

#### THE WORLD'S WEIRDEST NEWS STORIES

HUMAN FLY • RUSSIAN SLEEP EPIDEMIC • LUNATIC PHEASANT • VAMPIRE BURIALS

# THE WORLD OF STRANGE PHENOMENA WWW.FORTEANTIMES.COM CONTROL STRANGE PHENOMENA

FT316 JULY 2014 £4.25



# BRATISH VOODOG

THE STRANGE CAREER OF ROLLO AHMED, BLACK MAGICIAN



MASS HYSTERIA IN THE WORLD'S CLASSROOMS



# ONE OF THE M FILMS OF A



"A DISTINCTLY SURREAL, UNSETTLING VIEWING EXPERIENCE"

DAVID WOOD, BBC

"LA BÊTE IS THAT RARE ACHIEVEMENT, A TRULY EROTIC FILM"

DAVID THOMPSON, TIME OUT

"ARGUABLY THE DIRECTOR'S MOST BEAUTIFUL FILM"

MONDO DIGITAL

"THE STUFF OF LEGEND, THE MATERIAL OF AN **AUDACIOUS BUT** REFINED OBSESSION"

ALEXANDER WALKER, EVENING STANDARD

"A CONSISTENT JOY"

MONDO DIGITAL

"IF THERE IS A MESSAGE IN "THE BEAST," ... THAT MESSAGE IS UNFIT FOR MAN OR BEAST"

DAVID WOOD, BBC



#### ALSO AVAILABLE AS PART OF CAMERA OBSCURA:

THE WALERIAN BOROWCZYK COLLECTION INCLUDING: THE SHORT FILMS, THE THEATRE OF MR & MRS KABAL, GOTO, ISLE OF LOVE, BLANCHE, IMMORAL TALES, THE BEAST, FEATURING ALL NEW DOCUMENTARY MATERIAL, INTERVIEWS, AN EXPANSIVE BOOK AND MUCH MORE!

**DVD & BLU-RAY 18<sup>TH</sup> AUGUST** 

SHOP DIRECT FROM THE ARROW STORE AND EARN REWARD POINTS TO BE USED ON FUTURE PURCHASES!\* WWW.ARROWFILMS.CO.UK/SHOP

FOR THE LATEST INFORMATION ON FORTHCOMING RELEASES VISIT:



/ArrowVideo



@ArrowFilmsVideo



/ArrowVideoUK



**www.arrowfilms.co.uk** 



### **ForteanTimes**



# CONTENTS

#### the world of strange phenomena



36 DAZED AND CONFUSED Outbreaks of mass hysteria among the schoolchildren of Afghanistan



IOHANNESSTOETTER / BNPS







## **Fortean Times 316**

#### strange days

Slender Man strikes; Ark in the garage; avian adventures and parrots to the rescue; Bibles stop bullets; criminal croppers; trapped by tumbleweed; Russian sleep epidemic; purple octopus; ghost photos - and much more.

12 SCIENCE **21 ALIEN ZOO** 

23 MYTHCONCEPTIONS 14 ARCHÆOLOGY 25 FAIRIES & FOLKLORE 15 CLASSICAL CORNER

18 GHOSTWATCH 26 THE UFO FILES

#### **features**

#### COVER STORY

#### 28 BRITISH VOODOO

Rollo Ahmed practised black magic, taught Dennis Wheatley yoga, helped Aleister Crowley find a flat and wrote a popular history of occultism. CHRISTOPHER JOSIFFE explores the life and times of a forgotten figure from the annals of British magic whose journey from British Guyana to England encompassed both exoticism and racism.

#### **36 DAZED AND CONFUSED**

ROBERT BARTHOLOMEW and BOB RICKARD have just published their survey of reports of mass hysteria in schoolchildren. Here, they present a general summary of its scope and a glimpse of two of many sub-topics: sudden outbreaks in war zones and grisi siknis in Nicaragua.

#### 42 WHATEVER HAPPENED TO THE HUMAN FLY?

He jumped 27 buses riding a rocket-powered motorcycle, strapped himself to a DC-8 flying over the Mojave Desert, starred in his very own comic book... and then disappeared. TEA KRULOS goes in search of "the wildest superhero ever".

#### reports

#### **46** DICTIONARY OF THE DAMNED

No. 56. Abduction by Aliens, Part One

#### **74 FORTEAN TRAVELLER**

No. 89. Hunting the Northern Lights

#### forum

51 Heavy metal plummeting by David A Kaiser

52 Speculative zoology by Darren Naish

54 Foundation sacrifices revisited by John Clark

#### regulars

02 **EDITORIAL** IT HAPPENED TO ME **PHENOMENOMIX REVIEWS** 57 79

69 LETTERS STRANGE DEATHS 80

#### **Fortean Times**

**EDITOR** 

DAVID SUTTON

(drsutton@forteantimes.com)

FOUNDING EDITORS

BOB RICKARD (bobrickard@mail.com)
PAUL SIEVEKING (sieveking@forteantimes.com)

ETIENNE GILFILLAN

(etienne@forteantimes.com)

BOOK REVIEWS EDITOR VAL STEVENSON

(val@forteantimes.com)

RESIDENT CARTOONIST HUNT EMERSON

SUBSCRIPTION ENQUIRIES AND BACK ISSUES

www.subsinfo.co.uk ForteanTimes@servicehelpline.co.uk

FORTEAN TIMES is produced for Dennis Publishing by Wild Talents Ltd. Postal address: Fortean Times. PO BOX 71602, London E17 OQD.

You can manage your existing subscription through http://www.subsinfo.co.uk/ - this should be your first port of call if you have any queries about your subscription.

Change your address, renew your subscription or report problems

UK subscriptions: 0844 844 0049

USA & Canada subscriptions: (+1) 888-428-6676 Fax (+1) 757-428-6253 email cs@imsnews.com Other overseas subscriptions: +44 (0)1795 592 909 Fax: +44 (0)1795 414 555

#### LICENSING & SYNDICATION

LICENSING & SYMDICATION
FORTEAN TIMES IS AVAILABLE FOR
INTERNATIONAL LICENSING AND SYNDICATION – CONTACT:
Syndication Senior Manager
ANJ DOSAJ-HALAI TEL: +44+ (0) 20 7907 6132
Anj\_Dosaj-Halai@dennis.co.uk All\_Dosaphalaederinis.co.uk Licensing Manager CARLOTTA SERANTONI TEL: +44- (0) 20 7907 6550 Carlotta\_Serantoni@dennis.co.uk

Licensing & Syndication Assistant
NICOLE ADAMS TEL: +44- (0) 20 7907 6134 Nicole\_Adams@dennis.co.uk

YOU CAN REACH FT ON THE INTERNET www.forteantimes.com



© Copyright Dennis Publishing Limited

#### PUBLISHED BY DENNIS PUBLISHING,

30 Cleveland Street London W1T 4JD, UK Tel: 020 7907 6000

#### GROUP PUBLISHER PAUL RAYNER

020 7907 6663 paul rayner@dennis.co.uk

#### CIRCULATION MANAGER

JAMES MANGAN seymour.co.uk

#### EXPORT CIRCULATION

GERALDINE GROBLER seymour.co.uk

#### PRODUCTION EXECUTIVE

SOPHIE VALENTINE 020 7907 6057 sophie\_valentine@dennis.

#### ADVERTISING DIRECTOR

STEVE NICOLAOU ryan\_gw@dennis.co.uk

#### DEPUTY ADVERTISING

CIARAN SCARRY 020 7907 6683

#### SALES EXECUTIVE ISABELLA COX

020 7907 6717 isabella\_cox@dennis.co.uk

PRINTED BY POLESTAR BICESTER

#### DISTRIBUTION

#### Distributed in UK, Ireland and worldwide by Seymour Distribution Ltd.

22 East Poultry Avenue, London EC1A 9PT
Tel: 020 7429 4000 / Fax: 020 7429 4001
Queries on overseas availability should be emailed to

Speciality store distribution by Worldwide Magazine
Distribution Ltd, Tel: 0121 788 3112 Fax: 0121 7881272

#### STANDARD SUBSCRIPTION RATES

12 issues: UK £39.98; EU £47.50

Fortean Times (USPS 023-226) is published every four weeks by Dennis Publishing Ltd, 30 Cleveland Street, London, W1P 4JD, United Kingdom. The US annual subscription price is S89.99. Airfreight and mailing in the USA is by Agent named Air Business, C/O Worldnet Shipping USA Inc., 149-35 177th Street, Jamaica,

New York, 11434.

Periodical postage paid at Jamaica, NY 11431, USA US Postmaster: Send address changes to: Fortean Times 3330 Pacific Avenue, Suite 404, Virginia Beach, VA, 23451-2983, USA.

REST OF THE WORLD £55; US \$89.99 (\$161.98 for 24 issues)

DENNIS PUBLISHING LIMITED GROUP FINANCE DIRECTOR FINANCE DIRECTOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CHIEF EXECUTIVE

IAN LEGGETT KERIN O'CONNOR JAMES TYF

Member of the Audit Bureau of Circulations. Circulation 17,024 (Jan-Dec 2011)

Printed in the UK, ISSN: 0308 5899 © Fortean Times: JUNE 2014

# editoria

#### The long, the short and the tall

"HEY THERE, ARCHIE, THAT'S NOT A TOY"

#### THAT OLD BLACK MAGIC

In recent years we've run a number of articles offering detailed profiles of figures from the world of occultism - from the notorious (a certain Mr Crowley) to the neglected (Dion Fortune and Dennis Wheatley). This issue, we present the first

part of an account of the life and times of Rollo Ahmed - a name largely forgotten, and if remembered at all perhaps connected vaguely with that of Wheatley. But Ahmed was not an insignificant figure, penning his history of occultism, The Black Art, in 1936, decades before Wheatley published The Devil and All His Works. What's fascinating about Ahmed is the window his story opens on the play between esotericism and exoticism in Britain from the 1920s to the 1950s. As a migrant from a far-flung corner of the Empire - British Guiana, as it then was -Ahmed occupied a unique position; while in some senses



dubious nostrums. Christopher Josiffe paints a fascinating portrait of the ambigious Rollo huckster and historian, showman and scholar - in this two-part article. Hopefully, it will help rekindle interest in this fascinating figure; after all, ever since Chris tackled Gef the Talking Mongoose in his definitive article (FT269:32-40), the man weasel has been enjoying a renaissance as the subject of a symposium at London's Senate House earlier this year (see FT315:18-19) and articles in The Independent and the Wall Street

**SCHOOL DAZE** 

Iournal

Mass hysteria and shared delusions are topics we've covered on numerous occasions (see, for example, FT253:30-37 for a round-up of memorable examples, including the Cat Girls of India and the Jumping Frenchmen of Maine). Now, Robert Bartholomew - one of the foremost experts on the subject and no stranger to these pages - has collaborated with our own Bob Rickard on a major survey of reports of mass hysteria in school-aged children. Its scope is ambitious, drawing on cases from across the world and over a large span of time. Perhaps surprisingly, Mass Hysteria in Schools: A Worldwide History Since 1566 is the first book ever devoted wholly to the subject. As something of a taster, the two Bobs here present a brief overview of the subject and a more detailed

look at two of its manifestations: the effects of war on school-age children - something all too visible in the continued and frequent outbreaks of mystery illnesses, often taken to be the effects of poison gas, in Afghanistan since 2009. Thousands of schoolgirls have been stricken with

such psychogenic illnesses, and with the ongoing catastrophe in Syria and the current deterioration of the situation in Iraq - to take just two examples - it's clear that such outbreaks will only be on the increase in the Middle East and beyond for the foreseeable future. The culturally-bound grisi siknis to be found across numerous South American countries - often sparked by stories of evil gnomes called duendes - offers a quite different example, vectored in on local folklore and syncretic religious beliefs, even if some of the outcomes - children experiencing difficulties in

breathing, falling down unconscious and so on are very similar.

#### FROM VIRAL TO POSTAL

As we go to press, a figure even more menacing (and somewhat taller) than those malevolent, laughing duendes seems to have stepped out of the virtual reality of the Internet and into the mundane world. Three violent crimes - an attempted murder by two 12-year-old girls, a "frenzied" attack by a teenager on her mother, and a triple shooting/double suicide in Las Vegas - have all been linked in one way or another to the unnaturally tall and faceless terror known as Slender Man (see p4). The fact that this figure began life in a photo-editing competition before "going viral" as a hugely popular Internet meme is nothing unusual; what's striking is that, unlike lolcats or Tron Guy, Slendy (as he's known) appears to have crossed the line in more ways than one. We'll be taking an in-depth look at the Slender Man, and trying to figure out what, if anything, is going on, next issue.



# Join all these forums and more with one click!



Head on over to CULT-LABS.COM - where your taste in film is good!



# strangedays

# Slender Man always strikes thrice

#### Internet bogeyman is namechecked in a spate of violent acts across the United States

The Internet creation 'Slender Man' - who emerged from a photoediting contest in 2009 to become a popular figure in online fiction, art, videos and games - has been linked to three unrelated violent crimes in the space of a fortnight.

Two 12-year-old girls from Waukesha, Wisconsin, were charged on 2 June with the attempted murder of their friend, another 12-year-old girl who also attended Horning Middle School in the city.

The victim was found crawling from a wooded area to a nearby road by a cyclist on Saturday 31 May, covered in blood from multiple wounds. According to police, she had been lured into the woods by her two classmates after a sleepover the previous night and stabbed 19 times in the legs, arms and torso before being left to die.

The two suspects, Morgan Geyser and Anissa Weier, both 12, were found wandering by a County Sheriff's deputy some hours later. A five-inch knife was recovered from Weier's backpack. On 2 June, they were charged as adults with attempted first-degree intentional homicide

The girls told police that they had planned to commit murder for some time, intending to demonstrate their dedication to Slender Man by becoming his "proxies". They also hoped that their actions would prove to sceptics that the unnaturally tall, dark-suited, faceless entity they had learned about on a horror story websiste called creepypasta.com really existed. When picked up near Interstate 94 they had been en route to what they believed to be Slender Man's mansion in Nicolet National Forest. Geyser told police that she had never met Slender Man,





#### The girls told police they had planned the murder

but that he watches her, as well as being able to read minds and teleport. Journal Sentinel (Milwaukee), 2 Jun; BBC News 3 Jun; Guardian 4 Jun 2014.

Another story involving a "frenzied" teenage knife attack emerged less than a week later. A 13-year-old girl from Hamilton County, Ohio, is facing charges - this time as a juvenile - for attacking her mother with



a kitchen knife. The unnamed mother suffered slashes to her neck and face and a puncture wound to her back. "I came home one night from work and she was in the kitchen waiting for me and she was wearing a mask, a white mask," she said. "(She) mentioned playing a role. (I) got the feeling she was playing a role. It didn't feel like her at all," she added.

According to her mother, the teenager was also fascinated by Slender Man: "We found things that she had written and she made reference to Slender Man. She also made references to killing," the woman said. "She even created a world for Slender Man in the game Minecraft."

The girl, who says she can remember nothing of the attack, is LEFT: Slender Man. BELOW LEFT: A drawing by Morgan Geyser posted on Instagram by her father. BELOW RIGHT: Jerad and Amanda Miller.

being held at a Juvenile Detention Centre. Wlwt.com, 6 Jun; New York Post, D.Telegraph, 9 Jun 2014.

On Sunday 8 June, husband and wife Jerad and Amanda Miller shot and killed two off-duty Las Vegas police officers and a third person, before killing themselves. At around 11.30am that morning the couple shot and killed 41-yearold Alyn Beck and 31-year-old Igor Soldo as they ate at a branch of Cici's Pizza. After covering the bodies with a 'Don't tread on me' flag they ran to a nearby Walmart and shot dead 31-year-old shopper Joseph Wilcox. As the store was surrounded by police officers, Mrs Miller turned her gun on Mr Miller and then herself in what appears to have been a suicide pact.

Police were investigating the pair's links with anti-government and white supremacist movements. The day before the shooting Jerad had updated his Facebook status with the words: "The dawn of a new day. May all of our coming sacrifices be worth it."

Neighbour Krista Koch told reporters that the couple worked as street performers and would often wear the costumes of Batman characters the Joker and Harley Quinn, while Jerad Miller would also often dress up as Slender Man. James Holmes, who killed 13 people at a Batman cinema screening in 2012, had told police he was the Joker (see FT292:4) BBC News, Guardian, Independent, 10 Jun 2014.

For more on the origins of Slender Man, see Sharon Hill, 'Shadow of the Slenderman', FT305:55.



#### THE BIG SLEEP Russians go out like a light in narcoleptic epidemic PAGE 8



WHEN BIRDS GO BAD Errant ostriches,

emus and rheas, plus lunatic pheasants

**PAGE 14** 



#### CRAPPY CRIMINALS Another roundup of failed felons and rubbish robbers

**PAGE 16** 

### **Ark uncovered**

#### Biblical artefact found in garage

In December 2012, Sheena Bellingham and Don Hutton from Victoria, British Columbia, bought a run-down house in Richmond Road in the Jubilee district. Clearing a mountain of rubbish from the garage, they found a mysterious construction of wood panels covered in gold leaf. Neither of them had any idea what it might be.

"We thought it was a time machine when we first found it," Bellingham joked. After making some calls, the couple discovered that it was a full-size replica Ark of the Covenant as described in Exodus, and that it belonged to a friend of the home's previous owner. Inside was a series of wires and other electrical elements, but at the time of the report the couple had not powered it up to see what it might do. Perhaps they recalled the fate of those avaricious Nazis in *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981). They decided to unload the 200lb (90kg) object as it was taking up a lot of space. *Victoria (BC) News*, 8 *Jan; metronews.ca, 13 Jan 2014.* 



ABOVE: The replica Ark found in a cluttered garage by Sheena Bellingham and Don Hutton.

ON DENTON/BL

FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

# Cardboard policemen sent to tackle shoplifters

D.Telegraph, 27 Nov 2013.

Beware the killer bunnies

Metro, 5 Sept 2013.

# Rise of the mutant rats

Metro, 6 Nov 2013.

Hotel guest hurled abuse with hose up his bottom

Metro, 13 Nov 2013.

#### Morris dancers join badgers in crossing swords with minister

D.Telegraph, 26 Oct 2013.

### Spider killed my rabbit

D.Mail, 2 Nov 2013.

#### Union boss 'elected by phantoms'

Sunday Times, 10 Nov 2013.

#### Zombies steal jewellery

Adelaide Advertiser, 5 Nov 2013.

# Germany to get a government

D.Telegraph, 21 Oct 2013.

Shopper concerned about safety of witches' hats

Irish Times, 4 Nov 2013.

Toffees on an SAS mission

Hull Daily Mail, 22 Nov 2013.

# **CLEGG AIMS TO SWITCH HEADS**

Sun, 24 Oct 2013.

#### SIDELINES...

#### **SOMEHOW INEVITABLE**

A 62-year-old Canadian called Donald Popadick was arrested for repeatedly exposing himself in an Ottawa park called – wait for it – Mooney's Bay. The news was tweeted by police sergeant lain Pidcock. Popadick has been barred from parks and beaches. MX News (Sydney), 1 May 2014.

#### **REPTILE REPRIEVE**

A healthy but rather chilly gecko was found in York's 500-year-old Red Tower last January. How the tiny cold-blooded reptile, normally found in hot countries, ended up there was a mystery. Metro, 21 Jan 2014.

#### **BILLY FURY**

Anger management teacher Billy Marsh was arrested for punching a pupil in a school bust-up in San Diego, California. Sun, 4 April 2014.

#### **CHAMPION TRADERS**

Gang Chung, 35, and Pal Ming Tsui, 32 - taking advantage of a rare snowfall in Changdu. China - set up a stall and sold hundreds of snowmen at £3 apiece. Meanwhile, enterprising Girl Scouts in the US have been targeting potheads with their cookie drives. Danielle Lei, 13, sold 117 boxes of biscuits in just two hours when she set up a stall outside a medical cannabis dispensary in San Francisco. Metro, 13 Feb; D.Telegraph, 24 Feb 2014.



## LIFE SAVERS

HOW BIBLES, WATCHES AND EVEN NAIL SCISSORS SAVED WWI SOLDIERS





Walter Davis on the Western Front and the dented pocket watch that saved his life. He kept the bullet too.

 Corporal Walter Davis joined the 9th Battalion North Staffordshire Regiment in 1915, aged 22, and fought in the Battle of the Somme. He survived being shot in the chest when the bullet deflected off the small watch in his uniform top pocket. The watch - and, indeed, the bullet - remained hidden in an attic for more than 50 years. They were discovered by Davis's granddaughter, Linda Ward, 59, after the death of her father, Jack. There was also a diary, in which the corporal documented the horror he saw every day. "He was hit in the chest, while the soldier next to him was shot in the head and died," said Mrs Ward, a checkout assistant from Telford, Shropshire. "No one has ever known the details - he took that to his grave." Her daughter Louise, 23, added: "If it wasn't for that watch I wouldn't be here. In fact, 45 people from four generations wouldn't be here." Shropshire Star, 5 April; D.Telegraph, 22 April 2014.

• The family of a soldier injured in WWI has discovered the remains of the wallet that

#### "If it wasn't for that watch, 45 people wouldn't be here"

saved his life. Albert Rice carried his wallet containing a note from his headmaster, photographs of friends and family and a pair of nail scissors, to keep neat even amid the mud of the trenches. When a German bullet hit him in 1918, it was these scissors that saved his life, changing the course of the bullet, which would have passed through his heart. Instead, it went into his lung and he survived the war. *D.Telegraph*, 5 Feb 2014.

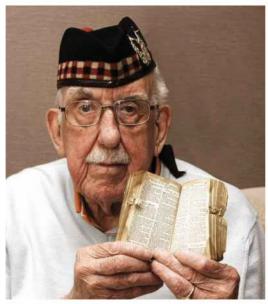
• Private William Taylor from Hertford joined the Hertfordshire Regiment and spent the entire Great War on the front line, surviving the Somme and Ypres. He twice won the Military Medal. Throughout the war, he kept his wallet,

containing eight pictures of his family, in his breast pocket. The wallet took the impact of a shell blast in July 1917 at Passchendaele, a battle that left three quarters of his regiment dead or injured. The shrapnel perforated seven photographs. The last picture, of his younger sister Lilly, stopped the fragment from going any further. Pte Taylor escaped with a broken rib. *D.Telegraph*, 16 May 2014.

• Private Harry Taylor was a despatch rider with the Army Cyclist Corps. In 1915, when he was 19, he was shot be a German sniper during a night mission near Arras, but was saved by the combined Bible, prayer book and hymnal that he always carried in his left breast pocket. The bullet knocked him off his bike. but he was otherwise unscathed. The bullet tore through the front cover of the fat tome, but failed to penetrate to the back cover. A few weeks later, Pte Taylor was saved once again, this time by his metal dog tag that took a direct hit from a bullet and deflected it away. He later transferred to the Gordon Highlanders and







ABOVE LEFT: Private Hodgson's watch. ABOVE RIGHT: Roy Taylor with the Bible (below) that saved his father's life in 1915.

fought on the Somme and at Ypres. He died in 1952, aged 56. Bible and dog tag now belong to his son Roy, 88, from Hyde near Manchester, who has eight children, 18 grandchildren and 14 great grandchildren. *D.Express*, 29 Mar 2014.

- One of the exhibits in a roadshow of World War I relics in 2012 was a Bible with a lump of shrapnel in it, which is said to have saved the life of a devout Christian German officer while he was sleeping in a trench in north-east Germany in 1917 even though the same grenade killed many of his comrades. D.Telegraph, 1 May 2012.
- Another biblical deliverance happened to Private George Mackie of the Gordon Highlanders in 1917, when a German bullet embedded itself in the New Testament he was carrying in his breast pocket. Mackie lived to be 96 and in 2000 his family presented the battle-scarred book to the Gordon Highlanders' Museum in Aberdeen. [FT185:12].
- Relics of such close calls can fetch considerable sums. In 2010, a Bible with a bullet lodged in it, said to have belonged to a New Zealand soldier in World War I, topped NZ\$100,000 (£50,750) in



# "The picture of his sister Lilly stopped the fragment"

an online auction. Kelly Harris of Christchurch was selling the heirloom on TradeMe.com. It once belonged to his great great grandfather's brother, Corporal William Henry Pimm, who served in France in 1916. "The story goes that he was praying with his Bible before battle," said Harris. "From what we can understand, he was closing it as the stray bullet went in."

Pimm's good fortune didn't last

- as he died from wounds received 48 hours later. *Press.co.nz*, 27 Mar
- A Victorian silver and copper pocket watch, with a bulletshaped crater in its protective cover, was left anonymously at the Forces Support charity shop in Leominster, Herefordshire. The case is inscribed with the name 'Pte Hodgson', the military number 2055250 and the words 'Farnboro Hants'. Military records show that Private Hodgson was a woman who served in an RAF auxiliary corps that delivered new planes to bases across Britain during World War II. The charity was trying to track down the owner of the watch or the person who donated it. D.Mail, 21 Mar 2012.
- More recently, a bus driver was saved by the Bible in his pocket. Rickey Wagoner, 49, was shot at by three teenagers when he stopped his bus in Dayton, Ohio, to fix a problem. The Bible stopped two bullets. "My chest feels like I've been hit with a sledgehammer," he said. MX News (Sydney), 26 Feb; Adelaide Advertiser, 27 Feb 2014.

For other miraculous deliverance from bullets, see FT150:14, 153:28, 169:26, 204:22, 232:11, 249:8, 273:9.

#### SIDELINES...

#### **DEAD SUSPICIOUS**

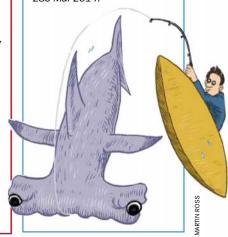
On 5 February, a 10ft (3m) Burmese python was found dead under a tree that had been blown down in Wallis Park, a suburban street in Northfleet, Kent. It had been dead for at least 24 hours. "We don't know whether [the fatal head injuries] occurred because of the fallen tree or happened before and the snake was then placed underneath the branch," said a suspicious RSPCA spokeswoman. No one came forward to claim ownership. D. Mirror, D.Mail, (Portsmouth) News, 7 Feb 2014.

#### **DAYLIGHT ROBBERY**

Allen Powell, 55, parked his Ford Fiesta in Abergavenny, South Wales, to go shopping. Returning an hour later, he found the entire front end of the car had been stolen. The grill, headlights, bonnet, radiator, fan belt and air conditioning system had been stripped off in broad daylight. *D.Star, 7 April 2014*.

#### **SHARK RIDE**

A hammerhead shark dragged Adam Fisk, 22, in a kayak up the Atlantic coast on a two-hour "sleigh ride", which the college student recorded with a head-mounted camera and posted on YouTube. Fisk set out with several fishing rods on 23 March before the shark took his bait near Boynton Beach, Florida. He was dragged an estimated 12 miles (20km) before the shark freed itself. MX News (Sydney), 289 Mar 2014.



# strangedays 🖫

#### SIDELINES...

#### **TOLD TO HOP IT**

A man phoned Crawley Borough Council in West Sussex to complain he was being "harassed" by a frog that had made itself at home at the bottom of the stairs in his black of flats: he demanded that pest control officers come and get rid of it. "We advised him that it would probably hop off on its own," said a spokesman. D.Mirror, 7 Feb; MX News (Sydney), 10 Feb 2014.

#### **BRIEF ENCOUNTER**

A pair of underpants signed by the mayor of Brussels was stolen on 18 January from an anarchist museum dedicated to showing "all people are equal in their underwear". Yvan Mayeur's smalls disappeared from Jan Bucquoy's "Museum of Underpants" in the De Dolle Mol bar, a well-known watering hole for Belgium's bohemian far-left. D.Telegraph, 23 Jan 2014.

#### **CHIMNEY ATE MY BUNNY**

Chloe, a pet rabbit belonging to nine-year-old Natasha Cameron, was trapped for three days after a freak gust of wind sucked it up a chimney in Bramhall, Cheshire, RSPCA officials tried in vain to coax Chloe down with food and water in the fireplace. Firefighters finally got her out with a snare made from a washing line. D.Mail, 28 Feb 2014.

#### **HOW THOUGHTFUL!**

From the Glasaow Herald comes the story of a married woman on trial for murdering her husband. When asked why she had shot him with a bow and arrow, she replied: "I didn't want to wake the children." Irish Independent, 23 Nov 2013.



# The big sleep

#### No explanation for strange narcoleptic epidemic



ABOVE: Krasnogorsk, the uranium-mining town at the centre of a mystery illness.

In the Soviet era, Krasnogorsk was a secret and 'closed' uranium mining town run directly from Moscow. In those days, the population was 6,500, but now it is ghost town. Scientists are struggling to identify the cause of a 'sleeping epidemic' among the 130 remaining residents and in the nearby village of Kalachi in Kazakhstan (pop. 680), which causes victims to doze off for up to six days at a time. Weakness, drowsiness, dizziness and memory loss are also symptoms. There are even fears that an elderly man was buried alive before the epidemic was diagnosed. The illness was allegedly first reported in March 2013, and has come in a number of waves - for example in May 2013, New Year 2014, and May 2014. About 60 people have been affected so far. Some residents even keep bags packed in case they need to be whisked to hospital.

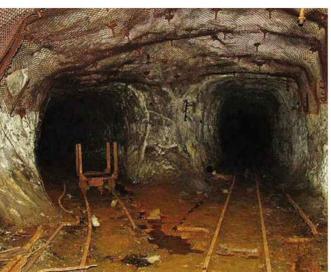
The epidemic is thought to have some connection to the disused uranium mine nearby,

but what that connection might be is a mystery. Almost 7,000 experiments have been conducted, with everything tested from local vodka to radiation, and including analyses of soil, water, air, blood, hair, and nails. So far, all have come back inconclusive. Adults

affected by the illness simply blacked out while two children suffered serious and frightening hallucinations. Young Misha Plyukhin saw light bulbs and horses flying around him, and then saw his mother with eight eyes and a trunk; then he recalled snakes and worms in his bed, eating his arms. Rudolf Boyarinos saw something too, but he couldn't remember what. His relatives say four of them had to calm him when he shouted "Monsters!"

"I was milking cows, as usual, early in the morning, and fell asleep," said Marina Felk, 50, a milkmaid in Kalachi. "I remember nothing at all, only that when I came round I was in a hospital ward, and the nurses smiled and me, and said: 'Welcome back sleeping princess, you've finally woken up'. What else do I remember? Nothing. I slept for two days and two nights. The women in my ward said that I several times tried to wake up, saying I needed to urgently milk my cows."

Alexey Gom, 30, was struck down with the sleep plague when he visited relatives in Kalachi. "I came with my wife to visit my mother-in-law. I switched on my laptop, opened the pages that I needed to finish reading - and that was it. It felt like somebody pressed a button to switch me off. I woke up in hospital, with my wife and mother-in-law by my bedside. The doctor found nothing wrong with me after a series of tests he performed. I slept for more than 30 hours. But it never happened to



ABOVE: Is the mine responsible for the rash of hallucinations among local children?



ABOVE: Affected children saw flesh-eating snakes, lights and monsters.

me before, never in my life, or to anyone from my family."

Lyubov Belkova was selling clothes as usual at her local market stall when she suddenly keeled over. Other women rushed to her asking what was going on, and then rapidly called an ambulance. The doctor thought she had suffered a stroke, but two months later, a woman working alongside Belkova at the market fell asleep in identical fashion. Then Belkova dozed off again, Sooner or later, all five women who were selling things at the small market on the road from Krasnogorsk to Kalachi fell asleep in the same way - and so did their security guard. By the end of it, pensioner Lyubov Belkova slept in this way seven times, her daughter Natalia Mikhel twice and her 15-yearold granddaughter Diana once. Diana Mikhel was at a school concert rehearsal and felt so weak she had to sit down, put her head on her crossed arms, and slept. Doctors initially thought the condition might be linked to bad quality vodka, but of the six people struck down in March 2013, none had taken alcohol.

Locals speculate that the problem arises after a sudden rise in temperature, but this has not been corroborated. While some scientists claim uranium gas evaporates from the mine, others claim it has seeped into local rivers. It could be similar to the 'Bin Laden itch' in the US when people found skin rashes because they were scared of possible bacteriological attack.

Dr Kabdrashit Almagambetov, chief physician in the district

# "It could be similar to the 'Bin Laden itch' in the US"

capital Esil, treated Alexander Pavlyuchenko, who fell into a long slumber while on a visit to the local cemetery. He awoke insisting he had been on a fishing expedition. "When the patient wakes up, he will remember nothing," said Dr Almagambetov. "The story is one and the same each time – weakness, slow reactions, then fast asleep. Sadly, the nature of this condition is still not known. We have excluded infections, we checked blood and spine liquid,

nothing is there. We categorised it as toxic encephalopathy, but 'toxic' is just a guess here, and encephalopathy is just the title of the set of brain diseases." Radon gas is seen as a possible cause, but the doctor is sceptical. "I am an anæsthesiologist myself and we use similar gases for anæsthesia, but the patients wake up a maximum in one hour after surgery. These people sleep for two to six days, so what is the concentration of this gas then? And why does one person fall asleep and somebody who lives with him does not?"

Somnologist Mikhail Poluektov, tutor of neurotic illnesses at the First Medical Institute in Moscow, said: "What is going on in Kazakhstan has nothing in common with any of 85 known sleeping disorders but it does not look like toxic encephalopathy either. People with encephalopathy do not walk and talk, they lie there going deeper and deeper asleep. We also do not know what the toxic agent is, so the doctors cannot offer any particular treatment. At the same time we see that patients are getting better even with general therapy. It supports the idea [that the illness is] psychogenic [in] nature. Something like this often happens in closed communities." Siberian Times, 16 May; dailymail.co.uk, 17 May; D.Express, 27 May 2014.



ABOVE: Alexey Gom: "It felt like somebody pressed a button to switch me off."

#### SIDELINES...

#### **DOUBLE SUPERHERO**

When Batman bin Suparman, 23, was jailed for 33 months in Singapore on theft and drug charges, his name prompted a wave of jokes on social media. It turned out that this was his genuine birth name. His family is from Java, where Suparman is a very common name – though 'Batman' was harder to explain. BBC News, 12 Nov 2013.

#### **ICE BOMB**

Taxi driver Ahmed Halhal, 44, was watching television in his house in Cricklewood, north London, at 8.20am on 12 November when he heard a loud bang upstairs. A block of ice probably from a plane had crashed through the roof and landed on his daughter's bed. Not all that rare an occurrence, but FT hasn't mentioned an ice-bombing lately. *D.Telegraph*, 15 Nov 2013.

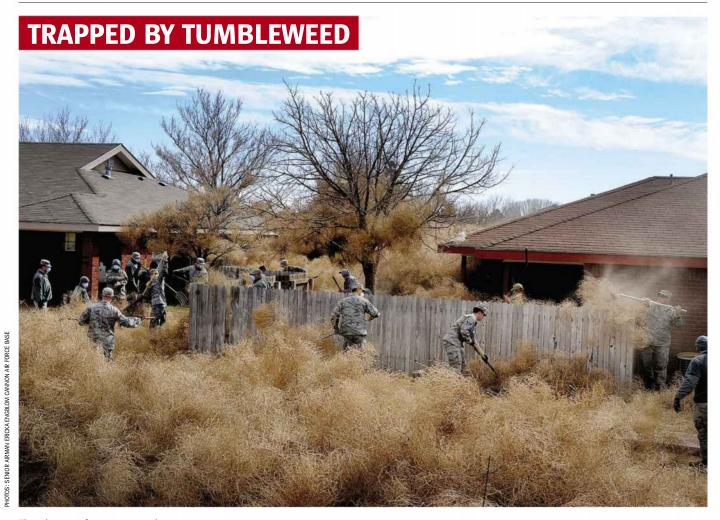
#### **FLOWER POWER**

A so-called 'Hortensia Gang' has been busy in Hucqueliers and neighbouring villages in the Pas-de-Calais region of northern France, ripping the heads off ornamental hydrangeas, which they are then smoking as a cheap alternative to cannabis, a trend first noticed in Bavaria. A pharmacologist warned that the habit could lead to "intestinal and respiratory problems, rapid heartbeats and dizziness". D.Telegraph, 7 Feb; <i> 11 Feb 2014.

#### **STREET CLUE**

British suicide bomber Abdul Waheen Majeed, 41, rammed a truck packed with explosives into a prison in Aleppo. Syria, on 6 February, enabling 300 rebels to escape. The road maintenance worker, of Pakistani descent, had been living in a council semi in the fittingly named Martyrs Avenue in Crawley, West Sussex, a house previously occupied by Roy Whiting, who murdered eight-year-old Sarah Payne in 2000. Sun, Metro, 13 Feb 2014.

# strangedays



Though more often represented on screen as a benign and harmless form of plant-life, and regularly used in fiction as a device to indicate the utter absence of drama, tumbleweed became a frightening enemy for one elderly man in New Mexico last March. Wilford Ransom, 80, woke up one morning to find he was trapped in his home by a tangle of tumbleweeds surrounding his 1,600ft² (150m²) house. The windows of the house were covered and when he attempted to open his front door it would only budge a few inches. He was obliged to call a police emergency hotline, asking to be rescued, but was eventually dug out of his property by a neighbour.

The disruption associated with tumbleweed has become a serious issue in areas across the southern parts of the United States. A widespread drought has unleashed a plague of the weeds, which are clogging up canals, blocking roads and burying homes. In New Mexico the military was called out to help clear the weeds, while in Colorado roads had to be cleared by bulldozers. Like Mr Ransom, residents of Colorado Springs were also trapped and called 911 for help. "I look outside and tumbleweeds are literally blowing up and over our house," said Melissa Walker. "I didn't expect to be able to jump from my second storey window into a pile of tumbleweeds." Independent, 18 Mar; KRDO, 20 Mar 2014



# Why Not Be A Freelance Journalist?

s a freelance journalist you can have an exciting and financially rewarding career. A recent survey shows that freelancers can earn up to £40,000 a year writing for newspapers, magazines, trade and technical publications, TV and radio.

Freelancing means you are your own boss with the freedom to work when and where you please. You can be either a full-time career journalist selling your services to the highest bidder or a part-timer submitting the occasional article to earn an extra income. It's up to you to decide how far you go. Plus, if you want to work on staff, freelancing is a great way to gain the necessary journalistic experience.

To succeed as a freelance journalist – at whatever level – training is essential. Our first-class home-study freelance journalism course



#### www.wbjournalism.com

Freephone 24hrs

0800 298 7008

Please quote ref: AT266J



www.facebook.com/writersbureau www.twitter.com/writersbureau

email: 14J1@writersbureau.com Please include your name and address

Members of The British Institute for Learning and Development and ABCC with personal tuition – gives you
all the training you need.

Professional journalists and writers show you how to write articles, features, reviews for a wide variety of newspapers and magazines. You are advised on style, content, presentation, copyright, ethics and law. Most importantly you are shown HOW TO SELL YOUR WRITING in the UK and around the world. Finally you are taken behind the scenes at a newspaper office, advised on how to get a staff job and much more.

We are so confident that we can help you become a published freelance journalist that we give you **a full refund guarantee**. This states that if you have not earned your course fees by the time you finish the course we will refund them in full.

Whatever your journalistic ambitions – for an extra income or an exciting new career – this is the place to start. No special background or experience needed. Ideal for beginners! Earn while you learn. 15 day trial. Details FREE. No obligation. Visit our website or call our freephone number NOW!

#### **Your Course**

28 Information Packed Modules 3 Supplements:

Spelling, Punctuation & Style Getting The most From Interviews Profit From Your Photography

15 Tutor Marked Assignments
Certificate of Achievement

- First-class home-study course from professional journalists and writers
- Expert tutors
- Flexible study programme
- Help to sell your writing
- Enrol any time
- Student Community Area
- Ideal for beginners
- Full refund guarantee
- Earn while you learn

I enrolled with The Writers
Bureau on a Freelance
Journalism course. By the
following year I had had
considerable success. Under the
guiding hand of my tutor I had
work accepted by the Financial
Times, Daily Express, Daily Mail,
Evening Standard and numerous
magazines.

Monica Weller Surrey

number wow.	Monica Weller, Surrey
Please send me free details of how I can become a successful freela	
Name	
Address	
<u> </u>	
Postcode	
Email	
Freepost RSSK-JZAC-JCJG	
The Writers Bureau College of Journalism Dept AT266J, Manchester, M3 1LE	16 Years of Success



# SCIENCE

#### COSMIC PHOTOGRAPHY

The tree-like patterns found on lightning strike victims are caused by a flash of energy, says DAVID HAMBLING, but is the Shroud more an artist's impression than a photo?

he appearance of an image of the Virgin Mary on a grilled cheese sandwich is a straightforwardly miraculous occurrence. Nobody has suggested that there might be any science involved, except the perceptual quirk of pareidolia, which finds significant shapes in random patterns. But other unexplained images appear to be formed by natural processes that we might call Cosmic Photography.

Cosmic photographs include pictures burned into human flesh, etched on window glass or, most famously, imprinted on the Shroud of Turin. In each of these cases a flash of energy - usually lightning – leaves a picture of the scene as a permanent record. While not necessarily regarded as miraculous, these images are always a source of awe and wonder - but they are not necessarily what they seem.

The commonest variety are the marks left on the unfortunate victims of lightning strikes. [1] Lightning leaves very distinctive skin lesions, elaborate branching patterns known variously as keraunographic marks, lightning flowers or trees, or ferns. They are formed from ruptured capillaries just under the skin, and tend to disappear after a few days. According to folklore, such marks are the exact image of the tree under which the victim was sheltering when they were struck.

