywood increasingly short of ideas. Of course, what lay behind it was simply the chilling logic of an IP rights situation that meant that if Sony didn't get a film into production quickly this

particular cash-cow would revert to Marvel, now in a perfect position to capitalise on its most famous son.

Marc Webb's 2012 film, therefore, took us - somewhat tiresomely - through Spidey's origin again, with the significant tweak of introducing the mystery of what happened to Peter's parents. This also had the effect of changing the essentially random, everyman nature of his transformation, by way of a new storyline that tidied and tied it into what promised to be a longer, more conventional narrative arc involving Norman Osborn's evil Oscorp and ongoing experiments in animal-human hybrid genetics.

This sequel starts with a flashback digging deeper into the parental disappearance - an unwelcome element that, in the end, adds little, other than running time, to the whole - then picks up some time after the events of the first film, with Peter Parker (Andrew Garfield) and Gwen Stacey (Emma Stone) graduating from high school. Peter's late appearance at the ceremony is due to a high-speed burst of crime-fighting en route as he has to prevent a truckload of deadly plutonium falling into the hands of crooks - a bravura, crowdpleasing chase sequence that's as amusingly frenetic as anything in

the original comic books.

Peter and Gwen's relationship is still an on-off affair (currently off, due to the late Capt Stacy's dying warning to Peter to stay away from Gwen rather than expose her to the dangers of being Spiderman's girlfriend), and the quieter portions of the film tend to focus on their teenage agonies as they try and decide where their lives are taking them. Despite the undeniable fizz between Garfield and Stone, these intimate moments, clearly meant to be the emotional heart of the film, are repetitive and a bit dull, truth be told, a problem that stems more from formulaic writing than than any shortcomings of the cast.

In the villain department, the main focus is on the emergence of Electro (Jamie Foxx); in this iteration, Max Dillon is still a friendless, disgruntled electrician who turns bad, but he now works for Oscorp and has ditched those snazzy yellow and green togs in favour of a look sadly reminiscent of Mr Freeze from Batman and Robin; his motivation, in our age of The X-Factor and selfies, is that he wants to be as famous as everyone's favourite wall-crawler; hero-worship turns to murderous envy, though, as it will when you fall into a tub of electric eels in an industrial accident. The special effects, as Max goes

on the rampage and faces off with Spidey in Times Square, are pretty impressive - certainly better than the CGI Lizard in TASM.

The trailers had suggested a plethora of supervillains, and as well as Electro, we get the (re)introduction of the Green Goblin; well, sort of. A dying Norman Osborn is passed over in favour of his son Harry (Dane DeHaan), who shows up after eight years away, takes over Oscorp and pals up with old friend Peter before going really bad. DeHaan, looking like a scary version of the young Leonardo DiCaprio, manages some real menace before his transformation; afterwards, he looks like a flying Hobbit with dried snot all over his face; oh dear.

Where Sam Raimi and his writers built the Goblin story carefully and based it around the dynamic of Peter's need for a father figure, Osborn Senior's willingness to step into that role and Harry's resultant jealousy, the predictably idiotic (but ubiquitous and seemingly untouchable) screenwriting duo of Roberto Orci and Alex Kurtzman give us an unsatisfyingly rushed origin, a conflict that comes out of nowhere, and a baddie who turns up in the last reel to put in motion the events leading to the movie's big emotional pay-off - and what I assume Sony thought was the film's big "surprise". All I can say is, after seeing Captain Stacy cop it (excuse the pun) last time around, anyone with a cursory knowledge of the source material will know exactly where this movie is heading.

And that's at the heart of what's wrong with TASM2. While all makers of comic book movies find themselves cherry-picking the most memorable elements from decades of stories, these need to be reintegrated with some care into a new narrative arc (the two Captain America films offer a good lesson in how to do so). The events that make up the climax of this film, in their original comic book iteration, were based on relationships and plot points built up over time and came as a genuine shock. Here, Spidey and Gobby don't have any previous, nothing is personal and it's easy to feel that the tragic dénouement has been shoehorned in for a big, if unearned dramatic pay-off; for me it fell badly flat. If the screenplay had bothered to introduce



the characters properly, woven the relationships that connect them and focused on this particular story - or even saved it for the inevitable third movie - then we could have been looking at something like the magical Raimi trilogy at its best. Instead, we have a film at which an awful lot of things have been thrown but to which very few have stuck: a bloated yet empty, overlong yet inconsequential CGI-fest with a whiff of the corporate about it.

There are pleasures to be had along the way, though. Some of the action sequences are impressive, and web-slinging one's way across the skyline of New York never gets old. Emma Stone's Gwen is perfect, and utterly charming; Garfield is immensely likeable, although his monobrowed mumbling and fumbling shtick, while undeniably cute, doesn't ever suggest that a great scientific intellect lurks under the man-child mannerisms and I'll still (unfashionably) take Toby Maguire, thanks. Paul Giamatti's turn as The Rhino - bookending the film's other events - is a major highlight, a fantastically bonkers Russian loon shouting incomprehensible insults as he goes head to head with our hero; I'm sure we'll being seeing more of him in the next one.

Peter Parker is a deservedly beloved character; Spider-Man has plenty of great stories to tell; they deserve far, far better than what is, in the end, a formulaic and poorly constructed movie that's a step down from the last one. **David Sutton**

Fortean Times Verdict THE JUST ABOUT ACCEPTABLE SPIDER-MAN RETURNS

Magic Magic

Dir Sebastián Silva, US/Chile 2013 On LIK release

"How do they sell that?" asked one reviewer on the way out of the press screening for Magic Magic. It isn't the horror you might expect from the title or the poster and the supernatural doesn't really get a look in, even though there's a brightly coloured mac involved (vellow, not red). Directed by Chilean Sebastián Silva, it's a Chilean-American movie that's best described as a psychological drama that for quite a while leaves you unclear about how it's going to

What is clear from the beginning is a growing sense of dread. Young American Alicia (Juno Temple, Britain's answer to Chloë Moretz) arrives in Chile, met by her American cousin and her Chilean friends. Odd camera angles at the start, a stray piece of subliminal messaging and a bunch of unpleasant strangers having whispered conversations contribute to this feeling. As the cousin has to return home pretty much immediately to deal with an "exam", Alicia's left, stranger in a strange land, with people who most definitely aren't on the same wavelength.

Sleeping in a strange room, incidents involving animals (parrotshooting, for instance), drunken confrontations with the most annoying of the cousin's friends, Brink (Michael Cera, cast against type and giving an excellent performance that's partly spoiled brat, partly sociopath), all have a disturbing effect on Alicia. Her increasing uneasiness with her situation takes its toll, and even the return of her cousin does nothing much to alleviate her insomniac confusion and desperation. Interestingly, the magic referred to in the title doesn't make an appearance until the end of the film.

