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# Fortean Times

FT317 AUGUST 2014 £4.25

## SLENDER MAN ATTACKS

DID A FICTIONAL ONLINE  
MONSTER INSPIRE TWO  
CHILDREN TO KILL?



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By Marian Ashcroft

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**Tim Skelton** "Besides seeing my first book in print, I've appeared in The Times and The Independent, and updated yet more guide-books for Fodor's, Thomas Cook, and the AA. I am writing flat-out, and getting paid what I can now describe with pride as a decent salary. And it is thanks to The Writers Bureau that I got this chance. It provided me with the opportunity to realise an

ambition which I didn't know how to nurture. I do now."

**Published**



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

something different."

**Published**



**Chris Green** "I've had 30 pieces of work accepted by various publications since I started my Writers Bureau course – a mere 18 months ago. I contemplate that fact and I am amazed to have come so far in such a short time. Thanks to the careful and patient tutoring provided by The Writers Bureau and the boundless confidence this has given me, I can continue to explore my potential and see where it takes me."

**Published**



**Jane Isaac** "When I started the Writers Bureau course, I wanted to explore avenues for my writing and develop and strengthen my personal style. I had no idea that it would lead to me being a published writer of novels and short stories. I still pinch myself when I receive emails and messages from readers who've enjoyed my work or

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**Published**

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## strange days

Islamists versus “mystical bees”; Ugandan cop shoots “aggressive” tortoise; runic code cracked; human Etch a Sketch; super-rats; hammock bear; Hampstead witch doctor; hippie conspiracy; British folk art – and much more.

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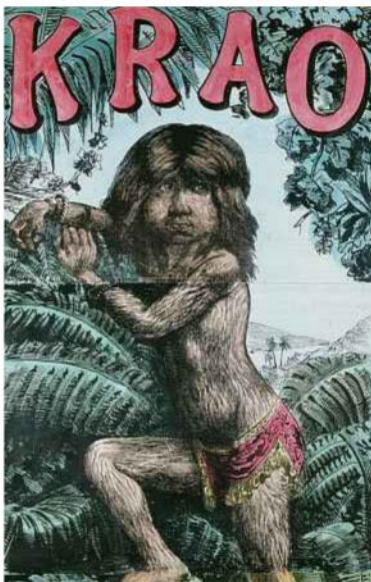
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# editorial

## Dark fairytales

Felix Dennis, founder and Chairman of Dennis Publishing, the company that publishes *Fortean Times* - as well as *Viz*, *The Week*, *Bizarre* and many other titles - died on 22 June 2014. He was 67.

Felix lived a remarkable life. From modest beginnings he created one of Britain's most successful magazine publishing businesses, achieving worldwide recognition for his contribution to media and establishing himself as one of Britain's best-loved entrepreneurs. He also enjoyed huge success as



a critically acclaimed poet and in 1992 established the Heart Of England

Forest Project charity. His considerable fortune will continue to help the charity achieve its aim of planting a 25,000-acre native broadleaf forest in the Warwickshire countryside, details of which can be found at [www.heartofenglandforest.com](http://www.heartofenglandforest.com).

But above all, Felix was an immensely gifted publisher. His obsession with high quality content, allied closely to an ability to identify what readers really wanted, set him apart as the finest magazine craftsman of his generation. He will be greatly missed.

It's always fun to see Richard Dawkins getting himself into a pickle. The occasion this time was the Cheltenham Science Festival, at which the intemperate atheist made some widely reported

- and, according to him, misreported - comments about fairytales. "Is it a good thing to go along with the fantasies of childhood, magical as they are? Or should we be fostering a spirit of scepticism?" the great thinker had wondered aloud to his audience, before suggesting that it might be "pernicious to inculcate into a child a view of the world which includes supernaturalism" and that a frog turning into a prince was "statistically too improbable".

A barrage of hostile comment ensued, including interventions from Marina Warner and Jenny McCartney in the press, defending our right to not spend our entire lives doing 'critical thinking' - that Holy Grail of 'sceptics' everywhere - and to indulge in the different modes of thought that stories, art and music provide. In a Twitter post bordering on self-parody, the Dawk seemed to change his mind about fairytales - "Might foster supernaturalism. On balance more likely to help critical thinking" - but demonstrated that he'd once again missed the point. *New Statesman*, 5 June; *Guardian*, *D.Telegraph* 7 June 2014.

In the wake of the violent events in Wisconsin (see FT316:4) in which two 12-year-old girls attempted to murder a schoolmate as a sacrifice to the Internet entity know as Slender Man, we may well wonder whether such modern fairytales can lead to harm, and what they tell us about contemporary forms of belief and reality.

Ian 'Cat' Vincent ponders the origin and future of Slender Man in our cover feature on p30.

### FORTEAN (TIME) TRAVELLER

An anomaly has come to our attention from within these very pages. Our regular (ish) Fortean Traveller section has been visiting some of the world's weirdest locations ever since we launched it back in June 2001 (FT147:51). Recently, though, it seems to have been wandering in time as well as space. FT303 saw no 87 in the series visiting the Grail Church of Ettal. Deja vu was apparent when FT304 again presented no 87, this time alighting at Cannock Chase. After this slight temporal stutter, we continued uneventfully on our way to no 91 in FT310; at which point, some species of time slip took

place, sending the column back to no 88 in FT312, whence it recommenced its journey to no 89, all over again, in FT316. Therefore, this issue sees us seemingly leap from Fortean Traveller 89 to 95; which means, clearly, that we're now exactly where (or when) we should be...



"IT'S THE TEDDY BEARS' TURN TO GET A SURPRISE IN THE WOODS TODAY"

*David R Sutton*  
 DAVID R SUTTON

*Bob Rickard*  
 BOB RICKARD

*Paul Sieveking*  
 PAUL SIEVEKING



## Why Fortean?

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

SEE PAGE 78



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# strangedays

## African wildlife backlash

Boko Haram attacked by “mystical bees” and Ugandan cop menaced by “aggressive” tortoise

### BOKO HARAM VS BEES

Islamists fighting for Boko Haram are leaving their forest hiding places after a number of senior militants died following relentless attacks by “mystical snakes” and “mystical bees”. Two suspected Boko Haram gunmen arrested in Maiduguri in northeastern Nigeria claimed that members of the group have now fled the Sambisa Forest, close to the border with Cameroon, following “incessant snake bites” and bee stings. The Nigerian army have been trying to flush the militants out of the area for months, but it appears they are now leaving voluntarily in the belief the attacking snakes and bees are possessed by the vengeful ghosts of their victims.

“Most of us are fleeing because there are too many snakes and bees now in the forest,” said Kolo Mustapha, one of the arrested men. “Once they bite, they disappear and the victims do not last for 24 hours. We were told that the aggrieved people who had suffered from our deadly mission, including the ghosts of some of those we killed, are the ones turning into the snakes and bees.” He claimed that the snakes attack the militants first, before dozens of bees surround the injured men and lead a second attack. The second suspected gunman, Umar Abor, confirmed his friend’s account. Local volunteers said scores of Boko Haram militants have been seen fleeing the forest in recent weeks, but until now the reason for their departure was not known.

The Congregation of the People of Tradition for Proselytism and Jihad, founded in 2002 and known by its Hausa name Boko Haram (“Western education is



### “The ghosts are turning into snakes and bees”

sin”), attracted international condemnation last April for the abduction of 220 schoolgirls in Chibok, Borno State, and was blamed in late June for the abduction of another 91 people – 31 boys and 60 girls and women with toddlers as young as three. Some believe the snakes and bee attacks are caused by the kinsfolk of the schoolgirls seized in Chibok, using juju. In May, twin car bombs in the central city of Jos left more than 130 people dead; and a car bomb at a bus station killed 24 people in the Christian quarter of Kano, a Muslim city. Nigeria’s military and government claim to be winning the war against Boko Haram, but the tempo and deadliness of attacks has increased this year, killing more than 2,000 people

so far compared to an estimated 3,600 killed over the past four years. Boko Haram wants to install an Islamic state in Nigeria, whose 170 million people are almost equally divided between Muslims in the north and Christians in the south. *allafrica.com, dailymail.co.uk, BBC News, 26 June; uk.news.yahoo.com, 27 June 2014.*

### TORTOISE TERROR

Charles Onegiu, a Ugandan policeman, has reportedly shot a tortoise dead after being attacked by the “aggressive” creature. He said the tortoise entered his home – in the Nebbi district in the north of the country near the Congolese border – and attacked him while he was enjoying a cup of tea after work. “I tried to scare it but it became very aggressive,” he told *New Vision* newspaper. “I took a stick to chase it but it became more violent.” After attempting to fend off the tortoise with a plastic chair, he said he “instinctively” drew his firearm and shot it dead. A local Christian group later prayed for

Onegiu, “before burning the dead reptile to ashes”. Nebbi district police commander Onesmus Mwesigwa said that his officer’s extreme reaction might have been down to local superstitions “where people think ‘somebody is after me’”. After consulting local elders and police colleagues, Mwesigwa appealed for calm “from the residents and police officers, maintaining that their lives are not in danger as they may have assumed”. *BBC News, 7 July 2014.*

The Gang of Fort recall that in August 1978 “thousands of Ugandans” believed that an *enfundu* (tortoise) was padding around the Ugandan countryside prophesying trouble for dictator Idi Amin. The shelled emissary asked for a private audience with a certain provincial governor and police commissioner, having a message for their ears alone. ‘Big Daddy’ Amin himself threatened to put anyone spreading such rumours before a firing squad. The tortoise was said to be under arrest in a Kampala jail, although the jailers were quick to deny this. (FT27:39)





## HOW TO POO ON A DATE

And the other contenders for year's oddest book title

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## HAMPSTEAD SHAMAN

London's fake witch doctor and her supernatural swindles

PAGE 10



## EARLY UFO ART FIND?

Flying saucer turns up in 16th century wall painting

PAGE 26

# New super predator

## What in all the oceans ate a great white shark?

The mystery of what could possibly have eaten a great white shark is chronicled in an upcoming Smithsonian documentary, "Hunt for the Super Predator". As part of Australia's first-ever large-scale tagging and tracking programme for great white sharks, cinematographer Dave Riggs and a film crew found the perfect specimen. They named it "Shark Alpha" and successfully planted a heat and GPS recording device on the 10ft (3m) female in 2004. Alpha reacted well to the tagging and was observed to be very healthy without any scars or marks. Four months later, however, the tag washed up on a beach 2.5 miles (4km) away in

Bremner Bay, Western Australia, and was found by a passer-by.