Some cases went further: in 1812, six sheep were killed by lightning in an oak wood at Combe Bay near Bath. Their skins were said to bear "a most faithful image" of their immediate surroundings. A report in the Leeds Mercury in June 1881 of a home struck by lightning noted three examples related to plants around them: a girl "burnt upon her left arm by the lightning and an impression exactly corresponding with the branch of the Aloysia citroodora [Lemon Verbena]," another girl with a mark which matched the flower of the same plant, and a servant whose injury was the shape of a geranium.

The theory of lightning trees had already been challenged in



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

1777, when German scientist Georg Lichtenberg experimented with electric discharges through various materials. Lichtenberg showed that a discharge across glass could be made visible by scattering the plate with powdered sulphur and red lead, revealing a beautiful branching pattern like a fern or river delta. These fractal shapes, known as Lichtenberg Figures, have nothing to do with the surroundings. They are simply the result of the random pattern of electrical flow. However, because the shapes mimic the natural environment it is easy to find patterns in them.

In some more remarkable cosmic photographs in the late 19th century, images were apparently left in window glass or a mirror after a lightning strike. The picture was invariably a portrait of the victim: "a perfect photographic likeness of her as she appeared in her neat cap and gown" in a small window.

On 14 October 1883, the New York Times reported an image found in a glass window of a Mrs Bowyer who had been "somewhat shocked by lightning" while sitting at the window years previously. In 1878, ex-slave Henry Wells looked out of a window in Pickens County Courthouse to see a lynch mob howling for him below: a flash of lightning supposedly portrayed his terrified face on the window.

None of these reports holds up well. The stories are often second-hand - the New York Times story was originally published in the Charlottesville Chronicle, and closely resembles a similar story about a Mrs Garth in the same paper eight years earlier. Other turn out to be embellished: the pane of glass that supposedly bears Henry Wells's image is still visible - but was not installed until some weeks after his death.

The American folklorist Barbara Allen has found that these stories all occur in the narrow period 1871-1892, and the newspapers always seem to compare the pictures to photographs. For most people at this period, photography meant bright flash and a portrait sitter being captured on a glass plate. It was a scientific miracle, and those ignorant of key aspects (a focusing lens, light-sensitive silver nitrate), might believe that a flash of light and a sheet of glass were all that were needed. In the 1890s, Kodak cameras with celluloid film became popular. Much of the mystique of photography was dissipated, and reports of lightning-on-glass images disappeared.

The Turin Shroud is the exemplar of Cosmic Photography, a type of relic known as acheiropoieta - or images made without human hands, a "mechanical, though miraculous, impression of the original". [2] Unlike the Virgin on toast, this Shroud straddles the awkward divide between miracle and scientific phenomenon. Religious supporters claim that the image was seared into the cloth by a blast of mystic energy, possibly associated with the resurrection. Other say the energy might have come from earthlights [FT313:15], or that it was created in a photographic process by Leonardo da Vinci.

However, as has been observed since the very start of Shroudology. the image is not a photograph because of the distortions. The right thigh bulges out, and the arms and legs are elongated. It looks more like an artistic impression - of a sort frequently seen in paintings than a precise representation.

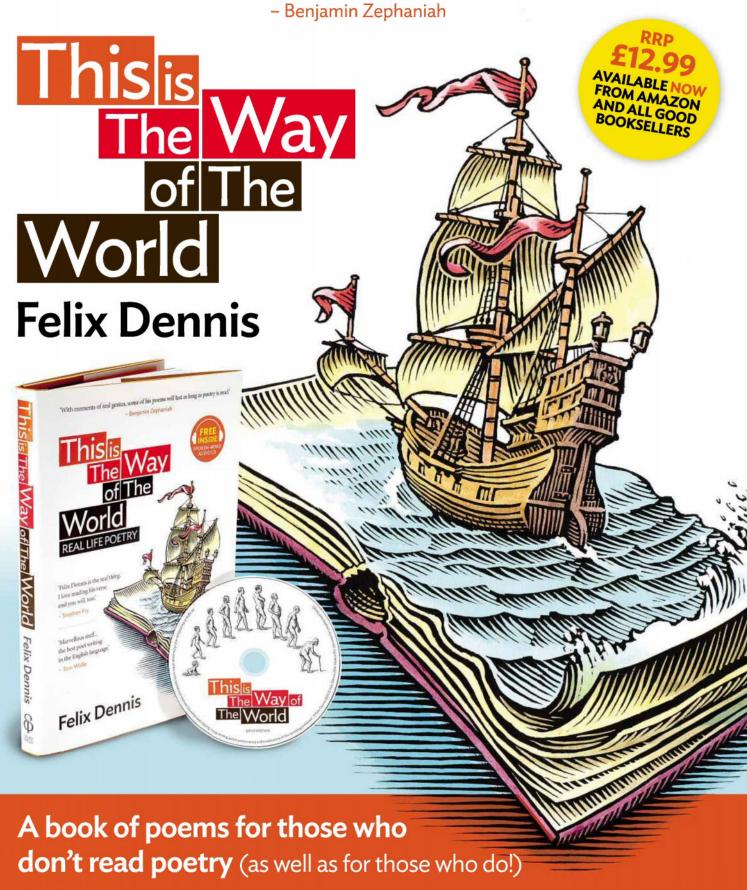
This is unlikely to have any effect on the debate. Lichtenberg Figures were being reported as images of plants 100 years after an alternative explanation was found, and what editor would be spoilsport enough to ruin a good story by mentioning them? The image in Pickens County Courthouse was still being described as a 'lightning photograph' in 1940. As long as people are impressed by startling images, nature will be credited with producing photographs that defy science.

#### **NOTES**

1 See Rickard & Michell: The Rough Guide to Unexplained Phenomena (2007), pp285-287.

2 Ibid, pp281-284.

'With moments of real genius, some of his poems will last as long as poetry is read.'



A collection of 'real life' poems by Felix Dennis, one of Britain's best-loved poets, charting life's course from infant to endings with illustrations by Bill Sanderson.





# 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.tandfonline.com/rtam





ABOVE: The skeleton unearthed in Kamien Pomorski, with a rock in its mouth (left) and one of the four from Gliwice with skulls placed between their legs (right).

#### VAMPIRE BURIALS

Archæologists excavating at the old market place in Kamien Pomorski, Poland, have unearthed a male skeleton that seems to have been that of a vampire, or, at least, of someone who was believed to have been a vampire. About 500 years old, the skeleton had a rock inserted in its mouth (the front teeth had been knocked out to allow that to be done) and its legs had been pierced through - presumably traditional precautions carried out to stop the person rising from the dead and wandering at night, and in any case rendering him unable to sink his teeth into any hapless victim. Polskie Radio/ thenews.pl, 8 May 2014. For other rock-inmouth burials, see FT249:18 (Venice) and FT283:18 (Co Roscommon, Ireland). Interestingly, what is thought to probably have been a vampire burial ground was discovered a few months earlier by archæologists in Gliwice, southern Poland. The site contained four skeletons; in each case, the deceased had been buried with the head between the legs. According to folk beliefs, this manner of burial prevented a suspected vampire being able to find its way back to the land of the living. There were no grave goods buried with the skeletons. There hasn't so far been an exact dating of the burials, but the Early Modern period (or perhaps late Mediæval era?) is being

What makes these two recent finds the more remarkable is the fact that the previous documented case of a vampire burial within current Polish borders was in the village of Stare Mierzwice, Masovia, in 1914. Polskie Radio/thenews.pl, 12 July

2013. More than 100 burials where the bodies have been pierced or clamped with iron, supposedly to protect the living from vampire depredations, have been found in Bulgaria, Serbia and other Balkan countries see FT291:20.

#### METEORITE SHRINES

Archæoastronomer Ken Zoll, executive director of the Verde Valley Archæological Center in Camp Verde, north central Arizona, raised an intriguing topic at the 2013 Pecos Conference, an annual meeting of Southwestern archæologists - namely,

meteorite shrines. He drew attention to two c.12th-century settlements built by separate communities some distance apart along the rim of the Verde Valley. One of the sites, on





ABOVE: The adobe complex at Casas Grandes, last outpost of the Anasazi, and the Wingfield meteorite.

Wingfield Mesa, southeast of present day Camp Verde, was a virtually square arrangement of pueblo-style rooms, a complex apparently (and most unusually) built in a single phase, as if for a specific purpose, by the southern branch Sinagua Indians. Inside the eastern wall of this complex was a stone-lined vault or cist that held a bundle wrapped in an ornate blanket made of turkey feathers. Inside was a 61kg (134lb) partially melted metallic meteorite. "The fact that it was wrapped in a feathered turkey blanket adds to the significance," Zoll pointed out. "It takes over a year to make. So obviously it made it a very sacred location."

The other site Zoll referred to, known as the Winona Ruins, built by the northern band Sinagua, is located 115km (71 miles) to the north, near Flagstaff. Just below the ground surface there is a square stone cist (box-like structure). Under its lid a mass of rocky iron meteoric pieces weighing collectively some 24kg (53lb) was discovered. These unsurprisingly became known locally as "winonaites".

Later analysis showed that the meteoric chunks at both sites were identical material. They are assumed to be debris from the massive meteorite that blasted out the great crater known as Canyon Diablo tens of thousands of years ago in northern Arizona. It is not known what if any contact there was between the people who built the Wingfield and Winona complexes, but clearly there was some sort of ritual connection involving meteorites. It may have been the metallic properties of the pieces that rendered them special, sacred, to the pre-metalworking Sinagua cultures. Western Digs, 26 Aug 2013.

However, ancient Native American worship of meteorites wasn't confined to Arizona's Verde Valley - roughly 400 miles (640km) as the crow flies to the southeast, in the Chihuahua Desert of northern Mexico, is Casas Grandes (Paquimé), last and southernmost outpost of the lost Anasazi ("Ancient Ones"). Dated to c. AD 1350, on the site of an earlier settlement, this multi-storied adobe complex, a UNESCO World Heritage site, consisting of about 2,000 adjoining rooms along with Mesoamerican ball courts, stone-faced platforms, effigy mounds, and a market area, had a room containing a 2,267kg (357 stone) iron meteorite, carefully wrapped in linen. (It's now in the Janet Annenberg Hooker Hall of Geology, Gems and Minerals at the Smithsonian Museum of Natural History.) These pre-Columbian Indians, irrespective of local culture, clearly revered the mysterious rocks that fell from the skies.



FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

#### 177: CARRY ON, BOADICEA!

(The role Hattie Jacques was born to play) Boadicea should actually be spelled 'Boudicca', but who's counting? I'm more interested in the claim that she is buried beneath platforms 9 and 10 at King's Cross.

"In November 1852, a much talked-about subject in England was reindeer's ears" - Fort, Books, p603.

Yes, and if they'd read Julius Cæsar's Gallic Wars (bk6 ch27 para1), the topic would have been elks that "used trees as beds". Plutarch (Caesar, ch23 paras2-3) says one reason he went to this "island of incredible magnitude" was to quell widespread doubts that it actually existed.

Cæsar's on-the-spot reporting claims that Kent was the most civilised part (as a Northerner, I reject this), that the natives had blue woad-painted bodies (all woads lead to Wome?), self-depilated everything save head and upper lip, and shared women among family packs of fathers, brothers, and sons -All In The Family.

Soon after Cæsar's visits, Horace (Odes, bk3 no4 v33) was describing the British as "unfriendly to strangers" - many foreign tourists might still agree.

Britain's existence may have been confirmed, but it was left for Tacitus's fatherin-law governor (Agricola, ch10 para4) to prove its insular nature - still a matter for debate (Quintilian, Institutes of Oratory, bk7 ch4 para2) - by his circumnavigation.

Boadicea's revolt (AD 60-61) was preluded by a host of forteana (Tacitus, Annals, bk14 ch322; Dio Cassius, Roman History, bk62 ch1 paras1-2): the statue of Victory at Colchester turned around to face the sea; shrieks were heard from the temple, laughter and foreign babblings from the council chamber; the sea turned blood-red; an image of the colony's destruction appeared in the Thames.

Agricola's victory over the Caledonians at Mons Graupius (battle and aftermath comparable to Culloden Moor in 1745) comes with the usual ancient lop-sided casualty figures: 10,000 dead enemy, a mere 360 Romans, including a lone officer - far cry from The Great War.

Not so mind-boggling, though, as a statistic from a generation or so later: 70,236 dead Parthians, two dead Romans and nine wounded (Lucian, How To Write History, ch20) - Talk about 'Shock and Awe'.

Agricola did much to Romanise the natives, so much so that (Juvenal, Satires, no15 v111) British lawyers had already become proverbial for their eloquence.

These pre-Rumpolians may rarely have had to eat their words, but a recent archæological

find (FT150:7) suggests proto-Brits were eating each other - implied comment on early English cooking?

Had there been no physical evidence left, we'd have scholars doubting the existence of Hadrian's Wall, since the only mention of it in Roman literature is from that most unreliable of sources, the Historia Augusta, in its 'Life of Hadrian' (ch11 para2). A bare sentence, stating that the wall was the first of its kind, 80 Roman (73 British) miles long, designed to keep out the barbarians.

I fear the story that a sign on its English face read "This side Civilisation, that side Scotland" is apocryphal.

"Over the heather, the west wind blows/ I've lice in my hair, and a cold in my nose/ The rain comes pattering out of the sky/ I'm a Wall soldier, I don't know why" - WH Auden, Roman Wall Blues.

"It's only a wall, woman!" - Terry Collier, Whatever Happened to The Likely Lads?

Recent years have seen the discovery of hundreds of texts from Wall site Vindolanda, including the earliest known writing (a birthday party invite) by a Roman woman, and a new mocking diminutive Latinism, Brittinculi, perhaps scratched by a visiting Roman football fan or a wannabe scriptwriter for Little Britain.

The Romans evacuated Britain in the fifth century. This was the age of Arthur (aka Artorius), hero of Nennius's Historia Brittonum (c. 830). Gildas's On The Ruin of Britain (c. 540) is rich in (e.g.) tales of the wonders wrought by St Alban (bk2 ch11). Richer yet in forteana of all kinds is the Verminous (sorry, Venerable) Bede, detailed in a previous Classical Corner (FT240:21).

Last word goes to the sixth-century Byzantine historian Procopius (Gothic War, bk1 ch4 para20), taking us back in a way to Plutarch and Horace with his mention of the belief that Britain was in fact the Island of the Dead, the ghostly abode of departed souls again, some foreign visitors may find this all



## **AVIAN ANTICS**

BIG AND SOMETIMES BOLSHY BIRDS HAVE BEEN MAKING THE NEWS, FROM ERRANT EMUS AND OSTRICHES TO "LUNATIC" PHEASANTS

On 15 March, a South American rhea called Rita escaped from Jo Clark's smallholding at Starling's Green near Brent Pelham, Hertfordshire, where she was being kept in a pen with three younger rheas and employed to control weeds. The three-yearold flightless bird, 6ft (1.8m) tall, fled after apparently being spooked by a local hunt. She was photographed in Nuthampstead, five miles (8km) away, on 10 April, then seen in Anstey on 13 April, and Barkway Park Golf Club for several successive days between 6.20pm and 7pm. Jo Clark was not surprised to hear her bird had made it to Barkway, as this was the location of a breeding male rhea she had sold to a local nature lover, and Rita might be searching for a mate, it being the mating season. Another apparent sighting was next to the Arthur Findlay College for Psychic Science, a training centre for mediums and spiritualists. The college grounds are further south than Barkway, near to the M11.

Rheas are omnivorous, often eating insects and small vertebrates, as well as their preferred large-leaf plants. Rita, we are told, also has a penchant for dog food. As rheas can run at 45mph (72km/h), disembowel a person with one flick of their 6in (15cm) claws, or peck out their eyes, people gave Rita a wide berth. Then on 9 (or 5) May, the errant bird - named Chris by local people, after the singer Chris Rea - wandered into Stuart Howe's rifle sights in a nearby oil rape field, and the deer manager killed her with a single shot to the head at 70 yards (64m). He insisted she had not suffered, and said the meat would be made into gourmet sausages. He added that he understood that the police wanted the bird dispatched because they were worried it could cause a road accident. "I knew this would happen in the end," said Rita's owner, Jo Clark. "But there was no need to shoot her. She was never going to hurt anyone. All this stuff about them ripping a man's arm off with their



ABOVE: Rita the Rhea during her glory days of freedom. BELOW: The Lincolnshire emu "put up quite a fight" before its arrest.

#### The emu was wrestled into the back of a patrol car by police officers

claw is nonsense. They are very shy and like to eat weeds. She would just have run away if you approached her."

In 2010, an escaped rhea in

Evke, Suffolk, died from a panic attack after it was shot with a tranquilliser gun. Another rhea was seen strolling down a railway line near Wickham Market, Suffolk, in May 2012, and a third hung around a golf club in Caerphilly, South Wales, for several days in May 2011 [FT290:12]. D. Telegraph, 16+17+18+19 April, 10 May 2014.

 In January, an ostrich caused traffic chaos near Tunbridge Wells in Kent, after running alongside cars on a main road at more than 40mph (64km/h). The bird,

- believed to have escaped from a nearby ostrich farm, hurtled past more than 20 cars between the villages of Rusthall and Speldhurst on 13 January. Adult ostriches can run up to 43mph (70km/h) and grow more than 9ft (2.7m) tall. The Tunbridge Wells bird was a juvenile standing iust over 2ft (60cm) tall, but still demonstrated blistering speed, according to witnesses. D.Telegraph, 15 Jan 2014.
- An emu "put up quite a fight" when it was placed under arrest on 19 March. It was wrestled into the back of a patrol car by two police officers after it was seen wandering in the road near RAF Coningsby in Lincolnshire. It was being looked after at a farm park while efforts were made to find its owner. There was a local ostrich farm, but it was not one of theirs. Metro, 20 Mar 2014.
- A French couple who were forced to undergo therapy after being terrorised by a councilowned peacock have won 4,000 euros in damages from a Marseille court. According to a lawsuit brought against the city, the couple claimed to have been left with insomnia and depression after four years living with the bird's shrill raucous shrieks. The



peacock was given to the mayor in 2008, but it soon began escaping and making its way through people's gardens, where it would display and squawk, drawing complaints from neighbours. Following the court settlement, the peacock was relocated to a farm well outside the city. *Independent*, 31 Mar 2014.

• A pheasant arrived at Wood Farm in Hail Weston, Cambridgeshire, at the beginning of March, and began attacking vehicles and chasing cats and dogs at a local farm. Farmer's wife Anne-Marie Hamilton, 63, described the male bird as "a complete lunatic". A delivery driver was trapped for 20 minutes after the bird blocked his way, flew at the bonnet then chased his van. Mrs Hamilton said she had lived on farms all her life and was used to pheasants visiting, but had not come across this type of behaviour before. "He really has been terrorising us," she said. "He's not at all wary of people, and he chased my poor Jack Russell all the way down the farm track and back home. The dog was exhausted. One young girl was having her first driving lesson on our land and could not move the car because the pheasant would not leave it alone. I don't think we'll see our delivery driver for a while either." When it is not busy seeing off her dogs, cats and visitors' vehicles, the pheasant



ABOVE: The Tunbridge Wells ostrich stops traffic. ABOVE: Under siege from the pheasant described as "a complete lunatic".

has taken up residence outside her patio doors. "We keep a big stick there so we can get in and out," she said. "It's an absolute nightmare. Even when you can't see him, you can hear him lurking about. He's never far away so you can't let your guard down. He's a holy terror. Hopefully, he'll find a wife soon and clear off, because it's becoming a flaming nuisance."

Paul Stancliffe from the British Trust for Ornithology said: "It's the start of the breeding season so the pheasant sees everything

as a threat. He's trying to get everyone and everything off his territory so he can install his harem. It's not unheard of for pheasants to see off animals or chase vehicles, but he's perhaps taking things a little to the extreme." Meanwhile, another pheasant in Houghton-le-Spring, Sunderland, was particularly hostile to red vehicles, meaning local postman Neil Fogg was having a hard time. He said the bird followed him through the whole estate. "It has pecked me before and pecked at the wheels

of my post van," he said. Last spring a Shropshire family had a similar experience; "Phil the angry pheasant" did not stop at attacks on their vehicles, however, and turned his attentions to a number of members of the family, forcing one of them to carry a badminton racket for self-defence. D.Mail, 3+25 Mar; BBC News, 24 Mar 2014.

• At the beginning of 2013, Penny Freeman, 69, started feeding the birds in her back garden in Bridlington, East Yorkshire. One gull became increasingly aggressive, pecking at her windows with such force that she thought the glass would break. Then it built a nest in her chimney. At the end of July a baby gull fell from the nest into the garden and its parents set up a round-the-clock guard to protect it. Ms Freeman and her brother Jim, 67, were too scared to leave the house as the gulls swooped and pecked at them every time they opened the door. "It was terrifying," she said. "I couldn't get to my washing. The noise was appalling. They also warn off predators with vomit, so when we tried to go outside, they would vomit on us. It was really vile." After four days, the chick flew off and its parents followed. D.Mail, Sun, 9 Aug 2013.





# **GHOSTWATCH**

**ALAN MURDIE** ponders recent ghost photographs and the unearthing of a devil dog

#### APPARITIONS AND IMAGES

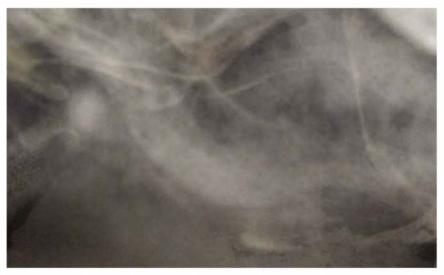
This year has seen no reduction in ghostly images caught on film and served up via the national and local press as supposed evidence of phantoms in our midst. Examples include "Is this a ghost outside Parliament?" (D.Mail. 4 Jan 2014 – answer no, double exposure); "'Ghost' caught on CCTV at Bolton's oldest pub" (Bolton News, 17 Feb 2014 - identified as an overlay of CCTV footage); "York Castle Museum haunted: UK family discover ghostly image of Victorian girl in photos" (D.Mirror, 22 April 2014 – identified as a photo-shop application prank). Whilst illusory, spurious and downright hopeless ghost photographs abound, some presented by ghost hunters are proving more intriguing, though often the background stories prove far more interesting than the images themselves.

The headline "'Real' ghost caught on camera in Clophill church ruins" appeared in Bedfordshire on Sunday on 29 Jan 2014. The use of quotation marks throughout the article hints at the paper's own scepticism regarding the 'video evidence', describing Alex Duggan and Michael York of Northampton, as the 'duo behind the footage'. Their video shows a pattern of light and shadow which, when viewed in slow motion, "does actually turn into the shape of the figure that turns its head, looks and then disappears," according to Mr Duggan. He added: "At first I thought it was glare from the infra-red light but it seems to be moving in a different direction from the camera".

Unfortunately, this apparition is in no way obvious - the film was actually recorded in summer 2012 with no one noticing any figure until after a clip was placed on the Internet. This late identification is not encouraging; could one really remember precise camera positions and exact levels of illumination at a night-time vigil 18 months earlier?

Mr Duggan was at least familiar with Clophill, having previously walked over the site with friends on 9 July 2011, to see "if we had any feelings or strange things happen to us". Already in a mood of expectation, it was perhaps not wholly surprising that "Andy and Penny felt very sick at a particular tree over the far side of the grounds"; that, during a séance, Penny "had a feeling that she was heavily pregnant... she is not" and others felt touches and pains as they called out to Clophill spirits, whilst one team member "kept seeing a dark figure moving from grave to grave" and felt a blow when their séance had finished. However, it would appear none of these experiences were collectively shared, leaving open the possibility of individual hallucination. Confirming that he finds Clophill atmospheric, Mr Duggan stated: "It's a pretty eerie place, right in the middle of a field".

Now people who know the history of Clophill may very well find it spooky. As Mr Duggan revealed, "Before we came we had heard



ABOVE: Mr Burnell's misty swirl: "There are so many faces... it's almost undeniable proof..."

#### **EARLIER GHOST HUNTERS SELDOM SAW ANYTHING** WHEN INVESTIGATING **HAUNTED HOUSES**

lots of stories about demonic activity at the church... We wanted to see it for ourselves"; and Bedfordshire on Sunday chimed in: "For decades St Mary's has been at the centre of haunted tales: one involves a coven of witches who supposedly held a Black Mass at the church one dark night in March 1963, and whose evil spirits still linger around the ruined

This desecration is notorious as a piece of black magic vandalism, though the likely perpetrators were teenagers rather than serious practitioners of the dark arts – a generally juvenile aura attaches to many such antics and 'satanic' stunts over the years. But people coming to photograph Clophill have certainly been unnerved, even such veteran cataloguers of the strange in the British Isles as Janet and Colin Bord, as they recalled in their Atlas of Magical Britain (1993). Source: www.bedfordshire-news.co.uk/News/VIDEO-Real-ghost-caught-on-camera-in-Clophill-churchruins-20140129163446.htm#ixzz31QLQ331B

Being conveniently close to London, Clophill attracts ghost hunters from the capital on auspicious dates. Another such site is Minden Chapel on Hallowe'en where two ghost hunters some years apart both claimed to have heard phantom music: Elliot O'Donnell c. 1937 and Peter Underwood some time before 1949 (see O'Donnell's Haunted Churches, 1939, and Underwood's A Gazetteer of British Ghosts,

1971); I had no such good fortune myself on a vigil at the Chapel on 31 October 1986, encountering only other people drawn to the site and a low-flying plane.

Yet another place where groups of watchers annually gather is Cassiobury Park. Hertfordshire, traditionally haunted each 9 March by Lord Arthur Capel, beheaded in 1649, who supposedly appears and is identifiable either by his 17<sup>th</sup> century clothes and fine moustache or, alternatively, by being headless. Disappointingly, no sightings were received this year, but on 12 March the Watford Observer announced: "Paranormal investigators snap 'undeniable' evidence of Cassiobury Park ghost", following scrutiny of a picture taken in the park three nights earlier.

A gentleman with a spiritualist outlook, Mr James Burnell produced an image of a misty swirl to support this claim, stating: "The more I look at it the more I believe the spirit entities were trying to show themselves", and his perception that: "There are so many faces that I can make out, it's almost undeniable proof... adding: "There are faces on their sides and I can see almost a full body apparition. The more I look at it the more I see into it.'

Unfortunately, a readers' poll in the press took a different view on the image. When asked if they could see the faces - 84 per cent gave a resounding "absolutely not" compared with a mere 16 per cent replying "yes, it's obvious".

As with Clophill, Mr Burnell acknowledges a powerful atmosphere at the site: "When I went to the park four years ago I took a medium with me and she said there were murders, rapes and sacrifices that took place in there. It's a very strange place after dark." Regrettably, the coverage in the Watford Observer fails to make clear whether witnesses saw the mist at the time or whether it was only noticed viewing the picture later.

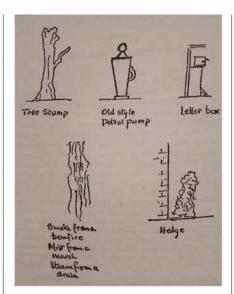
In fact, the Watford Observer of 16

November 2010 confirms Mr Burnell has been successful in obtaining foggy pictures in Cassiobury Park before. In that year he reported an unexplained mist surrounding him "just as he was speaking about the old English urban legend of 'Spring-heeled Jack'." On that occasion he believed the mist was Jack's spirit. Since Jack is considered 'an urban legend', one wonders how exactly any abstract idea can possess a spirit, let alone turning up as a mist on film. But myth rather than logic triumphs at such locations, with Clophill and Cassiobury Park seemingly becoming what folklorists view as legendary sites in the making, rather like the onceinfamous Clapham Wood in Sussex. (See "Clapham Wood - An Afterword" Peter McCue, Paranormal Review, 2005, 16; "Hecate in the primrose wood: The propagation of a rumour" by Jacqueline Simpson, 1994, *Contemporary* Legend, 4, 91).

More starkly, the ambiguity of many modern ghost pictures is in contrast to much eyewitness testimony obtained for apparitions in the past. People who actually see a ghost are normally left in no doubt about their experience; even folkloric descriptions are usually certain as to how a ghost looks, identity being tied up with distinct features concerning its gender and clothing – e.g. a cavalier in green velvet, a lady in white, a monk in a brown robe etc.

Also, although earlier generations of ghost hunters reported seeing materialised apparitions at séances, they seldom saw anything when investigating haunted houses. In 1986 Dr Peter Hallson observed that in contrast with the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, many modern apparitional reports were often vague and sometimes rather 'silly', including stories of black shadows, indescribable odours and attacks by evil spirits. Reports rarely contain the detailed accounts of life-like figures once supplied to the Society for Psychical Research. Then, as now, the best apparition reports came from people not on ghost hunts but simply going about their normal business and not thinking about ghosts at the time. In contrast, today's investigators, whilst admitting they don't usually see anything on a vigil, nonetheless and often almost routinely believe they have captured phantoms on film, despite the fact their anomalous images scarcely looking like anything at all.

Thus, it would be very easy to deride the results reported by ghost hunters at Clophill and Cassiobury on the basis that their photographs do not really show anything out of the ordinary, and that their personal experiences consist largely of lists of entirely individual and subjective impressions such as touches, sudden pains and feelings of fear, all potentially attributable to auto-suggestion. Nonetheless, the dedication of both Mr Duggan and Mr Burnell and their respective teams remains admirable. Whilst their photographs are indistinct and incapable of determination, both seem sincerely convinced that they have undergone strange experiences.



In this they are not alone, for there exists a huge and ever growing volume of personal experiences which modern psychology and Western paradigms of thought cannot adequately explain; indeed after four centuries science still does not have the means to classify subjective experiences, nor any understanding of the nature of consciousness.

Of course, sensations of fear and unease can be readily manufactured synthetically by such entertainments as the recently closed 'Carnesky's Ghost Train' at Blackpool. Something of the sort has probably happened with ghost tours going into the MacKenzie mausoleum at Greyfriars Cemetery, Edinburgh (see The Ghost that Haunted Itself, 2001, by Jan-Andrew Henderson, and also Professor Richard Wiseman's experiments in the Edinburgh vaults in 2003, showing how individuals easily become scared). But notably, no distinct apparitions are seen in these artificial conditions, suggesting people are in fact rather unimaginative, even when immersed in spooky environments. People become alarmed, but they do not hallucinate full apparitions. Indeed, to induce healthy and sober witnesses in waking states of consciousness into believing they are seeing a ghost often seems to require some objective stimulus capable of misinterpretation (e.g. someone dressing up or a 'trick of the light') or alternatively, the introduction of powerful external influences upon their minds, such as hypnosis or drugs. Ghost hunter Andrew Green (1927-2004) cited many examples of everyday objects mistaken for apparitions.

The need for an actual physical stimulus to trigger a convincing visual experience was demonstrated 40 years ago when a fake 'haunted gallery', set up on a south coast pier, started employing an actor to play a ghost, chiefly by waving a luminous mask in the dark. He was forced to take a first aid course to treat his victims when his performances caused "an average of three people a week to collapse in a state of absolute terror". One of his last customers was a 50-year-old woman who, on

**LEFT:** Some everyday objects commonly mistaken for ghosts, as sketched by ghost hunter Andrew Green.

her bended knees, begged him, as the ghost, to leave her in peace, and a middle-aged policeman who had visited the establishment "for amusement", who had to be treated for shock after seeing him. A ghost that only performed on the pier from 10 to 5.30pm for a 5p admission price should hardly have been credible even to the most gullible, yet the results proved otherwise with the use of the luminous mask crucial to achieving these results (*Ghost Hunting: A Practical Guide*, 1973, by Andrew Green).

Ultimately, the theory of auto-suggestion fails adequately to explain crisis apparitions – where a recognised apparition is seen just once but coinciding with that person dying or suffering trauma – and cases where several witnesses see exactly the same figure.

Indeed, one such historic example was recalled lately, following an intriguing headline in the East Anglian Daily Times: "Are these the remains of the legendary beast known as Black Shuck?" (15 May 2014). The article detailed the discovery by archæologists of the skeleton of a large dog at Leiston Abbey in east Suffolk. Estimates suggest it weighed more than 196lb (89kg) and stood 7ft (2m) tall on its hind legs. The unmarked grave was less than 20in (50cm) deep. This news immediately revived tales of the regional ghostly Black Shuck or devil dog "against which the hound of the Baskervilles was no more than a playful puppy" to quote East Anglian writer Ronald Blythe (Word from Wormingford, 1996).

Now it is not an everyday event to discover the bones of a feared devil dog (even in East Anglia), but the find recalls the amazing sighting of a phantom dog at Leiston over a century ago, recorded by James Wentworth Day (1899-1983) in his classic volume *A Ghost Hunter's Game Book* (1958).

Day recalled how Lady Walsingham, whose family owned Leiston Old Abbey in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, told him of sitting up in Leiston churchyard one moonlit night with her friend Lady Rendlesham, hoping to see Black Shuck.

Both ladies were duly rewarded when "a huge black dog appeared, loping along the road, swiftly, noiselessly, with glowing eyes; leapt the churchyard wall, and vanished among the gravestones". Day, who received this account in the 1920s, describes Lady Walsingham as a "charming, level-headed woman, not in the least given to exaggeration or idle fancies". Assuming the story is true, how precisely would auto-suggestion alone account for both ladies seeing the same ghost, at the same moment?

Certainly, anyone who can discover the precise mental mechanism whereby auto-suggestion can create multiple and simultaneous visual hallucinations of black dogs – whether in Leiston churchyard or anywhere else – is going to make a fortune. Such a discovery will also shut down stage magicians and illusionists for good.

## strangedays 👺

## CRIMINAL CROPPERS

Our latest round-up of felonius failures includes criminals armed with Toblerones and potatoes







- · Lee Wildman, 36, and Adrian Stanton, 33, broke into Durham University's Oriental Museum over Easter 2012, smashed cabinets and stole a bowl and porcelain figurine from the Chinese Qing dynasty, together worth £2 million, which they hid on wasteland. Trouble is, when they returned to retrieve their loot two days later, they couldn't find it. The precious objects - a 1769 jade bowl and a Dehua porcelain figurine of seven fairies in a boat - were subsequently located by a member of the public. Wildman was jailed for nine years and Stanton for eight. D.Telegraph, Guardian, 8+9 Feb 2014.
- An air passenger armed with a Toblerone chocolate bar demanded that the pilot fly to Sochi in Russia so he could watch the Winter Olympics. Antti Oskari Manselius, 23, from Finland was on a Cathay Pacific flight from Amsterdam to Hong Kong on 14 February when he approached the cockpit with two blankets wrapped around his head and one around his shoulders like a cape. He was waving the Toblerone like a sword and claimed there was a bomb on board the plane. He was handcuffed and strapped to his seat for the rest of the flight and later transferred to a psychiatric centre in Hong Kong. In court, he pleaded not guilty to disorderly conduct, and claimed it had all been a joke to entertain the other passengers. The case was



TOP: Adrian Stanton (left) and Lee Wildman (centre) couldn't find their hidden stash of stolen oriental antiquities (right). ABOVE: Resi Rokhis Suhana stole human remains from graves to help him gain powers of flight and invisibility.

adjourned. D.Express, 19 April; Independent, 20 April 2014.

• On 14 April, a man armed with a potato disguised as a gun tried to hold up workers at a Shell station in Providence. Rhode Island, but they were unimpressed with his weapon and after a brief struggle they scared him away with a bat (whether this was a winged mammal or a piece of wood is not stated). Half an hour later, Spudman robbed Anna Jung at her family's dry cleaning business. "He said, 'Don't call 911'. I said, 'OK. Take it easy'," Ms Jung told the police. The only thing in the register was a counterfeit \$20 bill. The man wasn't happy with the amount,

#### He said he believed the drug had made him invisible

but he eventually left. About a week later, Gary Deming, 34, faced charges of robbery and aggressive use of a vegetable. Turn to 10 (Rhode Island), 21 April; MX News (Sydney), 29 April 2014.

 A bungling bomber blew himself up after forgetting the clocks had gone forward when he planted his explosives.

- He fled "dripping in blood" after the bomb he left under a businessman's Volvo in Dublin on 30 March exploded in his face. "Insiders" said the ill-starred gangster forgot to put his watch forward for Daylight Saving Time and it went off too early. Gardaí launched a manhunt. D. Star, 2 April 2014.
- Andrew Simon Mylan, 38, was "off his head" on the insomnia drug zopiclone (known on the street as 'zimmers' or 'zimmies') when he entered McColls in Stockton, Teesside, with an empty bag, which he filled up with toiletries worth £26, and then failed to pay for. When arrested, he said he believed the drug had made him invisible. Mylan received a six-week suspended jail sentence. Middlesbrough Eve. Gazette, 5 Mar 2014.
- A man stole human remains from graves to use in black magic spells he believed would give him the power of flight and invisibility. Following several reports of missing bones, police in Java detained Resi Rokhis Suhana, 27, on 15 December. "He admitted robbing the graves to perfect a magical power called 'Ultimate Magical Knight'," said the local police chief. [AFP] 17 Dec 2013.
- Evelyn Hamilton, 37, was arrested after complaining to police in Lufkin, east Texas, that a dope dealer had refused to return her \$40 when she told him that

the weed he had sold her was substandard. An officer visited her home to hear her complaint and arrested her for possession of drug paraphernalia. (*Portsmouth*) *News*, 9 *April 2014*.

- Hairdresser Aaron Chambers, 31, was "shocked and upset" when he discovered that the £4,400 cannabis crop in his cellar in Huddersfield, West Yorkshire, had been nicked. He yelled for neighbours to call police, who duly arrived and arrested him. He was fined £145 by Kirklees magistrates and sent for drug rehabilitation. Sun, 15 Jan 2014.
- After he built a "laboratory" to grow dope, Erik Schiffer, 65, took a photograph of his hard work before losing his camera. The Nikon ended up in a lost property office in Leoben, Austria, where staff looked at the pictures. After identifying Schiffer, they rang the police, who arrested him. *Metro*, 25 Oct 2013.
- · An armed robber was laughed out of a bookmaker's because he tried to hold it up on All Fools' Day. Firas Osman, 19, wore a mask and pointed an imitation gun at Helen Morris, who was working at the betting shop in Pentwyn, Cardiff, but she simply laughed at him because it was 1 April. She thought he was "one of the lads messing around". Osman left behind a bag he intended to fill with money and police traced him through DNA. He was jailed for five years. D. Telegraph, 29 June 2012.
- Aaron McNair, 20, stormed into a Chinese restaurant brandishing a knife at the owner, who was working alone. McNair then let off a smoke grenade, but fled when he couldn't find the till thorough the smoke. He was jailed for 40 months at Stoke-on-Trent Crown Court. *D.Telegraph*, 9 May 2014.
- Jerry Harlow shot himself in a bid to avoid jail time on a minor charge but then faced a longer sentence after police in Summersville, West Virginia, found that the gun was stolen. Sun, 27 April 2014.

# A ALIEN ZOO

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

#### PRETTY IN PURPLE

Jellyfishes come in many different colours, but purple is not one of the commonest which is why the vivid purple specimen (pictured at right) that lately washed ashore on Coolum Beach in Oueensland. Australia. has attracted so much scientific interest. Further adding to its potential significance is the fact that it appears to belong to the genus Thysanostoma, neither of whose two known Australian species is purple. Its bell is as big as a dinner plate and its tentacles are each around 3ft (90cm) long, but lifeguard Michael Daly (with the aid of protective gloves) boldly picked up the still-living creature, placed it in a bucket of seawater, and took it to a local marine-life

centre called Underwater World. After examining it there, jellyfish expert Dr Lisa-Ann Gershwin confirmed that due to its brilliant purple coloration and its very large size it may belong to a species new to science. This is because *Thysanostoma* jellyfishes are normally brownish, and sport a bell no bigger than a woman's fist. http://www.couriermail.com.au/news/purple-jellyfish-which-washed-up-on-coolum-beach-queensland-may-be-new-species-of-thysanostoma/story-fnihsrk2-1226925011858 21 May 2014.



In 1939, sasquatch enthusiast JW Burns, a teacher at the Chehalis Indian Day School, took an unusual, much-venerated artefact – a sasquatch mask, made partly from bear fur (below) – that belonged to Sts'ailes First Nation of British Columbia, Canada, and donated it to the Vancouver Museum. For the past 16 years, James Leon, a member of that First Nation, has been seeking this mask's whereabouts, in the hope of procuring its repatriation to its rightful owners, his Nation. However, because the mask had been on travelling display, it had proved impossible to track down – until Fate took a hand in the proceedings.

Attending another First Nation artefact repatriation event held at the Vancouver Museum recently, he happened to mention the missing mask to a lady from the museum sitting next to him, and was shocked but delighted when she replied that she had been viewing it just the other day! Naturally, Leon lost no time in requesting sight of the mask, and the museum duly agreed to repatriate it to the Sts'ailes. It had been carved by Ambrose Point, based upon ancient traditional stories of this First



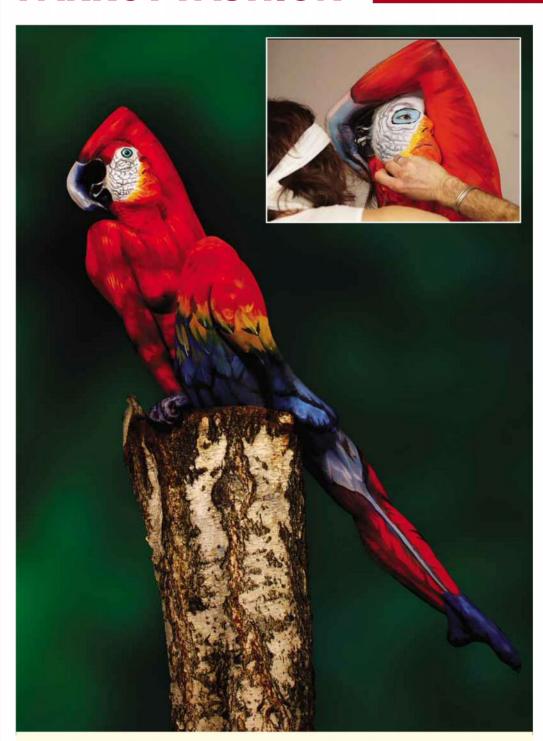


Nation. http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/british-columbia/sasquatch-mask-returned-to-british-columbia-first-nation/article18675367/ 14 May 2014.