The talents of Temple and Cera hold this film together. Alicia's mental health deteriorates in a realistic way, and the audience shifts its opinion of Brink as the film progresses and his character develops in a nuanced manner. The beautiful cinematography - the film was shot in a hugely photogenic part of Chile - also helps, as does the work of the sound department: the continual noise of screeching birds outside Alicia's bedroom, for instance, adds to the madness that's taking control of her mind. The score's great, too. Make sure to stay for the end credits: there's a very lovely piece of music that plays over them.

I would've given this film an eight but for the too long and too hysterical sequences at the end, and I wouldn't recommend it to those of a short attention span; but, all in all, it's a watchable psychological drama.

Julie McNamee

Fortean Times Verdict A BEAUTIFULLY SHOT PSYCHOLOGICAL THRILLER

SHORTS

THE INVOKING

RLJ Entertainment, £15.99 (DVD)



The legacy of James Wan's demonological smash *The* Conjuring continues its impact on marketing departments, with another horror movie ending in 'ing'. Originally titled Sader Ridge, The Invoking has a young woman return to her childhood home, with no memory of her family or the dark things that happened there. As the memories gradually return, she struggles to

distinguish between what is real and what is not. There's a few lowbudget hiccups here and there (a conversation at the start between two women seems to have beeny dubbed over with replacement dialogue) but with an atmospheric, woodsy score, good cinematography and fairly engrossing story it's a decent independent chiller. Some viewers are obviously finding the film frustratingly uneventful (IMDB currently gives it a measly one star), but the deliberately slow pace and serious tone do a good job of cranking up the psychological tension. Worth a watch. Rev Peter Laws 7/10

THE LAST DAYS

Metrodome, £15.99 (DVD)



Andrew Jara's film takes a look at surviving once the world has ended. Yawn; or maybe Spain hasn't suffered the same surfeit of airborne-virus/zombie apocalypse/ rise of cyborg (delete where applicable), movies, that the English-speaking, cinema-going world has. The twist here: extreme agoraphobia, so severe as to trig-

ger heart attacks. So workers live in their offices getting shabbier and smellier until some bright spark thinks of using the subway to get around. Quim Gutierrez is a likeable, though perhaps overtly stoic lead, with a face you sometimes want to punch (think Adrien Brody crossed with a flounder), and after the best part of a decade on Spanish telly, he seems on the brink of deserved major stardom. Apart from the aforementioned 'surplus to requirements' nature of this film, its big problem is its setting. Barcelona, even ravaged by plague, looks great, and with stars and writer/director David Pastor born there, this movie comes across as a love song to the most eccentric of cities. Tim Weinberg 5/10

NOTHING LEFT TO FEAR

Anchor Bay Entertainment, £12.99 (DVD), £19.99 (Blu-ray)



Considering this is the debut feature from rock-god Slash's Slasher Film Productions, it's remarkably childish fare, undeserving of its 15 certificate and likely to bore even the Twilight generation. With a plot that was already old when Scooby Doo pilfered it, this cries out for some sort of backstory, or at least the kind of

internal logic essential to the credibility of any horror plot. Instead, you'll find yourself thinking: 1) Don't move your entire family to the creepy backwoods town, Pastor. 2) Don't stop at the gas station run by retards, and 3) Don't let your horny, jailbait daughter date the local animal slaughterer. If three clunking great horror clichés in the first five minutes aren't enough, don't worry, there are plenty more, mostly stolen from better films. In its defence, though, the film is naturally acted, a rarity in any sort of horror movie these days, and you could almost call it sweet, in a Buffy-sort of way. The effects are good and everyone does their best with the expectedly hokey dialogue. Not a bad debut, then, but perhaps Slash might aim for a more mature slice of his vast fan base next time. TW 5/10

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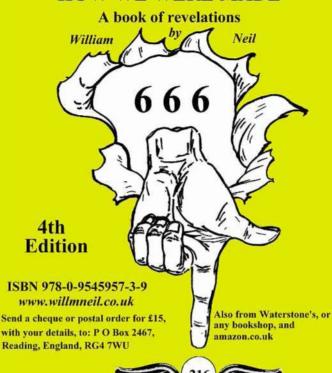
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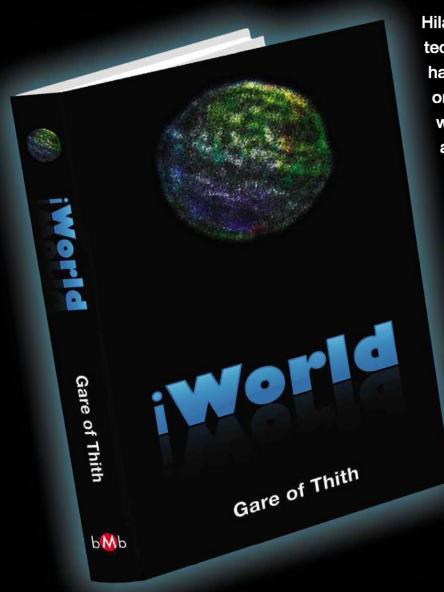
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Dear FT...

letters



The last witch

The Mythconception about Helen Duncan [FT312:19] fell short of FT's usual standards of accuracy. The name of the LSA is given incorrectly. We were the London Spiritualist (not Spiritual) Alliance. There was no conviction for fraudulent mediumship in 1934. This is probably an allusion to the Scottish conviction of 1933. No reference is made to either Manfred Cassirer's sympathetic study Medium on Trial or Malcolm Gaskill's sceptical Hellish Nell. Both these authors used the archives here and at the SPR. Reference is made to faking ectoplasm in 1944 but no fake ectoplasm was produced in court. Why not?

You often carry material in FT about conspiracies - indeed you have featured Duncan several times. Consider this: that the published diaries of Guy Liddell of MI5 edited by Nigel West record the actual names of the two agents assigned to investigate Duncan after the HMS Barham incident; also that the psychologist Robert Hartley in examining the cast of the 1944 trial found quite a number of people with security connections. And then there is the role of Brigadier Firebrace, later president of the College of Psychic Studies but active in military intelligence. He served as a Russian interpreter and was once addressed in Russian by a materialisation at a Duncan séance. How was that done?

Mr Coward seems to derive some information from the BBC; but if one reads Psypioneer, the on-line journal archived at www.woodlandway.org, one will find that the BBC's information appears to come merely from other websites, rather than actual original sources, and is frequently wrong. See, for example: "We shall fight them on the web sites?" (June 2006); "Bewitched by the Duncan myth" (Jan 2009) "Helen Duncan: new evidence" (Feb 2013); "1944 - Mrs Duncan criticised by Spiritualists" (Dec 2013).