Riggs was puzzled by the data it contained. Alpha had plunged straight down the side of the continental shelf to a depth of 1,900ft (580m). While the temperature of ocean water drops considerably in deep water, the tag itself actually heated up, from 8°C (46.4°F) to 26°C (78.8°F). That means the tag had to have been inside the belly of another animal. The tag had no algae on it, but looked as if it had been bleached in stomach acid. Alpha had been gobbled up, but by what? Online commentators argued for an orca, giant squid, or killer whale. Some scientists suggested a



GETTY IMAGES

bigger shark, motivated by a territorial dispute or extreme hunger; they called it a "colossal cannibal great white shark". Still, as freethinking forteans, let's not rule out a kraken. Riggs spoke to whale hunters in the Bremer Bay area and was told of an animal about 33ft (10m) long and others that were tracked

travelling up to 4.5 knots but not surfacing. Based on the tag's data, Riggs said the super predator had a stomach at least a metre (3ft 3in) wide, but couldn't have been a killer whale because the temperature recorded on the tag was too low to have been inside one. *Metro*, [news.yahoo.com/blogs, 10 June 2014](http://news.yahoo.com/blogs/10-June-2014).

## EXTRA! EXTRA!

### FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

## Dragon checked after dizzy spell

*Wolverhampton Express & Star, 11 Dec 2013.*

## Chimps lose fight for human rights

*D.Mail, 11 Dec 2013.*

## Australia police free naked man stuck in washing machine

*BBC News, 6 Jan 2014.*

## Wax figure of world's fastest man dons Christmas jumper

*Irish Times, 4 Dec 2013.*

## Van full of dead badgers crashes in city centre

*Gloucester Review, 18 Oct 2013.*

## Basking sharks pull the plug on giant offshore windfarm

*Independent, 16 Dec 2013.*

## Roman Forum tourist chased by a statue

*D.Telegraph, 31 Dec 2013.*

## Thumbs up as Owen's severed digit is saved

*Luton News, 27 Nov 2013.*

## Bed shortage forces patient to wait to see doctor laid on sofa

*Hull Daily Mail, 7 Jan 2014.*

## Deathbed confession solves mystery of phantom gnomes

*D.Telegraph, 25 Oct 2013.*

## Jennifer McCarthy 'Pulled Gun Out Of Vagina After Fight Over Space Aliens'

*Huffington Post, 8 Jan 2014.*

## Chutney strikes health officers

*Metro, 3 Dec 2013.*



## SCARING THE SPIRITS

25 June 2014: People from the village community of Tegallalang, Gianyar, Bali, Indonesia, prepare for the Grebeg Ritual. Held every two years, it sees young members of the community parade through the village with painted faces and bodies to ward off evil spirits. Photos: Putu Sayoga/Getty Images.









## SIDELINES...

### CAPITAL SERPENTS

A colony of more than 30 æsculapian snakes (*Zamenis longissimus*), 2m (6.5ft) long, is alarming residents near the Regent's Canal, north London, who fear for their pets. The snakes – which kill rats, birds and moles by constriction – are thought to be descended from some that escaped from London Zoo in the 1990s. They live in trees and slither along branches to roofs, where they bask in the sun. *Camden New Journal*, 8 May; *Times*, 10 May 2014.

### THEOLOGICAL BANTER

Rev Richard Bunday, the vicar of Kirkham in Lancashire, was standing in a shop queue with a stranger called John Dally when the latter asked him when Jesus would return. The cleric told Dally the answer was “complicated”, whereupon Dally throttled him (though not fatally). Dally admitted assault at Preston Magistrates' Court. *Church Times*, 24 May 2014.

### BROW BEATEN

A dentist who shaved off a patient's eyebrows while she was under anæsthetic is being sued in Palm Beach, Florida. *Sun*, 8 April 2014.

### SPECIAL TALENT

A British Telecom engineer fixing a line fault for *Shropshire Star* columnist Peter Rhodes told the latter of a colleague who had the ability to listen to a troublesome landline and know whether the fault was above or below ground. No one else in the depot could do it and he was never wrong. *Shropshire Star*, 25 Mar 2014.

### THROAT SQUATTER

Doctors from Zhaotong in China's Yunnan province removed a live 2in (5cm) leech from the windpipe of a seven-year-old girl after she was rushed to hospital on 10 March with breathing difficulties. She had been suffering throat pain for more than two months. Her parents admitted the family usually drank water straight from the tap. *ECNS*, 14 Mar 2014.

# Hidden whale found

## Restored painting reveals an unsuspected beaching



When the conservator Shan Kuang took a scalpel to a painting in the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge – the varnish of which had yellowed and become unsightly – she first uncovered a baffling figure of man apparently standing in mid air, and then gradually revealed that he was standing on the great hillock of a beached whale, possibly in the process of measuring it.

The 1641 landscape – ‘View of Scheveningen Sands’ by Hendrick van Anthonissen – was nicely painted but one of the less exciting works in the museum's Dutch Golden Age collection: it was always a puzzle what the people clustered on the sands were actually looking at. There was certainly no whale when the painting came to the museum in 1873, bequeathed by Edward Kerrich, a clergyman, artist, and collector. No one has traced any earlier reference to the whale or to the overpainting that sank it. Kuang can't date the extra layer of paint, though she suspects it might be 18th century and done because an owner thought the subject matter repellent, or a dealer thought the picture would sell better without a great dead animal taking up the middle



ABOVE: ‘View of Scheveningen Sands’ by Hendrick van Anthonissen before and after restoration, showing the newly revealed whale.

ground.

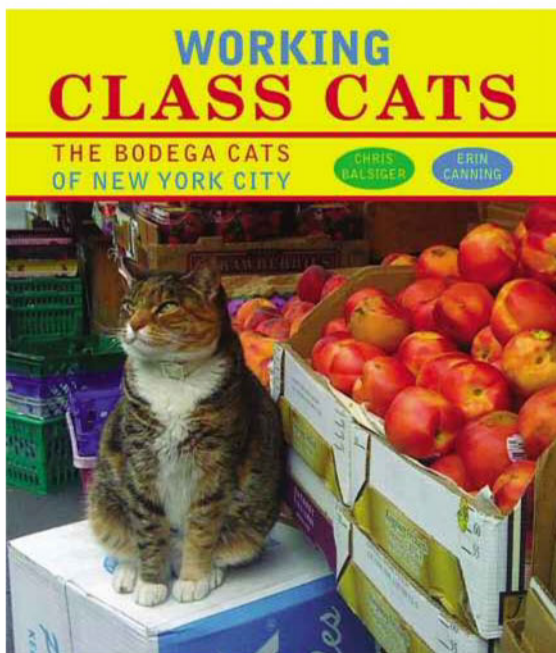
Unlike contemporary prints showing whales as terrifying monsters and omens of disaster, Anthonissen has depicted one in a real event. Records show there were many reports of beached whales in the Netherlands in the early 17th century, prompting a surge of public interest in the creatures. Such strandings still cause great excitement, often attracting doomed attempts to refloat the giant mammals. Huge crowds turned out to watch the Thames whale, 18ft (5.5m) long, which got as far upstream as Battersea in January 2006, but died during a rescue attempt

[FT207:22]. The skeleton is now in the collection of the Natural History Museum. There were fears last April that the bloated carcass of a dead blue whale that washed up near the Newfoundland town of Trout River, swollen to twice its normal size, could explode, like one in Taiwan in 2004 [FT183:6-7]. It deflated naturally, but was followed a few weeks later by a second even larger dead whale at nearby Rocky Harbour. Scientists believe both animals, from an endangered species, may have died trapped under thicker-than-usual Arctic pack ice. *Guardian.com*, 4 June 2014.



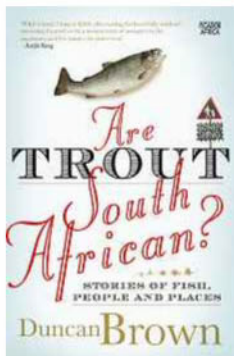
# Year's oddest titles

From the nationality of trout to romantic toilet etiquette



ABOVE: New York City's working class cats and toilet etiquette for lovers were highlights of this year's annual Diagram Prize.

Powered by the British public's irrepressible enthusiasm for scatological humour, *How to Poo on a Date: The Lovers' Guide to Toilet Etiquette* by Mats & Enzo (Prion Press) won the 36th annual Diagram Prize for Oddest Book Title of the Year. In a public ballot last March, the book garnered 30% of almost 1,500 votes, beating into second place *Are Trout South African?* by Duncan Brown (Pan South Africa) and *The Origin of Feces* by David Waltner-Toews (ECW Press), which both got 23%. The other



contenders were: *Working Class Cats: The Bodega Cats of New York City* by Chris Balsiger and Erin Canning (One Peace Books – 14%); *Pie-ography: Where Pie Meets Biography* by Jo Packham (Quarry – 6%); and *How to Pray When You're Pissed at God* by Ian

Punnett (Harmony Books – 4%).

Roland Hall, editor of *How to Poo on a Date*, said: "We are very happy and honoured that the public thought our book worthy of first place in this much sought-after prize; we'd have been disappointed to be number two.

*How to Poo on a Date* is a humorous self-help title and it means a great deal to the authors, and the rest of the team that put the book together, that it should encounter such a splash of success."

No prize other than the honour of the win is traditionally given to the winner of the Diagram, which was founded in 1978 as a

way of relieving boredom at the Frankfurt Book Fair by Diagram Group co-founders Trevor Bounford and Bruce Robertson. The person who nominates the winning title usually receives a "fairly passable" bottle of claret; however, as this year's nominator

was *The Bookseller's* own deputy chief sub-editor, Brian Payne, it was decided the claret would remain in the cellar.

Sadly, Bruce Robertson, 79, died suddenly on 21 March, the day the Diagram prizewinners were announced. A statement from his book-packaging company said: "For many years partnered by his wife, Patricia, his was a striking presence at the London and Frankfurt Book Fairs – a Union Jack tie, black beret, wild beard and colourful personality creating an unforgettable impression... He always claimed that his proudest achievement with the Diagram Group was the publication of a Japanese edition of *Woman's Body: An Owner's Manual* – in braille complete with charts, 'thus enabling blind Japanese women to know what goes on in their bodies', as he put it." *thebookseller.com*, 21+25 Mar; *Guardian*, 21 Mar; *D.Telegraph*, 28 Mar 2014. For the 2012 and 2013 winners of the Diagram Prize, see FT289:9, 302:9.

## SIDELINES...

### STAY FIT FOR EXECUTION

Child-killer Ronald Phillips's request to donate organs to his family members was rejected by Ohio authorities, saying he wouldn't have enough time to recuperate from the surgery before they executed him. This reminds FT of the smoking ban on Death Row in Texas. (Adelaide) *Sunday Mail*, 23 Mar 2014.