#### A THUNDERBIRD FEATHER?

Cryptozoologists are familiar with the longstanding mystery of the missing thunderbird photograph, but what about an alleged thunderbird feather? Interviewed recently by Tucson-based freelance writer Craig S Baker for an online article on unsolved mysteries of the Wild West, veteran Wild West author/investigator WC Jameson made a claim of considerable potential significance regarding the legendary thunderbirds. Jameson stated that a Cherokee treasure hunter he once knew told him that while looking for a long-lost cache of Spanish silver in a Utah cave, he had dug up several huge feathers, each one over 18in (46cm) long and with a quill of comparable diameter to one of his fingers. Above the cave's mouth, moreover, was an ancient pictograph of an enormous horned bird (a piasa?).

Moreover, Jameson claimed that he actually owns one of these remarkable mega-feathers, and alleged that its species had not been positively identified by any of the several (unnamed) ornithologists who had seen the plumes. Assuming that Jameson's story is accurate, could this giant feather be a bona fide thunderbird plume? Tangible, physical evidence for cryptids is, by definition, a rare commodity, so such a specimen could be of great scientific worth, thanks to the considerable power of modern-day DNA analysis in ascertaining taxonomic identity or kinship. By subjecting the feather to such analysis (using samples of dried blood if present at its base, or viable cells collected from the calimus - the portion of the quill that had previously been imbedded underneath the bird's skin), biotechnologists might succeed where the ornithologists have reputedly failed, and duly unveil the hitherto-cryptic nature of its avian originator. Let us hope, therefore, that someone will be able to persuade Jameson to submit his giant mystery feather for formal DNA testing. http://mentalfloss. com/article/56759/9-unsolved-mysteries-wild-west



This painted woman uncannily resembling a parrot on a tree stump is the work of Johannes Stoetter, 35, a champion body-painter from Italy. It took him four hours to paint the female model using special breathable paint, and another hour to get the right position to photograph. *Metro, 14 Mar 2014.* 

#### **PSITTACINE'S ARREST**

Ashutosh Goswami thought he would get away with killing his aunt Neelam Sharma, 45, when she caught him red-handed stealing jewellery from her house in Agra, Uttar Pradesh, India - but he reckoned without her pet parrot turning stool pigeon. Vijay Sharma returned home on 20 February to find his wife and dog dead and Heera, the parrot, traumatised. Goswami was one of a number of suspects until Mr Sharma read out a list of names in front of Heera. On hearing Goswami's name, the parrot supposedly squawked: "Usne maara, usne maara!" ("He's the killer, he's the killer!"). In a variant narrative, Heera (whose name means 'diamond') became agitated when Goswami visited. "The parrot that was unusually quiet suddenly started shrieking and flapping around the cage," said Mr Sharma, who edits a Hindi daily newspaper. "It was clearly distressed about something and only calmed down when Ashutosh left. Then when I spoke to other people, every time I mentioned Ashutosh's name the parrot would start screeching. This made me really suspicious and I decided to call the police."

The Press Trust of India reported that Goswami was arrested for the murder and confessed. According to the well-respected agency, the role of Heera was hailed by Shalabh Mathur, the local senior superintendent of police, who said: "We got a lot of help from the parrot to zero in on the murderer," adding: "[Goswami] admitted that he had also killed the dog, worried that it could be used in an identity parade against him, but he had not thought about killing the parrot, which had been silent in its cage."

However, Supt. Satyarth Anirudh, the investigating officer, expressed scepticism about the crime-fighting parrot (inevitably dubbed 'Hercule Parrot' in the British press). "We interrogated all the suspects and the nephew of the victim confessed to the crime," he said. "I don't know where the parrot came into it." Perhaps the policeman felt upstaged. D.Telegraph, Metro, D.Mail, D.Mirror, 28 Feb; (Sydney) D.Telegraph, 1 Mar 2014.

#### **WUNSY TO THE RESCUE**

Wunsy, an African grey parrot, was being taken for a walk and a fly - in Sunny Hill Park, Hendon, north London, on 4 April when her owner, Rachel Mancino, was grabbed by the shoulders and shoved to the ground. The nine-month-old bird sitting on her shoulder flapped her wings and squawked, causing the would-be sexual predator - a white man aged 25 to 35 – to take flight towards the Great North Road. A short while before, he had groped another woman. Ms Mancino, 25, said: "I'm pretty sure [Wunsy] slapped him in the face. She's still a baby, she's still mastering her coming-to-the-rescue technique." D.Telegraph, D.Mail, Metro, 11 April 2014.

#### **PROZAC PARROT**

A parrot was locked in a garage for three years after constantly shouting the name of his owner's late wife, Sarah, in front of his new partner. African grey Roy, 26, was pining for his former mistress so much he also plucked out almost all his feathers. Now the bird has been rescued by Elaine Henley, Britain's only parrot psychologist, and put on Prozac to beat his depression. Vet Elaine, 44, from Glasgow, has helped stressed birds across the world to stop swearing, squawking and self-harming. D.Mirror, 29 Mar 2014.



ABOVE: Rachel Mancino and her African grey parrot Wunsy.

# Mythconceptions

**bv Mat Coward** 

176. THE LAST POLISH CAVALRY CHARGE



#### The myth

When the Germans invaded Poland in 1939, the Polish high command – aristocratic and out-of-touch – ordered lancers on horseback into action against Panzer tanks. It was Ruritania versus the 20th century, and could only have one outcome: the chivalrous, heroic and absurd Polish cavalry was wiped out, and thus ended Polish resistance.

#### The "truth"

As recently as 2009, a major British newspaper referred to the Polish cavalry charge as a "romantic and idiotic act of suicide" – but it never happened, except in the imaginations of Nazi propagandists. Its value as propaganda is obvious: it helped to present Germany's campaign as the historically inevitable, and therefore justifiable, triumph of modernism over feudalism. Some German sources even claimed that the backward Poles didn't know what the Panzers were; in fact, Poland had hundreds of tanks of its own, attached to cavalry regiments. The germ of the story is almost certainly a skirmish in Pomerania, on the first day of the invasion, when Polish lancers did indeed engage German *infantry*. They did so with considerable success, until forced to retreat by the chance arrival of German armoured cars. Polish resistance continued well after the invasion, while thousands of Poles fought on in the British armed forces, most notably in the Battle of Britain.

#### **Sources**

www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2009/sep/01/afghanistan-war-on-terror-history; www.theguardian.com/world/2011/apr/06/myth-of-polish-cavalry-charge; www.historynet.com/polish-cavalry-charges-tanks.htm

#### **Disclaimer**

It didn't happen... unless, of course, it did. If you have better information, please trot over to the letters page and share it with us.

#### Mythchaser

A reader who's been watching a lot of telly has noticed that when a character gets non-fatally shot, and the bullet stays inside him, he is at death's door until the slug is removed – at which point, his fever instantly breaks, and everyone relaxes. What, if anything, is so toxic about bullets, our reader asks – and how does this square with people unwittingly carrying them around in their bodies for years without ill effects?

DON'T MISS MYTHCONCEPTIONS THE BOOK

OUT NOW ONLINE AND IN ALL GOOD BOOKSHOPS

## **NECROLOG**

We commemorate a podiatrist who developed an interest in alien implants, a PR pioneercum-pretender to an obscure 'kingdom' and a transhumanist Japanese conceptual artist



#### **ROGER LEIR**

A podiatrist by training, from the late 1980s Leir became increasingly involved with the Mutual UFO Network (MUFON). Attending one of its conferences in 1995, he was presented with several foot X-rays from a woman who believed herself to be an alien abductee. The scans indicated that there was something in her big toe, and Leir offered to operate on her free of charge. On 19 August 1995 he extracted two very small foreign objects, metallic in appearance. A second patient underwent surgery that same day for an object about the size of a watermelon seed. embedded between his thumb and index finger. Initial analysis of the objects at the New Mexico Institute of Mining and Technology produced only tentative results, but a reference to the composition of meteors in the final laboratory report convinced Leir that they were extraterrestrial in origin. However, the university's associate professor Paul Fuierer, who had conducted the metallurgical study, denied the possibility of alien involvement, while other medical sceptics pointed out that the "protective membrane" on all three objects was a normal biological response to the presence of a foreign object in the body, and not, as Leir claimed, a new kind of organic science at work. Further tests showed that the 'implants' were composed of commonly found elements, such as iron and aluminium.

Unsurprisingly, such reservations did little to deter public interest, and Leir soon found his Los

Angeles consulting office inundated with scans from people beseeching him to examine supposedly afflicted body parts. Leir enlisted a dentist, a radiologist and a general surgeon to assist him on another 14 operations. Some of the objects retrieved were said to emit "deep space frequency" radio waves, while others were supposed to possess unlikely magnetic properties, or contain unusual crystalline structures. Addressing the Citizen Hearing On Disclosure in 2013, Leir remained adamant that the 'implants' could not have entered the body by conventional means, since "there was no visible scar formation and no interruption of the integrity of the skin". In his book *Real-Life X-Files* (2001), paranormal investigator Joe Nickell concluded that the alleged implants appeared to be ordinary objects such as glass shards or metal fragments that had become lodged in the body due to accidental falls or walking barefoot. Nickell said that Leir's associate, Derrel Sims, refused to cooperate when asked to provide a forensic medical institute with specimens or photos for analysis.

The Aliens and the Scalpel, detailing Leir's experiences with 'implant' surgery, was published in 1999, followed by Casebook: Alien Implants (2000). He made appearances in various television documentaries and attended conferences in more than 40 countries. In 2003 he travelled to Varginha, Brazil, to conduct his own research into the alleged crash of an alien craft there in 1996 - an event dubbed "the Brazilian Roswell". This formed the basis of his final book.

nis final book, UFO Crash in Brazil (2005). Roger K Leir, alien implant exponent, born San Francisco 1935; died 14 Mar 2014, aged

78.

#### **PHILIPPE BOIRY**

Besides founding the first public relations agency in Western Europe, Philippe Boiry was the pretender to the throne of Araucanía and Patagonia, with the title HRH Prince Philippe of Araucanía. The 'kingdom' of Araucanía and Patagonia was a state declared by French adventurer Orelia-Antoine de Tounens in territory now part of Chile and Argentina. For centuries, the indigenous Mapuche Indians had successfully defended their sovereign rights against the colonising ambitions of the Spanish, both on the battlefield and through treaties, but in the 19th century they faced a new threat from the young and assertive republics of Chile and Argentina, and by the 1850s were involved in a desperate struggle to retain their autonomy.

In 1860 they apparently agreed to de Tounens's suggestion that they should establish a constitutional monarchy in Araucanía, a part of what is now Chile south of the Bío Bío river. It is disputed whether he declared himself king or was elected. He furnished his new kingdom with a national anthem; blue, white and green flag; royal coat of arms; constitution; coinage; and various orders and medals. He made the town of Perquenco his capital. Subsequently, following

an approach by another tribal leader, Patagonia was annexed by the fledgling state.

King Orllie-Antoine (he changed his first name on assuming the throne) sought international recognition without success. In 1862

he was kidnapped by Chilean soldiers, deemed insane by both the Chilean and Argentine authorities and committed to

an asylum -

but the French

consul intervened and he was deported to France. He mounted three abortive expeditions to reclaim his throne, dying penniless in France in 1878. Since then, the "royal house" of Araucanía and Patagonia has remained in exile in France, its claims nurtured by enthusiasts in France and the US.

Boiry became the sixth claimant in 1951, when King Antonio III abdicated in his favour. He gave active support to the Mapuche Indians, who currently number about a million, in their continued campaign for self-determination, doling out medals, minting commemorative coins and addressing the UN Working Group on Indigenous Peoples - but he was reportedly cold-shouldered by most Mapuche organisations when he visited South America in 1989. He lived in Paris, but maintained a second residence at La Chèze, King Orllie-Antoine's family home near the village of Chourgnac d'Ans in the Dordogne, where he established a small museum featuring artefacts and documents pertaining to the kingdom of Araucanía and Patagonia and to the Mapuche people, along with an art gallery.

Philippe Paul Alexander Henry Boiry, royal pretender, born Paris 19 Feb 1927; died Chourgnac, Dordogne 5 Jan 2014, aged 86.

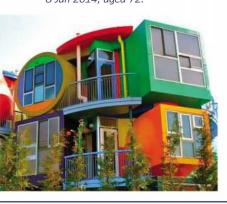
#### **MADELINE GINS**

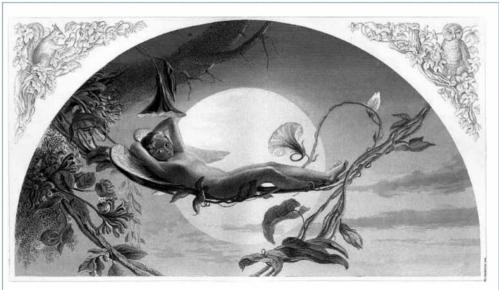
With her creative partner and husband Shusaku Arakawa (1936-2010), a Japanese-born conceptual artist and protégé of Marcel Duchamp, Madeline Gins set out to achieve everlasting life though architecture, designing structures that - they claimed would "counteract the usual human destiny of having to die". Their work, based loosely on a movement known as "transhumanism", stemmed from the idea that people degenerate and die because they live in surroundings that are too comfortable. The Arakawa-Gins solution was to create homes that leave the occupants feeling disoriented, dizzy, and slightly bilious.

"People, particularly old people, shouldn't relax and sit back to help them decline," Arakawa proclaimed.
"They should be in an environment that stimulates their senses." The couple's philosophy, which they called 'Reversible Destiny', resulted in designs for buildings where floors undulate like sand dunes; where kitchens are positioned at the bottom of steep slopes; where windows are too high, or too low, to look out of; where doors are missing, allowing no privacy; where electric sockets and switches are located in unexpected places on the walls; and where the whole is painted in dozens of clashing colours.



Their ideas remained largely theoretical until 2005 when they unveiled a small apartment complex in the Tokyo suburb of Mitaka, known as the Reversible Destiny Lofts. The estate agents' blurb touted "the discomforts of home"; some apartments even found tenants. A subsequent project, Bioscleave House on Long Island, New York, was similarly unsettling. The architects produced a manual for those having difficulty staying upright there, featuring such instructions as: "Try to maintain two (or more) separate tentativenesses, that is, two (or more) distinct areas of indeterminacy". Sounds distinctly fortean, though hardly cosy. The couple wrote several books, including Making Dying Illegal (2006). Bernie Madoff made off with their life savings in his mega-Ponzi scheme, exposed in 2008, and Arakawa died two years later. Madeline Helen Gins, artist and poet, born New York City 7 Nov 1941; died 8 Jan 2014, aged 72.





## FAIRIES, FOLKLORE AND FORTEANA

SIMON YOUNG FILES A NEW REPORT FROM THE INTERFACE OF STRANGE PHENOMENA AND FOLK BELIEF

WOMEN CLAIMING TO

#### ONE-EYED JOAN

Joan Tyrry of Taunton's troubles began in 1555, when she visited one Davyd Morris and told Davyd that his wife and his cattle had been bewitched by their neighbour. On

a subsequent visit, with what was possibly a lynch mob in tow, she named the witch as 'Simon Rychard'. But how did Joan know Simon's identity, the local ecclesiastical court asked at its next sitting? Well, that was simple enough, answered Joan innocently: the fairies had told her. You can imagine John Cotrell, who presided, almost swallowing his tongue on hearing her reply.

Joan, apparently oblivious to any shock she might have caused, continued: she had followed the fairies for 30 years and they had taught her "her Lyvynge"; sometimes, indeed, she danced with the fairies in the meadows. Now, there are other cases from the period of men and women claiming to fight witches with fairy aid: the problem is that these seers sounded suspiciously like witches themselves with their fairy familiars and their "[d]aunceinge yn grene meadowes", and all too often they ended up on the gallows or the pyre. Joan was luckier. She got some hard ecclesiastical hand slapping.

But, for me, anyway, the most interesting part of this case is a brief aside when Joan describes meeting a fairy. "And farther she saithe that on a tyme she mett w[i]th one of the fayre vayres beynge a man yn the marcatt

of Tawnton havynge a whyte Rodd yn his hand and she came to hym thynkynge to take acquayntance of hym and then her sight was cleane taken a waye."

Just in case the 16th-century English has stumped anyone: Joan sees the fairy man

in the market and goes up to him and she loses her sight in one eye; the court secretary goes on to note that Joan was, indeed, blind in one eye, "as yt appeith". This is fascinating, as there are several cases where early modern fairy seers claim to have been given their gifts after losing their sight. But it must also be recorded here that there is a yarn, much recounted in the 19th century, of a woman,

who alone sees a fairy stealing in a market. She goes up to said fairy and he is outraged that she can see through his invisibility. He asks her which eye she can see him with. He then blows or hits the offending eye and she is forever after blind there.

The earliest reference I can find to such a story dates back to the 18th century; yet, here we are, in the 16th century with the same essential plot. How do we explain the echo? The leaden positivist might wonder whether the tale did not originate in "the diseased mind" of Joan and then ask whether it had not spread, by rumour, throughout the Kingdom. I would prefer to think that this is the first recorded reference of a much older saga and that one-eyed Joan was living a fairy tale. Simon Young writes on folklore and history and runs www.fairyist.com



# the **UFO** files

FORTEAN TIMES presents our monthly section featuring regular sighting reports, reviews of classic cases, entries on major ufological topics and hands-on advice for UFO investigators. The UFO Files will benefit from your input, so don't hesitate to submit your suggestions and questions.

To contact The UFO Files, email: nufon@btinternet.com

## **FLYINGSAUCERY**

**ANDY ROBERTS & DR DAVID CLARKE PRESENT** THEIR REGULAR SURVEY OF THE LATEST FADS AND FLAPS FROM THE WORLD OF UFOLOGY

#### **ALIEN AGONY AUNT'S ROSWELL** REVELATION

As we write, a motley collection of people who belong to Britain's only support group for alien contactees is gathering for an 'experiencer' conference at Hastings in Sussex. Members of AMMACH (Anomalous Mind Management Contactee Helpline) include a Labour councillor who believes he has a hybrid child with his 9-ft-tall green alien 'mother' (see FT288:4) and a woman who believes her 'abductions' are triggered by fried chicken takeaways. Both featured in last year's memorable Channel 4 documentary Confessions of An Alien Abductee. This show opened a window onto a new phase of the alien contact syndrome, where a new generation of 'experiencers' are pick 'n' mixing abduction, contactee and New Age beliefs to produce a new mythology. When, in April, ITV's This Mornina invited Joanne Summerscales, an "agony aunt for victims of alien abduction", to discuss AMMACH's work during 'Supernatural Week', she said fellow experiencers did not believe in aliens. Rather, "It's a knowing... I just know they are there". Last year she was called, out of the blue, by 85-year-old Jo Walters from Bournemouth who had "some more information on Roswell". Walters, it was revealed, is another believer in UFOs and alien abductions. The octogenarian claims that on a trip to New Mexico she met the son of USAF General Nathan Twining, who played a prominent role in the US Air Force's first UFO investigation in 1947. The four-star general died in 1982 and had always refused to 'fess up about his role in the Roswell cover-up when quizzed by his son. But six weeks before his death he admitted: "It's true, there was a craft, there were beings found" and claimed that one alien lived for 15 years on a military base. If that wasn't far out enough, Twining senior became friends with this creature and had regular telepathic chats with it until its death around 1963! Belief-based researchers like Summerscales accept such stories as confirmation of what they already know. But seasoned ufologists will recognise them as examples of the 'deathbed confession', a taletype familiar to students of modern folklore. www.theufochronicles.com/2013/12/aliensurvived-roswell-crash-confesses.html

#### **EXPEDITION TO HESSDALEN**

The Hessdalen phenomena first came to attention early in the 1980s when it was revealed that residents of a remote sub-arctic

region, 400 km from Oslo, were regularly buzzed by luminous blobs of light, some the size of a car. An engineer, Erling Strand, launched Project Hessdalen in 1983 in an attempt to study them using scientific instrumentation (see **FT103:26-31; 189:30;** 204:29; 218:42-48). During the group's first expedition 188 sightings were logged and photographs taken, of which 53 could not be easily explained as lights from cars, planes and buildings. Sightings appeared to diminish during the 1990s, but small groups of scientists from Italy, Norway and France continued to collect data and test theories. These include the idea the lights might be a type of ball lightning, or 'dusty plasma' of the type imagined by the author of the MoD's Condign report. But plasmas are difficult to make, and attempts to find a natural source of energy in the valley, such as radon. have so far failed. But this summer Jader Monari of the Institute of Radio Astronomy in Medicina, Italy, is launching a fresh expedition to investigate the valley's unique geology in search of an answer. Monari suspects that minerals in Hessdalen's rocks, combined with acid leached from its mines into the river, could create a type of natural battery. Its electric charge might be sufficient to generate ionised gases that move around the valley and become visible at night. The Italian theory remains just that until a source of this putative electric field is found, but Monari hopes it may lead them to a new source of clean energy. Caroline Williams, 'Light fantastic', New Scientist, 10 May 2014.

CALLING OCCUPANTS...

If aliens exist, can they communicate? And how would we say hello to them if we made contact? Many people believe they have made contact and that many examples of alien writing have been received. But, as yet, no alien Rosetta Stone has been located, and so the glyphs, squiggles and alien alphabets remain untranslated. Messages received by 'contactees' might be genuine information from other species, but they are equally likely to be figments of the imagination.

Messages detected by radio telescopes are another matter entirely. Dr John Elliot (pictured below), a professor in Computing and Creative Technologies at Leeds Metropolitan University, is fascinated by the concept of alien languages and has devoted his spare time over the past 20 years to finding ways of decoding them. Elliott, who resembles a cross between Wyatt Earp and Lemmy and holds a PhD in the Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence (SETI), believes his algorithmic system for breaking down and analysing human languages could be the key to understanding alien messages. Elliott's method looks logical and robust. By analysing the structure of human languages and searching for the frequency of certain words, he has devised an algorithm that reveals their similarities. This algorithm, he believes, could be applied to any suspected messages received from space, revealing the encoded information. The lack of any alien signal so far doesn't deter him. He believes technology is the key: "We've just come out of the stone age in that respect. The power of computers is only just getting fast enough to do anything meaningful." But there are problems with any genuine message received. Any civilisation capable of sending messages across the vastness of space may be more technologically advanced than humanity, but not necessarily morally or ethically. Although the aliens' first message might be a simple 'hello', how do we know their intentions

> are peaceful? For every benign civilisation comprising loving Space Brothers, there could be equally as many who are the Universe's equivalent of Somalian pirates. By acknowledging and responding to any message received from out there, humankind is opening

itself to serious risk. Do we really want to take that risk, or should we remain in obscurity? People like Prof Elliott just might hold the key to our survival or demise.

www.dailymail. co.uk/sciencetech/ article-2626031/Couldman-communicate-ALIENS-Seti-astronomerreveals-maths-translateextra-terrestriallanguage.html

## ED CASEBOOK JENNY RANDLES RECALLS THE DAYS WHEN CROP CIRCLES WERE ALL ABOUT SCIENCE, NOT SYMBOLS

#### CATCHING A CODE

I am in the process of a fractious house move and whilst packing thousands of files into cardboard boxes came across one that made me smile. The file contained sheets of paper, each filled with lines and symbols. This took me back to the day that the writer – a wiry man with eyes that flittered from side to side - arrived on my doorstep unannounced, plonked these papers onto my living room rug and proceeded to explain their origin. They were, he stated, a message beamed into his brain during a UFO sighting and came from what he was sure were the alien pilots hiding inside the glowing golden blob. If only these patterns could be decoded then we would learn the truth and the world would change forever.

Fast-forward 25 years and the world has changed in many ways; but that alien code has not been responsible. I long since came to the conclusion that the golden blob was probably an aircraft, not a spacecraft, and the feverish scribbles were just that. A few people have attempted to unravel them, like a cosmic anagram-solving session, but the general consensus was that there is no order or pattern to be deciphered; they were nothing more than the consequence of a sincere vet misguided belief that superior beings had someone homed in on this ordinary chap from Lancashire and decided to impart secrets of the Universe via a series of squiggles.

UFO research has a strange history of this kind of thing - codes and messages that may or may not reveal something of great significance in the form of shapes or words 'channelled' into consciousness. The contactee movement of the 1950s offers several examples of such perceived profundity, but it occurs in more straightforward UFO sightings also, like the case above. Indeed, as will no doubt be debated in these pages over coming months, Britain's best known case -Rendlesham Forest, Suffolk, December 1980 - has recently spawned something similar.

That discussion is for another day, but, of course, there is one area of UFO-related research where secret codes are almost the raison d'être for its continuation. This is the crop circle season, now upon us, when the fields of (especially) southern England have sprouted mystic messages across wheat and corn that some believe are filled with deep significance.

I got involved in circle research quite early on, thanks to the excellent work done on the very first circles by Ian Mrzyglod and colleagues of the west country UFO team Probe, and an unexpected ally in the form of Journal of Meteorology editor Dr Terence Meaden. These circles in oat fields in Wiltshire in 1980 were barely mentioned outside the local press and are often unrecognised as a starting point because global interest in the subject did not get going until 1983, when numbers proliferated across Wessex. But they established something vital.

Simple circles have been around forever, and vet until there was a named mystery that seemed to include them they went largely unnoticed. They turn up not just in cereal crops,



but also in dust and sand and grass or pretty much anything that can retain a temporary impression. They are not spectacular or blatantly artificial and - while many of them have indeed been the result of pranks triggered by the intensity of crop circle mania - the older ones, predating this fad, looked to the first observers to be what common sense would infer: the result of natural causes, specifically weather phenomena.

As for the symbols, shapes and patterns that the world today associates with crop circle study, they were very much an add-on that came with the subsequent flood, when the media were hungry for ever deeper levels to the mystery and seeking answers that would sell more copy than mundane stuff like the wind. Whatever the cause of these bizarre structures that pepper the fields of the past three decades - with beautiful intricacy best appreciated from the air – they are not what was originally there for centuries and, I am almost certain, do not have the same basic

The symbology of crop circle patterns took off in May 1990 when the so-called pictograms first appeared. But they responded to 10 years of basic circles with increasing complexity, creating certainty that mere weather was not to blame. This is no surprise, as two of the most prolific hoaxers of the time confessed they started doing symbols to shut down the sensible people saying that the small circle patterns were caused by atmospheric forces.

Paul Fuller and myself had been writing on the subject for BUFORA since 1982 and lectured at a science conference in Oxford alongside prestigious atmospheric physics specialists from the UK, US and Japan. We wrote 'Mystery of the Circles' – a mini book published through BUFORA in 1986 - in an attempt to bring sobriety to the increasingly hysterical media coverage, and took copies to all the major newspapers, gaining credible pieces in places such as the Guardian and Telegraph. BUFORA (British UFO Research Association) also staged a conference in London debating the circles where all the early leading researchers of all shades of opinion took the platform. At the end, a vote was taken among the inevitably very pro-UFO audience. Overwhelmingly, this backed hoaxes and the weather as the best solution.

UFO research has rarely been given credit for the stance it took and what I regard as the good sense it adopted. But the likes of Ian Mrzyglod, Paul Fuller and BUFORA should be applauded.

After years looking at the subject - from

the ground and the air - Paul and I concluded our studies as the evidence mounted. Simple circles were an age-old phenomenon that had been recorded in folklore, described in science journals as early as 1909 and even witnessed being created several times – not by spaceships but by atmospheric forces. While these were of great interest to physicists and spawned intriguing lab experimentation, they were not alien or even supernatural. But they could be associated with some UFO sightings because electrified charged, rotating air can appear as a dark lens shape if seen in daytime and as a glowing sphere at night.

Our other conclusion was that a mythology had attached itself to this little-understood natural phenomenon and attracted hoaxers and speculators to escalate this simple anomaly into extraordinary patterns creating messages to be deciphered that were scattered over the fields of England. Such artificial complexity retained the mystery and fascinated the world at large. But it was a runaway social consequence of a smaller scale anomaly being hijacked by a global community and the media.

Ironically, the first clear message in the crops was a giveaway. It appeared in a field near Winchester just before the geometric shapes and symbols arrived and stated: "We are not alone". That seems to be a pretty clear indication that a human being was responsible; otherwise, it would surely have said: "You are not alone."

In the end, Paul and I wrote a book called Crop Circles: A Mystery Solved and left the field. We accepted that the mystery was essentially solved – a rare pleasure in our line of work. We didn't claim it was solved by us, of course, but by many people – and specifically by science. But, by then, those with a vested interest in the ongoing sideshow started to accuse us of being spoilsports or – as some did in darker tones – government agents spreading disinformation.

I was never sure if it helped or hindered that perception when noted sceptic and science writer Arthur C Clarke wrote to congratulate our crusade with the words: "It would indeed be ironic – and indeed poetic justice – if the crop circle, far from proving the ET hypothesis, drove the last nail into its coffin."

Arthur was premature in that aspiration. But the story of the circles is a vital one for ufology and other areas of fortean study. We should look at how it progressed from scientific explanations to decoding symbols; it's a trajectory that poses questions relevant to more than just the summer crop fields.

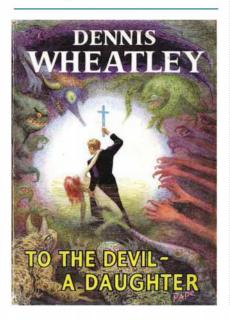
# BRITISH VOODOO THE BLACK ART OF ROLLO AHMED

Rollo Ahmed practised black magic, taught Dennis Wheatley yoga, helped Aleister Crowley find a flat and wrote a popular history of occultism. **CHRISTOPHER JOSIFFE** explores the life and times of a forgotten figure from the annals of British magic whose journey from British Guyana to the England of the 1920s encompassed both exoticism and racism.

ention the name of Rollo Ahmed, and – if it sparks any recognition at all - most people will say that they associate him in some way with bestselling novelist Dennis Wheatley (see FT256:38-43). Ahmed and Wheatley were indeed friends for many years. In his autobiography, Wheatley described his friend as "one of the most unusual men I have ever met. Born in Egypt, he had spent the greater part of his adult life in the Caribbean and South America. He had charming manners and laughed a lot. There was little he did not know about Voodoo... whether Ahmed was a follower of the Left Hand Path or not, he was a jolly fellow and I got a lot of useful information from him."1

Wheatley had been introduced to Ahmed by maverick Labour MP and all-round 'bad egg' Tom Driberg. Ahmed, a practising occultist, advised Wheatley on specific details of magic for the latter's first black magic blockbuster, The Devil Rides Out (1935). A thinly disguised portrait of Ahmed appears in chapter 14 of Wheatley's later black magic novel To the Devil - A Daughter (1953). The chapter in question is entitled 'The Black Art,' which happened also to have been the title of Ahmed's 1936 overview and history of magic. Two investigators, 'C.B.' and John Fountain, visit the country house of the novel's villain, Canon Copely-Syle, and are greeted at the front door by "a manservant of a type that one would hardly have expected to find in an Essex village. He wore a red fez and was robed in a white burnous. His skin was very dark, but only his thick lips suggested negro blood; and C.B. put

# "HE WORE A RED FEZ AND WAS ROBED IN A WHITE BURNOUS"



him down at once as an Egyptian. Crossing his black hands on his chest he made a deep bow, then waited silently until C.B. asked: 'Is Canon Copely-Syle in?' <sup>2</sup>

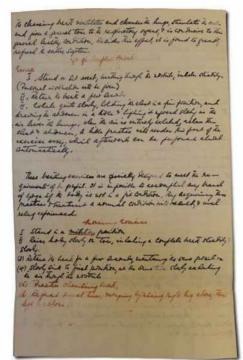
But Ahmed and Wheatley's relationship was not one of English gentleman and colonial manservant.

At one point, Ahmed had been Wheatley's Yoga teacher, instructing both the writer and his wife. (This was at a time when Yoga was a relatively mysterious and little-understood practice in the UK; it was only in the 1960s and afterwards that it began to attain the popularity it has today.) Wheatley had been impressed by Ahmed's extensive travels; he had apparently lived in the Amazonian jungle regions of Yucatán, Guyana and Brazil, and had travelled throughout Asia, including a stay in Burma, which was where (he told Wheatley) he had learned Raja Yoga.

Ahmed's Yoga – or at least the instruction he gave to the Wheatleys – seems to have placed an emphasis on breath control. Dennis Wheatley was keen to acquire knowledge of techniques for the arousal of Kundalini energy, but Ahmed did not feel he was ready for this: "I think that the Kundalini or spinal concentration is just a bit dangerous for you at the present, as you have not yet established the Breathing. I am anxious to give you the best, but feel that we must make haste slowly." <sup>3</sup> Wheatley had, he believed, been given a practical demonstration of Ahmed's powers, when, on a freezing cold London night, Ahmed

**LEFT:** Wheatley's novel *To the Devil – A Daughter* included a thinly disguised portrait of Rollo Ahmed.







ABOVE LEFT: A page of a letter from Rollo Ahmed to Dennis Wheatley and his wife, whose Yoga teacher he became. ABOVE RIGHT: Joan and Dennis Wheatley in 1933.

arrived at Wheatley's Queen's Gate house for dinner. He was dressed only in a light cotton suit, wearing no coat, hat or gloves, and had walked four miles from his flat in Clapham. Upon shaking Ahmed's hand, Wheatley found it to be as "warm as toast" – the result, apparently, of Ahmed's ability to generate internal heat via Yoga.

Wheatley had other reasons to be impressed by Ahmed and his occult powers; on another evening, he was entertaining Ahmed together with a member of the Society for Psychical Research, apparently psychically gifted. After Ahmed had departed, the SPR man asked Wheatley whether he had noticed the small black imp leaping about behind Ahmed. A demonic imp subsequently made an appearance in Wheatley's *The Satanist* (1960).

#### THAT OLD BLACK MAGIC...

Such was Wheatley's respect for his friend's knowledge that when his publisher, John Long Ltd., asked him to write a non-fiction book on the history of magic to capitalise on the success of The Devil Rides Out, he instead suggested that Ahmed write the book. The result was The Black Art (John Long, 1936), an overview of black magic and sorcery with a curious European/Western bias. Curious, because Ahmed, one of few non-white people on the British 1930s occult scene, was not of European descent. Many believed him to be Egyptian, and he was happy to encourage this belief. In fact, Abdul Said Ahmed (his real name) had been born in the colony of British Guyana (now Guyana), around 1898. He apparently told Wheatley that his father had been Egyptian and his mother West Indian.

The Black Art featured a generous introduction by Wheatley, who wrote: "I feel that no-one could have been better suited to write upon this mysterious and fascinating subject than Rollo Ahmed – a member of that ancient race which enjoyed by far the



greatest and longest-enduring civilisation of antiquity, the Egyptians. From his father's family he acquired his initial knowledge of the secret art. However, his mother was a native of the West Indies and, while Rollo was still quite young, his parents decided to leave Egypt. For many years he lived with them in those devil-ridden islands and in the little-explored forests of Yucatán, Guiana and Brazil. In these places he acquired first-hand knowledge not only of the primitive magic of the forest Indians, but of Voodoo and Obeah – those sinister cults which are still practised by the majority of the descendants of the slaves brought over from Africa." <sup>4</sup>

Ahmed himself had stated that his exposure to magic and the occult had begun at a very early age. In British Guyana he had encountered indigenous Indians "who practised a form of Ritual Black Magic which may be called tribal magic". <sup>5</sup> He also stated

that he had met Voodoo practitioners amongst the black population.

HULTON ARCHIVE / GETTY IMAGES

Despite Wheatley's commendation of Ahmed's knowledge of the subject, the book contains some perplexing errors, such as the statement that the Lancashire Pendle Witches case took place in Scotland. 6 In addition, a modern reader will be struck by The Black Art's antiquated view of indigenous magical practices and early modern European witchcraft as barely-disguised Satanism, and of present-day secret groups of jaded, dissolute sensation-seekers dabbling in black magic. It recalls the writings of one-time priest and full-time eccentric Montague Summers, who genuinely believed that Satan's hand was at work in the various manifestations of paganism, witchcraft, voodoo and the like, across the world.

A 1950s article by Ahmed, 'Black Magic Today,' took a similar line. 8 In it, he claimed that English occult societies hold regular Black Masses, "once or twice a year, usually in the deserted ruins of churches or in some cavernous place in a remote position," as well as lesser rituals once a week, usually on Fridays or Saturdays, in a room bedecked in black and red draperies and lit by black candles. At these ceremonies, the participants affirm their renunciation of "all orthodox religions and allegiance to God" and "to uphold the service of evil." Then, they throw back their headdresses and consume "huge quantities of food and drink", sometimes followed by "a weird dance" during which "all clothing is cast aside, and men and women with joined hands prance wildly, with their backs to the altar. In the end the dancers fall exhausted to the ground. After that animals or birds are sacrificed on the altar steps, the members drinking the blood and in some cases even eating the raw flesh of the victim."

Ahmed also makes references to specific cults or sects which, he says, are actually societies that practise Black Magic: "Societies

#### **LONDON AFTER DARK**

Inspector Fabian of the Yard investigates black magic in the capital's immigrant communities during the 1950s

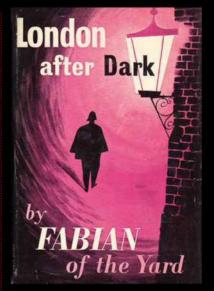
Interestingly, with regard to the Lancaster Gate temple, ex-Scotland Yard detective Robert Fabian ('Fabian of the Yard') wrote in his 1954 book *London After Dark*:

There is a house in Lancaster Gate that consists of one-room flatlets. The landlord and his wife occupy the ground floor and basement. Each room has a covered wash-bowl, a rather dispirited bed, a slot-meter gasfire, rickety table and two wooden chairs.

The landlord's wife dabbles in spiritualism, sometimes holds private séances. Her husband is an amateur herbalist. Their flatlets are seldom taken for more than a few days. They are too dingy and untended to be comfortable. Guests come and go.

Among them come and go the Satanists. Down in the cellar is a small doorway – probably, at one time, it was a fireplace. It leads through to the house whose walls adjoin it. The front door of this house faces upon an entirely different street. It is privately owned, and, from its cellar, stairs go to an old-fashioned lift-shaft, up which a spiral metal staircase ascends and stops at a sliding door, padded with black felt. Beyond this door is a private Temple of Satanism!

Was this the same temple as Ahmed's temple of Osiris? Or was 1950s Lancaster Gate a hotbed of occultism? Elsewhere in this black magic chapter of *London After Dark*, Fabian refers to special Satanic gatherings where "men and women will congregate at midnight in secret temples of South Kensington, Paddington and – I believe – Bloomsbury" <sup>2</sup> Lancaster Gate,



Paddington and other areas like these were known at the time for their large houses divided into small flats, as a result being associated with a transient and sometimes immigrant population, with a distinct flavour of London bohemia.

Black migrants to London are explicitly alluded to in Fabian's description of the Satanic temple, invoking the twin fears of black magic and immigration:

At one end of the long room is an altar, exactly as in a small church – except that the altar candles are black wax, and the crucifix is head downwards. There are no seats. Around the walls are low divans. Alongside each burns a saucer of dried herbs. Symbols of wizardry are daubed on cloths that completely cover the walls.

Pentagrams and sigils (supposed to be the magic signs of devils) are on the low ceiling. On the left of this altar, is a black African idol – the ju-ju, obviously, of some heathen fertility rite. It is nearly five feet high, squat, repulsive, and obscenely constructed. It is rubbed to a greasy polish by the ecstatic bare flesh of the worshippers. <sup>3</sup>

Fabian suggested that people became ensnared in black magic and Satanism as a result of Satanic groups concealing their true nature under the guise of a more innocuous practice, something akin to the 'cannabis as gateway drug' theory. His "Satan-worshippers... get their new victims among likely-looking students at lectures on spiritualism, necromancy, tribal rites" 4 may be compared to Ahmed's statement in The Black Art: "There are a few sects to-day practising black magic who more or less openly announce their perverted religious views, but most of these societies exist ostensibly for astrology, mystic development, and so on, while a few of them call themselves private spiritualist groups. In many cases members join in all good faith...'

- 1 London After Dark: An Intimate Record of Night Life in London, and a Selection of Crime Stories from the Casebook of Ex-Superintendent Robert Fabian, The Naldrett Press, 1954, p75.
- 2 Ibid. p74.
- 3 Ibid, p76.
- 4 Ibid, p75.
- 5 Rollo Ahmed, The Black Art, 1971 edition, p267.

actually practising Black Magic are difficult to track down, because on the surface they are something else... They may be spiritualists with private séances... They may be some weird cult or sect which appears harmless but which has an inner and secret membership which is not." <sup>10</sup>

One such, he writes, is The Brotherhood of the Golden Hay, based in Peters Marland, a village on the edge of Exmoor, and headed by two women, the chief one being "of the masculine, lesbian type." Members came down from London and participated in "doubtful ceremonies in an old chapel." Its Priestesses wore "long purple robes with scarlet fillitts [sic] round the head and scarlet girdles." Apparently this remote location had been chosen because it had been the site of an old battlefield. Another group he names is the Sons of Osiris, based at Lancaster Gate [see panel: 'London After Dark']. Its members dress as Egyptian deities; they "ostensibly meet for the purpose of visiting the dead in a trance, but who in reality practise sorcery... mainly concerned with the using of spirits for personal ends, and the casting of spells."