Finally, Mr Coward doesn't make the obvious point that Helen Duncan in 1944 was the first medium to be prosecuted under the Witchcraft Act. **Leslie Price**

Archivist, College of Psychic Studies, London



Frank's fortean alias

The Marvel comics character Frank Castle (The Punisher) occasionally goes by the alias Charles Fort. This began as an intentional nod, as the alias was first used in Punisher War Journal #6 (June 1989) by Carl Potts entitled "On The Track of Unknown Animals" after the cryptozoological classic by Heuvelmans. The story is something of a departure from the standard Punisher vs. Mafia storylines, and concerns poachers looking for Mokele Mbembe in the Congo. It features a guest appearance by Wolverine, and the discovery of Mokele Mbembe. In the story, it is the Punisher's assistant Microchip who prepares the documents with the alias, which he considers humorous. Since then this alias has become part of the canon of Punisher aliases. Zvi Ron

Neve Daniel, Israel

Political possession

I wish to inform you that a recent feature ('Going Caracas', by SD Tucker, FT312:42-47) seems to have been possessed by the spirit of the Daily Mail's RightMinds commentary section. Though other pages are unaffected, I have found that the magazine cannot be stored next to a copy of the Socialist Worker overnight without great unquietness in the house. Most mysterious! Sarah Spellman

By email

Soapbox smears

I have just read Steven Tucker's "Going Caracas". Mr Tucker certainly isn't a "natural friend of the left", something I had deduced well before I read his author biography. Maybe I'm a thin-skinned pinko but it seems FT has simply offered him a soapbox from which to offend a good proportion of your readership.

In his recap of the Mail's smear against the UN's representative Raquel Rolnik, Mr Tucker sneers at her concerns over the bedroom tax. I have two friends both faced with bedroom tax; one has a life-threatening condition but is deemed fit to work by Atos, the other has mental health issues. Due to their housing association's asset-stripping, each was moved to a two-bedroom flat due to a shortage of single-bedoom apartments. The "left-liberal sections of the media" who "lapped up" Ms Rolnik's views were right to see potential harm to the poor. My friends must pay from subsistance benefits which are falling behind inflation and still find enough for food. Sometimes they can't.

MC Kilburn By email

Defending Forman

While it is true that Ben Jonson called Simon Forman 'The Devil' ['Hippocratic Oafs', FT312:36], that can hardly be regarded as a truthful assessment of Forman's character; after all, Jonson was well known for disparaging all around him and berating the audience of one of his plays because they did not like it. Simon Forman is remembered almost solely for his sexual activities and being regarded as the main culprit in the Sir Thomas Overbury affair, but he should not be dismissed as a quack simply because he was an astrologer. To obtain a license to practise, all doctors and physicians at that time had to learn astrology as part of their training. Forman had his own methods and in fact he came before the College of Physicians on a number of occasions, in an effort to stop him practising medicine because his knowledge of astrology differed from that of the College's. The College was keen to maintain its lucrative medical monopoly by discrediting people like Forman.

Forman was one of the few doctors with the courage to remain in London to treat plague victims when all others deserted the city. For this reason he was held in high regard by the ordinary citizens of London and came to the attention of the nobility. We know so much about Forman because he kept meticulous patient records and detailed diaries that contained interesting information about everyday contemporary life in London, including reference to Shakespeare's plays. which he attended. In much the same way, the astrologer William Lilly kept journals and diaries about the English Civil War, and yet no historian has ever used his and Forman's contemporary accounts in serious historical writing, simply because they practised astrology - which is a shame as they (especially Lilly) give fascinating insights into our history. So please don't simply follow those who automatically equate 'Astrologer' with 'Quack'; it's not right and it's most certainly not fair.

John Dawson

By email

Hinton Ampner

Dr PA McCue is correct that the mansion house of Hinton Ampner was relocated to a more sheltered site after its 18th century demolition [FT312:68]. Pressure of space required me to drop this detail, which I discuss in the original version of the chapter in my book A Natural History of Ghosts. Also, Graham Mullins is quite correct that the governess is unnamed in the original Henry James tale; an error I realised had been introduced into the text, but too soon before deadline to correct.

Roger Clarke

By email

letters

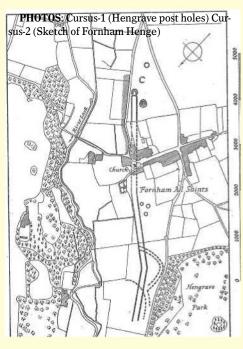


Cursus saving

It was heart-warming to read Paul Devereux's alert about the potential destruction of our "irreplaceable sacred geography" – the Woodhenge and Cursus site at Fornham All Saints in Suffolk [FT312:17]. Perhaps readers would like to get a feeling for the scale of this scheduled ancient monument by looking at the pattern of post holes visible on Google Earth – and this sketch as originally published in Antiquity (vol.38 Dec 1964). The developer responsible for the 900-dwelling scheme within 70m (77 yards) of the actual cursus and within this historic ritual landscape is Countryside Properties, based in Brentwood, Essex.

Currently the local development plan that might give this scheme the go-ahead is being considered by the Rt Hon. Eric Pickles MP, Secretary of State for Communities & Local Government – and MP for Brentwood & Ongar since 1992. We urge sympathetic readers to write to Countryside Properties, to Eric Pickles and to their own MPs to put a halt to what Paul Devereux has correctly identified as development vandalism.

Clare Higson & Andrew Bradbury Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk



Babbling or plain speech

Ted Harrison's article concerning the rise of charismatic Christianity [FT310:44-49] brings back memories and raises a few questions for me. I first came into contact with this brand of Christianity around 30 years ago at university. A student invited me to attend a charismatic group that met on a Sunday evening. What I found struck me as utterly bizarre. A microphone was passed to people whose only participation would be to babble

incomprehensibly. It would then be passed to others who would claim to 'interpret' the babbling, leaving me wondering why a deity would see fit to communicate so inefficiently as to be required to say the same thing twice, once in nonsense and once in English.

Others claimed to prophesy, though I saw no difference between the 'interpretations' of the messages in tongues and the plain English of prophecy – they all amounted to rather vague encouragement couched in platitudes about the love of God and the need to submit to it. I never saw an example of someone 'slain

in the spirit' but was told that it did happen there, albeit it went by the more prosaic name of 'falling over backwards'. One person went forward for healing, though without visible change despite my student guide assuring me how much the invalid had been helped. Three visits were enough and I called a halt.