### GAS GUZZLER

Brian Taylor, 45, from Brotton, East Cleveland, can't stop drinking petrol. Banned from dozens of fuel stations, he was arrested again on 30 December after sneaking onto two supermarket forecourts in Redcar to down unleaded and dance a jig. He has intimidated staff and customers for nine years, sometimes cutting fuel pipes and threatening those who try to stop him. He was warned he faced jail if he offended again. (Middlesbrough) *Eve. Gazette*, 1 Jan; *D.Mirror*, 2 Jan 2014.

### HOT DOG SAVES BOY

Raul Kutliakhmetov, seven, miraculously survived three days and nights down a 10ft (3m)-deep roadside service shaft in Siberia in temperatures of -10°C (14°F) because his faithful dog kept him warm. He was trying to rescue the dog when he slipped and fell down the hole. (Sydney) *D.Telegraph*, 27 Mar 2013.

### TRAPPED BY SPIDER

Reece Thomas, 17, called police on his mobile after getting stuck behind his wardrobe in Moulsecoomb, East Sussex. He was freed from a spider. He was freed by firefighters. *Sun*, 7 Mar 2014.







## SIDELINES...

### TIME FOR REFLECTION

Two policemen were investigating a suspected break-in at the Brig 'O' Dee bar in Aberdeen when they saw two intruders and called for backup. Two support units, including sniffer dogs, rushed to the scene, before the red-faced plods realised they had been looking at themselves in a mirror. *Sun*, 28 Jan 2014.

### LAVATORIAL PERSPECTIVE

Speaking on the sidelines of a conference on angels in a Renaissance palace in Rome, Father Renzo Lavatori, a Catholic "angelologist", said that angels exist but they do not have wings and are more like shards of light. They are needed more than ever because increasing secularisation and materialism in society have left an "open door" for the Devil. *D.Telegraph*, 21 Dec 2013.

### DYNAMUTT

A man who blew up his "devil-possessed" Labrador with explosives in Stevenson, Washington State, was jailed for a year. *Sun*, 6 Jan 2014.

### TOPPED CATS

At least four cat beheadings took place in Broadstairs, Kent, the latest on 28 October. A further six were found in Sittingbourne, 40 miles (64km) away, within a fortnight in January 2014. The RSPCA suggested foxes were to blame, but witnesses insisted the injuries had been made with a sharp blade. *D.Telegraph*, 9 Nov 2013, 30 Jan 2014; *Sunday People*, 2 Feb 2014.

# The witch doctor of Hampstead

It's quite astonishing what people can be led to believe, not just in remote villages in Papua or the Punjab, but right here in Hampstead, north London, home of the affluent chattering classes. Here it was that Juliette D'Souza, 59, a resident of Perrins Lane, masqueraded as a shaman for more than 12 years, persuading 11 of her well-heeled clients to hand over almost a million pounds after offering to cure terminal illnesses and solve fertility problems. She told her victims the money was a "sacrifice" that would be used as a spiritual offering and hung on a sacred tree in the Amazonian rainforest in Suriname. Pa and Oma, two other shamans in South America, would perform rituals over the money before it was sent back and their problems would be resolved.

The reality was that D'Souza used the money to pay for Hermes and Louis Vuitton handbags, expensive cars, Cartier jewellery, antique furniture, holidays and a property portfolio. She had multiple identities and a string of addresses across Hampstead – in Perrin's Lane, Denning Road, Willoughby Road, Rosslyn Hill and Heath Street – as well as in West Hampstead, Belsize Park, Kensington and St John's Wood. She would pay up to a year's rent in advance – in cash – and occupy several flats at once.

She led her clients to believe that Princess Diana was on her client-list and that she had warned the late Princess of Wales that she "would never see her sons again after she went to Paris"; also that she treated Prince Andrew and Robert Redford, and cured John Cleese's daughter of cancer; and that her sister was a PA to Prime Minister David Cameron. She promised a young singer an introduction to Simon



LEFT: D'Souza as a younger woman in an old photograph.

"Vanessa Campbell") persuaded one woman to have an abortion after being paid £170,000 to help her get pregnant. She told the unnamed victim that she should abort the child because it was "evil" and would be born seriously deformed and ill. Another victim was the mother of a 10-year-old boy with Down's Syndrome who was tricked out of £42,000 in 2004 when D'Souza claimed she could cure his behavioural problems. Retired solicitor Richard Collier-Wright paid D'Souza £7,000 to cure his terminal leukaemia. Another man

## She used the money to pay for expensive handbags

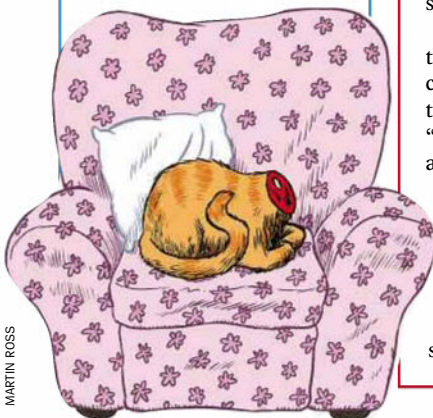
Cowell, the TV talent competition judge.

Jailing D'Souza for 10 years at Blackfriars Crown Court on 23 counts of obtaining property by deception and fraud, Judge Ian Karsten QC said she had cast a "spell" over her victims and persuaded them to hand over the money or they would face "terrifying" consequences. She claimed to have a degree from Oxford and to be a qualified barrister. The court heard how she cut her victims off from friends and family so they "lost all autonomy" and came to rely solely on her. It emerged during the trial that she was previously convicted of 28 counts of fraud and four of theft, spending time in Holloway prison in the 1980s.

D'Souza (calling herself

was persuaded to hand over £43,000 between 2004 and 2006 after D'Souza claimed his mother and girlfriend would die if he did not send the money. Ruth Fillingham paid £169,000 from 1998 to 2004 to ward off the evil spirit of her deceased brother, save her partner from a non-existent tumour and ensure her eye surgery would be a success – which it was not. Fillingham sold her house because D'Souza said it was "spooked". Her boyfriend, Geoff Wheeler, handed over £195,000 in the same period. Much of the money was supposed to secure his job, but he was still made redundant.

Sylvia Eaves, an 83-year-old retired opera singer, hoping to help her terminally ill sister and a friend suffering from cancer, handed over £353,000. Ms Eaves, who suffers from Alzheimer's, said she would be "a bit more careful" in future. Her friend, Guy Oldman, whom Ms Eaves had known for 50 years, also became a victim, after she convinced him to pay D'Souza £57,000 to release nearly half a million pounds 'held' by the taxman. The charade lasted







from January 1998 to June 2010, resulting in one of her clients losing her home and another left on the brink of suicide. The total amount she defrauded in relation to the charges on the indictment was £908,400, but on the evidence given by victims the final sum was closer to £1 million.

D'Souza did not take the witness stand during the trial, but in police interviews she attempted to pin the blame on one of her victims, osteopath Keith Bender, who had become convinced of her healing powers after accompanying her on a trip to Suriname in 1997. She told him she had been born on a plane mid-flight, with a caul (skin membrane) covering her head, which (according to her) meant she was a shaman. Bender went on to introduce D'Souza to many of her victims, believing that they would be helped. The jury heard that the osteopath "genuinely believed that she had special powers" and was "completely under her influence" for more

than 10 years.

D'Souza's web began to unravel in 2007 after she made a series of mistakes that aroused her victims' suspicions. She claimed to have attended St Hilliard's College, Oxford, which does not exist and got the name of Princess Diana's sister wrong. The woman who had an abortion realised she had been scammed and went to Hampstead police station, but said officers "laughed in my face". This left her so angry she forced her way into D'Souza's Willoughby Road flat with the help of Bender, who was paying the rent on that property, and three others. Inside they found drawings of the 'evil eye', black magic items including burned photographs half-buried in earth, a brand new barrister's wig, a black-capped capuchin monkey in a cage, seven freezers filled with rotting meat, and rooms filled with empty carrier bags from Chanel, Luis Vuitton and Cartier. (D'Souza was in Suriname at the time.) The owner of the property called in a

priest to bless it as he half-jokingly dubbed his tenant 'Dracula's sidekick'. Police still refused to take on the case until her crimes were laid bare by a Sunday newspaper.

D'Souza had bought the monkey, named Joey, in a market in Suriname in 1998 and smuggled him into Britain, where he spent almost a decade in a tiny cage without fresh air, exercise or company. The RSPCA took him to the Monkey Sanctuary in Cornwall. He was left permanently deformed with a serious metabolic bone disease that affects his spine, jaw and teeth, as well as severe agoraphobia. However, his health is much improved and he has been adopted by comedian Stephen Fry. He has also found a mate. *D.Mail*, 9+30 May; *Camden New Journal*, 29 May, 4+5 June; *D.Telegraph*, 31 May; *Hampstead & Highgate Gazette*, 15 May, 4 June 2014.

**For another manipulative con artist, see the story of Thierry Tilly (FT298:9).**

## SIDELINES...

### HIGH PRICE FOR WEALTH

A man let a hyena eat his genitals because a witch doctor told him it would make him rich. Chamangeni Zulu also lost three toes in Zambia after being told to go into the bush naked. "A hyena came to me and started eating my toes and eventually my manhood," he said, adding that it was worth it. *MX News (Sydney)*, 1 April 2014.

### TUCK IN

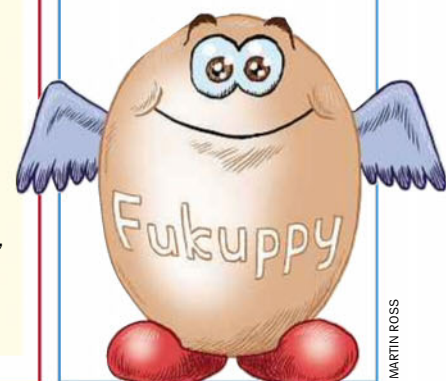
According to a study by Imperial College London, food allergy sufferers are six times more likely to be murdered than died from an allergic reaction. *Sun*, 26 Nov 2013.

### OLDEST FOSSIL

A mat of fossilised green and purple microbes found in sandstone in Western Australia is 3.5 billion years old, and is thought to be the oldest complete fossil ever found – 300 million years older than any other complete fossil. *D.Mail*, 15 Nov 2013.

### LOST IN TRANSLATION

Fukushima industries, a Japanese refrigeration company, was ridiculed for using the first four letters of its name and the last three letters of the word happy to name its mascot. The Osaka-based company, which is not related to the nuclear plant devastated by the quake and tsunami in 2011, used the smiling winged egg with a human face to welcome visitors to its website. "I'm Fukuppy," it says. "Nice to meet you". *D.Telegraph, Independent*, 16 Oct 2013.