It will be noted that neither of these groups, according to his account, appear

to practise what we would understand as Black Magic. Ahmed does go on to mention "sects of female so-called masons - some of which are harmless and some of which cover evil purposes" and other "mixed so-called masonic societies which practise... marriage with demons and pacts with evil spirits." 11 It is interesting to note his seeming opposition to co-masonry (the admittance to the Lodge of men and women), but he gives no further details, other than to say that one of the latter groups was based outside Bournemouth. It is highly probable that this refers to the Rosicrucian Fellowship of Crotona, based at Christchurch, some of whose members were co-masons, and some of whom - according to Gerald Gardner - were also members of the fabled New Forest coven, into which he was apparently initiated in the 1930s. How Ahmed knew about this secretive group is an intriguing question in itself.

#### **VOODOO HISTORIES**

It is odd that Wheatley commends Ahmed to his readers for the latter's first-hand knowledge of Voodoo, Obeah and Indian magical practice, since there is relatively little coverage of these in *The Black Art*,

and what there is takes a superficial and Eurocentric view. Presumably, the publisher was looking for a non-fiction equivalent to *The Devil Rides Out*, something similar to Summers's popular works on witchcraft and black magic. Perhaps a middlebrow 1930s readership was not ready for *Confessions of an Obeah Man*.

A sample of *The Black Art*'s chapter headings will give an indication of the scope of the book: 'Egyptian Rites and Practices', 'Jewish Necromancy and Magic', 'Magic in Greece and Rome', 'The Dark Ages, Mediæval Sorcery and Black Magic', 'Witchcraft, Vampirism and Werewolves in Europe', 'Black Magic in the British Isles', 'Necromancy and Spiritualism'. While there is one chapter that deals, in part, with African magic, it is titled 'Primitive Races and Black Magic', with a subheading promising a description of the habits and beliefs of savage races in connection with witchcraft. <sup>12</sup>

The chapter is a whistle-stop tour of these "barbarous peoples," including native Alaskans, Burmese, Cambodians, Polynesians and Africans, of which last, Ahmed gives a few instances. One is an African secret society known as the Ngil,



" Psychic phenomena . . . where materialisations . . . are sought."



"He (the magician) clothes such forms in the shape he desires."



"Among the majority . . . sorcery and magic are the prerogatives of the witch-doctors, and Secret Societies."

ABOVE: Three illustrations by artist CA Mills from the first edition of Rollo Ahmed's 1936 history of magic and occultism, The Black Art.

initiation into which involves "many obscene and disgusting rites, together with excessive gluttony." 13 Another is the Leopard Society of Sierra Leone, whose members dress in leopard skins for their ceremonies, and are thought to be "'Ju-Ju' or were-leopards, believed "to roam through the forest in bands, bent on evil and destruction." Another surprising claim is made about the pre-Buddhist Bon practitioners of Tibet, who, Ahmed says, "secretly make living sacrifices, accompanied by horrible blood rituals" and whose symbol is "the swastika with its arms reversed, which indicates its lunar origin" 15 as opposed to the 'good luck' solar swastika. In an early manifestation of 'Nazi occultism' or 'Hitler as black magician' theories, Ahmed goes on to state that: "In this connection it is rather suggestive that the German Nazis presumably unconsciously chose the same reversed aspect of the swastika for their emblem; the sign which represents to most occultists the sinister 'Soma' influence of the moon, and the dark and blood-stained emanations from it. 16 Given that this was written in 1936, when the true horror of the Nazi regime (whether one regards it as having been occult-inspired or not) had not yet become public knowledge, this is prescient of Ahmed.

Writing that "in the past very few of the Negro secret societies were free from the taint of cannibalism," 17 Ahmed also suggests that until recently, human sacrifice as a means of conjuring rain was commonly found "among the natives of the Pacific Islands, and also among those of the West Indies." 18 He claims that travellers have testified to having witnessed such atrocities, although it is unclear whether he is referring to the Pacific or the Caribbean. In a later chapter, on North and South America, he explains that: "two important kinds of black magic are practised in the United States, as well as in the West Indies and Guiana, by the Negro population who were originally imported from Africa. These two branches are Voodooism and

# "THE VICTIMS' FLESH WAS GIVEN TO THE CELEBRANTS TO FAT"

Obeah, and both are carried on today... Voodooism is Devil worship pure and simple. In past days it entailed the sacrifice of a girl-child who was called 'the goat without horns'." <sup>19</sup>

In similarly lurid fashion, Ahmed describes the typical Voodoo ceremony, which, he writes, was "carried out in lonely and desolate places, when the moon was full, the participants joining hands and dancing round the altar. Sometimes these dances were in honour of the moon as representing the 'Old Master' or Devil... As the dances grew wilder, the victims were killed and pieces of the quivering flesh given to each of the celebrants to eat, which spurred them on to even greater delirium. They shouted invocations to the 'Old Master' and the 'Sweet Moon' ... Such scenes were usually... accompanied by drunkenness and delirium".20

However, Devil-worship is not and was not a feature of Caribbean Voodoo or other African-Diasporic practice, and Ahmed – as a former native of Guyana – would presumably have been aware of this. What, then, do we make of such passages? Was he, perhaps, pandering to popular racist sentiment of the time, and giving

his British readership what they wanted? Or were these his genuine beliefs? Again, in another chapter of the book, Ahmed declares that "Everyone recognises that sorcery and magic are a natural part of the lives of barbarous peoples, but many find it difficult to believe that black magic has any reality in advanced countries". <sup>21</sup> Perhaps such views indicate Ahmed's reinvention of himself as an Egyptian, having repudiated his Caribbean past as a means to gaining acceptance in British society.

#### **I RISE**

A similar scene is described in Ahmed's 1937 novel, I Rise: The Life Story of a Negro (John Long, 1937), thought to be at least semi-autobiographical. In the book's foreword, Ahmed writes: "None of the characters is a portrait, but all the most important circumstances are founded upon fact." 22 The relevant passage is one which the protagonist, Caleb Buller, witnesses a Voodoo ceremony in Guyana as a young man. The celebrants, lit by torchlight and the light of the Moon, cry to "Ole Man Moon!" and "Ole Man Debbil!" as the muchfeared Obeah-man, old Kola, sacrifices a black goat. Could this have been a ritual that Ahmed had witnessed as a young man in Guyana? Interestingly, the novel also features some less dramatic (and thus more convincingly realistic) examples of African Diasporic magical practice. The protagonist's father consults a deck of playing cards for divination purposes; he also announces his intention "do some magic, an' put a spot ob Voodoo on de one what's stealin' Mammy's eggs." 23 Caleb then describes his father outside their shack, squatting down on the ground, and "engrossed with a tiny fire lit inside a shallow tin" round which "he had made a small circle of bones, and what looked like shiny beans. He was muttering something very rapidly, and every now and then he took a pinch of some powdery substance from a paper bag he was holding

and threw it on the fire, which then leaped up with vivid green and orange flames... The muttering grew louder and more rapid, and suddenly my father bent his head, dropped the paper bag and began rhythmically to beat the earth with the flat of his palms. The resulting sound was something between a miniature drum-beat, and the thudding of galloping hooves. For some unknown reason this procedure struck terror into my heart... A choking sensation seized my throat..." <sup>24</sup>

The result of this ritual is that Caleb becomes so terrified that he confesses to his father that it was he who stole the eggs! But evidently his father forgives him; later in the novel, after Caleb has relocated to England, he receives a good-luck message from his father: "Enclosed were two thin twigs, crossed, and bound about with white horse's hair, and a mysterious-looking piece of knotted thread. Some of Poupa's magic. I treasured this characteristic little evidence of my father's thought for me, and kept those twigs for many a year." <sup>25</sup>

While there are some episodes in *I Rise*, such as the above, which deal with magic, in general, the novel – dedicated to Paul Robeson – is more concerned with issues of race and racism. Tracing the protagonist's journey from his childhood in Guyana to Liverpool and thence to London, it illustrates the culture shock experienced by a young man moving from a rural to an urban environment, and from the Caribbean to England, coming up against the Mother Country's attendant prejudice and discrimination directed against a member of one of her Colonies.

Arriving in a cold and damp Liverpool in October 1921, Caleb attempts to find a place to stay: "It was one thing to search; quite

another to find. I had not expected equality in England, but neither was I prepared for a colour-bar. As soon as doors opened, and the maids or proprietors saw me standing there, excuses were made. Liverpool was apparently full to overflowing. They were very sorry, there was no room." <sup>26</sup>

He tries several B&Bs or hotels, but each time receives the same message: "Sorry. Full up." Seeing a notice fixed to the door of one such establishment, reading "No Jews. No coloured people," he determines to speak his mind at the next house: "Ah beg your pardon. Perhaps you don't understand. I am British, not a foreigner." Once again, tired and shivering with cold, he is turned away.

Eventually Caleb manages to find a "dreadful room" in a small hotel, whose

PASE
The life story
of a Negro

ROLLO
AHMED

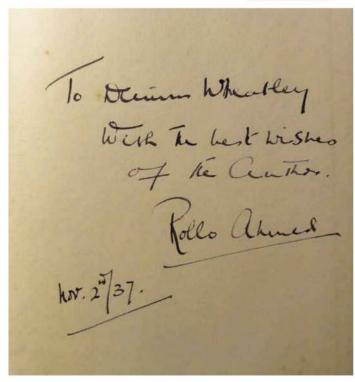
Author of
The Black Art"

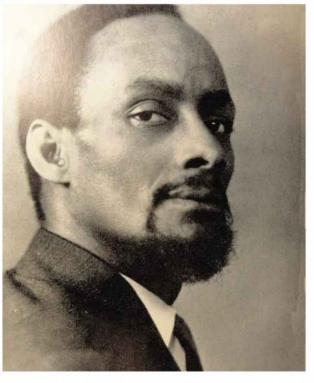
manager demands 3½ guineas – for which he gets the use of a gas fire and the dining room.

"What is all this?" Caleb asks. "For streets and streets I cannot get a room at all... and now for a room that is horrible you demand an exorbitant price." He is at pains to show that he is not as unsophisticated and primitive as the English seem to suppose: "I come from a lovely home in British Guiana: I suppose you people think of us as savages, running about in skins brandishing spears, or at least squatting in log cabins, when we are at home." Eventually, he manages to haggle the price down to 35 shillings, for which he may have use of the bath "last thing at night," when the other guests have finished using it. 27

#### LUCKY BEANS AND CROCUSERS

It was hard, too, to obtain employment. Having been a gifted dancer in Guyana, Caleb attempts to find work in Liverpool theatres and nightclubs, but is rebuffed. In desperation, he goes to Birkenhead docks looking for casual work unloading cargo vessels. The foreman refuses to take him on, not on the grounds that there is no work, but because "you fellows ought to be sent back where you came from. There's no room for you here." 28 Compelled to leave the hotel when his money runs out, Caleb finds a room with a landlord who lets to theatrical people. He then meets a middle-aged black man, Warren Oldfield, who invites him to a prayer meeting. Oldfield had been a qualified chemist with a successful business in Birmingham, but had been forced to sell up after a false accusation of procuring an abortion. He now sells herbal remedies, and introduces Caleb to this trade. He is able to





TOP: Ahmed's semi-autobiographical novel of 1937. ABOVE LEFT: Wheatley's signed copy, with a dedication from Rollo. ABOVE RIGHT: Author portrait from The Black Art.







ABOVE: The colourful Prince Monolulu – born plain Peter McKay – also came to Britain from Guyana and was a legendary fixture at British race meetings for decades.

utilise his showmanship on the market stalls, "growing proficient in the art of entertaining and wheedling my crowd, selling them 'lucky African beans'..." <sup>29</sup>

This seems to have been a popular source of income for black men at this time. Later, having moved to London, Caleb meets "coloured men who called themselves doctors, who lived in pokey holes in Brixton, Lewisham, Stoke Newington, and the Gray's Inn Road. They mostly possessed tumbledown cars, and pedalled [sic] patent medicines at various markets, as I had once done." <sup>30</sup>

The memoirs of another mid-20th century black immigrant to Britain, Ernest Marke's In Troubled Waters: Memoirs of my Seventy Years in England, confirm this. Marke - like Caleb - first tried his hand at show business, and then, when this failed - again, like Caleb - decided to try his hand as a 'crocuser.' This was the traders' term for the selling of herbal remedies and other medicines at markets. Marke learned the trade from legendary crocuser 'Professor' Edgar B Knight, a self-styled Abyssinian herbalist based in Wombwell, Yorkshire, where he was a muchloved figure. The sartorially elegant Knight dressed either in immaculate Western clothes or in equally expensive African garments. In fact, he had nothing to do with Abyssinia (modern Ethiopia) or any other part of Africa; like Rollo Ahmed, he had

been born in Demerara, Guyana. Renowned for his suave patter and perfect English, Knight was a very successful crocuser; one of his spiels would proceed along the following lines: "This particular herb only grows in my country and this is the first time it is being introduced to the Western world." In fact, the herbal remedies and other nostrums, whilst genuine, had been obtained from English chemists' suppliers. Marke explained Knight's reasoning: "He told me he never would have been half as successful if the public had known that he was from the Western world. Since he was a herbalist, he said, and herbs being nature's medicine, he had to present himself as a son of nature; for only then would they look up to him and believe in him.

'And I'll tell you something else [said Knight]; everyone who takes my medicine will be sure to find some improvement in his health. It matters not if my medicine is good, they'll find it good because I have impressed them and made them believe'." <sup>31</sup>

Another crocuser with whom Marke became friends was 'Black Dougie'. He was from Jamaica but, like Knight, let it be known that he was an African. "He was well educated, a master of words in the English language, and very dark with a pugnacious look." He also had a perfect set of teeth, which, Marke recalled, he used to great effect when selling a home-made tooth

powder: "In Africa where I come from," he'd spiel, "we clean our teeth with this very preparation! The root powder in it protects both gums and teeth, with the result that false teeth are absolutely unknown amongst my people. In fact, if I could take my teeth from my mouth and replace them in the presence of my people I would be acclaimed and accepted immediately as the greatest witch-doctor in all Africa!" 32

Yet another celebrated figure was 'Dr' Lascelles, who was genuinely African (from Sierra Leone). Marke describes him as "tall, black as ebony, with a commanding appearance. When Lascelles walked in the streets, everybody looked." He dressed in "spectacular Eastern costume" and his 'racket' was lucky charms; he sold one called 'Ragal,' which, he told his customers, was an African Goddess of Fortune. <sup>33</sup>

Marke was also friends with the legendary Prince Monolulu, the racetrack king, famous for his flamboyant 'African' costume, ebullient personality, and his "touch a Black man for luck" and his "I've gotta 'orse" routine. Monolulu, again, was no African, but had been born – like Ahmed – in Guyana, as plain Peter McKay.

The point I am trying to make is that these black entrepreneurs were not only small businessmen and entrepreneurs; they were also showmen, playing the role of the exotic 'Other' to their audiences/customers. And

we may view Rollo Ahmed in a similar light. Presumably he chose to style himself as an Egyptian partly because of the racism of the time, whereby a black man would not have been treated as an intellectual equal. But this Egyptian identity was also presumably a response to the fascination and allure of all things Ancient Egypt in Britain in the 1920s and 1930s. The ancient Egypt craze was well established in England. Its initial manifestation was the use of pyramids as a feature of 18th century architecture, and then the Victorian vogue for ancient Egyptian architectural forms as seen, for example, in Highgate Cemetery. This Egyptomania had been revived in the 1920s following the 1922 rediscovery of Tutankhamun's tomb, with the resulting penetration into popular consciousness. With Ancient Egypt seen as a repository for Ancient Wisdom, it was a clever move to present oneself as a member of that mysterious, powerful and wise race, rather than as a mere colonial from the backwater of Guyana.

## **IN BOHEMIA**

Initially, then, it seems Ahmed made a living in England as a seller of herbs and medicines, like other entrepreneurial black men of the time. Later, however, he branched out into offering services of a magical nature - again, trading partly on his 'exotic' appearance and purported Egyptian background. A clue to the circles amongst which Ahmed moved is given in chapter 10 of I Rise. Well-spoken and welleducated, he would have had no difficulty in being accepted amongst the left-leaning and progressive section of middle-class white society. The narrator describes a party in Hampstead, attended by "The usual extraordinary collection of people... 'Arty' women in beads, casement cloth and sandals, women with cropped hair and male dress suits. All smoking excessively.



ABOVE: Egyptomania arrives in Britain - a display at the British Empire Exhibition at Wembley in 1924

Inconspicuous elderly women who were as clever as the others considered themselves to be. Jameson, the poet, whose poems enjoyed a private circulation among that section of the intelligentsia who lap up filth disguised as art." 3

Despite Ahmed's disclaimer in the foreword that "None of the characters is a portrait," it is hard not to see the "Black haired, black cloaked, excessively bulky' Jameson, "never seen without his famous phallic symbol slung about his neck," as a Crowley pastiche, or perhaps a composite of Crowley and Robert Graves. Other characters at the party are "May Sing Koo, the Chinese model, who had half London at her feet, and who was the following year destined to fling herself from an upper story of a New York skyscraper," "Hilary Stringer, who was reported to practise Black Magic with his ladies of the moment," and "An Egyptian, several stage and screen

artistes, more or less celebrities, and many other people of both sexes and varying nationalities." 35 Perhaps the reference to an Egyptian is to Ahmed himself. FI

### **NEXT MONTH: ROLLO'S RISE AND FALL**

With thanks to Phil Baker; Anthony Clayton; Graham King (Museum of Witchcraft, Boscastle) for allowing access to the Doreen Valiente collection; and the staff of the British Library's Reading Rooms.

## **AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY**



**CHRISTOPHER JOSIFFE** is a library cataloguer interested in Western magical traditions, Spiritualism, religion and folklore. He is currently writing a biography of Gef, the talking mongoose

### **NOTES**

- 1 Dennis Wheatley, The Time Has Come... The Memoirs of Dennis Wheatley, Vol 3 1919-1977: Drink and ink, 1919-1977, Hutchinson, 1979, p134.
- 2 Dennis Wheatley, To the Devil a Daughter, Wordsworth, 2007, p181 (original publication, Hutchinson, 1953).
- 3 Phil Baker, The Devil is a Gentleman, Dedalus, 2009, p319.
- 4 Rollo Ahmed, The Black Art, John Long, 1936; reprinted 1971, p11-12. All subsequent quotes are taken from the 1971 edition. Many years later, Wheatley produced his own survey of 'black magic' in The Devil and All His Works,

Hutchinson & Co., 1971.

- 5 Peter Haining, The Anatomy of Witchcraft, Souvenir Press, 1972, p75.
- 6 The Black Art, p224.
- 7 Montague Summers, Witchcraft and Black Magic, Rider, 1946.
- 8 Ahmed's account was intended for publication in a national newspaper, but only saw the light of day thanks to the efforts of editor Peter Haining. It finally appeared in The Necromancers, a 1971 collection of historical and contemporary short stories and articles, both factual and fictional, all with black magic or witchcraft themes. Peter Haining, ed., The Necromancers: The Best of Black Maaic and Witchcraft.

Coronet, 1971, p.31.

- **9** The Necromancers, p31.
- 10 lbid, p31.
- 11 Ibid, p32.
- 12 The Black Art, p175.
- 13 Ibid, p184.
- 14 Ibid, p175.
- 15 Ibid, p183.
- 16 Ibid, p183.
- 17 Ibid, p185.
- 18 Ibid, p187.
- 19 lbid, p198. The term "goat without horns" is attested in an influential, if notoriously sensationalist and unreliable, 19th century work. Havti: or the Black Republic by Spencer St John (1884), who writes of "two sects which follow the Vaudoux-worship - those

who only delight in the flesh and blood of white cocks and spotless white goats at their ceremonies, and those who are not only devoted to these, but on great occasions call for the flesh and blood of 'the goat without horns', or of human victims. It is a curious trait of human nature that these cannibals must use a euphemistic term when speaking of their victims, as the Pacific Islanders have the expression of 'long pig'. Hayti: or the Black Republic, Frank Cass, 1971, p192.

- 20 The Black Art, p199.
- 21 Ibid. n267.
- 22 Rollo Ahmed, I Rise: The Life Story of a Negro, John Long, 1937, p9.

- 23 lbid, p72.
- 24 Ibid, pp72-73.
- 25 Ibid, p267.
- 26 Ibid, p247.
- 27 Ibid, pp248-249.
- 28 Ibid, p258.
- 29 Ibid, p296.
- **30** Ibid, p317.
- 31 Ernest Marke, In Troubled Waters: Memoirs of my Seventy Years in England, Karia Press, 1986, pp101-102; originally published as Old Man Trouble, 1975.
- 32 Ibid, p104.
- 33 lbid, p105.
- 34 I Rise, p327.
- 35 Ibid, p328.

## DAZED AN



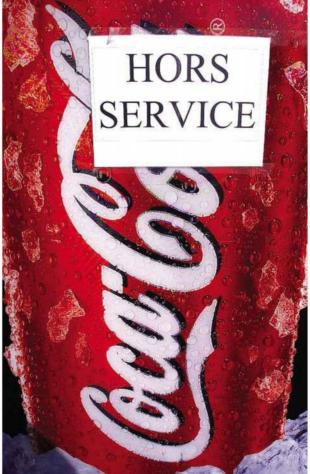
ROBERT BARTHOLOMEW and BOB RICKARD have just published their survey of reports of mass hysteria in schoolchildren from 1566 to the present, the first book ever devoted to the subject. Here, they present a general summary of its scope and a glimpse of two of many sub-topics: sudden outbreaks in war zones and grisi siknis in Nicaragua.

### WHAT IS MASS HYSTERIA?

Mass psychogenic illness, aka mass hysteria, is one of the world's most remarkable and misunderstood conditions because it can mimic virtually any disease and is triggered by a combination of stress and deeply held beliefs. The result is a strange mosaic of responses depending on the culture, context and era. The condition is also known as conversion disorder, describing the converting of psychological distress into physical complaints for which there are no organic bases. An example is the soldier opposed to killing whose arm freezes in combat when trying to fire a rifle. Epidemic hysteria refers to the rapid spread of conversion symptoms and anxiety states in a cluster of people.

There are two main types of mass hysteria. The first is 'anxiety hysteria,' which typically lasts a few hours or days and involves sudden fear in the wake of a false or exaggerated threat. It is common in modern Western countries in response to terrorism and fears about the contamination of air, food, and water. A second type, 'motor hysteria,' builds slowly, then explodes. Weeks or months of relentless pressure soon disrupt the nerves and neurons that send messages to the muscles and control coordination. As a result, students' bodies go haywire, twitching, shaking, and convulsing. Interference with brain function results in trance states and emotional instability; students scream, cry, and laugh uncontrollably. Such outbreaks are common in Africa, Asia, and some Pacific Islands, but a similar pattern also arose in Europe during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, triggered by extreme discipline in schools.

The social and financial impact of mass hysteria on society is both enormous and



**OVER THE PAST DECADES, MASS HYSTERIA HAS** MANIFESTED IN A VARIETY OF WAYS LEFT: A poster saying "out of order" on a coca-cola vending machine in Belgium in 1999. Coca-Cola products were withdrawn from shelves when 42 schoolgirls who drank their beverages

underestimated. A 1999 outbreak in Belgium resulted in the recall of Coca-Cola products that cost the company an estimated \$250 million. 1 Eight years later, when a group of Australian schoolgirls fainted after receiving inoculations for the human papillomavirus, an estimated one billion Australian dollars was wiped from the share market value of the maker of the Gardasil vaccine. 2

Until recently, outbreaks of motor hysteria have been rare in Western countries. Curiously, and alarmingly, over the past few years there have been several outbreaks of this type in American schools. An episode at a school in LeRoy in Western New York in 2011-12 (see FT287:8-9), struck down over a dozen students and a nurse who developed vocal tics, twitching, shaking and trancelike states. The incident caused nationwide fears that there was a 'mystery illness' that health authorities were hiding from the public. When the mass hysteria diagnosis was made public, parents were furious and called in outside experts in order to identify the 'real'

cause. By the middle of 2012, the symptoms had dramatically subsided once the media glare had died down.

The LeRoy affair is the same type of hysteria that appeared at Salem Village in the 1690s that resulted in accusations of witchcraft and executions. The key difference is the vector of spread. During the late 17th century, the strange outbreak of twitching, shaking and trance states was spread through word of mouth by a fear of witches and demons. In LeRoy, the

## CONFUSED



ABOVE: LeRoy High School, New York, scene of an outbreak of motor hysteria in 2011-12.

anxiety appears to have been generated by the sort of interpersonal conflicts that are so common among high school students, yet the symptoms were spread by social media: e-mail, text messaging, Twitter, Facebook, Youtube and so on. In the 21st century, we may be plagued by a return of the more severe motor hysteria. If this prophecy should prove true, the coming decades will see the return of some bizarre episodes.

### THE MANY FACES OF MASS HYSTERIA

Over the past few decades, mass hysteria has manifested in an extraordinary array of ways.

In Malaysia, a schoolgirl crashes to the floor, shouting curses at her principal in a strange voice, as if a mysterious force has seized her. Soon, a dozen classmates exhibit similar behaviour and claim to be possessed by demons, forcing the school to close.

A student in Tanzania starts to laugh uncontrollably. Soon, thousands of students are stricken with the mysterious affliction – some laugh intermittently for days for weeks, forcing numerous schools to close.

In Papua New Guinea, a nursing student gets a headache, is struck deaf and attacks bystanders. In no time, two dozen classmates exhibit similar symptoms.

In other regions, outbreaks of mass hysteria take different forms. During a British jazz gala, 130 band members suddenly faint, tumbling over like dominoes. In another part of the country, a British schoolgirl exhibits the classic symptoms of pregnancy, complete with a bloated stomach. Girls around her experience similar symptoms and trigger a pregnancy scare. Tests reveal that the girls – some of whom are virgins – are the victims of a rare psychological condition: false pregnancy caused by their belief that they were pregnant. At an American school, a sudden itching frenzy sweeps through classes, forcing a mass evacuation. In Thailand, anxiety from ghost scares often leads to breathing problems and a belief that spirits are choking the children.

Remarkably, these are some of the tamer outbreaks. In 1673 at Hoorn, Holland, a group of children were stricken with fits of shouting and barking like dogs. Their yelps would start with one child and quickly spread to others. Such episodes are not confined to the distant past. In 1968 on the Pacific Island of Fiji, a group of schoolgirls began to twitch, tremble, fall into trance states and began meowing like cats. In 2004, a group of students at a remote school in India fell into a strange state and began acting like cats, meowing and walking about on all fours. <sup>3</sup>

Outbreaks of mass hysteria are limited only by plausibility. If a group of people believe in something – be it witches, spirits or poison gas – then an outbreak of illness reflecting those beliefs is possible. For those of you who are baffled as to how a group of students could suddenly start barking like dogs or meowing like cats, you'll find the answer in the pages of our book.

## MASS HYSTERIA AND PHANTOM TERRORISTS

Outbreaks of mass hysteria are common in times of war because they are incubated by anxiety and fear. Schools are the most frequent target. In 1989, Soviet Georgia was the scene of intense unrest. In a lastditch attempt to maintain control of their crumbling empire, Soviet authorities ordered the use of potentially deadly poison gas to disperse crowds at a protest rally. The incident shocked Georgian citizens. Shortly after, amid rumours that they might have been exposed to the gas, 400 schoolgirls at several nearby schools were stricken with symptoms of gas poisoning: burning eyes, skin irritation, dry throats and stomach pains.4 The girls were rushed to nearby hospitals, where they quickly recovered.

Two years later during the Persian Gulf War, there was intense speculation that Iraqi soldiers might attack Israel with scud missiles filled with toxic gas. While no such attack took place, news reports highlighting the fear made a deep impression on children at a Rhode Island elementary school. When a pupil fainted and classmates smelled a strange odour, a sudden wave of anxiety swept through the seventh and eighth graders, who assumed they were under a gas attack. Seventeen students and four teachers. were stricken with dizziness, headache, and nausea. The victims were examined at a nearby emergency room, where they were reassured and made a speedy recovery. 5

One of the strangest outbreaks took place in the Middle East in 1983, and was blamed by media reports on a plot by Jewish terrorists to sterilise Palestinian schoolgirls. The claims dominated global headlines for months. The United Nations even issued a resolution condemning the acts, triggering outrage throughout the Islamic world. The 'attacks' occurred between March and April in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, among mostly Arab schoolgirls who complained of headaches, blurred vision, stomach pain, fainting, weakness and blindness. During the crisis, people saw what they wanted to see. Doctors treating the girls tended to interpret their medical findings along political lines. Even before the results of medical tests came back, Palestinian doctors at Djenin Hospital concluded that different poisons had been used. These diagnoses were later proved inaccurate. 6 Investigations by US and World Health Organisation doctors soon concluded that mass hysteria was the culprit.

The scare took place over 15 days amid



ABOVE: Nearly 100 Afghan schoolgirls were admitted to hospital with symptoms of poisoning on 12 May 2009. The children fell ill as they entered the school building in the small town of Mahmud Raqi, about 45 miles (70km) north of Kabul.

long-standing Palestinian mistrust of Israelis and rumours that someone was using poison gas on the girls. The episode was mostly confined to schools in several adjacent villages. Israeli investigator Baruch Modan traced the original incident to a smelly latrine near the Arrabah School. Later that day a second, larger wave ignited during recess, when friends of the first group spread rumours about their possible poisoning. During the second wave, which affected several schools in Jenin and nearby villages, the media and the rumour mill were instrumental in spreading the symptoms. In one influential incident, over 60 residents reported being gassed by a passing car. Investigators later determined that the 'gassing' was a cloud of black smoke belched from the vehicle's exhaust. Modan and his team concluded these and other incidents were triggered by the continuous spreading of poison gas rumours by the media. American doctors reached the same conclusion: the outbreaks were triggered by the smell of hydrogen sulphide gas escaping from the Arrabah latrine; mass psychology and the media had done the rest. 8

Since 2009, thousands of schoolgirls in the northern provinces of war-torn Afghanistan have been stricken by waves of mysterious 'poisonings,' striking them down in clusters. Symptoms include fainting, nausea, headaches, weakness and vomiting (see FT268:23, 292:14). The outbreaks are widely believed to have resulted from poisoning by either Taliban hardliners or Pakistani spies. However, the Afghan poisoning scare has all the earmarks of mass psychogenic

## **SUCH OUTBREAKS SHOW HOW EASY** IT IS TO TRIGGER **MASS HYSTERIA**

illness, embedded within a larger social panic involving the fear of Taliban insurgents who have been known to target female schools.

The tell-tale signs of psychogenic illness in these outbreaks include the preponderance of schoolgirls; the absence of a toxic agent; transient, rapid onset and recovery; plausible rumours and the presence of a strange odour - all against a backdrop of constant anxiety generated from a prolonged war. As the overarching trigger is ongoing fear, these episodes are likely to continue in a sporadic, waxing-and-waning fashion. The fact that girls' schools have been targeted by the Taliban in the past only serves to give plausibility to the rumours. In such outbreaks, there is usually a single high profile incident that gets widespread media coverage; this leads to more cases due to the heightened fear and expectation; these get reported in the media, which in turn generates even more anxiety and more episodes.

Recently, western Sudan has been plagued by civil war. Since Christmas Day 2013, dozens of schoolchildren in Darfur

have been stricken with a 'mystery illness'. These symptoms include pain, spasms and twitching. Some students were so affected that they were unable to walk, eat, talk or drink. 9 By early February 2014, doctors from the Sudanese Health Ministry concluded their investigation, announcing that the students were suffering from mass hysteria. 10

These outbreaks highlight just how easy it is to trigger mass hysteria. The key ingredients are fear, plausibility, and an unusual trigger event. Once panic sets in, it does not take long for episodes to spiral out of control.

## **GRISI SIKNIS**

In chapter seven of Mass Hysteria in Schools, we review a number of outbreaks from South America - principally Mexico, Nicaragua and Guyana - where an indigenous tradition of 'spirit possession' is mixed with 'voodoo Christianity'. Almost universally throughout Latin America, these involuntary trances are associated with the duendes - a Spanish term, variously translated in our sources as referring to diminutive and usually malevolent elves, devils, fairies or nature spirits. In Nicaragua in particular, these outbreaks are called grisi siknis - Miskito Coast Creole for 'crazy sickness' (FT181:10). Earlier forms of the belief in these 'little people' located them in the dense forests and deep mines, and, as many guidebooks and folklore studies attest, such beliefs antedate the arrival of the Spanish and Catholicism. 11

Most of our reports of duende-related mass hysteria come from the ethnic Miskito (or Miskitu) Indian communities of Nicaragua,

which, historically, have suffered poor education and high unemployment. They generally involve teenage girls, although boys and adults have also been reported as affected. 12

A typical instance from June 1996 began with sudden screams from the girls' toilets in the Simón Bolivar School in the city of Masaya, south of the capital Managua. Several girls rushed out of the bathroom and one was so scared she fainted. They claimed to have seen three small elves, dressed in red suits, hats and shoes, "coming out of the toilet bowls". Another student said he had heard "strange laughter". One of the frightened girls said she watched as the little men "disappeared before my eyes". 13

Phil Dennis – a professor of anthropology at Texas Tech University, who studied the phenomenon among the Miskito people in 1978 – argues that grisi siknis is comparable to anorexia nervosa in the affluent West, amok among the Malays and pibloktog ('Arctic hysteria') among indigenous people in Greenland. 14 It features "long periods of anxiety, nausea, dizziness, irrational anger and fear, interlaced with short periods of rapid frenzy," he says, in which the victims "lose consciousness, believe that devils beat them and have sexual relations with them". Although Dennis has called these seizures "a wild, orgiastic rite of sex and violence," not all the attacks are as orgasmic as he implies, and others have suggested they might function as a culturally-sanctioned 'safety valve' for relieving sexual tension and frustration outside normal social rules. 15

Dennis himself witnessed four attacks during his research and said the victims were "clearly in another state of reality". In this trance state, they seem to perform feats that border on the paranormal. Time and again we hear of the victims' "unnatural strength" – it takes "five or six people to hold down one girl," said Rev. Harold Dixon, headmaster of a school in which there was an outbreak of prist siknis

Another unusual feat is sufferers running at high speed, often with their eyes closed as they attempt to flee from their communities. As Nicola Ross, who travelled up the Rio Coco to interview families and victims of *grisi siknis*, put it: "With their eyes closed, and armed with machetes or sticks, they think nothing of attacking whoever or whatever stands between them and the mysterious force that beckons." 16

Porcela Sandino, a respected *curandera* in Puerto Cabezas, explained to BBC reporter Nicola Fell in 2009: "*Grisi siknis* turns people into witches and they go crazy." She told of treating a girl who "was just running around like a maniac. She tore off all her clothes." The girl's mother said, "One time, she fell into the well while suffering an attack. Other times, she'd run into the bush or into the river and people would try to catch her." <sup>17</sup>

The nature and mechanism of the contagion is also interesting. There is a belief that it can spread by line-of-sight, "sending teenager after teenager into a frenzied state followed by long periods of coma-like



unconsciousness." Nicola Ross said one girl, Licha, told of a strange ability that came to her in her madness: she could "predict who the next victim would be and was at a loss to explain how this knowledge came to her." She had been eight years old at the time and found this particularly disturbing. Phil Dennis also noted that victims need to see other victims; on occasion they name other people and if any of those people happen to be present, they too become afflicted. This might be explained as a form of contagious imitation on the part of the secondary victims, but it is regarded by the community as a form of prophecy.

While the outbreaks may begin in small rural communities, they are many and spread over a very large geographical area; which tends to favour a cultural and psychological vector rather than an organic disease-causing agent. <sup>18</sup> According to Dennis, culture-bound syndromes like *grisi siknis* demonstrate that health and disease are not simple, or simply, biological matters, "but a complex interweaving of various aspects of being human." Florence Levy, who led the medical team at the 2003 outbreak in Raiti, also emphasises that "the illness is more spiritual than physical, so [the afflicted] turn to the healer for the spiritual part." <sup>19</sup>

When we turn our attention to the victims' own accounts of *grisi siknis* we can see their narratives have much in common with visionary experiences, 'demonic possession' cases and tales of supernatural abduction from folklore. <sup>20</sup>

**LEFT:** A typical 'duende' as seen in a YouTube video. **LEFT:** Porcela Sandino, a respected *curandera*, has had to treat victims of *grisi siknis*.

For example, the Nicaraguan photographer Richard Leonardi blogged: "The Managua daily El Nuevo Diario on January 12 of this year [2003] reported of the widow Doña Fátima López who escaped the rock-throwing duendes that attacked her home near Cuapa, Chontales; finding refuge in her father's farm 90km [56 miles] east, only to have the duendes follow her and steal her small son one night from bed and leave

him asleep outside in a cattle trough." <sup>21</sup> And, in his thesis on 'Involuntary Mass Spirit Possession Among the Miskitu', Johan Wedel tells of a Miskitu undergraduate student "who watched as his peers slowly became infected and later did so himself as well. This student's roommate described having dreams about *duende* arriving to kidnap him." <sup>22</sup>

Often, mention is made of the seductive laughter or calls of the duende that only the afflicted can hear. Leonardi notes that: "Nicaraguan newspapers report annually of school children afraid to attend class and farmers who flee ranches thanks to horrifying little duendes, who appear, laughing their dangerously contagious duende laugh, invisible to most, but completely visible and both repulsive and enticing, to a select few." He continues: "Their main purpose, or joy, is to steal yet-to-be-baptised babies or unwed young women... The unwed post-pubescent girl is lured away by hypnotism, little gifts, and sweet words, never to be seen again." In another, more hallucinatory, example, Reverend Harold Dixon, who witnessed many such attacks among his pupils in the 2009 outbreak, tells of three classmates affected the same day. One of them, 16-yearold Anadina Smith, said later: "One day at school, I felt giddy, and found it difficult to breathe. Then, I saw something coming towards me, a kind of black man or a dragon that entered me and possessed me." 23

Nicola Ross's informant, Licha – a survivor of the 2000 Krin Krin outbreak, which felled about 80 teens – told her that initially she





ABOVE: An adolescent school student falls victim to grisi siknis in Laguna de Perlas, Nicaragua, in early 2014.

simply had a headache and felt dizzy; a condition the Miskito call bla. As the trance deepened, Licha recalled, her most vivid memory was of visions in which "small, black men riding red horses came down from the mountains to lure her away from the village". This was why it was necessary to tie her up, she explained. "They offered her a cup filled with blood. She was afraid of the duende, the spirits from the forest, but felt compelled to follow these powerful strangers anyway." 24

## FROM BILWI TO SALEM

Our final story resembles more the kind of lurid panics we associate with the Middle Ages or modern Africa; only it happened at Bilwi, outside the Caribbean coastal town of Puerto Cabezas in mid-May 2009, when around 120 teenage girls were affected. Tim Rogers, reporting for the TicoTimes, tells of two sisters, Jose and Rafaela Chao, who "in a scene that must be reminiscent of the Salem witch trials [and] in the throes of their madness, accused a mysterious drifter who

was living in town of being a witch and trying to kill them. That was all the evidence the townsfolk needed to organize a lynch mob and go after the man. After being beaten for hours, he admitted he was the one causing all the trouble. The villagers burned what they claimed were his spell books and forced him to cure the girls, which he did in exchange for his life. Since that moment there have been no reported cases of grisi siknis and authorities think the problem has been resolved for the moment. However, the suspected warlock has escaped and some fear he will seek his revenge through the dark arts." 25

You might think Rogers was being a bit frivolous in comparing the incident to the spectacle at Salem in 1692 ... but perhaps not. At least one other commentator on an online blog reminded readers that the Salem children were influenced by a maid called Tituba who came from the Caribbean... to which Nicaragua is adjacent.

## **AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES**



**ROBERT BARTHOLOMEW** is a medical sociologist, writer, journalist and human rights advocate currently teaching history at Botany Downs Secondary College in South Auckland, New Zealand.



BOB RICKARD started Fortean Times in 1973 and was its co-editor for 30 years. He is the author of numerous books on fortean subjects and a founder of the Charles Fort Institute.