However, accepting that the term 'charismatic' is used to refer specifically to gatherings that adhere to practices such as speaking in tongues, I wonder precisely what are the real differences between charismatic activity and some of the practices of non-char-

ismatic groups. For example, some Brethren gatherings hold the view that the modern charismatic gifts are a fraud. First Corinthians 13 - that speaks of how tongues, prophecy and 'knowledge' (taken to mean miraculous knowledge or direct revelation) will pass away while faith, hope and charity remain - is interpreted as meaning that the former were specific to the Apostolic age and became obsolete as Christian revelation progressed and the canon of New Testament scripture came into being. So far, so non-charismatic. Nevertheless, they reject the use of paid ministers, and maintain (arguably with variable degrees of consistency) that worship and prayer is 'led by the Spirit', with believers taking audible part to worship, pray, read or expound the Bible as they are 'moved'.

All this would be in plain English (I'm talking of UK gatherings), but still based on the idea that God prompts the individual when to speak and what to say, though without overriding the individual's awareness and faculties. Furthermore, the belief persists that the ability, for example, to preach or teach from the Bible is itself a spiritual 'gift'. So, they reject the supposed gifts of the charismatic movement, but still claim some sort of divinely inspired motivation for what is said and when. Is the practice of prayer meetings with general participation so very different from the concept of charismatic activity? Both sides share the belief that God somehow directs them to participate, while differing on what sort of participation God would regard as appropriate. I have to ask therefore how far the claim of being directed by a biblical text is a significant difference between participants in such respective religious gatherings? Even in the context of 'healing', is being moved to pray for divine help to heal a sick person really to be categorised according to whether or not hands are place on the sick person's head while so praying?

Of course those on each side of this particular theological debate probably see a huge difference between their respective views and actions; however, from an objective standpoint, I am not so sure that the label 'charismatic' really provides a useful distinction.

Simon Curzon

By email

letters

Hidden trains

I found "King Arthur's Loco Reserve" by Roy Bainton [FT311:58-591 very interesting. This topic has been discussed by many train buffs over the years. I would not be surprised that if 70 Stanier engines exist, they would have been placed in a cool and dry - not necessarily underground - location, or even split up around the country in similar dry places.

What makes me think there is truth in this tale is that many years ago I bought in Hereford an ex-naval radio short wave receiver made by Murphy called a model B40. It weighed 100lb (45kg) and almost broke the table as I struggled to lift it up. I sold it many years later, but the interesting thing was this radio was all valve-operated. It was one of a few in the shop (SGS Electronics?) that then sold military surplus items. I wrote letters about it in the wireless magazines and in that way contacted many other B40 enthusiasts around the world. I learned from radio hams in Australia and New Zealand that their navies still had B40s, new models crated up in case of a nuclear war, as valves were not affected by the electromagnetic pulse from a nuclear blast whereas transistors would die immediately.

This may be the same here in the UK. Hereford in the 1960s had MOD stores in the area at Rotherwas and Moreton on Lugg and my B40 may have been released for sale locally. So why not locomotives stored somewhere? To bolster my belief in the tale of mothballed steam engines, someone told me many years ago that just outside Hereford at Moreton on Lugg was another MOD store where the lights were kept on 24/7 and in part of the stores were very old basket-woven seats for riding elephants. Presumably they had been there since the early 20th century or late 19th century. So who knows? Perhaps some steam locos are secreted at Morton; the Hereford-to-Shrewsbury line goes right past it.

Roderick Williams

By email

I was surprised that Roy Bainton suggested that the myth of the "strategic reserve" of steam

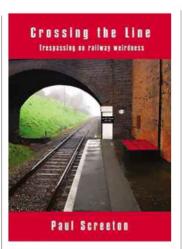
locomotives in Britain was occasioned by the Cold War threat of a nuclear attack, leading to concealment in underground bunkers. In fact, the myth arose from real concerns about the "dieselisation" of British Railways following the Suez crisis of 1956. British coal could fuel both steam and electric traction, but the widespread use of diesel engines was something else. A continuing supply of diesel oil was feared to be compromised both by political instability and limited reserves.

Writing in 1958, two years after the Suez Crisis, a senior railway engineer put the case succinctly: "[I have] a touch of sadness to realise that the majority of ordinary people today, so far as public transport is concerned, are so mesmerised with the diesel bus, that they forget that every drop of fuel for that vehicle has to be imported from not very reliable sources. Furthermore, such liquid fuel is essentially of a limited nature." (CE Box: Liverpool Overhead Railway, Ian Allan, 1962.) The myth seems to have come about through a sop to appease the powerful ASLEF (Association of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen) trade union. Always remember that the diesel locomotive caught up in the Great Train Robbery of August 1963 had a co-driver, or fireman, but no coal fire.

Nick Warren

Pinner, Middlesex

Journalists speak of a story having legs, i.e. there's some mileage in it. Well, the strategic steam reserve had that aplenty in the 1970s and 1980s, but today it is so arthritic it is almost wheelchairbound. As a lifelong railway enthusiast, I have chronicled the saga from articles in the Hartlepool Mail. I even interviewed a couple of FOAFs [friend-of-afriend] - one who said a fellow railwayman was involved in an 'interrupted journey' episode and another ex-signal cabin boy whose pal noted the number in the Heapey secret bunker (as related in my Heart of Albion Press book Crossing the Line: trespassing on railway weirdness). In fact, the subject is still raising steam among rail fans and is regularly given a run out in the rail press.



When the 'definitive' series of books on when and where British Railways steam locomotive fleet was disposed of was found to have around 1,000 erroneous entries, the conspiracy buffs had a field day. Its author, Peter Hands, is trying to rectify this (www.whatreallyhappenedtosteam.co.uk/). But the damage was done and the Knights of the Round Table stirred.

Are Arthur and his 20th/21st century cavalry of the Iron Horse still awaiting resurrection in some secret location? Well, just maybe. In his Forum piece, Roy Bainton touched on some of the popular bases and mentioned myself and fellow conspiracist and railway industry chum Rory Lushman, who kindly supplied me with an absorbing film he made of the prime suspect site: Heapey in Lancashire, which is patrolled by armed guards. Another scene of intense secrecy and security that I have passed - another 'Fort Knox' of a posited location - is Rhyd-y-mwyn, near Shrewsbury. In the past, other supposed repositories of mothballed locos have been Marchwood Military Port,

Hampshire; Hessay, near York; and Box Tunnel. Roy Bainton seems to regard the latter complex beneath Wiltshire as separate from Corsham. He also names the underground city (which has its own pub) as Burlington, although the literature usually refers to it as

Turnstile. The entrance is accessed at RAF Rudloe Manor.

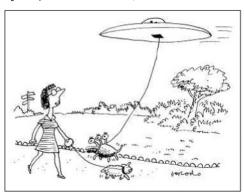
On a personal note, I too had dealings with paranormal author Barry Herbert. For anyone reading his work, two of his books include the same chapter on the SSR: although uncredited, I was the author. My book gives a great deal more additional material on the pros and cons of the legend. Were I to be asked which urban legend I would most hope to actually be true then this is it - but, sadly, rust never sleeps. Surely Arthur, you and your knights must by now be ferric moondust.