MARTIN ROSS

- A Russian girl gave her family's £17,000 savings to a 'witch' who promised to lift a curse placed on her loved ones. Terrified Hope Seleznyova, 11, paid the cash to "save her mother's life". A search for the charlatan was under way. Police believe she was working with an accomplice who knew her victim had cash at her home near Moscow. *Metro*, 9 May 2014.

- Last year, Asian Australians were falling victim to scammers telling them evil spirits were chasing them. A woman aged 66 was talked into handing over a large sum to three women at Preston Market in Melbourne on 21 March. They told her she was being haunted by spirits and would die in three days if she didn't pay. She withdrew \$30,000

(£16,600) from three ATMs, then collected jewellery from home and handed it to the trio. Police spokeswoman Natalie Webster said: "It is alleged the women convince their Asian victims that they are possessed by evil spirits and then offer to help the victims rid themselves of the spirits by praying over their bag containing money and jewellery... Investigators believe there may be further victims out there who have not reported matters to police." Webster said the offenders tell their victims not to look in the bag for some time; when they do, they find their valuables have been stolen. She said there had been similar scams in Melbourne on 12 March and Glen Waverley on 26 January. The offenders were described as aged 40

to 50, and speaking Mandarin or Cantonese. (*Melbourne Herald Sun*, 12 May 2013.

- Between June and November 2012, three Cantonese-speaking women approached seven elderly Chinese women in different neighbourhoods of Vancouver and told them they were being followed by a ghost or evil spirit and that one of their children would die. They convinced their victims to accept a lucky jade bracelet or bottle of mystical water to protect them against ill fortune. The scammers arranged for their victims to meet them again a few hours later with \$20,000 in cash and valuables, including jewellery, which they put in a bag to be blessed. They then left, telling their victims not to check the bags' contents for a specific

period. When the bags were opened, it was found that the valuables had been replaced with worthless items. *Victoria (BC) Times Colonist*, 10 Nov 2012.

- In July 2013, five Chinese nationals in New York were charged with trying to swindle a Chinese woman out of thousands of dollars through a ruse to get rid of "evil spirits". Jun Liang, Xiumei He, Yae Chen, Huahuo Chen, and Jingchang Quan all attempted to carry out the "evil spirit" scam, where a victim is told they're cursed and that they should place all their valued possessions into a bag for "cleansing", which results in the bag's contents being stolen. The NYPD set up a sting, which netted the five defendants. *New York City Metro*, 1 July 2013.





## SIDELINES...

### PEAK OF CRUELTY

A man who made his two-year-old stepson swallow 31 sewing needles has been jailed for 12½ years. Roberto Magalhaes, 30, from Bahia, Brazil, targeted the child after rows with his wife. He was caught when the boy suffered stomach-ache and was X-rayed. Doctors removed 27 needles, including two that punctured his heart. Four remain but he is recovering. *Sun, D.Mirror, 15 Mar 2014.*

### SHANGHAI KILLOYS

Romantics planning a movie for Valentine's Day were thwarted by pranksters who reserved all the odd-numbered seats at a cinema's prime-time screening, forcing couples to sit apart. A group of singles liaised on-line and bought up the tickets to a 7.30 screening of "Beijing Love Story", a big-budget romance, at the Shanghai Xintiandi cinema on 14 February. *D.Telegraph, Guardian, 15 Feb 2014.*

### CHURCH VAN ROLLS

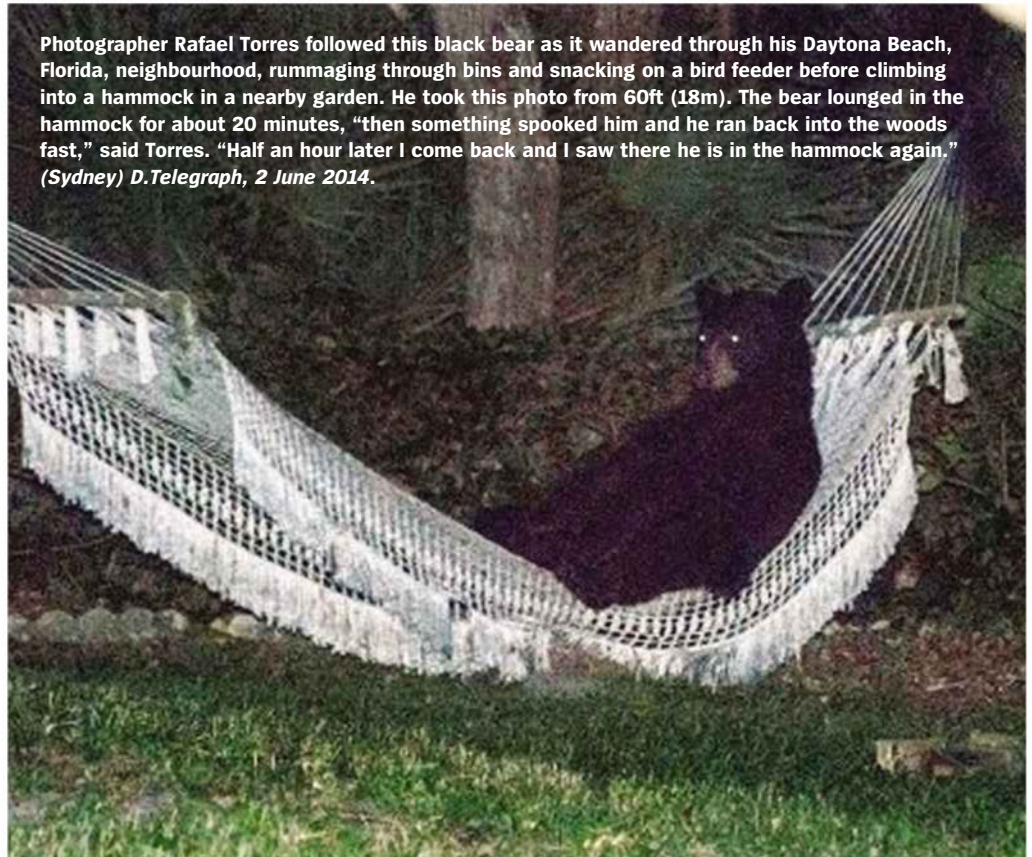
On the morning of 16 February, two vans belonging to churches with similar names both rolled over on Highway 131 in Grand Rapids, Michigan. The one belonging to Wellspring Church of Grand Rapids overturned at 9am, while the one belonging to Wellspring Community Church in Jenison flipped several times at 9.45am after hitting black ice. There were several injuries, none serious. *mLive.com, 17 Feb 2014.*

### INVENTIVE EXCUSE

On 12 February, a 10-year-old boy from Dokka in Norway loaded his 18-month-old sister into the family car and drove off to visit their grandparents in Valdres, 40 miles (64km) away. After crashing the car into a snowy ditch, he told a rescuer that he was not a child but a dwarf and had left his driving licence at home by mistake. A week or so later, the boy drove off in the car of a relative during a family visit, but was stopped after 19 miles (30km). *Irish Independent, 14+21 Feb; D.Express, 14 Feb; D.Telegraph, 21 Feb 2014.*

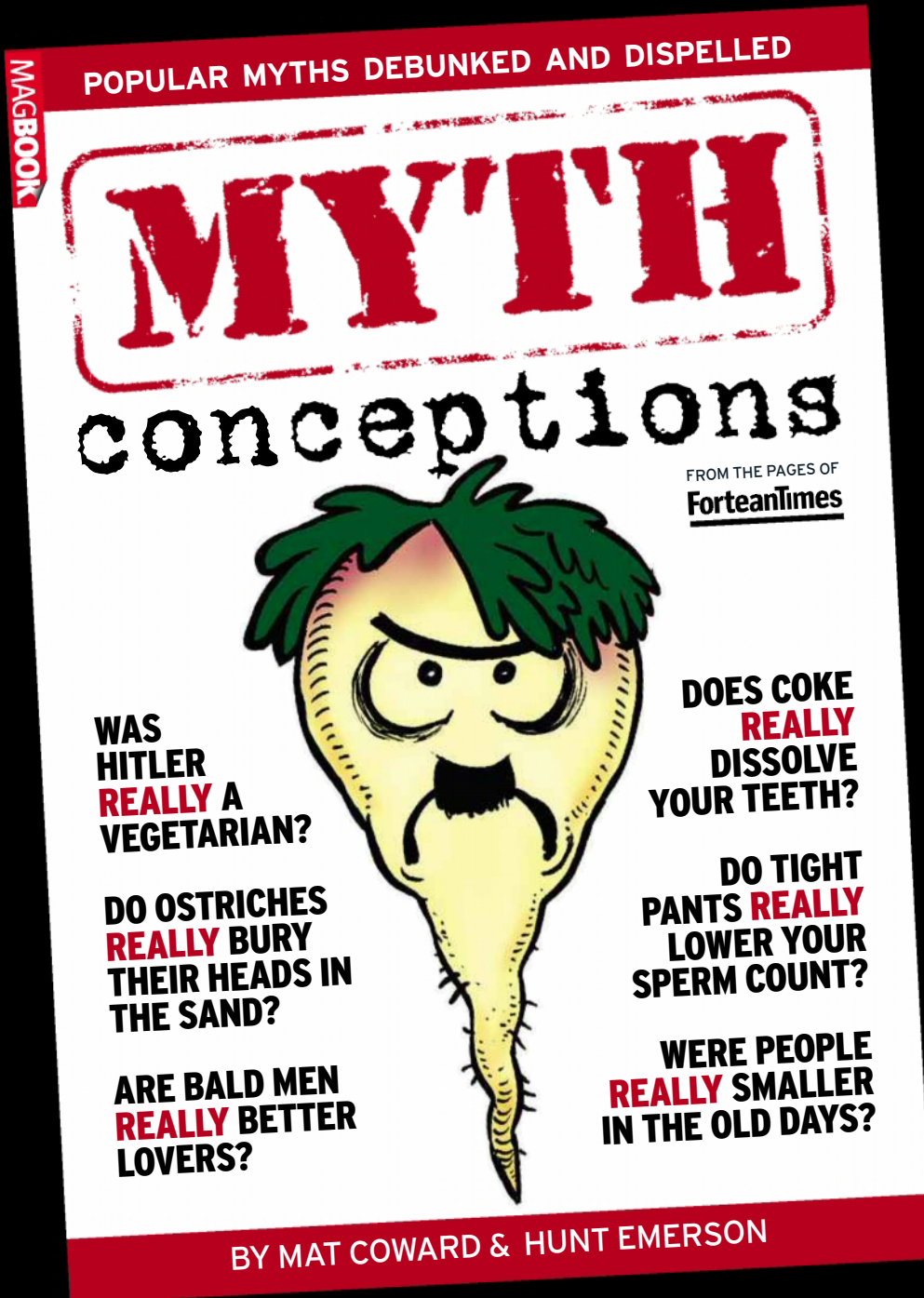
## BEAR RELAXES

Photographer Rafael Torres followed this black bear as it wandered through his Daytona Beach, Florida, neighbourhood, rummaging through bins and snacking on a bird feeder before climbing into a hammock in a nearby garden. He took this photo from 60ft (18m). The bear lounged in the hammock for about 20 minutes, "then something spooked him and he ran back into the woods fast," said Torres. "Half an hour later I come back and I saw there he is in the hammock again." *(Sydney) D.Telegraph, 2 June 2014.*





# THE TRUTH ISN'T OUT THERE...



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# ARCHAEOLOGY

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

BOTH PHOTOS: TORSTEN SILZ / EPA



ABOVE: Part of the treasure trove found near Ruelzheim: pieces of golden jewellery from a ceremonial dress and silver stauettes and fittings from a general's chair.