Mass Hysteria in Schools: A Worldwide History Since 1566 by Robert Bartholomew with Bob Rickard is published by McFarland & Co, priced £32.50

### **NOTES**

- 1 B Nemery, B Fischler, M Boogaerts, D Lison, 'Dioxins, Coca-Cola, and mass sociogenic illness in Belgium', Lancet, 354:77, 1999.
- 2 S Chapman, R MacKenzie, 'Fainting schoolgirls wipe \$A1bn off market value of Gardasil producer', British Medical Journal, 334:1195, 2007.
- 3 For a survey of these and other outbreaks, refer to Robert Bartholomew and Bob Rickard, Mass Hysteria in Schools: A Worldwide History Since 1566, Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2014.
- 4 M Goldsmith, 'Physicians with Georgia on their minds', Journal of the American Medical Association, 262:603-604, 1989.
- 5 R Rockney and T Lemke, 'Casualties from a junior high school during the Persian Gulf War: toxic poisoning or mass hysteria?', Journal of Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics 13:339-342, 1992; R Rockney and T Lemke 'Response', Letter, Journal of Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics 15 (1):64-65, 1994
- 6 A Hafez, 'The Role of the press and the medical community in an epidemic of mysterious gas poisoning

- in the Jordan West Bank', American Journal of Psychiatry 142:833-837,
- 7 Baruch Modan et al, "The Arjenyattah epidemic", The Lancet ii:1472-1474, 1983.
- 8 P Landrigan and B Miller, "The Arienvattah epidemic: home interview data and toxicological aspects", The Lancet ii:1474-1476, 1983.
- 9 "Mystery disease" strikes North Darfur school children. Radio DaBanga, 2 Feb 2014. Thanks to Roberto Labanti for these reports.
- 10 'Darfur pupils' mystery disease 'hysteria': Sudanese Health Ministry,' Radio DaBanga, 9 Feb 2014. Contamination of food was ruled out as cases occurred on different days.
- 11 Should you type the words 'duende Argentina' (or replace with almost any South American country) into Google, be prepared for many links to YouTube clips purporting to show evidence of tiny figures popping up briefly, unexpectedly and, of course, out of focus. Dubious they may be - see Snopes's rebuttal of the 2008 Argentinian flap of duende videos (www.snopes. com/photos/odd/gnome. asp), but they demonstrate

- that the belief in Los duendes is still as strong and as widespread today as it was a few centuries ago.
- 12 Video clips of victims in their throes can be found on YouTube that do, indeed, show some young male victims: www.youtube.com/ watch?v=5kWbhdm6-6E
- 13 Barricada Internacional, San Francisco (Aug 1996).
- 14 Phil Dennis, 'Grisi siknis among the Miskito', Medical Anthropology 5(4), 1981, pp445-505. Phil Dennis, ed. 'Grisi siknis in Miskito culture', The Culture-Bound Syndromes, D Reidel Publishing, Holland, 1985, pp.289–306.
- 15 Occult Forum Archive, 'Grisi Siknis': www. occultforum.org/forum/ viewtopic.php?f=4&t=17139
- 16 Nicola Ross, 'Nicaragua's crazy sickness: An indigenous community grapples with a mysterious ailment', The Walrus. Jun 2006: and online at www.walrusmagazine. com/articles/2006.06anthropology-nicaragua-grisi-
- 17 Nicola Fell, 'She ran around like a maniac', BBC News 20 Apr 2009: http:// news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/ health/8007895.stm
- 18 Prof. Pablo McDavis of

the Indigenous Diseases Department at Uraccan University in Puerto Cabezas admits to being puzzled:

"Drugs or injections tend

- to only increase a patient's aggressiveness. Clinically we can't detect anything. Mr Alvarado said a medical report on an outbreak in the 1950s raised the possibility of "deliberate contamination of wells with hallucinogenic substances". At Raiti, wells and other likely sources of contamination or poisons were sampled, but no sinister agents were found. For a discussion of the widespread fear of contamination of wells and reservoirs, and why it seems unlikely, see Andy Roberts' 'Reservoir Drugs', FT262:38-42.
- 19 Robert Widdicombe, 'Nicaragua village in grip of madness', Guardian, 17 Dec 2003: www.theguardian.com/

world/2003/dec/17/1

20 There are also less 'spiritual' associations: eg. 'crossover' cases of hauntings and poltergeists. For one quite specifically blaming a "duende invisible" for a mysterious light and rain of large stones on a house in Tecolostote in Jan 1971, see a blog by Martha Isabel Arana.

'Nicaragua of my Memories',

- 23 Sept 2010: http:// nicaraguademisrecuerdos. blogspot.co.uk/2011/07/ el-duende-invisible-detecolostate.html . More mentions of duende poltergeist-like stonethrowers at http://leyendasnicaraguenses.blogspot. co.uk/2007/03/el-duende-dela-piedra-de-cuapa\_28.html
- 21 Richard Leonardi, 'Nicaraguan Leprechauns', Essays on Nicaragua: www. nicaraguaphoto.com/essays/ update\_nicaraguaSept2003. shtml
- 22 Johan Wedel, 'Involuntary Mass Spirit Possession Among the Miskitu' (2012): https://wiki.geneseo.edu/ display/cultural/Wedel.+Joha n+(2012)+Involuntary+Mass +Spirit+Possession+Among+t he+Miskitu
- 23 Fell, op cit.
- 24 Ross, op cit.
- 25 Tim Rogers, 'Grisi Siknis illness grips indigenous Nicaraguan communities', TicoTimes.net, a blog and newspaper on Central America issues; Paul Hoffman, Sex With the Devil, blog post 10 Aug 2009: http:// bigthink.com/ideas/15839; also as a YouTube report, 5 Aug 2009: www. youtube.com/watch?v=7ivbei4D4Q&feature=related

NERDOH PRESENTS





ALWAYS FREE UK PGF















































Stitched from skin & cotton by

## WWW.NERDOH.COX

FREE UK DELIVERY TEL ORDERS: 0115 8440088 ALL CARDS ACCEPTED

## WHATEVER HAPPENED TO THE HUMAN FLY?

He jumped 27 buses riding a rocket-powered motorcycle, strapped himself to a DC-8 flying over the Mojave Desert, starred in his very own comic book... and then disappeared.

TEA KRULOS goes in search of "the wildest superhero ever".



arvel Comics billed him as "The wildest superhero ever – because he's real!" And although the pages of *The Human Fly*, which ran from 1977-78, were the work of fiction, they were indeed loosely based on a mysterious masked stuntman whose name may or may not have been Rick Rojatt, who boldly proclaimed that he would prove that the Human Fly "was the greatest superhero that has ever lived or will live" in addition to being "the world's greatest stuntman."

Opinion differs as to whether he achieved those titles, but no one can disagree that he gave it a good try; he did several stunts standing on top of a DC-8 airplane travelling at 250-300mph (400-480km/h) and broke one of Evel Knievel's records (and a few bones) by jumping a rocket-powered

## THE HUMAN FLY HAD AN UNLIKELY ORIGIN= A BORED SAUSAGE MAKER

motorcycle over 27 school buses during a disco-themed concert at Montreal's Olympic Stadium.

The Human Fly's wild ride on planes, motorcycles and through news reports and comic book pages had an unlikely origin: a **LEFT:** The Human Fly is strapped to a DC-8 aircraft taking off in the Mojave Desert.

Montreal sausage maker who was bored out of his mind.

Brothers Joe and Dominique Ramacieri were born into the family sausage business, Roma Foods, which was founded in 1953. The business was doing well, but for young Joe it was a dull trade.

"Td be making sausages and my hands would freeze, from morning until night, and I would tell my brother – I can't do this, I got to find something else," Joe said in a documentary interview with film maker Tony Babinski.

Joe and his brother decided to use some of the pepperoni profits to form Human Fly Spectaculars Ltd in 1976, hiring an enthusiastic stuntman who called himself "Rick Rojatt" to fill the fuzzy red felt Human Fly costume. The full body

superhero suit covered him from head to toe, completely masking his identity. It was decorated with white stripes and bedazzled with sequins. The Fly also sometimes wore a cape and carried an ornate sceptre. He had a back-up red-and-white leather costume and a helmet to protect him while engaging in his stunts.

Rick Rojatt had a dramatic backstory, one that calls into question exactly which parts of his 'life' were fact, and which comic book-style fabrications.

"Yeah, I thought he was a con-man, a bullshitter all the way," Ramacieri admitted. Rojatt claimed he was a former stuntman and that, five years before his appearance as the Human Fly, he'd been in a terrible car crash that had left his wife and daughter dead. Doctors, sworn to confidentiality, worked feverishly over the course of "38 operations" to save Rojatt's life and replaced "60 per cent of his bone

structure" with moulded steel parts. As part of his Fly stunt training, Rojatt said that he woke up every day at "3am, ran six miles, and then plunged into a bathtub full of ice cubes."

Human Fly Spectaculars was soon attracting media attention. In a 1976 interview about his plane-riding stunts, the Fly told People magazine: "Frankly, I'm not worried about death. I don't have a death wish - I have a life wish." After getting chewed up by 250mph (400km/h) rain drops while atop a plane in the skies over Dallas (which he claims it took two weeks in hospital to recover from), the Fly made another run on top of a DC-8 over the Mojave Desert in 1977. This performance was caught in detail in a 23-minute Human Fly Spectaculars promotional film titled "The Human Fly Challenges the Mojave Skies."

The film shows the Fly being greeted by the UCLA marching band, talking about how he trained in a wind tunnel for the stunt and then being strapped into what looks like a mediæval torture device on top of a plane with the words 'THE HUMAN FLY' painted neatly down the side. Then the plane takes off and circles above the gathered crowd for 20 minutes, all set to a bumping Seventies soundtrack by the Black Light Orchestra.

This was right around the same time that Marvel Comics picked up on the Fly's story and rolled out *The Human Fly #1* in 1977. The comic book Fly found himself joined by a supporting cast of characters – and guest stars like Spider Man and Ghost Rider – who helped him escape from sharks, fight giant robot birds and save children by walking to rescue them on a tightrope. Burning questions from readers about the real Fly were delegated to the letters section of the comic book, called "the Fly Papers."

"We take certain license with our monthly adventures," the editors admitted in response to a Fly Papers letter on whether the Fly really fought crime. "We build on the concept of the entity known as the HUMAN FLY as opposed to documenting his everyday appearances. The newspapers and TV do that – our job is not to report but to get the Fly's message across in as an entertaining manner as possible."

Both the comic book and the Mojave Desert promo film mention that one of the Fly's goals was to inspire ill youngsters and that he donated some share of his stunt earnings to children's hospital charities; both the film and a Canadian television news report show footage of the Fly paying visits to hospitals to pose for pictures, visit,





and sign autographs for the young patients. Specific details on how much money the Fly was able to raise, and for which charities, remain unknown, but it would appear that if the Fly was a madman, he was at least a generous one.

Late in 1977, he was booked to do a half-time show for a concert in Montreal's Olympic Stadium featuring Gloria Gaynor and several other disco era performers. It was destined to be the climax of his career. The Fly's goal was not just to smash Evel Knievel's motorcycle jump record of 13 school buses but to double it by jumping

**LEFT:** The Human Fly and team pose with Ky Michaelson's specially designed rocket-bike. **BELOW:** The first issue of the Fly's Marvel comic book from 1977.

a line-up of 27 buses. To help give him the extra firepower he needed, he enlisted Ky "The Rocketman" Michaelson (who still maintains his company, Rocketman Enterprises, Inc., in Bloomington, Minnesota).

"Rick sent me a brand new 1977 Harley Davidson XL-1000 Sportster, a true black beauty, to work from," Michaelson recalled in an essay on his website. "I put exactly three miles on it and then the fun began. I yanked out the engine and built two 1,500lb [680kg] thrust hydrogen peroxide rockets, which I mounted one on top of the other directly underneath the fuel tank... if a guy were to take this out to the local drag strip, hold the throttle wide open and hope the tires didn't fall right off, he'd be capable of going well over 300mph [480km/h]."

Michaelson recalled joining the Fly at Olympic Stadium and becoming immediately nervous about the stuntman's chances

of surviving the jump when he noticed that the ramps weren't quite built to specification. The Fly ignored the potential danger and the show went on. He kicked in the rocket boosters, shot up the ramp and flew over the long line of yellow school buses. He cleared his mark but flipped the bike too high to make the landing.

"My heart just pounded as I stood there, witnessing the crash landing of all crash landings right before my eyes," Michaelson wrote. "A hush fell over the crowd as we all expected the worst. It looked like nobody could have possibly survived such a crash. We were soon relieved when we realised he was actually OK. He survived and he had done it – he had broken Evel's record, but not without paying the price. He waved to the crowd as he was carried away on a stretcher, suffering a broken ankle and several other injuries." The Fly was rushed to hospital to recover.

After 19 issues, Marvel pulled the plug on the comic book series, but it's still remembered by fans and has a cult-like following today. Fly fans post pages from the series online, create their own fan art and start threads pondering what was perhaps the last great stunt of the Human Fly – his disappearing act. After the crash at Olympic Stadium, no one seems to know what happened to Rick Rojatt and the book seemed to close on the Human Fly... for the moment.

About 10 years ago, Tony Babinski, a film-maker from Montreal, envisioned a Human Fly media revival. Babinski is now the president of Human Fly International





and has a dedicated crew helping him with his vision. Growing up in the Fly's hometown (and reading the Marvel comics) gave Babinski an added fascination with the masked stuntman as a kid.

"Of course the big jump at Olympic Stadium happened in my hometown and there was lots of hype on the AM radio station I listened to," Babinski says. "I really wanted to go to the jump, but couldn't convince anyone to go with me. I missed out seeing it live, but read about it afterward in the newspapers."

Many years later, Babinski was bouncing ideas off a producer for film ideas, and remembered the story of the Human Fly. Assisted by his journalist brother, Babinski tracked down Joe Ramicieri and started on a project he's been working on for the past decade – a film based on the Human Fly. He bought the rights to the character from Ramicieri and got a surprise about the identity under the mask.

"The reality is that Joe and his brother hired several people to be in the costume at various times," Babinski explains. "The identity of the person under the mask was supposed to remain a secret, but Rick Rojatt apparently wanted to hog a little glory and let his identity slip to a reporter." Babinski and his brother tried to track the elusive stuntman down, learning that his real name was Rick Rajotte.

"We sought Rick out and think we found him, but he denied he is who he is. So no one really knows what happened to Rick after the Olympic Stadium jump. Nevertheless, the Fly continued to exist. He ended up fronting a band called 'Human Fly and the Red Rockers' that played original music in New Jersey bars. The Fly at that time was Cyndi Lauper's boyfriend, David Wolff, a musician in his own right."

To help reintroduce audiences to the Human Fly, Babinski has helped collect an anthology of new Human Fly comic book

## "A HUSH FELL OVER THE CROWD AS WE ALL EXPECTED THE WORST"



stories for a graphic novel that debuted at the 2013 San Diego Comic Con.

"It's very exciting to see the Fly back in this way after all these years," Babinski says. In addition to editing, he contributed one of the stories himself. "A bunch of talented artists and writers from today's scene and from the 1970s who actually worked on the ABOVE LEFT: The Fly relaxes, complete with cape and cane. ABOVE RIGHT: Jumping 27 schoolbuses in Montreal. BELOW: The events at Montreal featured in fictionalised form in *The Human Fly* #11.

Marvel comic have agreed to be a part of it. The stories are very 'meta,' not the straight take on the character you see in the Marvel comics. They take into account the story behind the story, the funny and twisted reality – though we also pay homage to the Marvel comics, so we have our cake and eat it, too."

Babinski says he is trying to close financing for the film and hopes to start shooting soon.

"Creatively, we've always been fashioning a period piece that takes place in the 1970s and is a heartfelt recounting of the journey Joe and his band took on when they decided to create a real life superhero. It's funny, raucous, irreverent, and wild." Babinski says. "And yet, I think we take their insane desire for fame and notoriety seriously. So many of us want it, and they went to extreme lengths to get it. Of course, they paid the price, too. But we're still talking about what they did today," Babinski says, noting that the legend of the Human Fly is now nearly 40 years old. "So in a way they pulled it off. Pretty good for a bunch of Italian Montrealers from a sausage factory."

## **AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY**



TEA KRULOS is a freelance journalist from Milwaukee, Wisconsin. He is the author of Heroes in the Night: Inside the Real Life Superhero Movement (Chicago Review Press, 2013) and blogs at heroesinthenight. blogspot.co.uk/.

## HAVE A READ... IF YOU DARE!

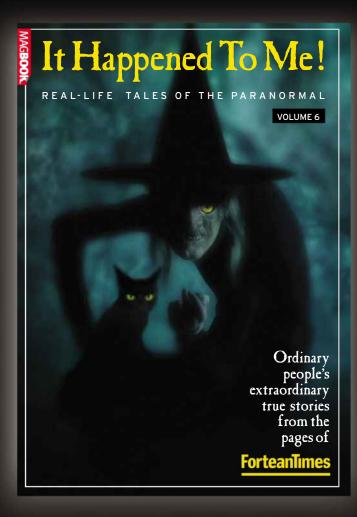
More than 100 real-life stories that will make Hallowe'en seem like a walk in the park...

Phantom Templars

Haunted iPod

Talking cats

Graveyard witch



Newcastle mothman

Teleporting spiders

Hounds from Hell

Aliens under

AND MUCH, MUCH MORE...

AVAILABLE FROM AMAZON.CO.UK
OR VISIT MAGBOOKS.COM FOR MORE INFORMATION







## No 56: ABDUCTION BY ALIENS PART ONE

ooner or later we had to deal with this contentious subject because, while it's nowhere mentioned in Fort's books, it has become entrenched in modern fortean studies as an aspect of ufology. It's also (unlike many another fortean subject) become entrenched in popular culture, where one image and one idea are fixed among the ignorant and vulgar generality: the aliens who do the abducting are creepy little grey creatures with oversized heads, big black eyes and implausibly spindly bodies; and the one thing they'll surely do if they nab you is wang something horrid up your bum. Informed forteans know that alien abduction is a rather subtler phenomenon than that and, from the historical point of view, a good deal more plastic. What it seems to be today is in many respects quite different from what it seemed to be half a century ago, and different again from what it appeared to be a quarter of a century ago. So we'll look at this record first, and plot that plasticity, while noting the common factors, before considering what it might all mean.

### A MATTER OF HISTORY

By common consent the first people to be abducted by aliens were Betty and Barney Hill, in New Hampshire's White Mountains on 19 September 1961. They were in fact preceded by Antonio Villas Boas, who was taken on 16 October 1957 while ploughing on the family farm near São Francisco de Salles, Minas Gerais, Brazil. Here's our first historiographical problem. The literature is littered with claims of abductions that took place as long ago as the 1930s, some of them in unexpected places such as Malta, Kazakhstan, Greece and Romania. Unfortunately these claims were made many years later. So the history of abductions is really the chronology of a series of stories in the order in which they surfaced, not the order in which they purportedly happened. So the Hills beat Villas Boas to first place. This peculiarity is central to understanding the phenomenon as a whole. When, in the mid to late 1970s, investigators began unearthing more abduction accounts, they tended to use the Hills' story as a benchmark.

Their experience has been described many times: but, in outline, it occurred while the Hills (Barney was black, Betty was white) were returning by way of a long overnight drive from a long weekend in Canada to their home in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. At about 1am, on US Route 3 near Groveton, Betty sighted what she believed was a UFO. It seemed to be tracking them. They stopped the car at what is now the Indian Head resort when the UFO, "as big as a four-motor plane", swooped down to about 100ft (30m) above the ground. Barney (who was driving throughout) got out and looked at the craft through binoculars. Through its windows he could see figures dressed in shiny black "Nazi-like" uniforms, and black caps; one, that he identified as the crew leader, transfixed him with a stare. Barney leapt back in the car shouting: "O my God, we're going to be captured!" As they drove off, they heard a series of beeps from somewhere in the back of their car. At this point their conscious memories stopped. At some point, sure that the UFO was above and behind them. Barney felt "compelled" to leave Route 3; somewhere on a back road they came across a roadblock - half a dozen 'men' standing in the road. The car engine died. These humanoid characters, between 4ft 6in and 5ft (1.4-1.5m) tall, dragged a now-unconscious Barney into a clearing and up a ramp into a craft of some kind, scuffing the toes of his shoes. Betty walked aboard unaided, while one of the aliens explained that all they wanted was to do a few simple tests. The couple were put into separate rooms where each was laid on a table.

The aliens were intrigued by Betty's skin: they took samples, along with snippings of her hair and nails, and deployed an electronic device for "checking my nervous system", and then they stuck in "a needle-like instrument just below my navel." This – apparently a pregnancy test – hurt, but the leader put his hand over her eyes, and the pain abated. After this, Betty asked the leader for a souvenir, lest no one believe this had happened to her. The leader said she could have a large book that was lying on a table although, after some heated discussion with his colleagues,

ABOVE LEFT: Betty and Barney Hill; packed and ready for an interrupted journey. ABOVE RIGHT: Antonio Villas Boas undergoes a medical examination. normal iris and pupil.) "Their speech was "totally different she was told she had to leave it behind, and would not remember what had happened. Betty was shown Barney's from anything I had heard... They [made] slow barks false teeth and had to explain what they were. The and yelps, neither very clear nor very hoarse, some aliens also didn't understand the concept of the colour longer, some shorter, at times containing several yellow, nor the idea of time (although they had just different sounds all at once... I still shudder when I think of those sounds." In contrast, the Hills' aliens said Barney would be back with her "in a minute"). On asking where they came from, Betty was shown a map, communicated by telepathy. The aliens stripped Villas Boas of his clothes, and with lines joining what appeared to be stars; the lines, she was told, were trade routes. The aliens did not name one of them rubbed a liquid over his skin. Then he their home star or planet. was led into another room, sparsely furnished with Barney, for his part, apparently had a saliva a few chairs and a couch, where the aliens produced sample taken (although he did not report his "a sort of chalice", which they used to take a blood dentures being removed), then had a "cup-like sample from their captive. Then he was left alone, device" placed around his genitals while semen and a strange odour filled the room, which made was extracted; then a "cylindrical object" was him vomit. Then in walked a slim, naked woman, inserted into his rectum. After that, he rejoined whose body was "more beautiful than any I have Betty, and they were led back to their car, where ever seen before... her breasts stood up high and

they watched the UFO take off before driving away, somehow rejoining Route 3; for on that road, near Ashland, they heard beeps again, and their conscious memories resumed. Events between the two sets of beeps were retrieved under hypnosis, some years later. The Hills arrived in Portsmouth at about 5am, two hours later than they had reckoned on getting home.

## MEANWHILE, ON THE FARM...

Antonio Villas-Boas's experience on board a UFO was altogether different. He was taken struggling up a flexible ladder into the machine, and found himself in a small, square, brightly lit room with metallic walls.

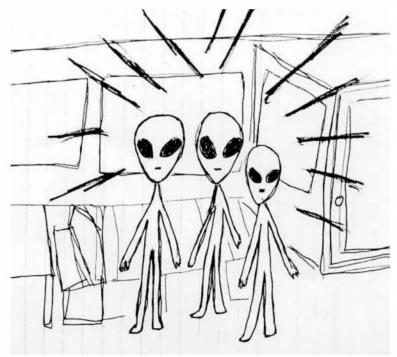
There were five small entities present, wearing tightfitting suits of thick, soft, unevenly striped grey material, and large, broad helmets reinforced with bands of metal. Pipes led from the helmets to their clothes, two going under each armpit and one down their backs. Thick-soled 'shoes' seemed to be integral to their suits, as did thick, unwieldy gloves. All Villas Boas could see of the creatures' features through the helmets were their small, pale blue eyes. (Barney Hill's aliens had 'wraparound' eyes but with

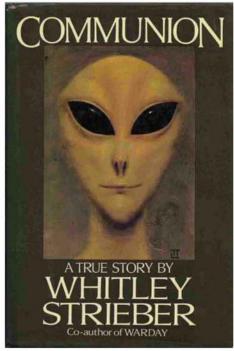
well separated." Her fair hair was smooth and almost white; her underarm and pubic hair was bright red. She had big blue eyes, "rather longer than round, for they slanted outward".

Then, said Villas Boas: "The woman came toward me in silence... and suddenly she hugged me and began to rub her head against my face from side to side. At the same time I also felt her body glued to mine... We ended up on the couch, where we lay together for the first time. It was a normal

act and she reacted as any other woman would. Then we had some petting, followed by another act, but by now she had begun to deny herself to me, to end the matter." He had also been a bit put off because "some of the growls that came from her at certain times nearly spoiled everything, as they gave the disagreeable impression of lying with an animal." Then it dawned on him that "all they wanted [was] a good stallion to improve their own stock..."

Before she left, she pointed to her stomach, and then at the sky, which he interpreted as a sign that sooner or later she would return to take him away. Brazilian investigators persuaded him, however, that she had simply meant that she would bear their child on her home planet.





ABOVE LEFT: A drawing made by an American abductee from John Mack's support group shows classic 'Grey' aliens. ABOVE RIGHT: Whitley Streiber's book – along with Spielberg's Close Encounters of the Third Kind – helped crystallise the modern iconography of big-headed, blank-eyed alien abductors.

After this, Villas Boas was given back his clothes and taken on a tour of the alien craft, during which he tried, and failed, to purloin an instrument as a keepsake. Then he was carried back down the ladder to the ground, and the UFO took off like a bullet. He had been aboard the craft for 4 hours, 15 minutes. Villas Boas did not need hypnosis or any other memory aid in recalling his experience.

## **E PLURIBUS UNUM**

The young lovely who seduced Antonio Villas Boas and her cohorts

were clearly of a different order of alien from the ones who waved down Betty and Barney Hill. About the only item the two events have in common is that the UFOs involved featured two red lights. Over the next few years, abductees seemed to encounter even more disparate aliens. In November 1967, 14-year-old 'David' was wafted aloft on an orange light beam and examined by naked, hairless, 2m (79in)-tall beings with four fingers on each hand, scaly crocodile-like skin, holes for ears and nose, slanted eyes, and slit mouths. In December 1967 Herb Schirmer described creatures that were "1.25-1.50 metres [49-59in] tall, with overdeveloped chests, pasty faces, slanted eyes like cats, slit mouths and with a nose flatter, longer and more prominent than a human's, on a long thin face." They wore silvery, one-piece uniforms bearing a silver, serpentine logo, with hoodies, on one side of which was an earpiece with a short antennna. A couple of years later, José António da Silva was abducted by pale-

skinned, helmeted 1.2m (47in)-tall dwarves with long red beards, hair to their waists, thick legs, large green eyes ("like green leaves beginning to wither"), long pointy noses, and deep guttural speech that issued from mouths that "looked like fishes' mouths. I didn't see a tooth in any of them." Big blue 'brain-like' entities confronted Peter Hodges and John Rodriguez in 1971; Hodges was abducted and given a scary illustrated lecture on the horrors of nuclear war by a bunch of bald, thin-lipped, flat-nosed, 7ft (2.1m)-tall, grey-skinned humanoids with "very thin" eyes and hands sporting six webbed fingers and a thumb. David Stephens was lifted in 1975 and examined by 4ft 6in (1.4m)-tall beings wearing long black paper robes, with completely hairless, mushroom-like

white heads and slanting, white, teardrop-shaped eyes, small flat noses, and no mouth (they communicated telepathically); their hands had a thumb and three long fingers.

Obviously, none of this motley crew – and there are many others we've not mentioned – bears much resemblance to the classic Greys/Grays of later abduction lore, let alone to one another. The 'examination' phase of the abduction, where it occurs in these cases, is generally non-invasive, usually involving some kind of scanning machinery and maybe a few hair and fingernail clippings or the like. One notable exception is Sandy Larson, who claimed

that in 1975 she had her brain removed and replaced, or perhaps just rewired. Creatures with large heads and small bodies, a staple image of 'advanced' extraterrestrials in science fiction, did not become established as the template for alien abductors (at least in the United States) until the late 1970s. In among all the weird creatures there had always been a running image of 'little men' with big heads, short legs and a tendency to need breathing apparatus and wear uniforms, and they began to transmogrify into the spindly. thin-necked, solid-black-eyed and apparently unclothed and gender-free creatures we know today. This shift in morphology owes much to the black-eved aliens with pencil-thin necks that appeared in the hit film Close Encounters of the Third Kind (1977). The image was further developed in the descriptions of ETs in Budd Hopkins's best-selling Missing Time (1981) and finally crystallised in the famous/notorious cover of Whitley Strieber's Communion (1987). Jenny

Randles noted in 1992 that British and European abductors tended to be 'human' or of the tall, long-blond-haired 'Nordic' type (a hangover, one assumes, of contactee imagery from the 1950s) until *Communion* came out, whereafter cold, impersonal Grays with dodgy sexual tendencies began to predominate.



The year 1987 was a tipping point for the phenomenon. Not only did *Communion*, at best an ambiguous and somewhat paranoid treatment of Strieber's abductions by 'visitors', become a bestseller, so did Budd Hopkins's *Intruders*, which laid out quite plainly the author's belief that aliens were engaging in a variety of



more or less sadistic activities in order to create a human-alien hybrid race. Uncharitable critics wondered aloud why they included in this 'breeding' project the main subject of his book, who was overweight, prone to illness and, in the ancient phrase, was no oil painting. As the phenomenon (and its proponents) reliance on testimony acquired through hypnosis) seemed ever more outlandish, however intriguing, to the public at large, there rode to the rescue of adherents a monumental, two-volume study by an author with impeccable academic credentials. Dr Thomas 'Ed' Bullard's UFO Abductions: The Measure of a Mystery examined hundreds of reported cases. Bullard argued that the consistency of the structure of these accounts made them on balance convincing as real, not factitious, events. He concluded that the archetypal abduction broke down into eight episodes: the notes on these that follow take into account the elements in narratives that became current during the late 1980s, after his study was published. 1: Capture: First, in many cases, comes a UFO sighting, sometimes involving electromagnetic or other physical effects on the witnesses' home or vehicle. (Later reports featured aliens abducting victims directly from their bedrooms.) It is not always clear exactly how the craft is entered - a phenomenon known as 'doorway amnesia'. The interiors of alien craft are reportedly brightly but diffusely lit, often featuring round or curved, clinically clean 'rooms'. The abductee is undressed – sometimes forcibly - and may be prepared for the examination by being bathed or immersed in liquid. Witnesses most often report seeing small grey aliens, sometimes together with taller humanoids, on board the UFO.

2: Examination: Mechanical devices vaguely resembling X-ray cameras may be used on the abductee, and appear to scan them physically and, according to some, mentally. Other implements may be thrust into various orifices. Explanations for these operations vary; sometimes the aliens offer no rationale for their behaviour. Samples of skin, ear wax or nail scrapings may be taken. These examinations may also involve small 'implants' being inserted in or removed from the abductee's body. Researchers believe these to be tracking devices of some kind. Others report being forced to have sex with aliens (or being seduced by them) and/or humans or fellow abductees of either sex. Some women have claimed to have found themselves pregnant as a result. Communication with the aliens is generally telepathic. Some victims also say they feel as if their minds are being scanned telepathically rather than mechanically during the examination phase, often by this 'leader' or 'doctor'.

3: Conference: Once these ordeals are over, witnesses are allowed to dress and many report having extended conversations with their captors before leaving the ship. At this stage some abductees try to remove an item of the craft's equipment as physical proof of their experience, but the aliens prevent them. Others however are given gifts by the aliens, and sometimes words of wisdom or a 'message for mankind' as well. Frequently, the knowledge they are vouchsafed is to be kept secret and beyond the recall of memory but, the abductees are told, they will be able to remember it when the time is right to reveal it.

4: Tour: A guided tour around the aliens' spacecraft or part of it. In later accounts, this stage includes a visit to alien-human hybrid children, which the abductee may have fathered or borne.

5: Otherworldy journey: Some abductees also report being taken to visit the aliens' planet, or a base on this or another world; this segment of the abduction scenario may take on a distinctly mystical character, which shades into the relatively rare



'theophany'. In abduction reports gathered since the 1980s, this stage is often replaced by screenings of scenes, often apocalyptic, that are taken to be views of Earth's future, or of the aliens' home planet.

6: Theophany: The abductee is put in the presence of a figure, being or other manifestation of apparently divine origin or authority. Here again 'messages' or 'wisdom' may be imparted. Very few abductions feature this stage.

7: Return: The abductee is 'transferred' directly from the craft or 'floated' back to where the aliens first took him or her captive; memories of this stage of the proceedings, like entering the craft, are often very vague. The UFO then leaves at high speed.

8: Aftermath: After the experience is over and the UFO has departed, the abductee discovers that the events of what seemed like a few minutes' duration turn out to have taken an hour or even several. In a few reported cases, days have elapsed. Many abductees report no conscious memory of their experience, and some researchers regard this perception of 'missing time' as a primary clue that an abduction has taken place. In the following days or weeks, bizarre UFO-related dreams and memory flashes may occur. Physical symptoms and emotional reactions may afflict the witness. Some change their way of life entirely.

Bullard regarded this consistency in abductees' narratives as a key indicator of authenticity, maintaining too that "variation is the hallmark of folklore. If parts of a story can vary, they probably will. The parts in an abduction story do not, so I have little confidence that these narratives belong to oral tradition." Critics wondered exactly where Bullard found such a mutable folklore, and further observed that as time went by parts of the 'standard' abduction scenario itself changed too: UFOs appeared less frequently as a precursor to an abduction; the 'conference' gave way to mind 'scanning' and scenes of a depraved sexual nature; a visit to alien-human hybrid 'baby farms' replaced the 'tour'; and the 'otherworldly journey' was replaced by video shows of ruined planets, often assumed to be from Earth's near or potential future.

Critics noted too that the consistency of the abduction narrative did not account for the persistent inconsistency of the appearance of the abductors themselves: by the 1990s, the 'Nordic' types may have faded largely from view, but were replaced by creatures vaguely resembling praying mantises, or reptilian figures (often with rampant libidos), while more humanoid figures appeared in the background or in management roles. Some of these latter, it was said, were humans in USAF uniforms. The little Greys who did constantly appear, and who did the really dirty work, seemed to be subservient to all these horrorshow characters. But perhaps the most devastating criticism of the 'stable narrative' argument was Martin Kottmeyer's demonstration that the abduction scenario simply followed the natural dramatic logic of a good story.

And there was still the problem of hypnosis. In 1988 Philip J Klass published UFO Abductions: A Dangerous Game, which demolished the abductologists' claims that this was a reliable technique for recovering 'lost' or repressed memories. By the early 1990s an incisive academic literature had appeared - mainly in reaction to factitious claims of 'forgotten' child abuse and ritual satanic abuse - that demonstrated how hypnosis could create false memories of the most bizarre (non-) events, and destroying the belief that memories are somehow etched into the brain like grooves on vinyl. None of this made much difference to the proselytisers of the reality, genuineness and authenticity of alien abductions, who soldiered on, broadcasting their ever more outlandish presumptions. And if the claims of a human-alien 'breeding project' seemed conspiracy enough, that was as nearly nothing to the truly paranoid folklore that was building up around the subject. As we shall see next time...

## FREE

Forteanlimes

EXCLUSIVE MUG

when you subscribe

## **Your Phenomenal Offer**

- Get your first 3 issues for £1 if you're not completely satisfied, simply cancel during your trial period
- Exclusive FREE Fortean Times mug
- SAVE up to 21% on the shop price if you continue your subscription
- FREE delivery to your door before it hits the shops



SUBSCRIBE TODAY quoting your offer code below

Call 0844 844 0049

Visit dennismags.co.uk/forteantimes or complete and return the form below



## Forteanlimes 3 TRIAL ISSUES ORDER FORM

YES! Please start my subscription to Fortean Times with 3 issues for £1
and send me my Exclusive Fortean Times mug for FREE. I understand that
the first 3 issues of Fortean Times I receive are on a no obligation trial basis. If I choose
not to continue my subscription I will miss out on updates on the world of strange
phenomena. The trial issues and FREE gift are mine to keep, whatever I decide.

OR I am an existing subscriber. Please extend my subscription with this offer.

## YOUR DETAILS:

Mr/Mrs/Ms	Forename	
Surname		
Address		
		Postcode
Telephone		
Mobile		
Email		Year of birth

## CHEQUE & CREDIT CARD PAYMENTS: £39.98 FOR 12 ISSUES (SAVE 21%)

DΝ	NUM	BER																	START DATE		<b>EXPIRY</b>	DAT
1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	- 1	1	Ш	1	-1	1		1		1

## DIRECT DEBIT PAYMENT: £19.99 every 6 issues (SAVE 21%) - UK ONLY

Name and full postal address of your Bank or E	Building Society	- 1	Oriele		Ident	fication	on Non	mba
To the manager: Bank name			- Uniqui	Lator 3	- Iuent	-	-	T -
1994			7	2	4	6	8	0
Address					your Ba			
		8			s Publish			
	Postcode		the acco	unt deta	illed in th	is instruc	tion sub	ect to
	Postcode		safegua		ed by the	Direct D	ebit Gu	rantee
Account in the name(s) of	Postcode		safegua Lunders Dennis I	nds assur tand that Publishin		Direct Druction n	ebit Gua nay rema tails will	rantee ain with the
	Postcode		safegua Lunders Dennis I	nds assur tand that Publishin	ed by the this inst g Ltd. and	Direct Druction n	ebit Gua nay rema tails will	rantee ain with the
Account in the name(s) of	Signature(s)		safegua Lunders Dennis I	nds assur tand that Publishin	ed by the this inst g Ltd. and	Direct Druction n	ebit Gua nay rema tails will	rantee sin with the

Dennis Publishing (UK) Ltd uses a layered Privacy Notice, giving you brief details about how we would like to use your personal information. For full details please visit our website www.dennis.co.uk/privacy/ or call us on 0844 844 0053 or 01795 419 844. If you have any questions please ask as submitting your details indicates your consent, until you decose otherwise, that we and our partners may contact you about products and services that will be of relevance to you via (infect mail, phone, email and SMS. You can opt-out at ANY time via www.subsinfo.co.uk or privacy@dennis.co.uk or 0844 844 0053 or 01795 419 844.

Gifts limited to first 100 orders. Please allow 28 days for delivery. UK only. This offer is limited to one offer per household

Return this order to: Freepost RLZS-ETGT-BCZR, Fortean Times, 800 Guillat Avenue, Kent Science Park, Sittingbourne ME9 8GU (NO STAMP REQUIRED) OFFER CODE: P1408P

## **HAVE YOUR SAY**

## forum



## **Heavy metal plummeting**

**DAVID A KAISER** suggests that the source of some recent mystery skyfalls might be much nearer the ground than you'd think...



DAVID A KAISER is a writer and researcher in archæology and folklore. He lives in Portland, Oregon. This is his first piece for Fortean Times.

nusual objects falling from the sky have been reported for a couple of thousand years. Charles Fort reported numerous examples in his books and further reports have been a recurring staple of this magazine since its inception.

There are two main types of reported skyfalls. The most common are natural objects, often found in great numbers, such as stones or most commonly fish and other aquatic animals, often arriving during storms and said to have been scooped up in a waterspout and dropped far inland. The second type of object to fall on those unsuspecting below are manmade items. Though groups of coins and other objects have been reported, these manufactured items usually fall singly, and are often said to be space debris, or items fallen from a passing aircraft. This second category offers us more of a chance to get to the bottom of the mystery. If the object can be identified, hopefully its use and possible origin can be determined.

In a survey of manmade objects that came crashing down to earth (see FT285:12) an item was reported that fell through the roof of a furniture warehouse in Plymouth, Massachusetts, on 1 December 2011. It was a six-inch (15cm) long metal tube weighing 3lb (1.4kg). The item was discovered below a hole punched through the roof and surrounded by smashed ceiling tiles1. Nobody was hurt, but warehouse workers reported the event to the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) who came to investigate. The investigator ruled out an aircraft as the source, and a FAA spokeswoman suggested that it might have come from some heavy machinery, like a wood-chipper.

The FT report continues, asking how

such an item could gain enough velocity to come crashing through the roof if it didn't orihginate with an aircraft or as space junk. Another, very similar case from 12 years ago in Hillsboro, Oregon, <sup>2</sup> may help to shed light on these events.

On Thursday 15 August 2002, 21-year-old Aisha Wiig was sitting at home in a suburb outside of Portland when she heard a terrible crashing sound from another room. Rushing into her family's dining room she found the head of a sledgehammer sitting on the dining table beneath a sm

the dining table beneath a smashed chandelier and a hole tunnelled though the ceiling, insulation and roof. A neighbour put the time about 3.40 in the afternoon, when he had heard what sounded like an explosion come from the Wiig house.

When Aisha's father Lawrence got home and saw the \$2,000 worth of damage to the house, he contacted the police and the nearby municipal airport, sure that the item had somehow fallen from an aeroplane; he was particularly convinced of this as there had been increased air traffic that week following a large air show the previous weekend.

The circumstances of these two events were very similar as were the items that crashed through the ceilings. One was a heavy cylinder and the other the head of a sledgehammer, but each item was about 6in (15cm) long and made of metal. The tube weighed 3lb (1.4 kg) and the hammer head weighed 4lb (1.8 kg). Both were found beneath a hole in the ceiling.

Likewise, the FAA was also called in to investigate the Oregon case. <sup>3</sup> The investigator climbed onto the Wiigs' roof and studied the holes in the roof and ceiling. Instead of the item coming straight down, the angle of the holes pointed to a different trajectory – about



ABOVE: The metal tube that crashed through the roof of a furniture warehouse in December 2011. 300ft (91m) away to Oregon Roses, a local plant nursery.

When contacted, the nursery said that they had been grinding up nursery waste in a huge chipper the previous Thursday. At around 3.30 that day, the chipper let out a loud roar and broke down. Workers repaired it and

continued, unaware of any further events that had transpired. When shown the head of the sledgehammer, the nursery's owner recognised it and declared: "Mystery solved."

Other similar cases have also been reported. On 12 March 2010 in Carpentersville, Illinois, a 3 by 4 inch (8 by10cm) piece of metal was tossed 400ft (122m) from a log grinder and through the roof of a nearby house <sup>4</sup>. The Massachusetts case was similar enough to an event six months prior in Belton, Texas, that the victim came forward in the media comparing the two cases. He claimed that a metal shard was thrown as far as 800 yards (732m)

from a tree grinder at a construction site and crashed through the roof of his funeral home <sup>5</sup>.

Wood chippers or similar machinery cannot be to blame for all such falling items, as space debris does sometimes survive reentry and objects do fall from aircraft. 6 However, here we have cases where a terrestrial source of the falling object was positively identified. Certainly, it shows that machines can accidentally launch relatively heavy objects a significant distance and with enough velocity to smash through a roof. This seems a likely solution to the Massachusetts case. So, before looking skyward for a solution to some sky-fall mysteries, we might search for a more terrestrial origin. III

### NOTES

- 1 www.lifeslittlemysteries.com/1958-metal-debris-roof-warehouse.html
- 2 *The Oregonian*, Portland, Oregon, 20 Aug 2002.
- 3 *The Oregonian,* Portland, Oregon, 22 Aug 2002
- 4 Daily Herald, Chicago, Illinois, 14 Mar 2010
- 5 http://boston.cbslocal.com/2011/12/02/police-eye-texas-mans-theory-on-mystery-metal-chunk-that-hit-plymouth-business/
- 6 Another Oregon example, traced to an aircraft, is a rain of furniture that fell near Medford in 1951. *The Oregonian*, Portland, Oregon, 13 Dec 1951.