Paul Screeton

Seaton Carew, Cleveland

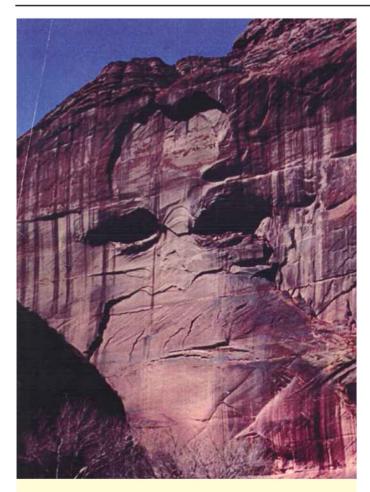
The feature on strategic steam reserve was very interesting. When I was a child, our house (later, my aunt's house) overlooked the main switching yard in Trondheim [Norway] and I would spend hours watching the trains through binoculars. Steam had mostly been superseded by diesel and electricity in the late Fifties, but several of the big old steam engines were stored in this yard, inside and outside of sheds. I remember hearing the grown-ups say that the steam locos were to be kept in reserve in case of war. I had the impression that this was common knowledge - nothing particularly secret about it. As far as I know, all the old engines were eventually scrapped, except a few that ended up in museums. It wouldn't have made a lot of sense to keep them anyway, since Norway has no coal reserves. (We actually have coalmines on Svalbard, but transporting coal 1,000 miles by sea to keep steam trains running in wartime is hardly realistic.)

Nils Erik Grande Oslo, Norway



simulacra corner

We are always glad to receive pictures of spontaneous forms and figures, or any curious images. Send them (with your postal address) to Fortean Times, PO Box 2409, London NW5 4NP or to sieveking@forteantimes.com.



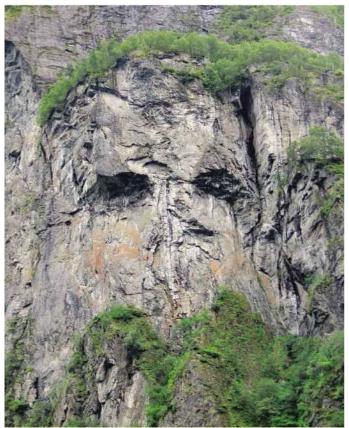
This cliff face is in the Canyon de Chelly, Arizona, and was photographed by Jeffrey Vallance, who thought it resembled President Richard Nixon. He called it "Tricky Dick Mount Rushmore".



Grover Wright photographed this face on a Portuguese beach. It can be found in the Algarve, between Sagres and Aljezur at a surfers' beach known as the Praia do Amado. Head down the common beach path past the bars and then turn right and walk along the beach. It is on the cliffs facing the sea, about 100 yards in.



Paul Blakeman came across this limestone face in the Manifold Valley, Staffordshire.



Ron Gardner spotted a stern face on the cliffs in Geiranger Fjord, Norway, and immediately thought of Tolkien's Gate of Kings (Argonath) on either side of the River Anduin that marks the northern border of Gondor. "The face is so large and obvious that I thought it must have been recorded before, but I can't find any mention of it online," he wrote. "The fact that it is almost opposite the famous Seven Sisters waterfall probably means that few people look in its direction."



it happened to... Paul Giamatti

Award-winning American actor Paul Giamatti has appeared in films including *American Splendor*, *Sideways*, *Barney's Version* and *12 Years a Slave*, as well as producing and starring in *John Dies at the End*. His latest role – following his acclaimed Hamlet at the Yale University Theatre – is The Rhino in *The Amazing Spider-Man 2*. He is a longtime *FT* reader.

bout 10 years ago, I visited an eccentric childhood friend of mine who had moved into a semi-rural area outside the town of Poughkeepsie in upstate New York.

The house was fairly isolated, set in the woods at the end of a long driveway. My friend's marriage had gone bust and she was happily living alone, chain-smoking furiously, banging out an endless and increasingly bizarre novel, designing lovely, peculiar, delicate pieces of jewellery that she set aside and never sold, collecting stray cats and padding around the house at all hours with a cup of coffee, a darkly cheerful hermitess.

The house was odd. I would guess it had been built in the 1960s or 70s, a big, rambling affair, and clearly constructed to someone's very personal, very private specifications. I guess you could say the *feng shui* was a bit screwy. The whole thing perched over an unnecessarily huge garage, and was accessed by a strange steep and narrow staircase in the back, tucked into a gap left by two wings of

the house, with no front door to speak of. Inside, it was labyrinthine and disorienting. It seemed unfinished, wiring and beams exposed in spots. Nothing was laid out sensibly. Rooms varied uncomfortably in size, and there were strange unusable spaces between them. Hallways took meaningless turns. Windows were too big or too small and placed too high or too low or in weird angles of the walls. Steps went up and down where none were needed – staircases in, quite simply, the wrong places. Weirdest of all had to be the inside balcony looming over the barnlike living room – a long, shallow and absolutely inaccessible balcony built high up into a blank wall; a useless balcony.

The activity in the house was equally disconcerting: furniture moved, closed windows opened, locked doors were unlocked, and so on. There were tappings, bangings, whispers. There was one area of the makeshift dining room where occasionally one could hear faint orchestral music. All of this had been confirmed in the past by my friend's now absent husband.

It was creepy outside too: once my friend called me to tell me she had just seen a huge black cat out the kitchen window – "A black panther, dude, I swear to God!" – slinking slowly through the snow. Though a long time FT reader, I was sceptical and assured her this probably wasn't the case. Imagine my surprise when,



She called me to tell me that she had just seen a huge black cat out the kitchen window, slinking through the snow

a few days later, I read a short notice in the newspaper to the effect that several people had spotted a "black panther" in that area.

And there were the voices in the guest bedroom. But I will get to that shortly.

So, I paid my friend a visit. I think she was lonely, though she would never have admitted it. We smoked a lot and talked about all kinds of things, particularly things uncanny and bizarre. I had only been up there once before, and in the course of the weekend she suddenly realised, with tremendous excitement, that I had never seen "dolly"! Out we went into the grey autumn woods, where, about 100 yards from the house, she showed me an odd, small headstone marking the grave site of a seven-year-old girl named Dolly Howell who had died in 1811.

It all seemed like too much.

I slept for two nights in a windowless guest bedroom at the lonely end of a needlessly long corridor at the front of the house. This was the room where folks who had stayed over in the past had heard voices. My friend had never heard them, but apparently, sometimes, according to people's accounts, voices could be heard "emanating from the wall" at around three o' clock in the morning. Her husband, fairly handy around the house, had investigated at some point and found no pipes that could be making a noise - nothing at all that could account for the "voices". I had stayed in this bedroom on my previous visit and experienced nothing. "You sure you want to stay in there?" she asked me on this visit. I was undaunted.