## NIBELUNG TREASURE?

An unauthorised metal detectorist has discovered a trove of gold and silver in a forest near Ruelzheim in the western German state of Rhineland Palatinate. The silver bowls, brooches and other jewellery from ceremonial robes, and small statues that adorned a grand chair – valued in total at about a million euros (£800,000) – seem to have been buried in haste in about AD 406-407, when the Roman Reich was crumbling along the Rhine. The Battle of Mainz (406) a key event in the collapse of imperial control, took place not far from the treasure site. Could the haul be part of the “Rhineland” of Norse and German sagas that inspired Wagner’s Ring Cycle? There’s no way of proving this of course, but Axel von Berg, the state’s chief archaeologist said: “In terms of timing and geography, the find fits in with the epoch of the Nibelung legend.” According to the legend, the warrior Hagen killed the dragon-slayer Siegfried and sank his treasure in the Rhine. The river has shifted its course many times over the centuries, so the treasure need no longer be under water. The haul is now in the state cultural department in Mainz, but officials suspect the finder may have sold some of it, possibly to a buyer abroad. “The spot where the find was made was completely destroyed by the improper course of action,” the department said in a statement. [R] 21 Feb 2014.

## VIKING RUNE CODE CRACKED

A 12th century runic code used by ancient Vikings, which has baffled linguists and historians for years, has now been demystified. K Jonas Nordby, a runeologist from the University of Oslo in Norway, was able to crack the puzzle of the jötunvillur code after he noticed that two men, Sigurd and Lavrans, had signed their names on a piece of wood from Bergen wharf both in

code and in the regular runic alphabet. The message is typical of the light-hearted use of runes at the time. All runes have names, and the jötunvillur code works by exchanging the rune sign with the last sound in the rune’s name. For example, the rune for the letter U is called “urr” so it is encoded with the rune for R. The problem is that many runes end in the same sound, which makes it hard to figure out which runic letter the code refers to. “The code gives many possible readings when deciphered and so cannot have been used for ordinary communication,” said Nordby. “Therefore I believe it is a kind of playful writing practice that was used to learn the names of the runes and their

sound values.” The exchange of these brief runic messages was a common part of Scandinavian Viking and mediæval society, and the missives – carved mostly into wood and bone – were used for anything from love-notes to receipts.

Runes are not a language, but an Old Germanic alphabet that is thought to have been developed some time in the first century AD. Nordby is the first person to study all the findings of runic codes in Northern Europe, around 80 inscriptions, only nine of which are in the jötunvillur code. He says that there are other ciphers that are more common. “Rune sticks and bone were used for all kinds of everyday



ABOVE: Examples of the jötunvillur code carved into wood and bone. The bottom one reads “Kiss me”.

# CLASSICAL CORNER



FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

## 178: ESPRIT DE CORPSE

messages and writing practice, and there are lots of ordinary runic inscriptions from the 1100s to 1300s with romantic messages. One example reads: 'So much do I love another man's woman that the wide mountains shiver. Wonderful ring-woman! We love each other so much that the earth explodes!'" Another, using numbers to indicate runes, says "Kiss me". Sometimes, the playfulness of these codes even strayed into the pictorial, with the vertical 'staves' and diagonal 'branches' of the runic alphabet woven into doodles including faces with beards and the fins of fish.

Many of the messages in runic codes included a challenge to the reader to crack the code. The inscription "Interpret these runes" was common. "People challenged one another with codes. It was a kind of competition in the art of rune-making. This testifies to a playfulness with writing that we don't see today," says Nordby.

Runes were used across Northern Europe including England until around 1000, and in Scandinavia until the 15th century, and there was obviously some prestige associated with their use. One example from the Orkney Islands reads more like a piece of graffiti, boasting: "These runes were carved by the most rune-literate man west of the sea".

Nordby's work has been enthusiastically received by the academic community. Above all, it helps us understand that there were more codes than we were aware of," said Henrik Williams, an expert on runes from Uppsala University. "Each runic inscription we interpret raises our hopes of soon being able to read more," he said. "This is pure detective work and each new method improves our chances." He also agrees that in the case of the jötunvillur code it's likely that the runes were being used as part of the learning process and not for concealing information. "They challenged the reader, demonstrated skills, and testify to a joy in reading and writing," he said. "But personally I think jötunvillur is an idiotic code, because whoever made it chose a system that is so hard to interpret."

*Fortean Times* correspondent Sven Rosén comments: "Nordby's breakthrough raises the hope that more insoluble runic inscriptions will soon be possible to read. The whole society in those days seems to have been obsessed with creating riddles. Just think of the skaldic dróttkvætt poetry with its unnatural word order and hair-raising kennings. Each kenning was a riddle, but when you had solved it you would find the answer to be another riddle, and so on." *sciencenordic.com*, 5 Feb; *Guardian*, 12 Feb; *Independent*, 13 Feb 2014.

**FT315:12** reports a would-be Cambodian necrophile falling asleep on the job in the coffin of his intended partner – a grave offence.

Can't compete with the Italian described in medical reports compiled by Katherine Ramsland in her on-line essay 'Varieties of Necrophilia'. This professional corpse buriar would masturbate over any dead beauty being interred – as the proverb nearly says, a wank is as good as a nod to a dead woman. He then graduated to fellating the cadavers – Suck It And See – in which activity he was caught, arrested, and confessed to hundreds of post-mortem encounters, easily outstripping such modern necrophile celebs as Earle 'Gorilla Man' Nelson (hanged in Canada, 1927) and England's very own John Christie.

Ramsland also describes some role reversals, documenting one female mortician who claimed multiple corpse couplings – details of her technique are disappointingly lacking – and another who achieved penile penetration by inflating the deceased's cock with a specially-invented pump – giving a new meaning to 'Rumpy-Pumpy'.

Naturally, the ancients are part of the story. First up (so to speak) is Achilles, who (Apollodorus, *Epitome*, bk5 chs1-2) shagged the corpse of Queen Penthesilea whom he'd just slain in a Trojan War battle – well, Achilles is history's most famous heel. (Two consequent footnotes: when jeered for this deadly passion by Thersites, Achilles killed him with a single blow, neither in a position to know that 'Trojan' is a brand of contraceptive, something necrophiles hardly need.)

Anticipating Ramsland's female fetishists, Herodotus (*Histories*, bk2 ch90) informs us: "When the wife of a distinguished man, or any beautiful woman, dies, her body is only given to the embalmers after three or four days, as a precautionary measure against their violating the corpse, something that is said to have happened in the case of a woman who'd just died, the culprit being given away by a fellow-workman."

Of course, anything was possible in Egypt, thought Herodotus, including (bk2 ch42) the goat that tupped a woman in the village of Mendes – "a most surprising incident." In this case, both participants were alive and kicking.

Elsewhere (bk5 chs90-2), Herodotus discouragingly introduces Periander, tyrant of Corinth, as one who "left no crime undone against his people, surpassing his father in bloodthirstiness and savagery, anything the latter had done by way of banishments and killings Periander completed for him." He goes on to describe how, when Periander was making enquiries of the Oracle of The Dead,

the ghost of his wife Melissa, whom he'd killed, appeared and refused to answer, saying she was cold and naked, blaming Periander for "having put his loaves into a cold oven." This was an allusion to his having fucked her after the murder. To save the situation, Periander ordered every woman in Corinth to strip naked, throw their clothes into a pit and burn them, while he prayed to the ghost of Melissa which re-appeared, appeased, and answered his original question – the ghost with the most.

Across the incontinent continents, so various books and websites assert, necrophilia was routine amongst the Moches of South America, and in India, if an engaged girl died before the nuptials, her fiancé was obliged to deflower her before cremation in front of the village priest – burning passion preceding passion for burning.

Concluding this morbid globe-trotting is King Herod of Judæa (c. 74-4 BC), said by the later Babylonian Talmud to have preserved in honey for seven years of regular sex the body of Mariamne, in one version the wife he'd bumped off, in another a maiden who killed herself to avoid marriage with him – either way, she came to a sticky end.

Nero may have pursued his incestuous relationship with mother Agrippina post mortem. All sources (Dio Cassius, Suetonius, Tacitus) say that, after murdering her, he groped her corpse, rhapsodising over her beauty whilst taking a drink – sounds like a *seductio ad absurdum* – cf. my 'Nero and his Mother's Corpse,' *Mnemosyne* 32 (1979), 380-1.

Later history abounds in royal and courtly corpse-fuckers, from Charlemagne and Waldemar IV of Denmark (c. 1320-75) to Baron Gilles de Rais (1404-1440), the supposed inspiration for Bluebeard, who (despite his farcical 1902 'exoneration' by headline-seeking author Gilbert Prouteau) violated the bodies of his 150 or so child victims. As Quentin Crisp famously remarked, "Numbers are not style, but it's difficult not to be impressed."

Roman and Byzantine *Oneirocritica* (Dream Books) imply widespread fascination with their interpretations. For instance, Artemidorus (bk1 ch80) explains that necrophile fantasies (male and female relative apart – must keep it all in the family) are "thoroughly inauspicious because they presage the penetrator's death. Another (anonymous) text is more encouraging: "If someone dreams he has performed sex on a dead man who was an acquaintance, he will do good to that man's heirs. But if the man was a stranger, he will trample down a very powerful ruler" – prescription here for getting rid of Putin, or Angela Merkel, once described as "an unfuckable lard-arse".