## Speculative zoology

**DARREN NAISH** argues that cryptozoologists have failed to provide evidence for their putative unknown creatures – but perhaps there's another approach...



**DARREN NAISH** is a palæontologist based at the University of Southampton and blogs at Tetrapod Zoology, hosted at *Scientific American*.

t a Weird Weekend talk delivered in the backroom of a pub called the Cowick Barton, my plan was to eject a slide featuring the front cover of Meurger and Gagnon's classic Lake Monster Traditions from the projector before vigorously stamping it to bits on the floor. Cryptozoologist Richard Freeman was going to leap to the fore and help me out. And, yes, slides and slide projectors - you know that I'm talking about something that happened a long, long time ago. The dislike that some cryptozoological literalists had (and have) for Michel Meurger and his colleagues reflects a battle that's occurred for years behind the scenes in the world of mystery animal research, one in which each side sees the other as woefully naive and hopelessly misguided. Herein lies part of the backstory to the Cryptozoologicon, a book that I published with John Conway and Memo Kosemen in 2013 1 and which has received both praise and scorn, albeit in unequal measure. We liked what Meurger had to say, 2 but we were inspired by other events to approach cryptozoology from an altogether different direction.

As a much younger person, I became interested in cryptozoology because I believed that the eyewitness accounts of the literature described encounters with real unknown animals – animals that represented unknown species that were spectacular in form, size, or significance. I hold out hope that new, large animal species might prove to be the explanation for certain sea monster reports, mystery primate reports, or whatever; many of us do.

But having engaged on a long and meandering trip that's led me to where I am now, I think that Meurger and colleagues were mostly right: that cryptozoology has more to do with a mythified, cultural view of the world, and how people interpret and misinterpret the world around them,

than it does with the flesh-and-blood cryptozoological literalism promoted by Bernard Heuvelmans and his followers. Investigations of many of the classic tales of eyewitnesses and stories-passed-down-since-the-dawn-oftime have shown that most are wanting, corrupted, or so suspicious that they should be discarded.<sup>3</sup> The evolutionary scenarios and cryptid identities that cryptozoologists have favoured are almost wholly based on incorrect ideas that were otherwise thrown out decades ago.4 And cryptid hunters have been outstandingly good at providing an overwhelming absence of evidence for the mystery creatures they seek. An enormous body of research has also shown that people are terrible eyewitnesses 5 - the takehome being that any field based predominantly on accepting eyewitness testimony at its word is on fatally shaky ground.

The key epiphany came from an endeavour not traditionally associated with cryptozoology: speculative zoology, the imaginative field in which people invent creatures from hypothetical timelines, alternative evolutionary trajectories and 'what if?' scenarios. In 2012, John, Memo and I published *All Yesterdays*, a book devoted to the idea that long-extinct animals might (in some cases) have looked very different from traditional depictions, and might also (in some cases) have engaged in behaviours that we might consider

BELOW: What do speculative creatures – in this case future animals from Dougal Dixon's 1981 book *After Man* – have in common with cryptids? Well, a lot.



absurd, or even not (ordinarily) consider at all. <sup>6</sup> A long-standing interest in the writings of Dougal Dixon and other spec zoo visionaries meant that we were familiar with the fictional creatures of the speculative literature, and already versed in producing our own (see Memo's *Snaiad* project, and my own *Squamozoic*).

Cryptozoologists have done so much more than collect sightings and sort them into sets for analysis. They have made explicit and precise identifications of the creatures they believe to be at the bottom of eyewitness reports, have given them their own scientific names, have allocated these hypothetical creatures specific positions on the tree of life, have placed them within an ecological context, and have given them their own evolutionary histories.

If we're going to take seriously the idea that some mystery animal reports describe genuine undiscovered animals, a bit of speculation is forgivable and even necessary. In the vast majority of cases, however, things have gone way too far. We aren't sure that these creatures exist in the first place, so giving them names and concocting evolutionary scenarios for them is more science fiction than science.

There are many excellent examples of this over-confident 'creature building'. One of my favourites concerns the Dingonek, a tusked, predatory water monster, 5-6m (16-20ft) long and said to inhabit river systems across tropical Africa. Supposedly, it goes by many local names, an assumption being that the many entities concerned refer to the same animal (a big assumption and almost certainly an erroneous one). Based on details reported by witnesses and the ethnic people who 'know' this creature, Heuvelmans proposed that the Dingonek might be a modern-day, aquatic sabretoothed cat. He reasoned that sabretooths might have survived to the present by adopting lifestyles where they could avoid competition with conical-toothed cats (lions, leopards and so on), gigantic feline 'jungle walruses' being the result. Make no mistake, this is speculative zoology at its finest. Likewise for various of the hypothetical sea monsters and other cryptids that Heuvelmans invented, often with the input of his friend and colleague Ivan T

Heuvelmans and Sanderson are revered and admired by cryptozoologists and their conclusions are widely adopted. Partly this is because they've been regarded as scientific gurus who came to consider cryptozoological

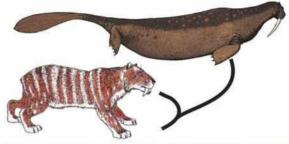


problems only after they'd become qualified and experienced in staid, technical zoology. In fact, both were very much outside the sphere of scientific research, and committed to popularisation and cryptozoology. There's nothing wrong with that, but what people seem to ignore is that material written to sell books and magazine articles is very different in scope and content from material designed for the technical literature - it needs to be entertaining, even sensational and dramatic, and is not constrained by a reliance on evidence in the same way that scientific hypotheses are.

In the end, Heuvelmans and Sanderson were brilliant, experienced, and intelligent, but their contributions to the literature have to be seen within the context of speculative zoology, not as science or even scientific writing. And to those who say that Heuvelmans and Sanderson weren't meant to be "doing science" anyway: wrong. Heuvelmans specifically said that cryptozoology was about the formulation of hypotheses, that it involved the collation of data, and that it was subject to self-correction, verification and falsification.7 Cryptozoology is a science, even though it overlaps other areas of study (like ethnobiology and anthropology) and even if some of its proponents practise pseudoscience, are more interested in folklore or the collection of anecdotes. or have an anti-scientific agenda.

Anyway, if cryptozoologists can take reports of mystery creatures and weave them into a detailed biological, evolutionary and ecological narrative, can people versed in the ways of speculative zoology do likewise? Yes they can; and this is exactly what we set out to do in *Cryptozoologicon* – merging a speculative treatment with heavy scepticism, rebranding the creaturebuilding component of cryptozoology as speculative zoology, and 'outsciencing' some of the speculations of the cryptozoological literature.

Creatures covered include classics like Bigfoot, Yeti, Chupacabra, Bunyip and Waitoreke as well as more obscure ones like the Dingonek, Ahool and Mbielu-Mbielu. Our choice of creatures was based wholly on which ones we wanted to illustrate and write about. The aim was never to discredit or mock cryptozoology. I personally think that attempts to do so look lazy and intellectually unsatisfying, in part because you can't smear all cryptozoological research efforts with the same proverbial brush, nor





## We aren't sure that these

from sabre-toothed cats is partly based mythical monsters zoologically accurate.

ABOVE: The idea that the Dingonek evolved on an ancient piece of rock art. But that rock art shows a series of and is not meant to be it the focus of the volume. Annalee Newitz at io9 understood what we'd done, describing the Cryptozoologicon as a "complicated merger between speculative fiction and scientific analysis" that provides "both a scientific debunkery as well as an enthusiastic, fictional endorsement of the creature's existence". Oh, that thing that we didn't think anybody would be dumb enough to fall for - you know, the thing where they become aware of our imagineered cryptids and think that we're proposing them as a serious explanation for the cryptid concerned - happened, since one cryptozoologist took time to complain about the concept of Mbielia, the gargantuan bichir we 'proposed' as the 'explanation' 'behind' the Congolose Mbielu-Mbielu-Mbielu (bichirs are weird, tropical African fish with numerous dorsal finlets and an overall prehistoric demeanour). But, then, in order to read what we say in the book, you do have to buy it. Sorry about that.

What do we gain by rebooting (part of) cryptozoology as speculative zoology? Nobody's going to sensibly claim that a heavily illustrated, 100page softback might be revolutionary, but it might be true to say that the Cryptozoologicon helps point cryptozoology in the right direction. As is often the case with perspectives that contradict those championed by the main proponents of a field, what we say is not liked or appreciated by some, and ignored by those who think that we're spoiling the fun. And we'll do more of that in volume II, soon to appear. 🔟

- 1 John Conway, CM Kosemen, Darren Naish, Cryptozoologicon Volume I. Irregular Books, 2013
- 2 Michel Meurger, Claude Gagnon, Lake Monster Traditions: A Cross-Cultural Analysis. Fortean Tomes, 1988
- 3 Daniel Loxton, Donald Prothero, Abominable Science! Columbia University
- 4 Darren Naish, "Sea serpents, seals and coelacanths: an attempt at a holistic approach to the identity of large aquatic cryptids". Fortean Studies Volume 7, 2001.
- 5 See citations in Charles Morgan et al., "Accuracy of eyewitness memory for persons encountered during exposure to highly intense stress", International Journal of Law and Psychiatry 27, 2004, 265-279.
- 6 John Conway, CM Kosemen, Darren Naish, All Yesterdays, Irregular Books, 2013
- 7 Bernard Heuvelmans, "What is cryptozoology?" Cryptozoology 1, 1982,

do all practitioners of cryptozoology

dunderheadedness. Rather, our aim was

to point to the more problematic aspects

of the field: pseudoscience, anti-science,

naivety, speculations that are too wild to

The speculative sections of our book

are sometimes silly and fanciful, moving

discussion present throughout the rest

wrote those sections as if we ourselves

the book away from the review and

of its text. In part this is because we

literalists, over-interpreting meagre

anecdotes and angrily ranting about

rich, ivory-tower scientists who are

too lazy or cowardly to consider the

possibility that cryptids might be real.

with an enormous online presence said

that the speculative sections obscured

serious review and critique. And some

others readers also suggested that we

would have done better without them.

A majority, however, told us precisely

the opposite: they loved the speculative

zoology, wanted more of it, and wished

that we'd latched on to this and made

the fact that the book also included

One prolific cryptozoological author

were dedicated cryptozoological

be taken seriously, sloppy research and

inane claims.

employ the same lack of rigour or



## **Foundation sacrifices revisited**

Is there any real evidence connecting London Bridge with instances of human sacrifice? Nursery rhymes, children's games and Victorian folklorists aside, a sceptical **JOHN CLARK** rather doubts it...



JOHN CLARK is a retired museum curator with an interest in the folklore and fakelore of London, and what they tell us about the past of the city and attitudes to it.

ondon Bridge has, over the years, attracted a range of myths, including that of the "human foundation sacrifice" discussed by David Hambling in his article "In the shadow of the Shard" [FT314:56-7] – but perhaps a little scepticism is in order in this case.

Hambling quotes the Victorian folklorist Alice Bertha Gomme who, in her 1894 book The Traditional Games of England, Scotland and Ireland, suggested that the nursery rhyme/singing game "London Bridge is falling down' reflects a tradition of human sacrifice connected with London Bridge. She notes that the rhyme, after recording failed attempts to repair the bridge using various materials, culminates in the decision to appoint a watchman to guard it; the game includes the 'capture' of a 'prisoner' as the children forming an arch bring their arms down to grasp one of those passing underneath. Mrs Gomme concludes that this prisoner was originally destined to be immured in the foundations of the bridge as a perpetual supernatural guardian: "Looking to the fact of the widespread superstition of the foundation sacrifice, it would seem that we may have here a tradition of this rite."

Like her husband, the historian and folklorist George Laurence Gomme, Mrs Gomme followed the then fashionable practice of finding a very early origin for recent popular beliefs and customs in 'primitive' or 'pagan' ritual – they were too ready, perhaps, to accept, on the basis of 'tradition', that there was a widespread 'fact' of human sacrifices placed in the foundations of bridges and other buildings.

"London Bridge is falling down" was also discussed by Fiona and Peter Opie in their books *The Oxford Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes* (1951) and *The Singing Game* (1985). They set it in its wider context, amidst a range of similar games and accompanying songs from THE

## TRADITIONAL GAMES

Of England, Scotland, and Ireland

WITH

TUNES, SINGING-RHYMES, AND METHODS OF PLAYING
ACCORDING TO THE VARIANTS EXTANT AND
RECORDED IN DIFFERENT PARTS
OF THE KINGDOM

COLLECTED AND ANNOTATED BY
ALICE BERTHA GOMME

VOL. I.

ACCROSHAY-NUTS IN MAY

LONDON DAVID NUTT, 270-71 STRAND

elsewhere in Europe. There are, for example, versions from Germany (where it may be the bridge of Meissen, or Merseburg, or Magdeburg, or simply "the golden bridge"), from Scandinavia, Spain and France. Thus we need to widen our scope - if the rhyme embodies a tradition of ritual human sacrifice, it is one that relates not specifically to London Bridge, but to European bridges in general. And indeed, that is how the Opies (usually more sceptical about such matters) take it: "Bridge building is a hazardous undertaking, and it has long been thought sensible to propitiate the river with a sacrifice, a human life if possible" (The Singing Game, p 64). In support of this view they quote an incident in Assam in 1939, when an engineer constructing a bridge claimed that his enthusiastic Indian workmen had brought him a live month-old baby to build into the foundations.

If this is true, one wonders whether the workmen did so because it was a custom among their own people, or because they believed that it was a requirement of their European masters. GL Gomme gives an account (Folklore as an Historical Science, 1908, pp26-7) of events in Calcutta



ABOVE: Alice Bertha Gomme, who suggested a connection between "London Bridge is falling down" and human sacrifice. in 1872, also briefly mentioned by Mrs Gomme in her 1894 book, when a rumour apparently went round among the local population that the government needed 100,000 human heads for the foundations of a great new bridge across the Hoogley (Hooghly) River, and that government officers were collecting heads. (In fact, the new Hooghly River bridge was a pontoon bridge, which required no foundations!) Often (as seems also to be true of many tales of ritual cannibalism) the practice of human foundation sacrifices is attributed to the distant past or to 'other people' - in this case the British government of India. And in this context the circumstance noted by Hambling from Eric Hansen's 1988 book Stranger in the Forest: On Foot across Borneo - is interesting - that as a white man he was regarded with suspicion, because the locals believed that Western oil companies were kidnapping children to bury in the foundations of their new buildings!

However, the very term "the tradition of foundation sacrifice", as it appears for example in the paragraph heading Hambling's article, is ambiguous. Does it mean "there has existed in the past a widespread and traditional practice of human foundation sacrifices" or simply "there is/was a widespread tradition that human foundation sacrifices once took place"? I suspect most modern folklorists would accept the truth of the latter, but would deny that it gives us any grounds to believe the former in the absence of corroborative evidence.

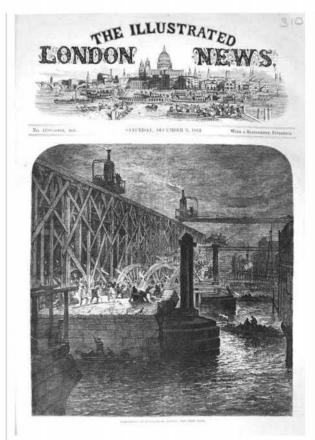
For example, Hambling refers us to the volume edited by Alan Dundes *The Walled-Up Wife: A Casebook* (1996). It comprises a number of papers on the subject of a particular form of the 'foundation sacrifice' legend popular in Greece and the Balkans, in which a stone bridge continually collapses until the chief mason's wife is immured in one of the piers. Dundes includes a paper by Paul Brewster entitled "The foundation sacrifice motif in legend, folksong, game and dance". Brewster discusses not just the Greek/Balkan legend, but also "London Bridge



is falling down" and its relatives; implicit in his work is the assumption that all of these reflect actual ancient ritual practice. Brewster's article was first published in 1971, and in reprinting it in 1996 Alan Dundes adds a caveat, gently reminding the reader that in writing it Brewster had adopted what Dundes terms the 'myth-ritual' approach (evidently now unfashionable among folklorists) - "a story-line which involves the sacrifice of a young woman to ensure the successful construction of a bridge, castle, or monastery was understood to refer to an actual historical custom... a form of 'foundation sacrifice'."

Dundes comments that a "problem with the myth-ritual theory is that one almost never finds concrete documentary evidence" (or, one might add, reliable archæological evidence) "of the alleged ritual actually occurring. Rather it is just assumed that a particular ritual must have occurred in the far distant past." The Gommes and their contemporaries, and many of their successors, most notably Sir James Frazer, were what Terry Pratchett and Jacqueline Simpson (The Folklore of Discworld, 2008, pp292-3) have defined as 'speculative folklorists': "That, at any rate, is a theory... put forward by speculative folklorists in Ankh-Morpork, and enthusiastically adopted by people who feel tradition must always be bloodthirsty, or about sex, or (preferably) both." But, as they also remind us (p349), "Folklorists have learnt to be careful; if it looks like a jolly good story" (like that of the walled-up wife) "it may very well be one."

What of the other supporting 'traditional' evidence quoted by Hambling? He cites folklorist and mythologist Lewis Spence (Myth and Ritual in Dance, Game, and Rhyme, 1947) as the source of the information that "a tradition existed that when London Bridge was built it was 'sanctified' or 'insured' by the blood of children." However, Spence's own footnote takes us straight back to Alice Bertha Gomme, who claimed "there is a tradition about London Bridge itself, that the stones were bespattered with the blood of little children." Sadly, Mrs Gomme provides no reference for this information, and I have not identified her source or any independent account of this tradition. Hambling also directs us to Benedict le Vay's popular guidebook Eccentric London (2007), which tells us: "It is said by various chroniclers that the



## There is no account of human bones being found

previous timber bridge had a virgin's bones in its foundations..." I have no idea who these chroniclers may have been (if there were any), and suspect that this author has replaced the usual children by 'a virgin' because virgins are sexier. Guidebooks are generally

not the best guides to history.

All one can safely conclude is that there *are* (in the 21st century) traditions about foundation sacrifices at London Bridge, traditions that are passed on and elaborated uncritically in print and on the web – but we have no idea of their origin or their age, and we certainly cannot use them to reconstruct rituals that may have occurred when London Bridge was being built or rebuilt.

As to archæological evidence: Hambling has clearly (like me) found no account of human bones being found by archæologists in the ABOVE: The demolition of the first Blackfriars Bridge, as shown on the cover of the Illustrated London News.

foundations of Old London Bridge or its Roman and early mediæval predecessors. But he refers to an interesting discovery made in the 1860s during the demolition of the first Blackfriars Bridge. built between 1760 and 1769. Contemporary accounts (in the Illustrated London News, 2 Mar 1867, p218 and the Journal of the British Archæological Association, vol 23, 1867, pp92-3) indeed confirm that during the demolition of the old bridge in the autumn of 1866, a large number of bones was found, 15ft (4.6m) deep in the riverbed below one of the bridge piers. They included a horse's skull, other horse and cattle bones, and some bones identified as human. In the absence of a modern archæological investigation, it is unclear whether or not these bones were related to the 18th-century construction. One member of the British Archæological Association, when they were exhibited there, expressed the view that they were of "great antiquity" - hardly consistent with a date of deposition only 100 years earlier - and one may be permitted to doubt their association with the construction of the bridge in the

Hambling ends with "a grisly modern footnote" - the mutilated body of a young Nigerian boy found floating in the Thames in 2001. He comments: "Possibly by coincidence, Ikpomwosa's body was found floating underneath London Bridge." Yes, I'd agree that if the body was found floating underneath London Bridge, it was a coincidence - but is that where it was found? From media accounts (such as BBC News, 23 Sept 2001: http://news. bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/1558833.stm) it seems that the body was first seen near Tower Bridge [FT277:22], and later recovered by the police from the river opposite the reconstructed Shakespeare's Globe Theatre although I suppose one could argue that the body did float underneath London Bridge between those two locations.

The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Quotations includes a recommendation from the aged Oxford classical scholar Dr Martin Routh (1755-1854), which should surely be borne in mind by anyone who sets out to investigate either folklore or forteana: "You will find it a very good practice always to verify your references, sir!"

## Facts and fun for inquisitive Girls & Boys!

**AQUILA MAGAZINE** is ideal for children who want to know the whys and wherefores of everything.

AQUILA will start its young readers on the right track and feed their interest with factual articles, puzzles and fun-activities that are designed to ignite children's enthusiasm and creativity.

Great

gift for

12 year

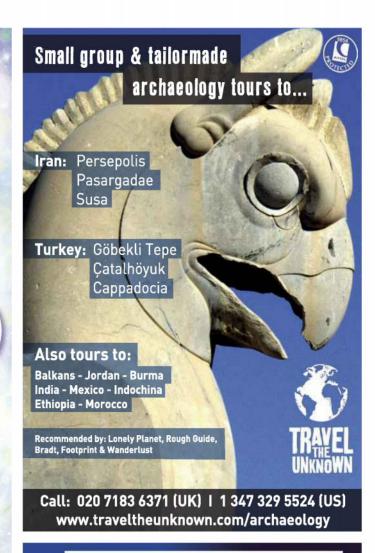
Every monthly issue of AQUILA has a new topic. Coming up next: Captain Cook, Sport and The Equator. There's no celebrity gossip or advertorial; instead, children can deepen their interest and understanding of the world around

Research suggests that one in five primary-aged children finds school work too simple, so it is reassuring to know that AQUILA Magazine, which is recommended by educational specialists, will provide challenges for our brightest children. You will not find AQUILA at the newsagents; it is only available by subscription.

"I've read every single one, and I'm still not bored!"

www.aquila.co.uk • 01323 431313





## **INVESTORS** WANTED

website enquiry form at: www.1renewables/get-in-touch.ph JOIN OUR GROWING LIST OF INVESTORS IN SINGLE TURBINES 1 RENEWABLES LTD, a Scottish wind-power company, seeks investors for renewables projects secured by the UK Government Feed-in Tariff. Minimum amount 5k, no maximum amount. Excellent

returns for 20 year FiT programme, or for shorter periods if preferred. Corporate and personal guarantees provided.

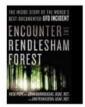
CONTACT Ian on 07713 912473 ian@lrenewables.com or alastair@lrenewables.com This month's books, films and games

## reviews



## **UFO** theories built on sand

Rendlesham witnesses may still be alive and kicking, but some testimonies appear inconsistent – and the inclusion of debunked evidence does not inspire confidence



## Encounter in Rendlesham Forest

The Inside Story of the World's Best-Documented UFO Incident

Nick Pope with John Burroughs and Jim Penniston

Thistle Publishing 2014

Pb, 288pp, £9.99, ISBN 9781910198186

### FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £9.99

This is one of those books that's designed to entrench a certain view of the events of December 1980 in Rendlesham Forest rather than to analyse competing claims about them. Still less is it intended to deconstruct or debunk this hardy ufological legend, but that's hardly a shock. The authors' take is essentially that of 'key witness' Jim Penniston, as variously developed in interviews over the years, and here elaborated. This isn't the authors' final word on the case. since Penniston and Burroughs maintain that their encounter with a UFO has left them with chronic health problems, but they have had difficulty extracting the relevant medical records from US Government archives. This opens the way for a sequel. We may have to steel ourselves for that in any event, for 'lead' author Nick Pope likes to remind readers (several times) that "Roswell has become part of history" whereas, because the Rendlesham witnesses are still alive and kicking, this incident should become "the new focus" of ufology.

In short, we may take it that

this is the first in a series of soidisant canonical works, through which Pope presumably hopes to become the gatekeeper of the case in the same way (exactly the same way) that Stanton Friedman keeps guard over 'Roswell' and MJ-12. I say soi-disant because, useful and revealing as definitive versions of legends are, Pope's account is hardly an authoritative presentation of facts. His essential argument is this: "The most compelling aspect of the Rendlesham Forest incident are the events that were witnessed by several people, such as when Burroughs and Penniston witnessed the UFO at close range on the first night or when Halt and his men saw the UFO fire light beams at the ground on the subsequent night; it's the corroborating evidence such as the charred trees, the radiation readings and the radar evidence."

Slight difficulty here, m'lud. First there's the central glitch in the logic - as in, how does anyone know that Burroughs & Co's UFO was among the party of UFOs that Halt & Co thought they were watching? Then there's the curious mismatch between the boxy UFO as drawn by Penniston for his official witness statement, and the more complex one that appears in what he claims was the notebook he carried at the time. And the mismatch between what he savs he saw and what everyone else there has said they saw and didn't find. No one has corroborated Penniston's version of how 'his' UFO departed, either. While he was having a dramatic encounter, his cohort Burroughs seems to have been 'switched off' like any abductee's companion. This isn't the place to pick apart such things in detail (those interested can

## "'Rendlesham' is not so much a classic case as a baroque one – with lashings of Rococo"

consult Ian Ridpath's web pages), but it is worth noting that all the 'pro-UFO' participants' accounts of the incident have elaborated over the years (so much for the reliability of living witnesses), and may now be some distance from trustworthiness. 'Rendlesham' is not so much a classic case as a baroque one – and this book adds a few lashings of Rococo.

Penniston counters: "Any inconsistencies in my account can easily be attributed to the meddling of the inept debriefing and the drug-induced attempted extraction of information by the US agents at the AFOSI building or quite possibly by the phenomenon itself." Blaming a 'phenomenon' whose existence is more than somewhat questionable is the ultimate get-out, which might be translated as 'scraping the bottom of the barrel' and is, of course, unfalsifiable. None of the stories about 'drug-induced' (doesn't he mean 'drug-assisted'?) interrogations have withstood close examination.

Halt's beam-shooting UFOs can, with virtual certainty, be identified as the scintillating stars Sirius, Vega and Deneb. Pope presents forester Vince Thurkettle as qualifying his identification of the lighthouse as the flashing 'UFO' Halt saw. Pope reports Thurkettle telling him in 2010 that "while he still

maintained that it was possible that the lighthouse could have played a small part in the events, he did not believe it could fool people over two nights or for so long a period of time. So... its original proponent has effectively ruled it out." This is playing fast and loose, because no one has ever claimed the lighthouse was more than one (albeit significant) aspect of the concatenation of events in the forest, and Thurkettle clearly hasn't ruled it out, effectively or otherwise. Words seem to mean whatever Pope wants them to mean. No one listening to the radio traffic from Halt's search team and watching the sky from Woodbridge saw any of the lights Halt described, either in the sky, on the ground or shooting 'beams'.

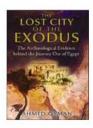
The report of 'charred trees' that Pope & Co rely on came from a supposed 'forester' of whom none of the professional foresters in the area had ever heard. The 'abnormality' of the radiation readings that Pope harps on about has been debunked by the manufacturers of the equipment used - and their conclusions broadcast in a TV programme in which Pope himself appeared. Was his mind elsewhere while the cameras were on him? If not, why does he mislead his readers? As for the 'radar evidence': there isn't any. Pope is deceiving his readers, or those of them who may have come to this book hoping for a balanced account. But then the whole book is full of tendentious, distracting rhetoric.

In sum, this is an attempt to trap the Rendlesham legend into one particular jelly mould, with the added spice that Penniston telepathically received a message

Continued on page 60

## An inexact science

The exodus of the Jews cannot be dated, verified or identified with a particular person, so orthodox views lose their heft



## The Lost City of the Exodus

The Archæological Evidence Behind the Journey out of Egypt

Ahmed Osman

Bear and Co 2014

Pb, 224pp; £10.99 ISBN 9781591431893

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £9.89

The relationship between Egypt and Israel in ancient times is both a focus of intense interest, academic and otherwise, and a morass of conflicting evidence, contradictory theories and crackpot revelations. If one event perfectly symbolises this confusion, it is the Exodus. Is it an historical event, now buried beneath a mountain of scripture and prejudice? Or is it a scriptural fiction that has become an historical chimera, guiding maverick scholars through a desert of delusion like a pillar of uncanny fire?

Since the beginning of the 20th century, when Freud first made the connection between Moses and Akhenaten (originally as a personal attempt on Freud's part to understand what it meant to be Jewish) a great deal of paper has been consumed trying to prove or disprove the link between the men recognised as the world's first two great monotheists. The pedant in me wants to point out that they were actually both monolatrists, but why spoil a good cliché?

Thus the end of Akhenaten's reign, obscurely inglorious as it was, marks a pivotal point in the modern version of the Exodus narrative. Around it, dating

estimates for the supposed event range 1,000 years back and 6,000 years forward (and that's an estimate on my part; there may be theories out there too wild even for my forgiving bibliophilia).

What does it say about our capacity for accurate historical knowledge that an event of enormous significance for millions of people cannot be dated securely within 1,000 years or so, cannot be verified one way or the other, and cannot be safely identified with a particular historical character? Well, one thing it suggests is that the mavericks are just as likely to be right as the academics, and the academics are just as likely to be heroically wrong as the crackpots.

Which makes the whole business fertile fortean territory, of course; and it also allows for a type of scholar who is both academically accredited and outside the box of orthodoxy. David Rohl is perhaps the most famous member of this group, and has thrown his own fourpence worth into the vexed subjects of ancient Egyptian chronology and the authenticity of the Old Testament narrative.

Ahmed Osman is less well known, but his work is consistently interesting. Most of his career has focused precisely on the subject of ancient Egypt and Israel, and the Exodus has been at the centre of his work for some years.

In this, his latest book on the subject, Osman focuses on identifying the city of Zarw in the Nile delta, and its connection with the ancient Hebrews, the remnants of the Aten cult, and the Exodus narrative. After reviewing his own history (a pretty interesting mix of fundamentalist Islam, card-carrying Communism, and a litany of struggles with various forms of archæological – and, frankly, racist – prejudice) Osman gives a reasonably comprehensive

overview of the whole Moses/ Akhenaton controversy, and summarises recent archæological work in the area. Then he goes on to set out his own theories about the influence of Hebrew figures in the Egyptian government and monarchy in the period just before and during the ill-fated reign of Akhenaton. He identifies Joseph, the biblical patriarch, as Yuya, the éminence grise who appears to act both as a trusted family advisor to Akhenaton and Nefertiti, and a shadowy player in the confused aftermath of the El-Amarna dynasty.

This is not an original insight on Osman's part (Velikovsky suggested it many years ago), but he makes a good case for both the identifications, and the major role played by Hebrews in the political and religious life of the Kingdom in one of its more troubled periods.

The significance of Zarw rests on theories of what the Israelites were doing immediately prior to the Exodus, and how that impacted on Egyptian history, and what it means for the Exodus narrative.

He clears up some of the confusion around the role of the city of Avaris (a subject Rohl has written about extensively) and paints a credible picture of the period that makes sense of the archæology and the biblical narrative.

I just wish Ahmed Osman made use of a decent editor. Some of the prose is so littered with mistakes it makes him look like an illiterate, which he plainly is not. Better presented, this book would be a must for readers interested in the subject. As it is, it's well worth the read if you can bridle your grammatical irritation.

**Noel Rooney** 

Fortean Times Verdict

FASCINATING TALE, BUT NEEDS SOME RIGOROUS EDITING

8

Continued from page 59

in binary code from the landed UFO. This makes the case neatly straddle the crashed-saucer and the UFO-contactee legendries, with Penniston as prophet ("So my thinking is that it [the binary code] is for all of mankind and not one man"), creating a new ufological sub-genre. But if you're going to go in for such an enterprise, you might at least give references to and titles of documents quoted, provide an index in all printed copies (mine stopped dead at p269), try to give proper accounts of military encounters with UFOs (Pope even peddles the Thomas Mantell and Phoenix lights cases as unsolved), lay off the gossip and innuendo, and generally make your glorified pamphlet a trifle more plausible. And do not use phrases like "ongoing situation", know the difference between a lieutenant commander and a lieutenant colonel USAF, and maybe even name some of your more trenchant sceptical critics. That last omission smacks of cowardice.

Peter Brookesmith

Fortean Times Verdict
IF YOU WANT A LEGEND, BUY IT.
IF YOU WANT FACTS, DON'T

2

## Göbekli Tepe

**Genesis of the Gods**Andrew Collins

Bear & Company 2014

Pb, 432pp, illus, notes, bib, ind, £16.99, ISBN 9781591431428

## FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £15.29



The author develops themes from his previous works to fill in the background to one of the great recent

archæological discoveries, the megalithic site of Göbekli Tepe in southeastern Turkey (c.11000-8000 BC). The founding elite are identified as descendants of Swiderians, a post-Ice Age 'tanged point' flint culture that ranged across Europe, reaching the Caucasus Mountains in their search for obsidian. Collins further proposes the Swiderians were ideological successors of the Solutreans, whose cave art shows certain animals also found at Göbekli Tepe some six millennia later. Analysis of

celestial alignments somewhat validates the Swiderian idea, and a cometary catastrophe prior to Göbekli's construction rounds off the site's raison d'être. much in the vein of the theories of Knight, Lomas, Hancock, Velikovsky etc. With 35 centuries dividing the Solutreans from the Swiderians, and the region's social situation inadequately framed, the interpretation of some of Göbekli's curious symbolism in celestial terms may overreach, with tangential research from a grab-bag of world myths (eg. Mayan).

Collins's kicker is that the Swiderians were Neanderthalhuman hybrids whose cranially-elongated, 'viper-like' physiognomy passed into Judaic myth as the serpentine Watchers and the Nephilim, and the Mesopotamian Annunaki. This also explains the head-binding practice during the Halaf and Ubaid periods (5500-3500 BC) in the Middle East.

Unless this region is a special case, does it also explain the practice on every inhabited continent from much earlier eras? The CG visualisation of the Göbekli elite with their terrifying features undermines this theory. It does not resemble statuary contemporary with (and likely portraying) the Göbekli 'priesthood'. No snake-people carvings exist at Göbekli; its snakes are snakes, and animals like wild boar and spiders are also prominent. Other crucial findings don't require ranging across millennia and much later cultures to better understand its purpose and why it was eradicated are overlooked. As an opening gambit, though, it's a good stab at a mystery that will endure with the entire site yet to be uncovered.

The final third of the book relates a quest in Armenia to find the original Garden of Eden and the source of biblical Genesis narrative. The maze of arcane references and interpretations are far too wide-ranging to assess without considerable research. Jerry Glover

**Fortean Times Verdict** OVER-SPECULATIVE TREATMENT **OF AN IMPORTANT SITE** 

## **Post-deluge mythos**

Richard S Shaver and his Boswell, Ray Palmer, created a complex and unlikely mythology about underground deros





## Shavertron, Vol. 1

The Mimeograph Years

Richard Toronto, ed.

Shavertron Press 2013 Pb, 132pp, illus, \$14.95, ISBN 9780991139606

AVAILABLE FROM THE PUBLISHER

## Shavertron, Vol. 2

**The Lettershop Years** 

Richard Toronto, ed.

Shavertron Press 2014

Pb, 228pp, illus, \$15.95, ISBN 9780991139613

AVAILABLE FROM THE PUBLISHER

"Now, I don't have to tell you that the dero are sex-obsessed to a high degree. Is it possible that in most cases, a rapist is a machine controlled by the hidden dero?'

Umm... Well, there's a lot of that sort of thing in the pages of these two collections of Richard Toronto's now-defunct newsletter, which in its day boasted it was 'The Only Source of Post-Deluge Shaverania'. And if names like 'Shaver' and 'dero' mean nothing to you, so will these books, made up of issues of the fanzine from 1979 to 1983.

Though to my knowledge I have never personally met anybody who believes in the literal existence of deros (demonic underground entities originally from another planet), these books do persuade me that such individuals, if not many of them, still walk the planet.

Shaver is Richard S Shaver, who died in 1975. He was famously championed by 1940s sciencefiction editor Ray Palmer (d.1977), who turned the delusions of a man suffering clinical mental illness into the 'Shaver Mystery',

an elaborate mythology which fascinated or repelled readers of Amazing Stories long ago. Flying saucers would come along just a little later, and ever since a parallel debunker mythology - that Shaver's yarns are responsible for the 'UFO legend' would persist, even in the absence of any demonstrable link between the two.

Hardly any UFO observers, then or now, knew or know of

Shaver

Mystery

Revisited

Jack Strikes Again!

Shaver or Palmer, though the latter would go on to co-found Fate and publish his own minisculecirculation Flying Saucers years later.

Toronto, the go-to biographer of Shaver and Palmer, is author of the excellent War Over Lemuria (2013), which you ought to read before vou plunge into the alternative Shaver on the cover of Fate, 2005 universe of Shaver

enthusiasm chronicled here.

In his biography, which presents its subjects in a sympathetic if unsentimental light, Toronto exposes the true origins of Shaver's beliefs - not physical visits to the caverns, as alleged, but voices in the head, sometimes channelled orally.

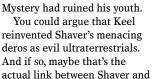
Still, as these Shavertron volumes attest (two more are on the way), a tiny core following has taken it all in, and some enterprising souls have even

searched for cavern openings. Shaverians don't represent a "cult," though; they're the sorts of people who've absorbed a range of fringe beliefs, prominently (it goes without saying) conspiracy theories, and the Shaver Mysterv takes its place alongside lots of other wildly unlikely notions, each serving to validate the other.

The pages of these books will amuse or exhaust you, sometimes at the same time. They do

> document what might be called an anarchy of the spirit, where imagination is freed from the shackles of that detestable nuisance called 'evidence'.

The one consistently sane voice is Toronto's, at once engaged and detached. I do learn, incidentally, that John Keel believed exposure to the Shaver



Jerome Clark

reinvented Shaver's menacing deros as evil ultraterrestrials. And if so, maybe that's the actual link between Shaver and ufology, or that little corner of it forever hooked on paranoia and demonology.

**Fortean Times Verdict** A FASCINATING PLUNGE INTO THE MAD UNIVERSE OF SHAVERANIA

To order any of these titles – or any other book in print – contact the

## FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP

Telephone: 08430600031 Fax: 01326 569555 Email: FT@sparkledirect.co.uk Address: Fortean Times Bookshop, PO Box 60, Helston TR13 OTP. We accept all major credit and debit cards including Switch & Amex. Cheques or postal orders should be made payable to the FT Bookshop. Delivery is 7-10 days, subject to availability. Postage & packing is free within the UK.

## Mad, bad, dangerous

Trolls are non-human, non-dead Other (except when they're not), but Lindow picks his way through the brambles with ease



## Trolls

**An Unnatural History** 

John Lindow

Reaktion Books 2014

Hb, 144pp, illus, sources, ind, £16.95, ISBN 9781780232898

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £15.25

I live near the Yorkshire Dales, a landscape with a strong Anglo-Scandinavian heritage. Sheep are still counted in Old Norse. In Wharfedale there is a limestone gorge called Troller's Gill. Forbidding, dark and inhospitable, its name apparently derives from the presence of trolls with a habit of throwing rocks at travellers.

Reading John Lindow's excellent overview of the history of trolls reminded me of this forebidding place.

Trolls: An Unnatural History weighs in at only 144 pages, but never feels too brief. Lindow takes a long view of his subject matter. He begins with one of the earliest mentions of trolls, a verse exchange between poet Bragi the Old and a troll woman. From here Lindow pursues the stories, folklore and meaning of the word through the last two millennia. right up until its current Internet Age usage. Along the way he explores the nature of trolls as they appear in the Eddas, how they are dangerous, anti-social and liminal. Throughout he puts forward a strong argument that during the mediæval and post-mediæval period, troll not only means a specific type of creature, but begins to stand for all supernatural beings, and magic. On page 46 he states: "Two or more other species can comfortably inhabit the

same space, so long as they are distinguished along some meaningful axis. The dead are quasi-human non-living Other, while trolls are non-human non-dead Other. What is fuzzy about this distinction is in fact subsumed in the fuzzy application of the word troll for all sorts of other beings."

Throughout the book Lindow uses a wide range of tools: documentary research, linguistics, folklore art history and even pop culture. All of these are handled competently. Most of the stories discussed are summarised, but where Lindow retells them he does so with character.

One of the examples Lindow uses to explore the significance of trolls is an encounter a friend in Norway has with a troll. This is an excellent, delicate, fortean approach. He is never dismissive of the individual experience, certainly never mocking, but attempts to put it in context both in terms of the individual situation of his friend and the wider social world.

Sometimes, particularly in shorter explorations such as this, books are let down by the number or quality of images. Here there is a whole section on trolls illustrated with a wealth of drawings and paintings, all well reproduced. The detail is excellent and reflects the detail in Lindow's text. I particularly liked the illustration by Theodor Kittelsen, 'The Great Troll on Karl Johan Street', as well as Lindow's explanation.

He is thorough on the subject of how trolls in contemporary landscapes become attached to place and identity, particularly as sculpture underneath various bridges (and how that particular narrative became fixed in the English-speaking world's consciousness). This can also be seen in the tug of war between firms in Denmark and the United States over who first created the

troll dolls.

The epilogue explores the way the term is being used in contemporary society to refer to online behaviour, with Lindow making links with the wider troll narrative.

(As an aside I found it interesting that the 14th century text *Bergbúa þáttr*, where a protagonist and servant are entreated in a mountain cave to learn a poem which the servant fails to do and dies, echoes the modern chain letter posts on Facebook. Nothing new under the sun.)

There were two areas I'd have liked to see Lindow's opinion on. First, on the presence of trolls outside Scandinavia, particularly in place-names of the area known as Danelaw in England. Lindow is a professor of Scandinavian, rather than English Toponymy, but it would have been interesting to see Troller's Gill and Trow Gill, along with their folklore, included.

Secondly, an analysis of Neil Gaiman's excellent short story 'Troll Bridge'. Dealing with a boy meeting a troll under a railway bridge and subsequent encounters throughout the boy's life, it touches on several issues raised in Lindow's discussion.