On my second and last night in the guest bedroom, I was wrenched awake, pulled abruptly out of the absolute black depths of deepest sleep. I was extremely groggy, feeling drugged, unaccountably alarmed and completely puzzled as to why I should be suddenly awake. The room, perfectly pleasant when I had gone to sleep, was now uncomfortably stuffy, heavy, still and soundless. It was 3.15

by the bedside clock. I started sweating and lay staring into the dark for maybe 30 seconds when, finally, the voices started.

Two female voices in conversation came indistinctly through the wall in the corner furthest from the bed on my right, muffled, as if in conversation in the next room or in the room downstairs (which was an empty, low-ceilinged storeroom). One voice higher pitched, older; the other lower, younger, middle aged, more serious in tone. One voice would speak, then the other, clearly in response, but the words were indistinguishable. They would stop and the silence seemed endless and more ominous than when they were speaking, and every time I thought it was over, it would start again. The effect was deeply unnerving, terrifying, and perhaps most terrifying for the utter banality of these voices. Two ladies in calm, warm, intimate conversation, even occasionally talking at once. leaving the older one laughing in the gentlest, bubbly manner. As if they were sitting there doing... what? Quilting? That was, oddly, the effect of it.

I've no idea how long it went on – an eternity of probably only a minute, if that. I really don't remember.

Afterwards, in the light of day, when I had stopped flipping out, I was reminded of Rudyard Kipling's wonderful short story *The Wish House*.

STRANGE AND SENSAT



JfN BONDESON presents more sensational stories and startling Victorian images from the "worst newspaper in England" – the *Illustrated Police News*.

30. SPIRITUALISM AND ANIMAL HOARDING IN THOMAS CARLYLE'S HOUSE

Thomas Carlyle, the celebrated historian and literary lion of Victorian times, lived at 5 (today 24) Cheyne Row, Chelsea. His fine town house dating from 1708 still stands today, in one of London's best preserved early Georgian streets. But the *Illustrated Police News* provides details of some distinctly weird goings-on in Carlyle's house a few years after his death in 1881.

In 1850, the 24-year-old Elizabeth Ann Caulfield married the army surgeon James William Cottell. He served in India for some considerable period of time, but was back in England in 1858. Cottell died unexpectedly in 1860, leaving his not inconsiderable savings to his wife and children under an indenture of settlement. Mrs Cottell tried to get her hands on the money directly, but was repulsed in the Court of Chancery. The trustees of the marriage settlement proved not to be ungenerous, however, and she could educate her four sons in good schools, and live in some style at 26 Cheyne Row, Chelsea. Two of the sons grew up to become army surgeons just like their father; a third became a midshipman. But in the 1880s, when her children had all fled the nest and gone abroad, Mrs Cottell's behaviour became increasingly odd. She developed a strong interest in spiritualism, and an equally powerful fondness for cats and dogs.

In 1887, six years after her famous neighbour Thomas Carlyle had died, Elizabeth Ann Cottell bought the lease of his house and moved into 24 Cheyne Row. The move into 'Carlyle House', as she called her new town house, seems to have unhinged her mind permanently. A great friend of stray cats, she provided free meals for these animals. Cats from all over Chelsea





congregated in
Cheyne Row to enjoy
these feline banquets,
amidst much
caterwauling. Inside
Carlyle House, Mrs
Cottell kept a dozen
dogs, which she kept
well fed on bins full
of tripe and cat's meat
that was delivered
daily.

The two-legged inhabitants of Carlyle House were of an equally queer standard. The New York sisters Leah, Margaret and Kate Fox had become quite notorious in America as spiritualist mediums. In 1888, the sisters quarrelled, and Margaret confessed that their 'spirit rappings' had been a fraud all along, to devastating effect for their future careers. Kate had married a London barrister named Jencken, who had died in 1881 leaving her with two sons. In some way or other, her path had crossed that of the animal-hoarding weirdo Elizabeth

weirdo Elizabeth Ann Cottell, and in 1888, Kate Fox Jencken moved into Carlyle House, where she held several séances, to the perfect satisfaction of her hostess. It is not mentioned if Thomas Carlyle's spirit made itself known. When there was newspaper publicity about the spiritualists in Carlyle's house, Mrs Cottell wrote back saying that she was the sole proprietor of the premises, having bought the lease, and that Mrs Jencken and her children were merely her visitors. Kate Fox Jencken was a hard drinker, and it appears that Mrs Cottell also took to drink during the transatlantic spiritualist's stay.

In 1889, Mrs Cottell got fed up with Kate Fox Jencken and her children, and they were evicted from Carlyle House, probably because they had objected to the 20 dogs sharing the house with them. The once celebrated spiritualist ended her days in

TIONAL STORIES FROM





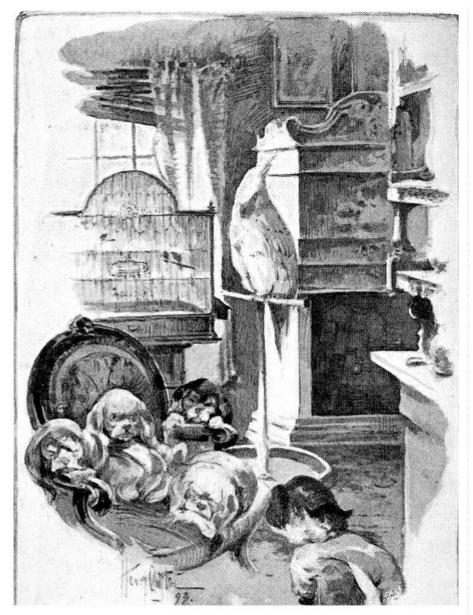
ABOVE: Mrs Cottell's mongrels and cats prove a challenge to the Census taker visiting Thomas Carlyle's old house, from Illustrated Police News, 17 December 1892.

miserable circumstances, dying in 1892 and being buried in a pauper's grave. Mrs Cottell had been one of her last supporters, and some letters from her are quoted in Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *History of Spiritualism*. The 1891 Census finds Elizabeth Ann Cottell living at 24 Cheyne Row, with boarder

William Littler, who described himself as an artist, two female servants and a young errand-boy.