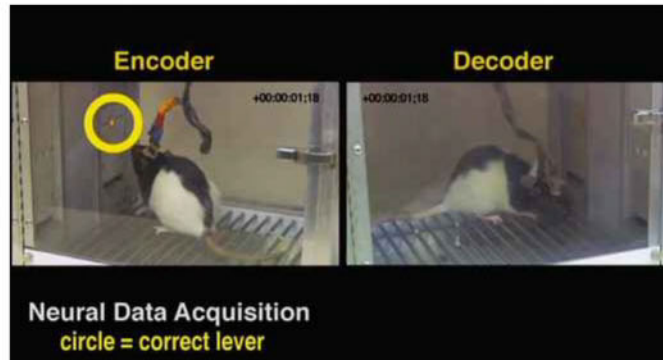
## MEET THE SUPER-RATS!

MIND-MELDING LAB RATS, SWEDISH RATZILLA, AND A CAPYBARA AT THE EIGHTH HOLE

- Using electrodes implanted in the brains of two rats, one rodent was able to pass information to another in a cage thousands of miles away – albeit without conscious intent. The experiment, by researchers from Duke University, North Carolina, is the first direct communication link between two minds. Previous studies have shown that visual and tactile information can be transferred between a brain and a computer, for example allowing amputees to control prosthetic limbs, but the latest research represents a significant advance. “Basically, we are creating what I call an organic computer,” said Brazilian neuroscientist Prof Miguel Nicolelis, who led the study. “We cannot even predict what kinds of emergent properties would appear when animals begin interacting as part of a brain-net.”

Writing in the journal *Scientific Reports*, researchers described how rats had been trained to press one of two levers in their cage when a light went on above it. An array of electrodes was implanted onto a region of their brains that govern movement. The rats were then put in separate cages, one of which had lights above the levers. When the ‘encoder’ rat in this cage pressed the lever, an electrical version of its brain activity was transmitted to the ‘receiver’ rat. Seventy per cent of the time – significantly above the level of chance – the ‘receiver’ rats pressed the correct lever despite having no light to guide them, demonstrating that they were being guided by information from the first rat’s brain. The connection worked even when one rat was in North Carolina and another in Brazil 4,600 miles (7,400km) away, with the resulting noisy transmission and signal delays.

The encoder rat received a smaller sip of water as a reward if the decoder made the wrong decision. This established sensory feedback between the rats, as the first began to make faster,



TOP: Prof Nicolelis’s mind-melding rats. ABOVE: The giant rodent – dubbed ‘Ratzilla’ by the Swedish press – that invaded the kitchen of a Stockholm family.

clearer decisions that led to better rewards for both. Prof Nicolelis explained: “We saw that when the decoder rat committed an error, the encoder basically changed both its brain function and behaviour to make it easier for its partner to get it right.” His team intended to connect several animals’ brains at once, allowing them to work together on more

complicated types of problem-solving.

Prof Christopher James of the University of Warwick said the rodent mind-meld experiment was an “interesting improvement” on research he conducted in 2009, adding: “We are far from a scenario of well-networked rats around the world united to take us over – the

stimulation is crude and specific.” However, the experiment does take us a step closer to mind-reading technology. [R] 28 Feb; *D.Telegraph, Independent, Metro*, 1 Mar 2013.

- In early March 2014, the Korsås family were horrified to find a massive rat in their kitchen in Solna, north of Stockholm. The rodent was dubbed “Ratzilla” in the Swedish press (or “Putin” according to the *Sun*). It appears to have reached the kitchen via a ventilation pipe, having gnawed its way through cement and wood. After devouring food leftovers under the sink, the creature feasted on a “Swedish smörgåsbord” of waste in the bin. Enok, the family cat, had refused to enter the kitchen while the giant rat was there, said Erik Korsås. He had been away when his wife, Signe Bengtsson, first saw the giant intruder. “By the time I got home, the rat was so domesticated that it just sat under the kitchen table,” said Korsås, adding that it had chewed through the water pipes connected to the dishwasher and started a small flood. When the family saw the rat scurrying into a nook behind the dishwasher, they put the kitchen on lockdown and called the pest controllers, who arrived with three heavy-duty traps. Ratzilla was caught by the neck, but didn’t die immediately and again hid behind the dishwasher, but was eventually terminated. It was found to measure 39.5cm (15.5in), not including the tail, and to weigh about a kilo (2.2lb). The pest controllers had never seen such a big one. One reporter told Korsås he should have frozen the carcass for posterity; he was dismayed at suggestions he had photo-shopped the whole thing. He stressed that nothing was paid for any of the photos. *The Local SE (Sweden)*, 26 Mar; *BBC News*, 27 Mar 2014.

- Rats could grow to the size of sheep or even bigger as they



evolve to fill vacant ecological niches, according to Dr Jan Zalasiewicz, a senior lecturer in palaeobiology at the University of Leicester. He said that given enough time, rats could grow to be the size of the capybara, the world's largest rodent, which can reach 80kg (176lb). "If the ecospace was sufficiently empty, then they could get larger still." The largest extinct rodent known, *Josephoartegasia monesi*, which lived three million years ago, was larger than a bull and weighed over a ton. Like the capybara today, it lived in South America. *Irish Examiner*, *D.Mirror*, 4 Feb; *(Sydney) Morning Herald*, 5 Feb 2014.

- Birmingham is facing a rodent infestation – more than 5,100 alerts were recorded in the year up to April 2014. Domestic call-outs for March were up almost 300 on 2013. In the Bordsley Green area of the city, pest control officer Colin Watts had seen a rodent "as wide as a brick" and more than 2ft (60cm) from nose to tail tip. "Massive mutant rats" have allegedly been spotted in Bradford, Co Durham, Liverpool and Dublin. Mark Willmot took a photograph of his Jack Russell clutching a dead rat, almost as big as itself, between its teeth in a Tunbridge Wells park. In June, cat-sized rats were seen ripping open uncollected bin bags in Townhill near Swansea, South Wales.

Easy access to waste food is certainly a factor in this widespread size increase – just as it is with humans gorging on sugar and fat. The problem is compounded by less frequent rubbish collections and the recent habit of putting unwanted food in slop buckets left outside for recycling. There are estimated to be more than 80 million rats in the UK – 40 per cent more than in 2000. As well as threadworm and Weil's disease, brown rats can carry tuberculosis, salmonella, E coli, foot & mouth, toxoplasmosis and cryptosporidium (which causes severe gastrointestinal problems). *D.Telegraph*, 1 April, 11 June; *Metro*, 1 April; *D.Mail*, 4 April 2014.

- The new super-rats are becoming immune to standard poisons such as bromadiolone, and pest controllers are petitioning the EU to allow the use of stronger chemicals. The problem is that all wildlife is at risk from such poisons. There's also been a call for

the government to appoint a "Rat Tsar" to lead the fight... a modern Pied Piper perhaps. *Shropshire Star*, 23 April 2014.

- Giant rats are being trained to clear land mines in Africa thanks to a £60,000 programme paid for by Britain's Department



TOP: The mystery capybara lurking near the eighth hole of North Weald Golf Club. ABOVE: A baby giant pouched rat in training to clear landmines in Mozambique.

for International Development. The 3ft (90cm) long Gambian species has an acute sense of smell and is able to sniff out the concealed weapons. The rats are light enough to walk over the mines without setting them off. By the beginning of 2014, they had detected nearly 2,500 mines in Mozambique, as well as 14,000 pieces of unexploded ordnance and small arms. *D.Mail*, 3 Jan 2014.

- In April, rats caused chaos in the Indian election after they destroyed dozens of electronic vote-counting machines by gnawing through the cables. In Ghaziabad near New Delhi, for example, the determined rodents had broken into a strongroom near a wholesale wheat market and disabled the counting machines stored there. With more than 800 million voters, India uses the machines to reduce the time in declaring results compared with the old paper ballot system. *D.Mail*, 1 May 2014.

- Public health officials in San Francisco exterminated thousands of rats in the SoMA neighbourhood after they found that a 43-year-old woman, identified only as Erica J, was breeding them in her apartment; she had "hundreds" in her room, and they "had been there for some time", according to the Department of Animal Care and Control, which added that many had escaped to the surrounding area. *(Sydney) D.Telegraph*, 2 June 2014.

- In May, a 4ft (1.2m) -long capybara, the world's largest rodent, native to Argentina, was seen lurking around the eighth hole of North Weald Golf Club near Harlow in Essex. It later transpired that it had escaped from Ashlyns Farm Shop in Epping. Manager Rob Dixon said they kept trying to catch it, but it was too fast for them. "It jumps in the river and shoots off," he said. "Next time we've got to get a vet out and try and tranquillise it." Capybaras are most closely related to guinea pigs, though obviously much bigger. *D.Mail*, *D.Telegraph*, 6 May 2014.

## FORTEAN FOLLOW-UPS

The latest updates on lucky bullet dodgers, improbable funeral mix-ups and feline forteana

### LIFE SAVERS [FT316:6-7]



- Near Armentieres on 13 August 1915, Private WJ Smith of the Queen's Own Royal West Kent Regiment was aiming his short

Lee Enfield .303 at a German sniper in a trench 50 yards away when the German, using a gun of slightly smaller calibre, fired first. His bullet entered the muzzle of Smith's rifle at the exact moment the rifle was fired, which resulted in both bullets stopping in the barrel, the breech being blown out and the bolt smashed. The slightest twitch by the sniper would have sent the bullet on a fatal course. Smith's gun is exhibited in a museum in Maidstone, Kent. The position of the two bullets has been confirmed by X-rays. *D.Mail*, 29 Jan 1997.

- During a battle in the Western Desert during World War II, an anti-tank shell was fired straight into the muzzle of the two-pounder on one of the 4th Royal Tank Regiment's tanks. There were no muzzle guards in those days and it went up to about 2in (5cm). Two inches of the barrel were sawn off, wearing out several hacksaw blades, and the tank was then back in action.

- During the Burma campaign of 1944, C Troop of 44 RM Commando had a close encounter with a Japanese patrol on the Arakan Coast near Alethangyaw village. An enemy round entered the barrel of the patrol's Bren gun. It met an emerging round and the barrel of the Bren gun split for about 3in (8cm). The gunner was uninjured, and the damaged gun barrel can still be seen in the Royal Marines Museum at Eastney, Hampshire. *D.Mail*, 3+11 Feb 1997.

- In 2009, two bullets 'welded' together – one Russian, one French – were found on an 1854 Crimean War battlefield near Balaclava, southern

Ukraine [FT249:8].

- Federal agent Carlos Montalvo escaped death in Florida in 1987 when a bullet fired at him by a suspected drug dealer lodged in the barrel of his 9mm Sig Sauer semi-automatic handgun [FT50:4].