These are very minor gripes.

To follow a thread throughout
1,000 years of history, in several
different countries, is not an easy

In the hands of someone less knowledgeable and less skilled in presenting their arguments, a book can end up as a mess. Here, Lindow avoids all those traps, instead giving us a coherent, insightful and informed exploration of a fascinating subject that deserves a wider audience.

**Steve Toase** 

Fortean Times Verdict
EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW
ABOUT TROLLS – GOOD STUFF

### SAY

Vice and Love from Antiquity to Modernity

Alastair Blanshard

Wiley-Blackwell 2010

Hb, xvi + 219pp, illus, bib, ind, £25.99, ISBN9781405122917

### FORTEAN TIMES POOVEHOR RRICE 625 OC



After some academic twaddle linking sex with colonial and post-colonial politics, quality, readability,

and tempo surge as Blanshard romps through every conceivable (and some inconceivable) erotic activity from antiquity to a present-day climax, drawing sensible distinctions between facts and Maileresque 'factoids'.

An interesting epilogue describes two classicists squaring off over the morality of legal protections for homosexuals in a 1993 Colorado courtroom – how's that for relevance?

Fans of FT's back pages will enjoy the handy list of porno films with classical themes and detailed reviews of largely forgotten Hollywood epics, e.g. de Mille's Cleopatra and Sign of The Cross. Blanshard's 'pornotopia' (his word for Rome) misses two golden opportunities: the inventive orgies in the mirror-lined boudoir of Hostius Quadra (Seneca, Natural Questions) and the threeway simultaneous penetrations of Byzantine empress Theodora over which Edward Gibbon affected to be shocked. One or two tiny glitches: Caligula didn't get round to making his horse consul; Dio Cassius's dates are disputed; fellatio and irrumation are not the same thing.

Blanchard provides useful end-notes, a serviceable index and a copious bibliography (with the weird omission of Forberg's Manual of Classical Erotology, on whose content and curious publishing history Blanshard writes interestingly, albeit he was partly scooped by Halperin/Winkler/Zeitlin's Before Sexuality (1990, also not mentioned). There are only nine illustrations: what topic more demands a pictorial cornucopia?

Barry Baldwin

Fortean Times Verdict
THINKING MAN'S SKIN BOOK
WOULD MAKE WH SMITH SWOON

## **ALSO RECEIVED**

We leaf through a small selection of the dozens of books that have arrived at Fortean Towers in recent months...

## **Haunted Dartmoor**

Kevin Hvnes

The History Press 2014

Pb, 949pp, illus, bib, £9.99, ISBN 9780752493114

### **Haunted Wiltshire**

Keith Wills

The History Press 2014

Pb, 949pp, illus, bib, £9.99, ISBN 9780752463384

Folklorist Kevin Hynes mixes investigations into spooky places in Devon with summaries of legends and alleged witness accounts. Keith Wills probes the equally rich haunts of Wiltshire. Both fairly slender books concentrate on modern experiences whether underpinned by any historical 'backstory' or not.

## **Talking with the Spirits**

Eds. Jack Hunter and David Luke

Daily Grail Publishing 2014

Pb, 364pp, refs, index, £?. ISBN 9780987422446

An anthology of ethnographic writing on mediumship in different cultures, from the Victorians' drawingroom séances to the possessed of Brazilian Candomblé and Fast Africa; and its uses from psychological healing, appeasing spirits, and divination to online psychic readings; using techniques ranging from fasts and chanting to drugs. There is a variety of analyses of the experiences and how they are interpreted in different cultures. The sociological jargon never comes at the expense of good stories, interesting subjects (sorry, people) and each author's experience of their chosen culture, backed up by excellent references. It evokes wonder at the sheer diversity of human invention in dealing with the Unknown.

## When the Dragon wore the Crown

Don Cerow

Ibis Press 2013

Pb, 214pp, illus, notes, bib, \$26.95, ISBN 9780892542055

You don't see many books like this these days: one man's New Age thesis, melding his discoveries from astronomy, archæology, cultural history, linguistics, maths and geometry, myths and symbology. Cerow - described as "a certified NCGR Level IV astrologer" and a polymath with "celestial" insights - takes us on a 6,000-year journey to uncover the origins of astrology. He leans from culture to culture. choosing only those elements that support his theory that the constellation Draco revolving around the North Celestial Pole inspired our calendars, navigation, farming and social organisation. His style - putting keywords and important phrases he doesn't want you to miss into italics - remind us of Von Daniken's extravagance with apostrophes... but Cerow's excitement and eclecticism are attractive and remind us also of the late Donald Cvr's adventures in astro-archæology.

## Jack the Ripper: The Definitive Casebook

Richard Whittington-Egan

Amberley Books 2013

Hb, 349pp, illus, notes, bib, ind, £25.00. ISBN 9781445617688

Whittington-Egan, the founding father of 'Ripperology', returns to the topic with this revision of his Casebook on Jack the Ripper (1975). The core of the book is a masterly dissection of 27 theories and their proponents, to which is added a chapter viewing the events from a series of specialists (sexologist, historian, sociologist, pathologist, writer, etc); another on the infamous 'diary' and other hoaxes; and a critical Ripperthemed anthology of memoirs, writers and writings. You don't have to be a Ripperologist to enjoy this; it's well written and engrossing without being too grim. If it isn't definitive, it's pretty close.

## **Judas of Nazareth**

Daniel T Unterbrink

Bear & Co 2014

Pb, 365pp, notes, bib, index, \$18.00, ISBN 97811591431824

Scholarly analysis of controversial discoveries relating to the mystery of the historical Jesus strides onward with far-reaching conse-

quences for Christians, who ignore such challenges to their faith. The author argues that our image of Jesus is a composite of freedomfighter, historical Galilean messiah, and the first-century rabbi Judas of Galilee who was probably executed for sedition by the Romans. Elements of Jesus's life

are relocated a generation earlier and the apostle Paul is revealed as a traitor. Unterbrink, a retired forensics auditor, ferrets out proof that the myth that has come down to us was forged around the fourth century BC. Some of this is not new, but it is a fresh and thought-provoking study.

## FORTEAN FICTION

## **The Severed Streets**

Paul Cornell

Tor. 2014

Hb, 402pp, £12.99, ISBN 9781447262060



I'd been looking forward to the follow-up to Paul Cornell's 2013's London Falling ever since I put his debut novel down; I don't know what it is about a mash-up of police procedural, supernatural horror and urban fantasy that's so beguiling, but once you throw in a liberal sprinkling of dark London lore, it's a nigh-on irresistible package.

The Severed Streets picks up a while after the events of the first book, necessitating a bit of exposition while we reacquaint ourselves with Detective Inspector James Quill, his team of 'Sighted' coppers – Costain, Sefton and Ross – and their enigmatic superior, DS Lofthouse (I can't help picturing her as Helen Mirren in a sort of supernatural Prime Suspect). We're plunged into a sweltering summer of government cuts, police strikes and increasingly violent protests that will bring back memories of the 2011 riots for anyone who lives or works in the capital. Things turn nasty as a prominent MP is disembowelled in his locked and chauffeur-driven car; but what's reported as the work of the Occupy-style masked mob soon reveals itself to Quill's team as something much more terrifying: as further prominent public figures are razored to death, it seems that Jack the Ripper has returned to the streets of London, this time possessed of supernatural powers and targeting not vulnerable females but powerful white men.

If only things were that simple. Our flawed heroes, going undercover in an attempt to infiltrate the city's occult subculture, discover that the multiple layers of London are deeper, more complex and more dangerous than they'd suspected, and the book interweaves its own multiple strands to create a similarly labyrinthine narrative underpinned by a rich political subtext about money, mythology and the media. As well as the all-pervasive sense of darkness, there are some compelling moments of visionary experience too – such as when Sefton has a kind of out-of-body-experience reminiscent of the geological time perspectives conjured up by Jacquetta Hawkes's *A Land*.

The Severed Streets is almost as good as its predecessor, and leaves enough questions unanswered to make readers impatient to see where Cornell takes his characters next. A couple of niggles: due to an overzealous spellchecker or a misguided sub, every instance of the word 'ostension' – an important theme in the book – has been rendered as 'ostentation'. Then there's the appearance, as a fairly major character, of the author of Neverwhere (obviously an influence on Cornell's vision of London). We all love Neil Gaiman, but do we really want him wandering in and out of other people's novels dispensing occult wisdom? For me, it's just too cute and the answer's a definite no. David Sutton



## FILM & DVD

SEND REVIEW COPIES OF DVDS, BLU-RAYS AND GAMES TO: FORTEAN TIMES, PO BOX 71602, LONDON E17 OQD.



## Lost Girl Seasons 3 & 4

Created by Michelle Lovretta Gareth Edwards, US 2013-2014

Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, £29.99 (DVD)

Bo (short for Isabeau) is a succubus, a member of the Fae, an ancient and very long-lived race with a wide assortment of supernatural powers who live secretly amongst (and feed off) humans, most of whom have no idea of their existence. Unusually, she was brought up as a human, and didn't realise she was any different until she sucked the life out of her first boyfriend. Because she came late to the Fae community she's decided to remain unaligned, rather than joining either the Light Fae or the Dark Fae.

In the two or three years since Bo (Anna Silk) discovered her nature she's acquired a stable group of close friends: her sidekick Kenzi (Ksenia Solo), a streetwise, cute Goth human who is her intensely loyal BFF; Dyson (Kris Holden-Ried), a detective who is a shape-shifting wolfman and Bo's sometime lover; his detective partner Hale (KC Collins), a Siren; Bo's later lover Lauren (Zoie Palmer), a human doctor working for the Fae; and Trick (Rick Howland), landlord of the Dal Riata bar where they all hang out, the Fae Blood King and Bo's grandfather. There are other regulars, but these are the core, with shifting relationships between them all over the years.

Speaking of relationships, almost every episode features rampant, raunchy sex scenes between Bo and Dyson or Bo and Lauren (Bo is, after all, a succubus, feeding off sexual energy), carefully filmed to suggest far more than they ever quite show. Sex, humour, violence and the supernatural – it's a combination that really can't fail.

The first two seasons have Bo and Kenzi investigating cases involving weird stuff. Often they bump into Dyson and Hale officially investigating related cases; Lauren's medical expertise is needed to identify a rare type of Fae or to provide a quick antidote to a poison; and Trick quietly dispenses wisdom and calmness where needed. And the one thing that everyone keeps from Bo is that somehow she is hugely important.

New viewers of this quirky Canadian series: start with the above summary. Neither Season Three nor Season Four begins with any sort of "Previously on..."; you're thrown straight in, expected to be already familiar with all the complex back story. So if you discover Lost Girl part way through, do yourself a massive favour and start from the beginning. Even these brief opening paragraphs are immeasurably more background than you're given, and will help the first few episodes of Season Three make a

hell of a lot more sense.

Also absent from the DVDs are any extras: there's no "Mythology of...", no "Making of..." - disappointing when this is such a richlyimagined show, and somewhat ridiculous as the Showcase network has shown webisodes, teasers, blooper reels and even a 44-minute cast chat programme - none of which are on the DVDs.

Season Three starts with Bo being arrested and flung into a Fae equivalent of Prisoner Cell Block H run by sadistic Amazons; this is confusing enough for regular viewers, let alone newcomers. Hale has been appointed the new acting Ash, the leader of the Light Fae. (As with much else in Lost Girl it's never clear whether this role covers all the Light Fae, or just those within this city.) After the thoroughly unpleasant Ash of Season Two this is a relief, except that Hale is too much of a bumbling nice guy to be an effective leader. He's replaced as Dyson's cop partner by Tamsin (Rachel Skarsten), a Dark Fae Valkyrie who from the start clearly has her own agenda.

This is the season where Bo deals with her past and moves forward. Of all her adventures in each episode, the one with the most emotional punch is when she goes to visit (and forgive) her abusive human adoptive mother in a stereotypical Hicksville during its cherry

festival; the scenes are colourshifted towards yellow, giving a beautifully bizarre edge of unreality to the real, human world.

The season works towards two ends: Bo trying to discover more about her unknown father (you'll never hear the song "The Wanderer" in quite the same way after this), and preparing for and going through the Dawning, a rite of passage that will see her come into her full powers - or degenerate into under-fae. But with all the supernatural action, it's in this season that we see humans being as devious and manipulative as Fae, leading to a multiple-cliffhanger climax.

Season Four has a different feel from the start. Kenzi and Dyson are hanging out at the Dal with Trick, and we slowly realise they have no memory of Bo, who barely appears in the first two episodes. Although this was plotting born from necessity - actress Anna Silk had a baby between filming the two seasons - cutting the main character is a massive risk which the series only just gets away with. Lauren is missing as well - and Dyson's former partner Tamsin has reincarnated as a particularly immature young teenager. Eventually they recall Bo's existence and Dyson goes searching for her on a train running between realities, in the most surreal scenes of the entire series - Kafka through the Looking-Glass on mescaline. The highlight of the first episode, though, is Kenzi's beautifully choreographed and incredibly sexy tango with Dyson and Hale at the Dark Fae Ball. A three-minute dance in the middle of an episode: Lost Girl certainly takes risks.

This season also shifts the power structure of the mythology, with the introduction of the Una Mens, a humourless, coldly efficient group of elders - effectively both the Inquisition and the Puritans of the Fae. There are other shifts; as Bo becomes more deeply involved in her own searches for meaning, her love rivals Dyson and Lauren team up, Kenzi and Tamsin become buddies - and we learn dark things about Trick.

In fact, "dark" is the word for Season Four. The first three seasons had battles with evil enemies in their story arcs, but in general the fun interplay between the characters in the individual stories kept



the whole thing fairly light. In Season Four everything's shifted a gear. We're not sure about reality, we're not sure about our favourite characters; we're not even sure about Bo herself, who seems to alienate all those closest to her. There's a lot of heartache in this season - and as it goes on it gets darker and scarier, with revelations, reversals, betrayals, tragedies and deaths. The shock ending ensures that everyone who has followed the characters this far will come back for Season Five.

Unusually, the creator and several of the showrunners, producers and writers of Lost Girl are female. There's a lot to like about the series: it draws on genuine mythology, it's quirky, it's sexy, it's fun, and you quickly come to care for the main characters - most of all Trick, who has more stature than all the rest put together despite the actor, Rick Howland, being only 4ft 7in tall (140 cm). But there are also aspects that are irritating, or don't seem fully worked through. Why do all the English characters (including those played by British actors) speak Dick van Dyke Cockney? As with Buffy, how on earth can all this supernatural stuff be going on without people being aware of it? And again as with Buffy, how is it that our small group of Heroes do battle with forces that could threaten all of Fae? The Morrigan is leader of the Dark Fae (as with the Ash: of all of them, or just in this un-named Toronto-ish city?); but why is someone in her position (and several other dark characters such as the intensely irritating Vex) so selfish, petulant and immature? But you need villains to hiss and boo, and this is a fantasy world... David V Barrett

Fortean Times Verdict SEXY SUPERNATURAL DRAMA

## The Battery

Dir Jeremy Gardner, US 2012

Metrodome, £12.99 (DVD)

Sideways meets The Walking Dead when two mismatched former baseball-playing friends make their way across the zombie apocalypseravaged back roads of Connecticut with no aim in mind other than to stay alive. The anachronistic Shaun of the Dead normality they display in such a scenario is the source of much of the film's humour, but

## THE REVEREND'S REVIEW

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

## **RE-ANIMATOR**

Dir Stuart Gordon, US 1985 Second Sight, £20.99 (Steelbook Blu-ray)

This is a nigh-on perfect collision of HP Lovecraft's sombre obsessions, Stuart Gordon's thoughtful creativity and 1980s balls-out insanity. Herbert West, an opinionated yet brilliant trainee surgeon, arrives at Miskatonic University, but his lofty ambitions are exasperated by the out-oftouch academic establishment ("How can you teach these people such drivel?"). With the help of star student Dan Cain - who also happens to be engaged to the Dean's daughter - they skip the usual college beer-chugging and instead set about conquering brain death. It's a cracking ensemble piece where character conflict and thematic shenagans ride wild alongside genuine shocks and wildly inventive gore.

Jeffrey Combs is superb as the ambitious and probably unhinged Mr West in a performance that both defined the marketing of the film and his career. But the rest of the cast deserve much credit for their commitment to such mad material. The creepy, ambitious Dr Hill is played repulsively well by David Gale and his infamous sex scene with Barbara Crampton remains both toe-curling and shocking. (On seeing it at a screening, Gale's wife rose to her feet and shouted "David! How could you?"). One of my favourite performances is Robert Sampson as Dean Halsey, who has a seriously varied character arc, from cheerful, back-slapping daddy to suspicious academic, all the way down to... well, you'll

Richard Band has often been criticised for his 'Psycho homage' score, but it's a brilliant soundtrack, pounding home the quirkiness as well as highlighting the ultimately tragic themes. Stuart Gordon's love and experience of theatre shines through. His classic stage tricks might look a little ropey now, but still feel more immediate and effective than much of today's CGI.

Second Sight's Blu-ray is good, though not great. There are no new extras and the picture quality suffers from some noise - but this still remains the best version I've ever seen. There are

two versions of the movie on the Blu-ray. If you want a true flavour of the relentless pace then stick with the Theatrical Cut, although the Integrated Version (featuring all the extra scenes) is good fun and does add some interesting new plot threads.

I doubt I'll ever find a horror fan who doesn't love Re-Animator, or at least appreciate it for its horrid, moldbreaking approach. Because the enduring power of the piece, even after all these decades, is that for a film so obsessed with death, it's all so brilliantly lifeaffirming.

## **Fortean Times Verdict**

A CRAZED EIGHTIES CLASSIC COMES BACK TO LIFE IN HD





ultimately this isn't played just for laughs: these two regular guys are always just one bite away from genuine horror.

Ben (played by writer and director Jeremy Gardner) is a bearded, beery pragmatist, while dreamer Mickey (Adam Cronheim) blots out the terrifying reality with a set of cans attached to his CD Walkman, which is always turned on. The mysterious destination called 'The Orchard' that they learn about from a conversation overheard on walkietalkies gives Mickey a purpose, as does the voice of one of the survivors there, Annie. Ben warns him that she's almost certainly a "bull dyke" and not the "post-apocalyptic pixie girl" Mickey is imagining; very much a case of "Be careful what you wish for". The two men riff off one another to much amusement in an often painful and scary rites-of-passage buddy movie.

The skilful montage of empty vistas, abandoned homes and ghostly school buildings, some non-penetrative necrophilia and an extended climactic scene trapped in a car add to the film's indie credentials, as does the music. In his directorial début Gardner is proof that nowadays anybody can make a zero budget zombie movie (it often seems like everybody *has*). Almost all such films are now inescapably derivative in some way, few of them proving good enough to splice and balance now familiar tropes and disparate genres together with any originality. The Battery is one of the good ones.

Nick Cirkovic

**Fortean Times Verdict** ONE OF THE BETTER RECENT EFFORTS IN THE GENRE

## The 100-Year-Old Man who Climbed out of the Window and Disappeared

Dir Felix Hemgren, Sweden 2014

On UK release

Allan Karlsson, on the occasion of his 100th birthday, is bored. Silently, he ups sticks and climbs out of his retirement home window This is the start of a bonkers adventure in the life of a man of advanced years, and it's revealed during the course of the film that it's just the

latest in a long line of surreal episodes that have characterised his time on Earth.

The film, directed by Felix Herngren, is based on the 2009 Swedish bestseller of the same name (well, Hundraåringen som klev ut genom fönstret och försvann, actually) penned by Jonas Jonasson. It has sold more than six million copies and proves that not every piece of fiction coming out of Sweden is steeped in Nordic noir, as the newspapers would have you believe.

Allan becomes an explosives expert because of his love of big bangs, leading to his involvement in some of the most important events of the 20th century. He plays a key role in some of them (you'll never look at the fall of the Berlin Wall in the same way again) and meets some interesting personalities, like Einstein's less talented half-brother Hector, along the way. Flashbacks to earlier times are interspersed with the present day adventure that involves a suitcase full of money and a group of thuggish villains.

Robert Gustafsson, who plays the lead character, was chosen as someone who would be as credible as a young man as he was at 60 or 100 - and he nails it, with the help of some admittedly less than perfect prosthetics. His physicality and comic timing are perfectly suited to the role; if you're impressed with his performance in this, I can also recommend the bizarre comedy Fyra nyanser av brunt ('Four Shades of Brown').

The 100-Year-Old-Man is a less sentimental version of Forrest Gump, another character who things just happen to, and the dark humour at times brings to mind Fargo. There's a series of almost cartoonish deaths that elicit little or no reaction from the protagonists, and a motley crew of decent supporting characters, including an elephant, who join him on his newest escapade.

This is perfect for lovers of absurd Scandinavian humour and silly adventures, and manages to avoid the sentimentality that would inevitably be part of a Hollywood adaptation of a book such as this. Julie McNamee

**Fortean Times Verdict** 

QUIRKY, SILLY, ABSURD AND HIGHLY RECOMMENDED

## **SHORTS**

### **GRINDHOUSE TRAILER CLASSICS VOL 4**

Nucleus Films, £10.99 (DVD)



It'll be amusing if, after the nuclear apocalypse, future archæologists dig up a copy of this as a window into human culture. If they do, we'll be pegged as a species obsessed with sex slaves, cheerful swinging and homicidal midgets. At nearly two hours, it's packed with outrageous and often seedy low budget marketing

which will repulse some but be oddly heart-warming to others. Have fun spotting future and faded celebs paying their exploitation dues and discover some intriguing films you may never have heard of. I'm seeking out The Pyx as we speak...

Rev Peter Laws 7/10

## **GOAL OF THE DEAD**

Metrodome, £12.99 (DVD)



No early doors for this French zombie flick. It takes 10 minutes shy of an hour for the carnage to really kick in, when a small town local footballer runs amok among the Olympique de Paris team and starts puking milky viral bile over everyone, infecting the entire stadium. It isn't difficult to see the satirical analogy between mind-

less drooling 28 Days Later-type zombies and football fans reduced to snarling savagery through tribal rivalry, and there is much mirth to be had trading on that. The protracted set-up of establishing various relationship dynamics is necessary in order to make us care when people start being killed off; because, let's face it, it's hard to empathise with a professional footballer at the best of times. The last French zombie film I saw was La Horde and it is that film's director Benjamin Rocher who manages the film's first half. Goal of the Dead is literally a film of two halves, and has two sets of opening credits to prove it. In the second half, Thierry Poiroud, who has previously handled rampaging alien octopuses in The Return of James Battle, takes over the touchline duties in what for its final hour is essentially a zombie-and-mouse last-man-or-woman-standing chase around the town of Caplongue. It could have all been over in 90 minutes, and the 30 minutes of extra time leads inevitably to penalties in which there are too many misses. But on the eve of the World Cup, it's fun, even if you hate football; or maybe especially if you hate football. NC 4/10

### **HELLBENDERS**

Koch Media, £9,99 (DVD)

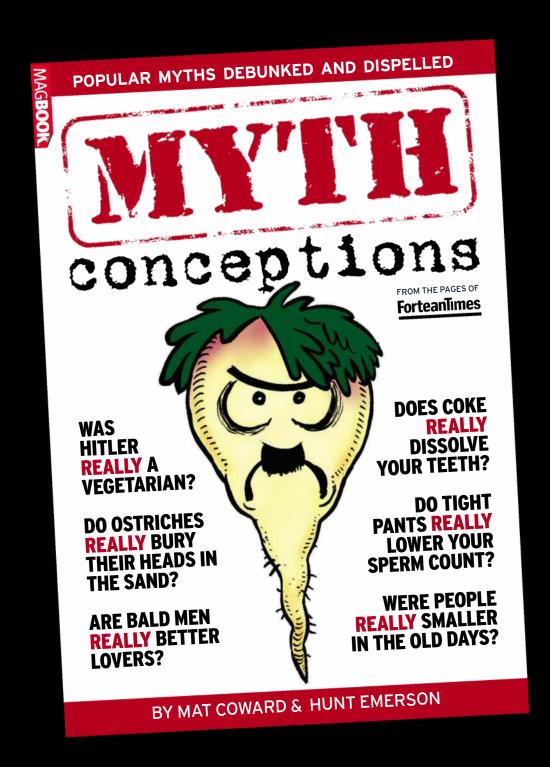


It's a shame that the brilliant idea behind this movie (drawn from director JT Petty's own graphic novel) has resulted in such a cheap, poorly put together film. Clancy Brown leads a team of dissolute priests known as the 'Hellbound Saints': it is their task to live in a constant state of debauchery and sin in order to cap-

ture demons through their own possession, then commit suicide, returning the demons to Hell. There's comic potential in this, but the uneasy mix of comedy and drama and a lack of consistency of tone sabotage Hellbenders long before it finds its footing. Aiming to be a more foul-mouthed version of Ghostbusters, it sees the team (which includes Clifton Collins Jr. and Dan Fogler) go sin-to-sin against an ancient demon. There are some laughs along the way, but by the climax the low budget lets the whole film down terribly. In trying so hard to achieve cult status, it is all but inevitable that *Hellbenders* would fail miserably. Cult films are discovered, not manufactured.

Brian J Robb 5/10

## THE TRUTH ISN'T OUT THERE...



AVAILABLE FROM AMAZON.CO.UK
OR VISIT MAGBOOKS.COM FOR MORE INFORMATION





## Self-publishing made easy

Professional, affordable self-publishing services, all in one place:

- Editing
- Proof-reading
- Cover design
- Printing
- Marketing advice
- · E-book formatting.

"The production team were always friendly and approachable, providing a great service."

Find out how we can help you publish call us 01926 886914 or email lulworth@lcp.co.uk www.lulworthcovepress.co.uk





## HISTORY THROUGH COINS

Support whilst you learn Course material supplied on CD, USB or as download

and their history. A must for Coins available for purchase

new coin collectors www.PhotographyCourseSelect.co.uk



## York Bookbindin

Book restoration

courses with a stand-alone

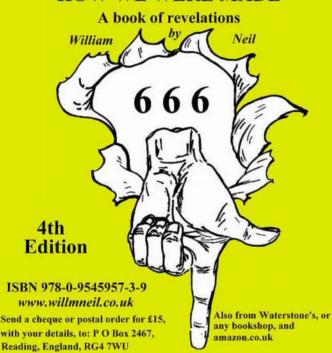
course on coin photography

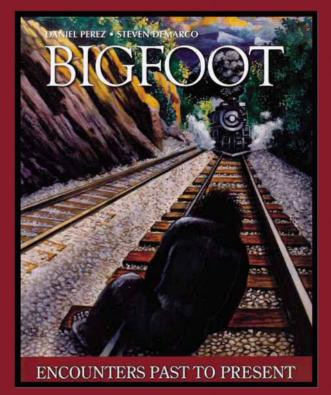
Memoirs/magazine binding

Bespoke boxes

www.yorkbookbinding.co.uk







Bigfoot book loaded with history and original illustrations. Only \$2.99/£1.78. Go to Amazon.com to order.

## Forteanlimes

## THE POCKET GODS

PROBABLY THE MOST FORTEAN BAND ON EARTH

DISCOVERED BY JOHN PEEL

HEAR OVER 1000 SONGS ABOUT UPOS

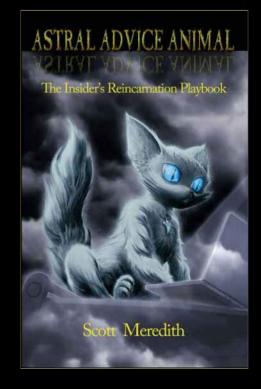
MONSTERS, CONSPIRACIES, AND MORE @

www.facebook.com/thepocketgods

WWW.TTINES.COM/THEPOCKETGODS







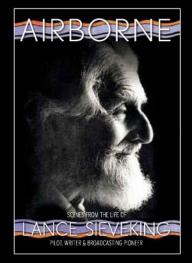
You've lived a million lives, And shed a billion tears.

## **GET IT RIGHT NEXT TIME!**

Read the ultimate insider's guide to reincarnation. You'll gasp, you'll laugh, you'll feel like a whole new person!

www.astraladviceanimal.com

## FROM THE FOUNDING CO-EDITOR OF FORTEAN TIMES



Contains anecdotes of World War I aerial adventures, the formative years of the BBC, clairvoyance, poltergeist hijinks, street light interference and encounters with many colourful characters of the inter-war years (including Aldous Huxley and Aleister Crowley). Edited and annotated by his son Paul Sieveking. Introduction by David Hendy.

Hardback, 375pp, with over 70 photos and drawings.
Edition limited to 250 numbered copies, signed by the editor.
Price (inc p+p): UK £25, EU £30, ROW £35
£UK cheque payable to Paul Sieveking or
via Paypal at www.strangeattractor.co.uk
Strange Attractor Press, BM SAP, London WCIN 3XX

## Skendleby Nick BROWN

Beneath the rolling Cheshire countryside dotted with the mansions of the rich and famous something buried for Millenia is beginning to stir.

Skendleby a Christmas haunting by Nick Brown author of Luck Bringer

" Gripping and genuinely creepy, it's an autumnal must-read." New Edition Magazine: Skendleby

First in the "Ancient Gramarye" series

Follow Nick Brown on Facebook https:// www.facebook.com/ NickBrownAuthor

Telephone: 07806 330119



ISBN 978-1-910053-20-1 available from Amazon and Waterstones and quality booksellers.

www.nickbrownbooks.com

# I S

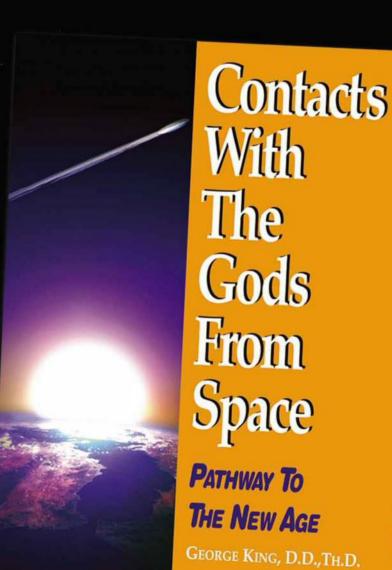
THEIR COSMIC MESSAGE

channelling beings from other planets • the secret history of mankind • the mother earth • spiritual energy • karma and reincarnation • the great change

Contacts with the Gods from Space by Dr George King with Richard Lawrence

order your copy £9.99 + p&p

www.aetherius.org



Dear FT...

## letters



## Arrogance of scientism

It seems to be a dogma of 'hard' scientism that science will eventually explain everything. At the same time, it seems to be a dogma of evolutionary science that Man has no special place in the scheme of things - we are just a transient species that appeared as a result of random circumstances. Now, it is clear that analytical intelligence increases with evolutionary sophistication. A chimpanzee is smarter than a dog, which is smarter than a rat, which is smarter than a fish, which is smarter than a slug. Every intelligence has its limits. A chimpanzee may be intelligent enough to make tools, but is unable to communicate on a human level. A rat may be intelligent enough to explore a maze, but cannot understand the purpose of the maze or the motivations of the scientists. What scientism says, in effect, is that ours is the only intelligence without limits. We are in fact the godlike 'crown of creation' that evolutionary science dogmatically tells us we are not. To me, this is a true paradox – both viewpoints cannot be right.

**Nils Erik Grande** Oslo, Norway

## **Strategic Reserve**

I enjoyed the article and letters on this old chestnut [FT311:58-59, 314:71]. There may not be a Strategic Steam Reserve, but according to Steam Railway magazine (Nov/Dec 1979, pp44-46) there is/was a Strategic Diesel Reserve: "Are there hoards of steam locomotives secretly stored in Britain for use in time of war or crisis? We throw some light on the theories and turn up an interesting admission by the Ministry of Defence." The article, and subsequent letters, accounted for all known steam locomotives; but ended: "And so back to Whitehall... That official Strategic Reserve? Yes, says the Ministry [of Defence] there is one. They're diesels. Kept by the Army for use in time of crisis. 'But we don't discuss how many we've got, or where we keep them'."

Roger J Morgan

London

## **Wudi's tomb**

The photograph identifying what is described as Wudi's tomb or the Maoling Mausoleum [FT314:45] may not have misled many of your readers but it certainly confused me: 53 years to complete that tiny building? Surely not. A quick online search revealed that the 'hillside' bevond the small structure was the real mausoleum - a man-made beaten-earth tumulus more than 50m (164ft) high. But I expect most people knew that.

**Douglas Law** Aberdeen, Grampian

## **Suicidal monkey**

Regarding the domestic robot that killed itself through boredom [FT312:6]: well, my nodding monkey tries it all the time. He is one of those photo-electrically driven things that nod, which wives buy and husbands hate. He likes to nod himself into the bowl in the kitchen sink, which is always half-full of slimy water because of that leaking tap I will fix tomorrow. When dried out after CPR, the nodding monkey starts to nod again, but looks even more suicidal that before.

I'll fix the tap tomorrow. And that monkey. When the wife is out. **Viv Hobbs** 

Caerphilly, Mid-Glamorgan

## Dodgy gallows

Regarding John Babbacombe Lee cheating the gallows [FT312:19]: surely if his escape from death was caused by the weight of the prison chaplain standing on a warped board, then any other potential executions using the same gallows would have been effected in a similar way.

**David Howse** 

By email

Editor's note: Mr Howse makes a good point. As the warped board was allegedly the 'official' explanation (some time after Lee's sentence was commuted to jail time), we can only assume it was subsequently replaced.

## **Javne Mansfield and** Satanism

Alexis Lykiard recalls the night Satanist Anton LaVey tried to 'get lucky' with Lykiard's two female companions while they were celebrating the launch of Colin Wilson's Mysteries at the Cheshire Cheese pub in Fleet Street [FT313:72-73]. LaVey may not have 'scored' at the Cheshire Cheese but he did with Miss Roquefort Cheese - the bucolic title held by Jayne Mansfield back in the 1950s when she was struggling to make a name for herself in Hollywood.

The self-proclaimed High Priest of the Church of Satan met the sex symbol at the San Francisco Film Festival in 1966 along with her lawyer/lover, Sam Brody. The jealous Brody insulted LaVey, causing the Satanist to put a curse on him; LaVey warned Jayne to get away from Sam as he would die within a year. Jayne Mansfield and Sam

Brody were killed in June 1967 when their car rearended a truck outside New Orleans (This accident led to the installation of the 'Mansfield Bar' in Americanmade trucks). The mangled 'Jayne Mansfield Death Car' was the stellar attraction at the now-defunct 'Museum of U.S. Tragedy' in St Augustine, Florida. There are photos of Mansfield online participating in a satanic ritual with LaVey that shows her drinking blood from a human skull.

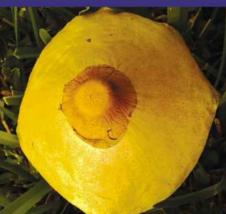
Some years ago, an older co-worker named Rambo who knew of my fascination with Mansfield - told

me he had dallied with her back in the 1960s when he went to Hollywood to 'break into the movies'. (He wound up becoming a used-car salesman). Strangely, the man driving the truck into which Jayne's car crashed was named Rambo and was from Pensacola, Florida

• I got a kick out of Gail-Nina Anderson's letter [FT313:71] chiding Emerson and Jackson for portraying Eleanor Jourdain and Charlotte Anne Moberly as "two Oxford dons sporting a bowler and moustache" in Phenomenomix [FT311:80]. One of Marie Antoinette's biographers (I think it was Antonia Fraser) suggested the two academics' 1901 Versailles "adventure" was a "homoerotic" experience created by their "emotional attachment" to the Queen. Two centuries after her death, Marie Antoinette is still being linked to lesbianism! **Greg May** 

Orlando, Florida

## Simulacra corner



Ron Stewart of Melville, New York State, came across this unusual mushroom resembling a female breast in Boca Raton, Florida.

We are always glad to receive pictures of spontaneous forms and figures, or any curious images. Send them to the PO box above (with a stamped addressed envelope or international reply coupon) or to sieveking@ forteantimes.com - and please tell us your postal address.

## letters



**ABOVE:** Young elephants that had feasted on fermented Marula fruit at the Singita game reserve in South Africa's Kruger National Park. They certainly appear drunk – or are they suffering from the toxicity of the beetle pupæ that live in Marula tree bark? [D.Mail, 24 April 2014, p.13]

## **Drunken Elephants**

Sean Stanley-Adams [FT311:73] suggests that the myth of elephants seeking out the fruit of the Marula tree and getting drunk (Mythconceptions, FT275:17) may have originated with the film called *Beautiful People*. In fact, from a Western viewpoint, the story dates back to the mid-19th century, though the locals knew it much earlier. WH Drummond in his book *The Large Game And Natural History of South and South-East Africa* (1875) writes of the elephants' love for the Marula tree (also called the umganu tree):

"They frequent, as I have mentioned, the country from the Pongolo northward, during the summer season, retiring to their fastness in the interior at the approach of winter. The general time of their arrival is simultaneous with the ripening of the fruit of the umganu-tree, of which they are passionately fond, and doubtless come in search of it. This fruit is capable of being made into a strong intoxicating drink and the elephants after eating it become quite tipsy, staggering about, playing huge antics, screaming so as to be heard miles off, and not seldom having tremendous fights. Native hunters fear to approach them in this state; but on the principle that it is safer to quarrel with a drunken man than a sober one, I consider that, so long as you possess sufficient nerve not to be flustered by their trumpeting, or by the exhibition of strength displayed upon the trees and upon one another, you have far more chance at such a time of killing several, as they are not likely to take flight at the first shot and perhaps make their next halt thirty miles off."

Drummond spent five years up to 1872 living and hunting in the wild and was knowledgeable about the habits of the large game animals. In the preface to his book he says that he has been careful to exclude everything "but what has come within my personal knowledge". He had presumably seen the elephants' excitement when consuming Marula fruit, so the elephant antics in the film *Beautiful People* may be quite real. If they aren't drunk, what is going on here? Several explanations have been proposed. <sup>2</sup>

Steve Morris, the scientist from Bristol University who debunked the drunken elephants story, believes that the tale is just an example of humanising animal behaviour. But if their antics are real, this rather begs the question. Another possibility comes from the fact that the San people have traditionally used toxic pupæ from the bark of the tree to poison their arrow tips. So eating pupæ might cause the behavioural changes seen in the elephants. Since strange behaviour is most commonly reported in bull elephants it may just reflect their attempts to defend a prized food. There again, it might simply be joie de vie at such a tasty feast.

## Ron Gardner

Ludlow, Shropshire

### NOTES

- 1 Full text available at: <a href="https://archive.org/stream/largegamenatural00drumrich#page/n13/mode/2up">https://archive.org/stream/largegamenatural00drumrich#page/n13/mode/2up</a>
- **2** See the Kruger National Park website: http://www.krugerpark.co.za/krugerpark-times-3-8-elephant-myth-22760.html

## **Women-baiting**

I'd like to offer a footnote to the discussion in "The Haunted Landscape" [FT310:30-35] of Springheeled Jack and associated scares. Though these were dressed up with varying degrees of supernatural coloration, the author rightly concludes that beneath the urban mythmaking runs a disturbing thread of violence directed against women.

Mrs Elizabeth Gaskell, author of such socially aware Victorian novels as North and South and Mary Barton, began in 1851 to write in a lighter vein about daily life in the village of Cranford, a fictionalised version of Knutsford in Cheshire where she spent much of her youth. Many of the incidents that appear in 'Cranford' (including, improbably, the tale of the cow furnished with a flannel waistcoat and drawers after falling into a lime-pit, and the cat that was successfully fed an emetic after swallowing some fine lace it found soaking in buttermilk) are drawn from real-life events in Knutsford, often recorded from the memories of her older relatives. She had already discussed these in a non-fiction article of 1849, "The Last Generation in England", where she includes a story that never made it into the genteel world of Cranford the novel:

"There were the usual respectable and disrespectable poor; and hanging on the outskirts of society were a set of young men, ready for mischief and brutality, and every now and then dropping off the pit's brink into crime. The habits of this class (about forty years ago) were much as those of the Mohawks a century before. They would stop ladies returning from the card-parties, which were the staple gaiety of the place, and who were only attended by a maidservant bearing a lantern, and whip them; literally whip them as you whip a little child; until administering such chastisement to a good, precise old lady of high family, 'my brother, the magistrate,' came forward and put down such proceedings with a high hand."

This account includes no monstrous alter-egos, but it does suggest that, even away from the metropolis, frightening unattended women constituted an early-19th century pastime.

### **Gail-Nina Anderson**

Jesmond, Newcastle-upon-Tyne

#### Lovecraft's hostility

Since my previous letter on the subject [FT309:71], I have stumbled upon another source for HP Lovecraft's views on Charles Fort, one that suggests his opinion darkened over time. In March 1982, Charles Platt interviewed the great fantasist Fritz Leiber in Boca Raton, Florida, during the International Conference on the Fantastic in the Arts. A chapter based on that interview appears in Platt's book Dream Makers Volume II: The Uncommon Men & Women Who Write Science Fiction (New York: Berkley, 1983). In the interview, Leiber recalls his epistolary friendship with Lovecraft "a few months before his death". This must mean late 1936 or early 1937, when Leiber was just turning 26 and was himself unpublished. "This was really my first contact with another writer," Leiber says, recalling how helpful and encouraging the older man was.

Leiber continues: "I wrote him about how I very much enjoyed the books of Charles Fort, and he wrote back saying that they did contain interesting material for the writer of horror stories, but of course you had to completely reject them. He wrote from the point of view of the genuine scientist, explaining why this sort of anecdotal material, with observations that couldn't be repeated or verified, couldn't be made the basis of any refutation of science. He wrote as a defender of science and as a complete materialist. So you might say that the thing that made me accept Lovecraft at the intellectual level was that he was a scientist. He was definitely not a crackpot or an occultist in any way" (p137).