In August 1892, the other residents of Cheyne Row had finally had enough of the twenty dogs kept at No 24, and they summoned Mrs Cottell under the Public Health Act. The barrister prosecuting for the Chelsea Vestry said that the magistrate probably knew of the Chelsea Sage's fondness for cats and dogs, but Carlyle would certainly have objected if he had known that his old retreat had been converted into a menagerie. Mrs Cottell was fined £10 and strictly warned





ABOVE: Cats and dogs in Carlyle's house, a drawing from The Homes and Haunts of Thomas Carlyle, 1895.

that further action would be taken if the nuisance continued. Just a few days later, there was 'Another Scene at Carlyle's Old House', as the newspapers recorded it: the servant Emma Stanton, who had complained after being pushed downstairs by a large dog, had been locked out of Carlyle House by the angry Mrs Cottell, who had told her through the letter box that she was fired. The magistrate ordered that Emma's clothes should be returned to her, and that Mrs Cottell should pay 23s. costs.

In December 1892, the Chelsea Vestry again summoned Mrs Cottell before the Westminster Police Court. Mr Grant, one of the sanitary inspectors of Chelsea, had found 11 dogs and six cats in the dining room of Carlyle House. But when the door was opened, as the *Daily News* expressed it, "In rushed mongrels and tabbies from up stairs and down stairs with a velocity that nearly made the Sanitary Inspector's head turn. He manfully tried to continue the census, but the animals refused to stand still. They ran in and out – barking, howling, yelping, mewing and miaulling – in such inextricable confusion that the enumeration broke

down..." Although the animals seemed to be in good cheer, and well fed, the house was very dirty, and the stench far from pleasant. This time, Mrs Cottell was fined £11 23s. and a further fine of £2 for each day the nuisance continued. There was widespread newspaper publicity about the neglect and animal hoarding going on in Carlyle's house. The *Illustrated Police News* thought the case most hilarious, and published a drawing of the mongrels and tabbies of 24 Cheyne Row.

Further prosecutions followed, in April and June 1893, and bailiffs entered Carlyle House to remove Mrs Cottell's furniture in lieu of the fines she had refused to pay. During the June hearing, Mrs Cottell lay down on the floor and pretended to go to sleep. The magistrate said that since she had kept his court busy for nearly a twelvemonth, and refused to pay the fines ordered by the court, she was clearly not in her right mind. The RSPCA accused Mrs Cottell of starving her remaining four dogs and three cats, but the old lady provided evidence that the cats' meat man provided plentiful amounts of food for them. In September 1893, an admirer of Thomas Carlyle made a pilgrimage to the

old house in Cheyne Row, the sad results of which he described in a letter to the *Daily Chronicle*. Mrs Cottell was away at the time, but she had left a caretaker to look after the house. This was not a task that this individual had taken particularly seriously, however, since the house was very dirty, the windows broken, and the rooms almost devoid of furniture. In 1893, Thomas Carlyle was still a household name, and many Londoners found it distasteful that his house should meet with such a dismal fate.

In November 1893, although still in possession of a handsome annuity, Mrs Cottell is recorded to have been in a Brighton workhouse. She died of delirium tremens in Richmond in July 1894. The old Chelsea chronicler Reginald Blunt described the decay of Carlyle's house, and the doghoarding Mrs Cottell's appearances in the police courts, adding the spicy remark that "A climax was reached when the lady herself succumbed, and a servant who continued in occupation introduced inhabitants far more objectionable than Persian cats and Maltese spaniels." But in late 1894, the house was cleaned and repaired, and its undesirable inhabitant evicted. The author of an article on Carlyle's house in the Woman's Signal magazine could report that although 24 Cheyne Row had now been cleansed of Mrs Cottell and her animals, there were still many stray cats nearby, perhaps vainly waiting for one of the feline banquets that Mrs Cottell had used to arrange for them. As demonstrated in the account of the demented 'Cat Woman of Rottingdean' (FT284:76-77), animal hoarding is not a modern phenomenon. Several instances of this unsavoury phenomenon are upon record from Victorian times, in the IPN and other papers.

Mr George Lumsden, an admirer of Thomas Carlyle, was very much pained by the indignities his hero's old house had had to suffer. He gathered together a group of kindred spirits, and pondered how to save the house. Lumsden and his friends found out that Mrs Cottell was in dire straits, and that her seven-year lease of the house was about to expire. They managed to raise £1,750, by public subscription, to purchase the house. After it had been cleared up, and much of the Carlyles' original furniture repurchased, 24 Cheyne Row was opened to the public in 1895. Although Carlyle's ponderous prose was already going out of fashion in late Victorian times, there were still enough admirers of his weighty tomes to keep the turnstiles ticking over at a steady rate.

Run by the National Trust since 1936, Carlyle's House is still open today, and admirers of his work, or of old London architecture, should take care not to miss it. I am assured that it is not haunted by a horde of ghostly cats and dogs.

Sources:

Anon., The Homes and Haunts of Thomas Carlyle (London, 1895), 108-14; R Blunt, The Carlyles' Chelsea Home (London, 1895), 41-8; G. Lumsden in the Illustrated Memorial Volume of the Carlyle's House Purchase Fund Committee (London, 1895), 1-26; Pall Mall Gazette, 15 Jan 1889, Standard, 5 Aug 1892 and 17 June, 1893; Morning Post, 11 + 18 Aug 1892; Daily News, 17 Aug 1892; IPN, 13 Aug + 17 Dec 1892; Daily Chronicle, 5 Sept 1893; Woman's Signal, 5 May 1895.



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Why Fortean?



ortean 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-asorganism 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 PL TRAVERS Part 1

HUNT EMERSON & KEVIN JACKSON

MARY POPPINS!

OH, COME ON. EMERSON! EVEN YOU, WITH YOUR LEGENDARY LACK OF KNOWLEDGE OF FILMS ... EVEN YOU KNOW WHAT MARY POPPINS LOOKS LIKE!

JOKING ... Haha. ahem YES, OF COURSE I DO .. I'VE GOT THE GOOGLE ... SHE LOOKS LIKE JULIE ANDREWS

MARY POPPINS ONE OF THE CHILDREN'S LITERATURE



CREATED BY THE AUSTRALIAN-BORN WRITER P.L.TRAVERS!



A RECENT HOLLYWOOD MOVIE SAVING MR. BANKS; TELLS OF HOW WALT DISNEY BROUGHT MARY POPPINS TO



BUT THE FILM BARELY MENTIONS THE KEY PASSION IN PLT'S LIFE -THE SEARCH FOR ESOTERIC WISDOM



THE QUEST BEGAN WHEN SHE WAS A YOUNG GIRL (BORN HELEN LYNDON COFF), OBSESSED WITH THE POETRY



YEARS LATER SHE ACTUALLY MET HER GIRLHOOD HERO, AND PRESENTED HIM WITH A BUNDLE OF ROWAN BRANCHES SHE HAD GATHERED IN THE POURING RAIN ...