### THE WALKING DEAD [FT259:26-27]



- Gilberto Araujo, 41, shocked his family by interrupting his own funeral in Brazil. Police in São Paulo had phoned his family on 21 October 2012 to say he had been shot dead. His brother, Jose Marcos Araujo, travelled to the city morgue and identified a body as being Gilberto. He took the body to his mother's home in the town of Alagoinhas in Bahia state where a wake was held, only for Gilberto to walk into the room, saying: "Guys, I'm alive, pinch me!" He had learned of the mix-up from an acquaintance on the street, who told him his family was setting off for his funeral. He had tried to tell them he was still alive over the phone, but his call was dismissed as a cruel prank, so there seemed nothing for it but to turn up in person. Friends and relations were grieving beside the open coffin, and the deceased was due to be buried two hours later. His mother, Maria Menezes, a shopkeeper, said some mourners fainted while others fled into the street. The dead man, eventually



ABOVE: Genivaldo Santos Gama (dead) Gilberto Araujo (alive and well, thanks).

identified as Genivaldo Santos Gama, was returned to the mortuary. Roberto Lima, a police inspector, said the confusion was "understandable" as the two men "closely resembled each other and both worked as car washers." Araujo had not seen his relatives for four months. *D.Telegraph, Irish Times*, 25 Oct 2012.

- A similar event unfolded in Brazil the following month: a woman in the town of Uberaba collapsed with shock after her son's funeral when she got a call from him and realised the road accident victim she had buried was literally a dead ringer. Bricklayer Gilsimar de Souza's mother Luzia had positively identified the 35-year-old, as had his aunt. Luzia spent a month grieving until the call from an addiction clinic her son had checked into. *Sun*, 17 Nov 2012.

- Sharolyn Jackson, 50 (below), was reported missing from her home in Philadelphia on 18 July 2013. When the body of a woman fitting her description was found two days later, officials thought it could be her. Her son Travis



and a social worker were shown pictures of the woman, who died of natural causes, and identified her as Sharolyn. Thirteen days after her heartbroken family had buried her, she was found at a mental health facility, leaving the identity of the woman in her grave a mystery. *D.Mirror, Irish Independent*, 24 Aug 2013

- Last November, a son returned to his hometown of Siedliska in Poland and greeted his parents as they laid flowers on his grave. Jaroslaw Carolinski, 38, had been declared dead after his mother and father mistook a body found by police in a forest for his. He had left Siedliska without prior notice in October 2011 to "find himself". A spokeswoman for the prosecutor's office said: "The question now is who is in the grave." Indeed. 26 Nov 2013.

- Mourners at the funeral in Cambodia of Kong Channeang, 32, fled in shock when he appeared at twilight just as his cremation was about to start. "We thought we were being haunted," said a witness. Kong had been missing for five days when a badly decomposed body was found floating in a nearby river and was mistaken for him. *MX News (Sydney)* 4 June 2014.

- When Bernadette Atkinson, 51, returned to her home in Chorley, Lancashire, there was a letter from the local council saying: "We have received information that Mr Anthony Atkinson [her husband] has sadly passed away", and asking for "further information". She nearly had a heart attack, and was mightily relieved when her husband turned up 45 minutes later. He had nipped out for a pint with his brother. *D.Mail*, 11 June 2014.

### CAT CURIOSA [FT314:8-9]



- When domestic pets seem spooked by nothing we can see, one hypothesis is that they are sensitive



to ghosts and poltergeists, but now a scientific team led by Ron Douglas, a biologist at City University London, has shown that cats and dogs can see in ultraviolet, giving them better nocturnal vision among other benefits. Many animals are known to have UV-vision, including insects (such as bees), birds, fish, some amphibians and reptiles, and a handful of mammals (such as some mice, rats, moles, marsupials and bats). Humans who have had their eye lenses removed, such as in cataract surgery, without being replaced by ultraviolet-blocking lenses, report being able to see in the ultraviolet. UV vision serves several purposes: bees and other insects use it to see colours or patterns on plants that can direct them to nectar; rodents use it to follow urine trails; and reindeer may use UV light to see polar bears, which, in visible light, blend in with the snow. It is thought that human eyes filter out UV light to improve visual acuity; skiers wear yellow goggles that block UV light specifically for this reason. *Live Science*, 18 Feb 2014.

- Four Britons have become the first people in the world to catch tuberculosis from cats. The cases were detected after animal health inspectors investigated an unusual cluster of nine TB cases in a group of domestic cats a year ago. Health authorities in the south of England offered screening to 39 people who had come into contact with cats that were infected with *Mycobacterium bovis* – which normally causes bovine TB in cattle. Of those, 24

people accepted the checks, and four subjects in Hampshire and Berkshire tested positive; two had active TB and two had latent TB. The disease can spread to humans if it is breathed in, enters a cut in the skin or is ingested. Symptoms include a persistent cough, weight loss and night sweats. *D.Mirror*, 28 Mar 2014.

### AWAY FROM IT ALL [FT303:10-11]

A homeless Brazilian man has slept alongside the body of his dead friend for 13 years. Fabio Beraldo Rigol, 47 (below), was discovered sharing space in a crypt (which has six burial chambers) after locals noticed he kept disappearing into the cemetery in Santa Isabel, São Paulo, at night. Rigol, who has the nickname 'Popo', found himself penniless and homeless after the business he worked for as a dispatch rider went bankrupt and he started using drugs. "I'm not afraid of the dead. I'm more afraid of the living," he said. "I've never seen a ghost. It gets a bit quiet here sometimes, but I'm not a big talker, so it suits me. I'm not very good around living people. I had to leave the house, and I ended up wandering the streets. One night it was raining hard. I don't remember how, but when I woke up I was in a tomb." On most days he begs for food in central Santa Isabel. "I never want for anything," he said. "God never lets me go hungry." *D.Mirror*, 4 Nov; *dailymail.co.uk*, 5 Nov; *MX News (Sydney)*, 6 Nov 2013.



One of the themes of this column has been that what's wrong with most conspiracy theorists isn't what they think but the way they think. David McGowan's *Weird Scenes Inside the Canyon* (Head Press, 2014) is an example. His subtitle suggests the story: *Laurel Canyon, Covert Ops and the Dark Heart of the Hippie Dream*. Laurel Canyon is the area of wooded hills just outside Los Angeles where members of the rock community lived in late 1960s and early 70s. McGowan lists the distinguished Canyon alumni – Frank Zappa, Jim Morrison, Neil Young, David Crosby and so on – and shows that many had fathers with military or intelligence backgrounds. He also notes the presence in the Canyon of a secret US Air Force unit apparently making films, and concludes that the 'hippie dream' was some kind of psy-war project by the US military/intelligence. (En passant he describes LSD proselytiser Timothy Leary as a "painfully obvious CIA asset" but offers no evidence. To me he looked more like a painfully obvious American academic trying to be hip...)

The book is full of anecdotes about Seventies rock stars but has no evidence for McGowan's theory. Rock stars with military/intelligence fathers? A secret Air Force base? McGowan asks: "What do you suppose the odds are that all of that just came together purely by chance?... Exactly how many coincidences does it take to make a conspiracy?" (p 60) But his list of rock stars in the Canyon is striking only because (a) he doesn't list the rock stars who didn't live there; (b) doesn't list those who lived there and didn't have parents connected to the US military/intelligence; and (c) he doesn't mention that America's military in the 1960s was enormous and thus a substantial proportion of young Americans in 1968 had parents who had been in it.<sup>1</sup>

The *New York Times*'s slogan was "All the news that's fit to print"; *Rolling Stone* modified that to their "All the news that fits"; and McGowan, like many conspiracy theorists, uses all the news that fits his theory.

From Laurel Canyon we move to Stoke on Trent, where local paper the *Sentinel* carried a story on 17 June about the inquest of a man killed by a train, headlined "Mystery surrounds death of Trent Vale conspiracy theorist who thought he was being followed". Sergeant Sean Morgan, of British Transport Police, told the inquest that in the dead man's flat: "There were a lot of books... relating to conspiracy theories and the Illuminati. The sort of books that might be read by a paranoid person."<sup>2</sup> That 'conspiracy theorist' has become publicly synonymous with a 'paranoid person' is at least partly down to people thinking and writing like David McGowan.

The political use of the 'paranoid' connotations of 'conspiracy theory' is discussed by James Tracey in his essay "Media Disinformation and the Conspiracy Panic Phenomenon".<sup>3</sup> In America and the UK, the state and the media are prone to labelling as 'conspiracy theories' any attempts to explain unusual or awkward political events which are subversive of those societies' official definitions as pluralist democracies. Tracey calls this "a disciplinary mechanism against unsettling observations and questions directed toward political leaders and the status quo", which is designed to end discussion regardless of the evidence that exists for any particular conspiracy. This use of this device shows little sign of diminishing even though the evidence of state conspiracies – Snowden and his NSA surveillance revelations, most recently – grows apace.

#### NOTES

- 1 Military active service personnel in 1965 totalled 2,653,926.
- 2 [www.stokesentinel.co.uk/Mystery-surrounds-death-conspiracy-theorist-Trent/story-21246064-detail/story.html](http://www.stokesentinel.co.uk/Mystery-surrounds-death-conspiracy-theorist-Trent/story-21246064-detail/story.html) Thanks to Garrick Alder for this.
- 3 [www.globalresearch.ca/media-disinformation-and-the-conspiracy-panic-phenomenon/5336221](http://www.globalresearch.ca/media-disinformation-and-the-conspiracy-panic-phenomenon/5336221)



GETTY IMAGES

### BRITISH FOLK ART

DAVID V BARRETT TAKES A STROLL AROUND TATE BRITAIN'S LATEST EXHIBITION, AND WONDERS EXACTLY WHAT FOLK ART IS ANYWAY...

One of the contradictions of Tate Britain's British Folk Art exhibition is that the main publicity image is of a work by a Frenchman. It's a cockerel made of small pieces of bone, and was created by someone at the world's first purpose-built prisoner-of-war camp near Peterborough, between 1797 and 1814, when Britain was at war with first Revolutionary and then Napoleonic France. The cockerel or rooster (French: *gallus*) has been a national symbol of France since the Middle Ages, so this bone cockerel was clearly designed and constructed with pride and dedication, as well as skill and ingenuity, using improvised tools (the prisoners would not have been allowed knives); and so it's a great example of folk art – albeit not British!

There are often fortan aspects to folk art, which sometimes stems from the more obscure recesses of the mind. Among the most intriguing exhibits are four examples of "God in a Bottle". An alternative to the usual ships in bottles, these sometimes contain small models of working tools, but their name comes from the bottles that contain mini-Golgothas – or, at least, the tools of the crucifixion: the cross, the nails, the spear, a ladder and so on. Dating from the late 19th century, their purpose is unknown, but they're thought to come from the Irish Catholic diaspora to northern England.