The implication that Fort, in contrast, was a "crackpot" or "occultist" may have been Leiber's and not Lovecraft's. Nevertheless, 10 years earlier, in correspondence with Donald Wandrei, Lovecraft had criticised Fort's prose style but exulted in his "delicious set of conclusions". By the time he corresponded with Leiber, Lovecraft apparently had gone further, rejecting Fort's methodology and ideas, which he saw (in Leiber's words) as a "refutation of science". What happened? One possibility is that Lovecraft had been offended



by New Lands (1923), Fort's most scathing attack on astronomers as a species. A dedicated amateur astronomer, Lovecraft haunted Brown University's Ladd Observatory and wrote newspaper articles on subjects astronomical. Maybe New Lands, for Lovecraft, was the last straw - or the final flicker of a falling star.

**Andy Duncan** 

Frostburg, Maryland

#### Mouse School

In March 2012 I spent a month in Latvia to participate in an art residency. We were based in Riga, the Latvian capital. When not drawing my graphic novel, either in the studio or in the apartment provided for me, I was doing visual and historical research toward said graphic novel. As it is set in the Duchy of Kurland-Semigallia in the 1770s (now the Latvian provinces of Kurzeme and Zemgale), some of the visual references I was collecting included the natural settings of Latvia. Around the corner from my apartment was the Natural History Museum of Latvia (www.dabasmuzejs.gov.lv), where I sought out some of this information.

While there, I found a display case that reminded me of the articles in Fortean Times about Walter Potter's whimsical tableaux constructed using animals stuffed and mounted in anthropomorphic poses; the most disturbing were the bright-eyed, adorable dead kittens seated for a tea party [FT168:10-11, 177:4-6].

The museum has many taxidermic displays of Latvian wildlife - hares, foxes, birds, etc., including my favourite, the "Fat edible dormouse" (their translation to English). But one case contained a display of taxidermy supposedly as an art form. The tableau was entitled "Mouse School" and as you can see, the students are being taught how to recognise common predators: hawks, cats, foxes, and owls. The taxidermist credited is T Tomane. The surname has a grammatically feminine ending for Latvian, so the taxidermist was apparently a woman. My notes do not give the date of construction. It could well have been during the period of Soviet domination, or even before.

**EJ Barnes** 

Cambridge, Massachusetts

#### **Mothman Questions**

I was interested to read the new information regarding the Mothman incidents in the FlyingSaucery piece "Mothman Myth Mothballed?" [FT311:26].

However, although the possibility of secret HALO jump training may explain some of the lights witnessed by John Keel and residents of Point Pleasant and its environs, I'd hardly say we can put the whole case in the Solved bin. It doesn't explain the other witnessed

phenomena, including poltergeisttype occurrences, bigger and more mobile lights in the sky and of course the many sightings of 'the Bird' itself. The hint of some sort of top secret and experimental military project could possibly help explain the many visits to witnesses and residents by "Men In Black", if not the bizarre way they acted and other anomalous behaviour reported by those they met.

I'm not ruling out some sort of terrestrial explanation for some of the events in Point Pleasant, and a clandestine operation by the military could account for a lot of other factors like the tapping of and interference with telephones recounted by Keel, and accounts by schoolchildren both at the time and later that military personnel were present at off-curriculum IQ and other tests, and the reported increased incidence of children with high IOs in the area (see The Mothman's Photographer II by Andrew B Colvin). Mothman himself could be proof of a secret test of some new armour or stealth uniform, infrared goggles included, although that doesn't explain the primal terror seemingly evinced by the creature. I doubt, however, that all these factors would be in place purely for experimental parachute jumps. Stu Ferrol

Hexham, Northumberland

#### **Space For Mystery**

The disappearance of Flight MH370 [FT313:4-5] brings into focus how easily an aircraft can just vanish. With all the technology of the 21st century (satellites, radar, etc), it makes you wonder what can fly above us without being detected. UFOs, anyone?

**Tony Smith** 

Oswestry, Shropshire



"And the sword will appear about erm... here... oh dear!"

### it happened to me...

First-hand accounts of goings-on from FT readers and browsers of www.forteantimes.com

#### Fear Not

Half a century ago, on Good Friday (27 March) 1964, the second largest earthquake ever recorded shook Alaska for more than four minutes. The total death toll was around 139. The epicentre was sub-oceanic and it had a moment magnitude of 9.2. Within minutes, the quake generated three massive tsunamis, the largest ever recorded, which raced across the ocean at speeds up to 300mph (480km/h), obliterating the tiny Native village of Chenega. Paul T Selanoff recalls that disastrous event and his mysterious deliverance. His account was told to John Smelcer, scholar of Native American studies, and appeared in his book, The Day That Cries Forever (Anchorage, Chenega Corporation, 2006).

I remember on the day of the earthquake we were all going to watch a movie. It was The House on Haunted Hill. Before movie time, my dad and the others just took a bath, and they were relaxing in the house. There was Mom and Willy. But I remember my oldest brother, Kenny, just wanted to go kill birds. So we went out on the beach, and we were chasing them. I was trying to get them first just so I could beat him, since he was older than me. I started getting way ahead on the beach. I was way out there all by myself, maybe a mile away from everybody. The village was really small from way out there. Even the other kids - there was Kenny, and Jerry and Georgie, I think – they were far away. I was all alone. I was way out there where the big boulders are. It was low tide.

All of a sudden the ground started shaking real hard. It was shaking so hard that those boulders were jumping off the ground like rubber balls. I started running back as fast as I could. I was wearing a black jacket with rocks in the pockets. As I ran, I jumped from boulder to boulder while they were bouncing in the air. I could hear Kenny and them. yelling, "Come on! Come on!" But they were so far away I could barely hear them. Pretty soon I could hear this big rumble, a roaring like 10 fighter jets flying by low. It was really loud. I got scared



"Later, I awoke on top of the mountain, saying the Lord's Prayer"

and started running faster. I was running and jumping from rock to rock, trying to get back to the village. The ground was like Jell-O.

I was really scared, and then I felt a tap on my right shoulder, and I heard someone tell me not to be afraid. He tapped me and said, "Look, don't be afraid." Suddenly, all of my fears just went like still waters. Everything was calm and peaceful. There was no fear. Everything was calm. Everything was OK. And then He tapped me again and said the same thing. Then He tapped me a third time and said, "Look, don't be afraid."

I remember I turned around to look and there was a giant tidal wave, maybe 100ft [30m] tall, and it was almost upon me. So I turned around, but yet I wasn't scared. But I was still too far away and there was no place to go. There was a side of the mountain that was almost straight up. I couldn't run along the beach, so I had to go up the mountainside. I had to go straight up. I ran up as fast and as high as I could. There were no trees there, I think from an earlier snow slide. I had my right hand dug in. I recall the ground was really like Jell-O. When I ran up. I was holding on to a twig. It was just a thin little root or something

sticking out of the ground. It broke, but I didn't fall. I don't know what it was. It was a powerful feeling, though, like someone holding me from falling.

I don't remember what happened after that. It's as if I fell asleep, as if somebody erased that time from my memory. I don't know how I escaped the wall of water. Since 1964, I've been thinking about it, trying to remember. I've come to think that He didn't want me to remember it, that there was no need to worry about it. Anyhow, that's how I've come to feel about that day. I just put it in His hands.

Later, I awoke on top of that mountain, saying the Lord's Prayer. It was like He was setting a stage for me, like I was going to watch a movie all by myself. He had a little place for me to sit down. It was a depression on the ground like a natural armchair. From it. I could just sit and see the waves coming towards the village. Down below, I could see someone running. I think it was Mike Eleshansky. He was running around on the dock checking on his skiff, and people were screaming at him. I saw Steve Eleshansky going around the point to John Selanoff's place. I watched Mrs Evanoff and Joann Kompkoff run into a house and close the door. And then the first wave came and went, and I saw three people riding in and out on the waves on this log. I think it was the light pole from the church. I came to find out later it was my dad and Kenny and somebody else. They rode out all three waves.

In between the second and the

third wave, the water went out so far that the whole bay just emptied out and became mudflats. I looked below at the village again and said, "What the heck?" There was this one guy running down, and there was someone stuck in the mud way down there. I didn't know who it was. You can't imagine how far down it was. But he ran down there and pulled the person out. It turned out it was my dad. The person he saved was my sister, Nancy.

Then, the next wave came in, and it washed

right up the hill where the village was. It swept all around it. It was way up there. The whole village was under water. It was 2ft [60cm] deep in the light plant (generator) up on the hill. A funny thing about it: there was my dad's boat - maybe 18ft [5.5m] long. It was named Jeanie. It was running around like it was full speed going 50 or 60 miles an hour [80-96km/h] as if someone was inside steering it. It was racing around all over. When it was all over - after the three waves had come and gone – it was parked right where it was supposed to be. without an anchor, not even broken, like nothing had happened at all. It must have got a hole, though, because it slowly sank there. Its bones are still down there.

From atop the hill, I saw the St Theresa get hit by two waves coming together. It was Eddie Vlasoff's boat. At first it was sitting on the mudflat because all the water went out of the bay before the big waves hit. When the wave came in, it lifted that boat right up and pushed it up in the air above the trees, annihilating it right before my eyes.

After the third and last wave, I remember the whole bay was full of debris, logs and lumber and parts of houses and boats and everything just going out to sea. Next thing I remember was hearing someone yelling for help. I stood up so I could see better and there was Margaret Borodkin floating out there among all that debris. I was too far away to hear what she was yelling, but I knew it was her. I recognised her voice. It looked like she was stuck in

the debris, like it was crushing her. In a little while, I saw a boat trying to get to her, pushing its way through all the debris. Eventually, George Borodkin, I think, came in his skiff and got her.

The old church was destroyed, but later they found the Bible from the church near the wreckage, and it was lying there open to a passage from Revelation. We still have that Bible in the new Russian Orthodox Church in Chenega Bay.

I still remember how powerful those waves were. You can't imagine what it's like to see three giant waves, each almost a 100ft [30m] tall, maybe higher, coming in at hundreds of miles per hour, maybe faster – a giant wall just coming in like that, that fast. It's just awesome. No words can describe it. I hope you never experience a thing like that.

I sat up on the hill for maybe two more hours. It was getting dark, and I could see only two lights left on in the village – Ms Madsen's and Norma Selanoff's, who were maybe alive up at the schoolhouse. There were no other lights at all. I thought they were the only other two people left on Earth. I really thought it was the end of the world. But I wasn't afraid. I remember that I was still calm, sitting up there on the hill in the snow.

I finally made my way along the hill around our village to look for people up near the school. walking in snow up to my waist. I was cold, I had lost a shoe, and I was tired. I got scared and started calling through the darkness. Someone answered. I ran downhill towards the voice, jumping over debris. I must have jumped 8ft [2.4m] at a time. I followed that voice, and guess who it was? It was my dad. When I saw him I jumped, almost flying, into his arms like a magnet. He hugged me and whispered in my ear, "You seen Buttons and Gula?" He almost cried. But he was happy to see me. I was so happy to see my dad.

Later, everyone who was left was up in the woods up above the schoolhouse huddled around a campfire. That night I slept in one of those old Blazo fuel boxes – one of those wooden crates – listening to my mom crying. There weren't many blankets or extra coats. All we had was whatever we were already wearing or what was in the school at the time. We used whatever we could find to

keep warm.

The next day, we started walking down the hill to where the village had been. We were at the schoolhouse when another big earthquake shook, almost knocking everyone down, and we all went running back up the hill again. We thought another wave was coming. We were like scared little rabbits. I could tell even the men were scared, which was really different. They were never scared of anything.

It was perhaps 10 minutes after the first earthquake hit that the waves began to come in. It might have been longer. I don't remember for certain. Everything happened so fast. So many things happened to so many people in just a few minutes. There was no time. We lost lots of people that day.

I remember when the planes came to take us away after the second day. When we were up in the air, I looked down at my village and there was nothing left except the old schoolhouse on top of the hill. There was nothing left. I remember as we flew over Knight Island, I looked out the window and saw all these orange things floating on the surface. I thought they were crab buoys. I remember thinking, "Man, they're crabbing all over." But it was red snappers that had died in the tidal waves and were floating around everywhere.

No one lived in Chenega after that. Everyone moved away to other places.

A few years after the earthquake, my family went back to visit the village for the first time. We were fishing aboard *Nellie Juan 36*, and we stopped to see our old home. I remember it was dark outside when we dropped anchor just off the beach. Then the strangest thing happened. It was strange, but it was also comforting at the same time. It was more mystery than anything else.

There was this dish-pan hanging on the wall near the door about 4ft [1.2m] from me – maybe 6ft [1.8m]. All of a sudden, the pan started making a sound like someone was banging on it. The thing was bouncing and swinging against the wall, but the sea was calm and flat. The boat wasn't rocking at all. I thought it was a trick, but no one else was there. Mom and dad were on the beach walking around with Tommy. I told George to look, and he also saw it just bouncing around, making

sound like someone was banging it, like someone was using it like a drum. But I wasn't afraid. I had the sense that every one of the 23 souls of those lost relatives was happy to see us come home. They were drumming to welcome us home. They were happy to see us.

Other strange things happened, too. We could hear what sounded like people walking around up on the deck. Things were being moved around like a washbasin that we found out on the deck by the winch. And then someone or something untied our anchor line, and you could hear it running out. My dad said, "That's enough," as he caught the line just before it went over the side. We slept there the next night too, but nothing happened. It was quiet. The spirits had come to visit us that one time, all at once, really hard. You could hear them all over that first night, but it was quiet from then on. I guess they got to say goodbye.

#### Deadly scents

I was a normal teenage girl, but my life began to change in an unusual way. At 15 I began smelling fresh flowers, a quick whiff of a bouquet under my nose when nothing was there. Days later I noticed strange similarities. Maybe it was coincidence. So I wrote down dates and circumstances: they were all associated with funeral processions and death. The concept frightened me: being shown something I had no control over. There was nothing I could do, only hope it would go away.

A year later I smelt flowers; they were overwhelming, sickly sweet and made my head ache. Again, there were none around. A few days later my aunt passed away. Over the years the phenomenon recurred. When I was 24 and a mother of three it happened

again; another aunt passed over. I realised the stronger the smell, the closer the person to me would be who died, although I never knew who or how it would happen. I hated it, but I had to live with the curse – an unwanted gift I couldn't return.

In May 1998, I was 26, living with my then fiancé, now husband, and our three children, and four months pregnant with our fourth child. My aunt's picture fell off the wall for no apparent reason. Later on that day the pungent waft of a bouquet lingered under my nose. It made me feel sick and lightheaded for a few seconds.

I waited... nothing. A week passed, all was good. Second week... life was calm. Third week... my 21-month-old son died in a house fire.

The 'curse' carried on over the years, but then something happened: *it* began to change – the meaning became not only about death.

In January 2004, there was another waft of a bouquet as I was cleaning out the rabbit hutches. I checked the garden - no flowers in bloom. I asked my husband if he could smell anything outside; he said no. Four days later I was phoned by my friend in Bolton who had visited her family and us in Wales only three weeks previously. While they'd been down her daughter became ill. We attributed it to a bug going round. They went back to Bolton on 21 December. My friend told me the headaches and sickness her 11-year-old daughter had here were the symptoms of a brain tumour. I was gobsmacked. It was a long and painful process but thankfully she made a full recovery.

There have been similar circumstances since then that alert me something is going to happen, but I never know what, who or when.

**Lisa Plowman** By email

#### NOW ON SALE!

#### IT HAPPENED TO ME! VOLUME 6

The latest collection of first-hand accounts of high strangeness from the pages of *Fortean Times* includes tales of phantom dogs, military ghosts, teleporting spiders and much more. Now available from WH Smith and Amazon.co.uk



# FORTEAN TRAVELLER

#### 89. Hunting the Northern Lights

**DAVID CLARKE** caught the 'fast boat' north along Norway's dramatic coast in pursuit of the aurora borealis and found a land rich in folklore and legend...

fter several nights of murky
January weather, we had begun to
wonder if we would ever succeed
in our quest to see the celebrated
Northern Lights. On the day we left
rainy Manchester airport, NASA
announced that a massive sunspot had
ejected a cloud of charged particles
out into space. If the predictions made
by solar astronomers were correct, this
would create the conditions needed to
produce a spectacular auroral display
around the magnetic poles.

"We can never guarantee that you will see the aurora during the cruise," warned Kari Moe Sundi, our tour leader, as we boarded our Hurtigruten ship, the MS *Midnatsol* ('Midnight Sun'), in rainy Bergen. "But once we reach the Arctic Circle and get away from the city lights, assuming we have clear skies, there is every chance that you will".

With the tantalising prospect of a celestial light show dangling before us, we began the long journey north. For the next six days the 'Midnight Sun' served as our floating observation platform as we approached the oval zone around the pole where the chance of seeing the aurora is the greatest. Since 1893, the ships in the Hurtigruten fleet ('the rapid route') have provided a passenger and freight service to communities along Norway's long and spectacular coastline. Every day, up to 12 ships ply the 1,200 (1,900km) mile route that links more than 30 small ports with larger towns and cities, from Bergen in the south to Kirkenes, seven miles from the Russian border.

Retaining their traditional role as a floating bus and freight service, Hurtigruten has built up a strong reputation with international visitors seeking a northern lights experience. Today, the company offers 'hunting the light' voyages as part of its winter programme, enlisting experts such as Ian Ridpath and John Mason of the Royal Astronomical Society for talks and guided tours of the night sky.

The journey north also provides an opportunity for nature lovers to observe a variety of wildlife including puffins, fulmars and cormorants. On day four, as we arrived in the port of Bodo, we saw a magnificent sea eagle, with a wingspan of two metres (7ft), swooping on its prey just yards from the starboard deck. Four hours before the eagle appeared we had crossed the Arctic Circle, the invisible border that

**BELOW:** Sailing into the Troll Fjord aboard the MS *Midnatsol*.



circles the Earth at 66' 33" north, to enter a twilight world of snow-covered mountains, islands and awesome fjords.

In this sparsely inhabited area of Norway, the Sun reaches its lowest point on 22 December and is not seen again until the end of January. Even though the Sun is below the horizon for weeks on end, the days are rarely just total darkness. An eerie twilight offers a reminder of the Sun's presence. During our trip, light from the Moon reflected upon the glistening white snow, providing a stunning backdrop to the Tolkienesque landscape. The rocks that form the backbone of Norway are some of the oldest in the world and Douglas Adams, in The Hitch-hikers Guide to the Galaxy, attributed the majestic appearance of the fjords to the genius of the galactic designer of planets, Slartibartfast, who won an award for his achievement. The Norse creation myths provide another explanation: Odin killed the giant Ymir and, from his body, created the world (Midgard). Ymir's blood formed the sea, while his flesh and bones became the mountains and his skull framed the sky.

The folklore of this dramatic coast is rich with stories of ferocious sea monsters and devouring whirlpools that have their roots in the Viking era. The Midgard Serpent or jornungandr was a monster produced by the union of a giantess and the god Loki and was so large that it encircled the world to grasp its own tail. In 1028, after the arrival of Christianity, St Olaf killed a huge sea serpent in Valldal, throwing its body onto Syletefjellet mountain in Nordland. The enduring power of the old gods was evident when we visited the mediæval Nidaros Cathedral in Trondheim, the former capital of Norway. Above the richly decorated octagon chapel is a stone carved image depicting a long sinuous dragon or worm, dating from the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Olaf began life as a pagan Norse chieftain who was killed in battle in 1070. He was canonised and the original cathedral was built as a memorial to him. Today the dragon stands guard over the saint's well that lies deep beneath the foundations of the chapel.

Long after the Christianisation of Scandinavia the serpent or dragon remained as a potent symbol of pre-Christian belief. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century the Swedish archbishop Olaus Magnus described a gigantic sea serpent, 200ft (60m) in length and 20ft (6m) wide, that hid in rifts and caves outside Bergen. "On bright summer nights this serpent leaves the caves to eat calves, lambs and pigs, or it fares out to sea and feeds on sea nettles, crabs and similar marine animals," he wrote. The monster had long hair hanging from its neck and "sharp black scales and



# The Sun is not seen again until the end of January

ABOVE: The deck of the *Midnatsol* is an ideal spot for aurora spotting.

BELOW: A 12th-century dragon guards Trondehim's Nidaros

Cathedral.

describe as the most dangerous sea current in the world. This is the deadly vortex that swallows the *Nautilus* at the conclusion of Jules Verne's 20,000 *Leagues Under the Sea*. The whirlpools here have inspired poets and writers including Edgar Allen Poe, whose short story "A Descent into the Maelstrom", published in *Tales of Mystery and Imagination*, is based upon the Moskenostraumen. In Poe's story it is described as a "terrific funnel, whose interior, as far as the eye could fathom

it, was a smooth, shining and jet-black wall of water, inclined to the horizon at an angle of some 45 degrees, speeding dizzily round and round with a swaying and sweltering motion". This nautical black hole sends forth winds that speak with "an appalling voice, half shriek, half roar".

Having left Lofoten behind us on day five, as the Midnatsol left the arctic capital Tromso just after 8pm, the skies cleared. Ten miles (16km) north of the city, as we enjoyed pudding in the restaurant, there was an announcement over the ship's intercom: "The aurora is visible!" After a mad scramble up four decks, clutching cameras and tripods, we caught sight of a streamer of light in the sky. It appeared to emerge vertically from a snow-capped peak to the northwest. Then an eerie streamer of yellow light seemed to rise high into the sky, dropping chiffon-like curtains in its wake along a long curved arch that soared above the northern horizon. Elated passengers crowded onto the upper deck to take in this majestic vision, creating a carnival atmosphere on the ship.

During the next 40 minutes the aurora grew, expanded and sent out glowing milky-white streamers that resembled balls of pulsing light. Eventually it receded into the firmament. Apart from the cheers and exclamations of delight from the passengers, the arctic night was clear and silent. Earlier in the voyage we had

flaming red eyes... it attacks vessels, grabs and swallows people, as it lifts itself up like a column from the water". According to our guidebook the last recorded sighting of a sea serpent along this coast was in 1926 when two boys fishing for mackerel north of Rorvik saw a creature 200m (656ft) long and with 60 humps. As is the way with these things, they did not have a camera with them at the time.

Sea monsters were not the only ancient and unknowable power that preoccupied the inhabitants of mediæval Norway. Our journey from Bodo took us through the Raftsundet, a 20km (12 mile)-long strait that forms the border between the Lofoten and Vesteralen archipelagos. As the Midnatsol edged slowly along the narrow sound, with mountain peaks towering on either side of the ship, we passed the entrance to the narrow Troll Fjord, which is just 2km (1.2 miles) long and 100m (328ft) wide at the point where it meets the Raftsunet. As the rays of the waxing Moon lit up the surreal scene, our captain shone a searchlight down the fjord and let out a deafening blast on the ship's horn. We could venture no further down the fjord - not because of marauding trolls, he reassured us, but as a result of the danger from rock falls.

Earlier, our route skirted the legendary maelstrom that flows between the islands of Vaeroy and the Lofoten archipelago, which some



heard stories about the lights from Kari Moe, who grew up in a Sami community just south of the Arctic Circle. She told us that the aurora was known to them as "the light you can hear". The folklore of the Native Americans, Inuit and Sami tells of aurora accompanied by low but distinctive sounds, such as hissing, crackling and piping. No modern recording equipment has been able to verify this and Kari Moe told us she doubted the literal truth of this auditory tradition. "Sometimes when you are out in sub-zero conditions it is so cold the air feels like it is hissing or crackling as you move," she said.

The late Bill Corliss, in his Sourcebook Project, lists accounts of low-level auroras that descend behind mountains or appear between the observers and nearby terrestrial objects. We know the measured height of the aurora is generally at least 60 miles (100km) from the Earth's surface, and optical and photographic studies have found no evidence of their occurrence in lower levels of the atmosphere. Nevertheless, Corliss found accounts in the scientific



literature of auroras occurring as low as one to four miles, and these were often linked with accounts of luminous fogs, sounds and even odours.

Sceptics have dismissed such accounts as optical or auditory illusions or misperceptions. But as auroral displays are related to tensions within the Earth's electrical field, it's possible their appearance may give rise to subtle acoustic phenomena than can be detected only by sensitive humans and

TOP: The aurora appears above the mountain neaks.

ABOVE: A ritual drum used by the Sami shamans.

**BELOW:** The Finnkirka rock formation.

animals. Dogs, for instance, are capable of sensing higher frequency sounds than us. When we joined a sub-zero dog sledding expedition at a wilderness centre outside Tromso, we learned that huskies often predict the appearance of the lights by howling in unison. Our sledding guide, a Danish émigré, was a source of legends about the lights. In the Middle Ages they were regarded as precursors of war and plague. One local tradition suggests they are the burning souls of those who perished in the witch-finding epidemic that gripped Finnmark in the 1620s. The remote northern province of Finnmark was known as ultima

thule to the mediæval Christians and its peninsulas and rocks continued to harbour devils and pagan gods. The region is the last stronghold of the Sami, one of the few remaining indigenous peoples who have managed to hold onto their traditions and culture, despite centuries of persecution. We examined a rare surviving example of a runebomme, or ritual drum, used by the Sami shamans, in the Nordland Museum at Bodo. Sami shamans, or noaidi, used these magic instruments to contact the spirit world and to predict the future. The example we saw is thought to be 350-400 years old and is one of only 70 to survive the Christianisation of Scandinavia, when many ritual objects were collected and destroyed by missionaries.

Our final experience of the Sami spirit world came on the last night aboard the Midnatsol. Rounding the North Cape, which forms the most northerly point in Europe, 1,292 miles (2,080 km) from the North Pole, we sailed past one of the Sami holy sites. The Finnkirka is a rock simulacrum that resembles a church or cathedral and was used by the Sami, along with fishermen and seafarers, as a sacrificial site. Offerings were made to the old gods here to ensure safe passage around the feared Nordkyn. Fortunately, our arrival at our final destination of Kirkenes left us only with a sense of awe and wonder at the natural phenomena we had witnessed on our journey into the land of the Midnight Sun. 11

David travelled with Hurtigruten for a 6-night/7 day cruise from Bergen to Kirkenes. He returned from Kirkenes to Manchester via Oslo with Norwegian Air Shuttle. A 12 day Classic Round Voyage is also available with direct charter flights from UK airports. For more details visit: www.hurtigruten.co.uk/ or call 0203 642



**DAVID CLARKE** is a senior lecturer in journalism at Sheffield and a regular UFO contributor to FT.





## No, for real-life, no-nonsense, buying advice go to Carbuyer

We won't just tell you what it is like to drive a car, we'll tell you what it is like to own. We'll reveal the running costs, explain what might go wrong and you can find out what existing owners think. So for information that'll help you buy your perfect new car, there's only one place to go.

# carbuyer



## reader info

#### how to subscribe

ANNUAL SUB of 12 issues (inc p&p) UK £39.98; EC £47.50; USA \$89.99 (\$161.98 for 24 issues); Rest of World £55.

#### North America (US & Canada)

Subscribers should contact: IMS. 3330 Pacific Avenue, Suite 404, Virginia Beach, VA 23454, USA. Tel: 888-428 6676. or 800-428 3003; Fax: 757 428 6253; Or order online at www.imsnews.com.

#### UK. Europe & rest of world

Major credit cards accepted. Cheques or money orders should be in sterling, preferably drawn on a London bank and made payable to Dennis Publishing. Mail to: Fortean Times Dovetail Services, 800 Guillat Avenue, Kent Science Park, Sittingbourne, ME9 8GU, UK. NB: This address should be used for orders and subscriptions only.

Telephone payments and queries: 0844 844 0049. Fax payments and queries: 0844 815 0866.

E-mail payments and queries: ForteanTimes@servicehelpline.co.uk

#### how to submit

Dennis Publishing reserves all rights to reuse material submitted by FT readers and contributors in any medium or format.

#### Illustrations

Contact the art director by email (etienne@forteantimes.com) before sending samples of work. We cannot guarantee to respond to unsolicited work, though every effort will be made to do so.

#### **Article submissions**

Please send all submissions to David Sutton, Editor, Fortean Times, PO BOX 71602, London E17 OQD, UK or email drsuttton@forteantimes. com. As we receive a large volume of submissions, a decision may not be immediate. A contributors' guide is available at www.forteantimes.com.

#### Letters

Letters of comment or about experiences are welcome. Send to PO Box 2409, London NW5 4NP, UK or email sieveking@forteantimes.com. We reserve the right to edit submissions.

Books, periodicals, DVDs and other material for review Send to: Fortean Times, PO BOX 71602, London E17 OQD, UK.

#### Caveat

FT aims to present the widest range of interpretations to stimulate discussion and welcomes helpful criticism. The opinions of contributors are not necessarily those of the editors. FT can take no responsibility for submissions, but will take all reasonable care of material in its possession. Requests for return of material should be accompanied by a stamped addressed envelope or an International Reply Coupon.

We occasionally use material that has been placed in the public domain. It is not always possible to identify the copyright holder. If you claim credit for something we've published, we'll be pleased to make acknowledgement.



#### **Clippers wanted!**

Regular clipsters have provided the lifeblood of Fortean Times since it began in 1973. One of the delights for the editors is receiving packets of clips from Borneo or Brazil, Saudi Arabia or Siberia. We invite you to join in the

fun and send in anything weird, from trade

journals, local newspapers, extracts from obscure tomes, or library newspaper archives.

To minimise the time spent on preparing clippings for a Fort Sort, we ask that you cut them out and not fold them too small. Mark each clip (on the front, where possible) with the source, date and your name, so that we can credit you in the listing (right) when we use the material. For UK local and overseas clips, please give the town of publication. For foreign language clips, we appreciate brief translations. To avoid confusion over day and month, please write the date in this form: 1 July 2014. If you send photocopies, copy on one side of the paper only.

Mail to: Fortean Times, PO Box 2409, London NW5 4NP, UK E-mail: sieveking@forteantimes.com or post on the FT website at www.forteantimes.co.uk,

where there is a contributor's guide.

## 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.

#### **Special Correspondents**

AUSTRALIA Graham Cordon (SA), Tony Healy (ACT), John Palazzi (NSW), Len Watson (Qld). CANADA Brian Chapman (BC), Graham Conway (BC), CYBERSPACE Richard Alexander, John F Callahan, Hugh Henry, Steve Scanlon. ENGLAND Gail-Nina Anderson, Louise Bath, James Beckett, Claire Blamey, Peter Christie, Mat Coward, Kate Eccles, Paul Farthing, George Featherston, Paul Gallagher, Alan Gardiner, Keith George, Anne Hardwick, Richard Lowke, Alexis Lykiard, Diana Lyons, Dave Malin, Nick Maloret, Valerie Martin, Tom Ruffles, Meryl Santis, Paul Screeton, Gary Stocker, Roman Suchyj, Frank Thomas, Paul Thomas, Nick Warren, Owen Whiteoak, Bobby Zodiac. FRANCE Michel Meurger. GERMANY Ulrich Magin. HOLLAND Robin Pascoe. IRELAND Andy Conlon, Pat Corcoran, Andrew Munro. ISRAEL Zvi Ron. NEW ZEALAND Peter Hassall. ROMANIA losif Boczor. SCOTLAND Roger Musson. SWEDEN Sven Rosén. THAILAND Chris Williams. USA Loren Coleman (ME), Jim Conlan (CT), Myron Hoyt (ME), Greg May (FL), Dolores Phelps (TX), Jim Riecken (NY), Joseph Trainor (MA), Jeffrey Vallance (CA), Gary Yates (UT). WALES Janet & Colin Bord.

**Fort Sorters** (who classify clippings placed in the Archives for Fortean Research) Phil Baker, Rachel Carthy, Mark Pilkington, Bob Rickard, Paul Sieveking, Ian Simmons.

#### **Clipping Credits for FT316**

Gerard Apps, Louise Bath, James Beckett, Brian Chapman, Peter Christie, Andy Conlon, Pat Corcoran, Graham Cordon, Charlotte Davies, Emily Davies, Kate Eccles, George Featherston, Rob Gandy, Alan Gardiner, Keith George, Richard George, Anne Hardwick, Hugh Henry, Nigel Herwin, Colin Ings, Ernest Jackson, Paul Jackson, Bill & Louise Kelly, Diana Lyons, Dave Malin, Bert & Betty Gray-Malkin, Nick Maloret, Valerie Martin, Tom Mason, Greg May, Cindy Mouchon, Alan Murdie, John Palazzi, Guy Lyon Playfair, Jim Price, Tom Ruffles, Tony Smith, Gary Stocker, Paul Street, Frank Thomas, Joe Trainor, Dave Trevor, Carole Tyrrell, Keith Warner, Nicholas Warren, Len Watson, Owen Whiteoak, Paul Whyte, Rosemary Williams, Janet Wilson, Zebbie Zubbeh.

















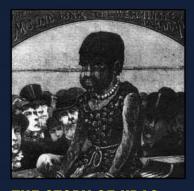


# COMING NEXT MONTH



#### DANGEROUS GAMES

THE SLENDER MAN'S JOURNEY FROM THE WEB TO WISCONSIN



#### THE STORY OF KRAO

THE VICTORIAN SEARCH FOR THE 'MISSING LINK'



IRISH FLYING SAUCERS, VENEZUALAN CULTS, VOODOO MARKET AND MUCH MORE...

# FORTEAN TIMES 317

ON SALE 24 JULY 2014

## STRANGEZ DEATHS

#### UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL

On 29 March, the skeletal remains of twin brothers Andrew and Anthony Johnson were found seated in recliners inside the modest home in Chattanooga, Tennessee, they shared for decades. They apparently died about three years ago; there were no obvious signs of trauma or foul play. The 63-year-old twins were something of a mystery to neighbours, who occasionally saw them wearing surgical masks while gardening, but never saw them with visitors. [AP] Boston Globe, 8 April 2014.

Maurecio Bell, 42, was choked to death on 7 April 2013 when he fell on as escalator in the Benaroya Hall Metro Station in Seattle and his clothing got caught in the mechanism. The same fate befell Naima Rharouity, 47, in Canada on 30 January 2014. Her scarf and then her hair got caught in the mechanism of a Montreal Metro escalator, strangling her. She was wearing a hijab. Authorities were unable to explain how the accident happened. (Victoria BC) Times Colonist, 13 April 2013, 31 Jan, 1 Feb 2014.

A man shot himself in the head while demonstrating gun safety. The unnamed 36-year-old from Independence Township, Michigan, was showing how his three handguns were safe when they were not loaded by holding them to his head and pulling the trigger. The third gun, unfortunately, was indeed loaded. He was pronounced dead at the scene. Sheriff's officials said drink appeared to have been taken. A man in St Petersburg, Florida, died in similar circumstances in January 2013, when he too tried to show that guns are safe and shot himself in the head. Don't try this at home... or anywhere else. *Irish Independent, 27 Feb 2014.* 

A British sniper in Kakaran, Helmand province, killed six Taliban fighters with a single shot last December when his bullet detonated a suicide vest one of them was wearing. The Coldstream Guards lance corporal, 20, fired from 850m (2,790ft) after spotting the Afghan fighter with his telescopic sight. He had seen the man's shawl billow up to reveal a machine gun but he had no idea he was also wearing a vest packed with explosives. When the bullet hit there was explosion and the man died along with five machine gunners guarding him. Sun, 1 April 2014.

Bridge player Wendy Brown died at the table as she claimed victory with a high-scoring hand. The 80-year-old grandmother, Cornwall's No1 player and a Premier Life Master, died clutching a "phenomenally rare" 29 points during her regular weekly game with friends at the John Betjeman Centre in Wadebridge. The maximum bridge hand is 37 points. "I can't remember seeing more than 29," said Barrie Benfield of Cornwall Bridge Association. "My theory is she couldn't take the excitement." Her son Charlie Brown, 47, said: "When all is said and done, it was a lovely way to go. She died doing what she loved to do." Sun. D.Mail. 27 Mar 2014.

Fatalities continue on the Western Front 96 years after World War I ended. Two workers were killed in March 2014 by an exploding shell at an industrial site near the town of Ypres. Another worker was in a critical condition and a fourth in shock. Every year the Flanders battlefields throw up hundreds of armaments; a special bomb squad destroys most of them without

incident. (Sydney) D.Telegraph, 21 Mar 2014.

It's never too late to end it all. Anastasia Khoreva, 105, hanged herself in her bedroom in Darsun, Russia, in 2012 after her relatives had gone out. She had told them that she was fed up waiting for the Grim Reaper, so she decided to go and meet him. After a tip-off on 29 January this year, police found Joseph Stirn, a 100-year-old widower, hanged at his home in Paignton, Devon, and concluded it was suicide. Mr Stirn, known as Joe, was born in Zduny, Poland, in 1913 and was a retired sheet metal engineer. Sun, 21 Mar 2012; D.Telegraph, 3 Feb 2014.

The corpse of a 66-year-old woman who died more than six months earlier was found in her apartment in Oberursel, near Frankfurt, last March. She had died of natural causes while watching television in her nightgown. The television was still on. There was a programme guide from September 2013 nearby, and the woman's body was described as "partially mummified". Irish Independent, 27 Mar 2014.

Former airline stewardess Ma Ailun, 23, was electrocuted when she answered her iPhone 5 while it was charging. She was rushed to hospital but doctors were unable to save her. She had bought the iPhone from an Apple store in December 2012 and was using the original charger. The fatal accident happened in China's Xinjiang province on 11 July 2013. It was claimed she might have left the bath to answer the phone, so maybe she got the iPhone wet. *Metro, 16 July 2013*.

A front desk clerk at a Florida apartment complex was fired after mistaking the body of a tenant for a mannequin and throwing it away. Ronald Benjamin, 61, saw the body in the car park and assumed someone put a mannequin there as an April Fool's Day prank. He got two people to help him toss the body in the garbage. A maintenance worker saw the body and called the authorities. The deceased was Nancy Yates, 96, who jumped from her balcony on the 16th floor. Orlando (FL) Sentinel, 4 May; Irish Independent, 5 April 2014.

#### THE FORTEAN TIMES BOOK OF STRANGE DEATHS VOL 2

ON SALE NOW FROM WH SMITH AND AMAZON.CO.UK TO ORDER DIRECT CALL 0844 844 0053



How does **PRANA** work? The way traditional magic has always worked!...

With very little time and effort, the Prana Talisman can provide its owner with the inner power to achieve any positive goals that they wish, however ambitious! Centuries of wisdom, knowledge and practice have percolated down from the scholars and mystics of the ancient world, and now their legacy can be revealed and offered to you, in the form of the Prana.

Here is the most important aspect; the Prana will remain nothing more than an interesting metal pendant displaying some curious and mysterious-looking symbols before it is first activated, or consecrated. However, once properly and personally consecrated, it will be transformed into a real and powerful talisman dedicated to helping you to achieve the success you desire. Just as with a brand a new car, which would first need fueling

and then purposefuly driving in
the right direction before it could
actually deliver anyone to their
destination, the Prana disc will
need charging with both your own
positive mental energy as well as
the earth's natural forces, and then
focusing on your personal
goals before it can succeed in
achieving them. Consecrating your
Prana takes only a few, but



priceless minutes. Anything can be achieved with enough self belief and determination, providing it is humanly possible. Prana is the truly magic catalyst that will assist you in achieving your most ambitious goals and desires. Once your Prana has been effectively consecrated, or 'tuned', in just the way a TV antenna collects and converts invisible

. . I think that Prana talisman is working as I have been creating and drawing nonstop and with new confidence. . .

unbelievable. . . Ms DN, London

Hey... I just wanted to let you know that the talisman is amazing! Thank you! Since I had it, work has been coming in, I feel great and everything seems to be getting better!

Ms NJ, Leicester

For further information visit-

www.PranaTalisman.com

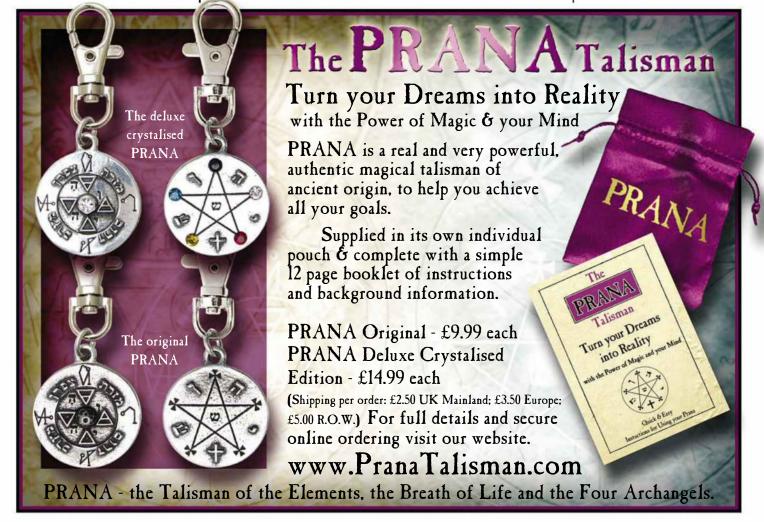
signals and then broadcasts them as a clear picture, it will collect and magnify all the available natural, positive forces along with your own psychic energies, and then channel them straight towards your personal goals.

You will feel physically and mentally stronger and energised. Confidence will brim within you and you will feel a potent force rise inside, discovering new personal powers and becoming sharp and decisive. You will intuitively recognise opportunities as they appear when previously they went-by undetected; you will feel 'lucky'!

Instead of stuff just happening around you, you will be able to make things happen!

Each PRANA talisman comes with its own 12 page booklet of easy instuctions and is supplied in a purple satin pouch.

www.PranaTalisman.com



# THE DISCLES

WELCOME TO AMERICA WHERE ONE NIGHT A YEAR ALL CRIME IS LEGAL #SURVIVETHENIGHT



BLUM MINES