HER MEETING WITH YEATS HAD BEEN SET UP BY HIS FRIEND AND NEXT-DOOR NEIGHBOUR, THE MYSTIC AND POET GEORGE RUSSELL, A.K.A. "AE" ... A MAN WHO FREQUENTLY SET HIS TROUSERS ON FIRE! SHE MET HIM SOON AFTER SHE MOVED TO LONDON. THEY BECAME CLOSE PALS, THOUGH NOT LOVERS.



HE INTRODUCED HER TO THEOSOPHY AND OTHER MYSTICAL BELIEF SYSTEMS ... AS WELL AS TO THE LITTLE PEOPLE OF WESTERN PRELAND, WHOM HE OFTEN SAW ...



PLT BEGAN TO HAVE VISIONS OF HER OWN! IN A PARIS BOOKSHOP SHE SPOTTED A PAN-LIKE FIGURE, WHO WAS CALMLY READING A BOOK BY KIPLING!





... AND SHE AND "AE" ON CE DISCOVERED A MYSTERIOUS Single Footprint in the grass, like that of a MONSTER WHO HAD HIT THE EARTH AND BOUNCED OFF!



NEXT TIME: GURUS! ZEN! DISNEY! AND PUNKS!

COMING NEXT MONTH



THE SOVIET SNOWMAN HUNTING THE GRAND OLD MAN OF RUSSIAN YETI RESEARCH



THE BALDOON MYSTERY
INVESTIGATING CANADA'S MOST
REMARKABLE HAUNTING



THE HUMAN FLY, THE NANDI BEAR, CORMAN'S POE AND MUCH MORE...

FORTEAN TIMES 315

STRANGEZ DEATHS

UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL

Kentucky pastor Jamie Coots - who starred in "Snake Salvation", a National Geographic reality show about snake-handling in church - died of snakebite on 15 February. Coots said on television that a biblical passage suggested that venomous snakebites would not harm believers as long as they were anointed by God. The practice is illegal in most states, but still goes on, primarily in the rural South. Coots had been bitten nine times before, losing part of his finger in one incident. He was killed by a rattlesnake, which bit him on the hand in front of his congregation, and he died less than an hour after he ordered doctors away from his home. He was a third-generation 'serpent handler' and aspired to one day pass on the practice and his church, Full Gospel Tabernacle in Jesus Name in Middleboro, to his adult son, Little Cody. Attleboro ((MA) Sun-Chronicle, 17 Feb; [CNN] 18 Feb 2014.

A chess player killed his opponent and ate his lung in a dispute over the rules – specifically, a move by the king. Saverio Bellante, a 34-yearold Sicilian from Palermo, pulled a knife on his landlord Tom O'Gorman, 39, at the end of their late-night game in the Dublin suburb of Castlerock, after bludgeoning him with a dumbbell. They were said to have previously been on very friendly terms. Pathologists said O'Gorman suffered dozens of knife wounds and one of his lungs was missing. Bellante, a pharmaceutical worker, was arrested on 12 January and confessed, saying that he had tried to eat his victim's heart. O'Gorman, a devout Catholic and anti-abortion campaigner, was thought to be Ireland's first ever known victim of cannibalism. irishcentral.com, 13 Jan; D.Mail, 14 Jan 2014.

A drunken row over the merits of literary forms in Russia ended in a poetry-lover stabbing a champion of prose to death on 20 January. A 53-year-old man in Irbit, a town in the Sverdlovsk region of the Urals, was charged with the murder of another man, 67, said to have been a friend, with whom he had been lodging for several months. They were drinking spirits when the friend reportedly said only prose was "real literature". The accused, a former teacher, stabbed him before fleeing, but was detained in a neighbouring village and confessed. He faced 15 years in jail. BBC News, 29 Jan 2014.

Fay Wesley, 68, and her husband Alan, 72, were eating steaks in front of the television at home in Upper Bucklebury, Berkshire. He had some French mustard, but she preferred English. She accidentally swallowed an inch (2.5cm)-long shard of glass from the jar. She coughed it up, but it had already cut her carotid artery. The wound caused her airway to swell, blocking oxygen to her brain. She died a week later in hospital – on 21 March 2013. Nobody knew how more than 30 fragments of glass had got into the undamaged mustard pot, which had been refilled. *D.Telegraph, Sun, 11 Oct 2013*.

John Fozard, 66, bled to death after cutting himself on a broken wine glass when taking out the rubbish. The glass tore through the polythene bin bag and left a 2in (5cm) wound on his thigh, severing the femoral artery just above his knee. He left pools of blood around the house and smeared up the walls as he attempted to stem the flow, before collapsing in the bathroom. A neighbour discovered his body after visiting his house in Llanerch-y-medd on

visiting his house in Llanerch-y-medd on the Isle of Anglesey, North Wales, in May 2013. D.Telegraph, Metro, 22 Nov 2013.

A Chinese teenager who survived the Asiana Airlines crash at San Francisco Airport on 6 July 2013 died after being run over twice by rescue vehicles. Ye Meng Yuan was on the runway when she was covered with firefighting foam before being mown down by a truck doing the spraying. The tyres displaced the foam and revealed the body, which was then covered with a blanket before being run over by another vehicle. *Metro*, 13 Dec 2013.

Delhi monkey-catcher Irfan, 26, died in a brawl with his drinking partner, Ram Babu, 36. Babu, a railway porter, told his friend that "monkeys have the right to drink wine" and started pouring alcohol into the mouth of one animal. A fight broke out, Irfan was hit on the head with a brick, and died in hospital. *D.Telegraph, 30 Aug 2013*.

Ben Hines, 31, collapsed at home in Brockdish, Norfolk, on 21 August 2013 and was rushed to hospital. Soon after, he died from taxine alkaloid ingestion, which is associated with yew needles and berries. The day before his death he had been working on a pond in the garden near yews. Recording a narrative verdict, the assistant coroner said there was no evidence of suicide and it was not known how the poison had got into his body. BBC News, 7 Feb; Sun, 9 Feb 2014.

Paul Dalling, 27, of Millford Haven, West Wales, brewed up some tea made with poppy seeds, using a recipe he found online. He thought it would produce a pleasant drowsy effect, but his nervous system closed down after he had drunk a pint of the brew. The coroner warned that such tea was dangerous, adding: "It is impossible to gauge the dosage as the strength varies from plant to plant." *D.Mail*, 1 Jan 2014.

A retired policeman was charged with seconddegree murder after shooting a man in a Florida cinema because he was text messaging during a film. Curtis Reeves, 71, was watching Lone Survivor, a drama about a US mission in Afghanistan, at a cinema near Tampa on 13 January when he asked Chad Oulson, 43, to stop texting. The argument led to the shooting and Oulson later died in hospital. His wife was also hospitalised, but her injuries were not considered life-threatening. D.Telegraph, 15 Jan 2014.

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