There are some exhibits celebrating individual idiosyncrasy and dedication, with quirky and naïve artistic skills – Alfred Wallis's crude paintings of ships, and George Smart's well-known repetitive pictures made from textile scraps, of the postman and the goosewoman in Tunbridge Wells. But rather than focusing on such untutored work, the epitome of folk art, there's a whole room devoted to ships' figureheads and tradesmen's signs. True, they're fun, and they're part of the social



ABOVE: A French cockerel made of bone and four examples of "God in a Bottle".

history of Britain, but they were professionally made so are they *really* folk art? On the other hand, they're made for ordinary people, and they're often brightly if not brashly painted; so they're certainly not "fine art".

Folk art doesn't always come from the people we might expect – poor and uneducated artisans; in some cases it's more likely to be created by the upper middle classes, people who had the luxury of spare time. Similarly we think of embroidery and quilt-making as female occupations, but they were often done by soldiers and sailors, sometimes just as a way to fill the time but also as a deliberate policy to distract them from drinking and gambling. Quilt-making was even used as therapy in military field hospitals and convalescent homes.

What exactly is folk art? It's a term used more by social historians and folklorists than by art historians, say the curators of the exhibition; they seem loth to define it, though, beyond generalising that folk art has its origin in tradition.

But, in fact, the exhibition almost ignores the strong links between folk art and folk traditions, folk beliefs and folklore. True, there are a few small photos of the May Day events at Padstow, Cornwall (dated 1910, 1912, 1930 and 1982, showing the continuation of the customs through the century) and of well-dressing in Derbyshire, but that's about it. The curators stressed how they had trawled museums across the country for the exhibits, but they missed the wealth of suitable material available at, to name just three, the Wellcome Collection and the Cuming Museum in London, which both hold large parts of Edward Lovett's collection of personal amulets and charms, and the Museum of Witchcraft in Boscastle, Cornwall.

*British Folk Art is at Tate Britain, London, until 31 August.*  
[www.tate.org.uk/](http://www.tate.org.uk/)



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## MEDICAL BAG

Cases of conjoined and parastic twins from India to Australia, Sarah the human Etch a Sketch and the teetotal Texan with a brewery in his belly

### TWO-IN-ONE

• Shivanath and Shivram Sahu, 12, can run like a crab on their four arms and two legs. They wash, feed and dress themselves, and ride a bicycle to school. When one wants to sit, the other has to lie down. They use the same stomach but have separate lungs, hearts and brains. “We will stay like this even when we’re old,” said Shivram. “We want to live as we are.” Neighbours in their village near Raipur, central India, worship them as gods. Their labourer father, Raj Kumar, 45, who has five other children, said: “It is good fun for everyone to watch my boys, but only I understand all the problems they have.” He would never let a doctor separate them; specialists say this could eventually be possible, but Shivanath would be left legless and would need full-time care. *Sun, 11 April 2014.*

• Faith and Hope Howie were born on 8 May at a children’s hospital in Sydney. The twin girls had an extremely rare condition known as disrosopus or craniofacial duplication, where a baby is born with two faces. They were born six weeks prematurely and shared the same body, heart, brain stem and skull, but each girl had her own brain and facial features. They were able to breathe unaided several days after their birth and were observed to sleep and cry at different times.

Fewer than 40 disrosopus babies are known to have been born and fewer still have survived beyond birth – but the girls’ parents, Simon Howie and Renee Young, were optimistic. They already had seven children together and though the abnormality was discovered at 19 weeks gestation, they decided against an abortion. In the event, Faith and Hope lived for 19 days. Their memorial service was marked by the release of 19 doves and a cloud of pink and white balloons. (*Sydney*) *D.Telegraph, Courier-Mail, 13 May, 3 June 2014.*



TOP: Conjoined twins Shivanath and Shivram are worshipped as gods in their village. ABOVE: Faith and Hope Howie shared the same body but each girl had her own brain.

• A two-year-old boy from Huaxi village in China’s Jiangsu province underwent an operation to give “birth” after he was diagnosed as “pregnant”. Xiao Feng was brought to hospital after his stomach had become so distended he was suffering breathing difficulties. When

doctors took X-rays and MRI scans, they discovered Feng was carrying the undeveloped foetus of his own twin inside his stomach, and he was rushed to surgery. The removed foetus measured 8in (20cm) in width and had a fully formed spine and limbs, including fingers and toes.

The parasitic twin would have developed into a boy and had grown so large, almost two-thirds of his affected twin’s stomach was taken up. (*Sydney*) *D.Telegraph, 2 Oct 2013.*

### BAFFLING BEER GUT

A 61-year-old Texan man has brought new meaning to the term “beer gut” after developing a rare condition that caused his digestive system to brew its own alcohol. He was found to have a blood alcohol reading of 0.3 per cent, despite insisting he hadn’t had a drop to drink. Doctors discovered he had a five-year history of unexplained intoxication. His wife, a nurse, had been documenting the phenomenon with a breathalyser, finding his blood alcohol level was often as high as 0.40 per cent. Gastroenterological investigation found the man’s stool cultures were positive for *Saccharomyces cerevisiae*, also known as brewer’s yeast. This had led to fermentation in the stomach, with the yeasts converting carbohydrates into ethanol. His condition was traced back to an earlier course of antibiotics, which had compromised his gut flora and allowed the yeast to flourish. He was successfully treated with a low-carb diet, antifungal therapy and acidophilus tablets to recolonise his gut. There had been previous reports of “gut fermentation syndrome”, also known as auto-brewery syndrome or drunkenness disease, but these had been largely anecdotal. *International Journal of Clinical Medicine 2013, 4:309-12, via Australian Doctor, 4 Oct 2013.*

This case adds a footnote to this pronouncement by Cecil Adams on straightdope.com back in 2006: “Auto-brewery syndrome has never been convincingly reported outside Japan. Why? It’s all about enzymes. When the liver processes ethanol, the enzyme alcohol dehydrogenase first converts it to acetaldehyde. In most people a second enzyme, aldehyde dehydrogenase



(ALDH), quickly converts the acetaldehyde to harmless acetate. But roughly 50 per cent of Japanese and other East Asians and some American Indians (but practically no Europeans or Africans) have a mutated gene that impairs ALDH activity.”

### SKIN SKETCHES

Sarah Beal, 43, from Arley in Warwickshire, has a condition called dermatographia: the slightest scratch can cause her skin to swell. This allows her to create designs and words on her body that vanish within an hour. “My skin is so sensitive that sometimes even clothes can feel uncomfortable,” she said. “I can scratch my arm or my back and long lines will come up. But being able to draw on my skin is so cool – it’s my party trick. The Etch a Sketch comparison is pretty accurate, although I wish a good shake was enough

to get ride of the itching.” Dermatographia is thought to be caused when cells release histamines under the slightest pressure. This triggers an allergic reaction, causing the skin to swell. *Metro*, 6 Mar 2014.

The Gang of Fort is reminded of the bite and scratch marks appearing on the arms, chest, neck and cheeks of the Romanian “poltergeist girl” Eleonore Zugun, studied by parapsychologists in the 1920s. For this, and other examples of “skin writing” in response to unspoken thoughts and hypnotic suggestion, see John Michell & Bob Rickard: *The Rough Guide to Unexplained Phenomena* (2007), pp.86-88; and the entry on “dermography” in *The Encyclopedia of Occultism and Parapsychology* (1978), edited by Leslie Shephard. For a photograph of unexplained scratches on schoolgirls in Botswana in 1992, see **FT69:8**.



ABOVE: Sarah Beal demonstrates that you can have fun with dermatographia: “Being able to draw on my skin is so cool – it’s my party trick.”

BOTH PHOTOS: DAN ROWLANDS / CATERS NEWS

# Mythconceptions

by Mat Coward

## 178: WASHINGTON’S GNASHERS



### The myth

George Washington (1732-99), first President of the USA, had false teeth made of wood. In some versions, he carved them himself.

### The “truth”

Washington’s choppers were made of all sorts of things over the years – including hippopotamus ivory, gold, lead, brass, and actual teeth – but experts are satisfied that he never had a single wooden tusk. No one’s entirely certain where this generations-old story arose, since wood was not a common denture material in Washington’s day, but it may simply have been that as the great man’s ivory click-clacks became stained with use they took on the appearance of old mahogany. Or perhaps the myth’s attraction is that it rescues George from the remoteness of legend, giving him a “log cabin” air as an unpretentious everyman, tortured by cheap, homely dentistry. In fact, his numerous false sets were cutting edge, the latest and best available in toothy-peg technology, expensively made and regularly serviced. Despite this, they were uncomfortable to wear and, to Washington’s distress, made his face bulge. He was troubled lifelong by his Hampsteads; he began losing them in his twenties, and had only one natural tooth left by the time of his inauguration in 1789.

### Sources

[www.nbcnews.com/id/6875436/ns/technology\\_and\\_science-science/t/george-washingtons-false-teeth-not-wooden/#.UGliYbHb7Zc](http://www.nbcnews.com/id/6875436/ns/technology_and_science-science/t/george-washingtons-false-teeth-not-wooden/#.UGliYbHb7Zc); [www.mountvernon.org/educational-resources/encyclopedia/wooden-teeth-myth](http://www.mountvernon.org/educational-resources/encyclopedia/wooden-teeth-myth)

### Disclaimer

The timber teatime-tackle is, along with the cherry tree, the best-known factoid about Geo. But have we pulled out the tooth of the matter? If not, please write in.

### Mythchaser

News reports of priceless works of modern art being cleared away by the gallery’s cleaners, who mistake them for rubbish, are always a good giggle. But has there

ever been a 100% confirmed case of this a) actually happening, and b) not being a publicity stunt? After all, if you had a valuable installation on show at your gallery, wouldn’t your insurers expect you to take rather better care of it than that? And most especially if it was in the form of an old ashtray or pile of scrap?

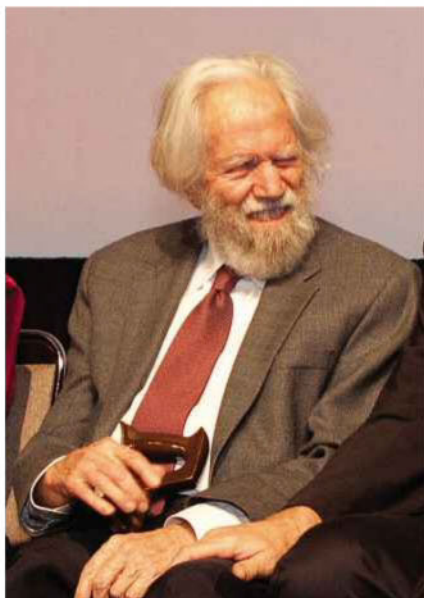


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## NECROLOG

This month, the 'Godfather of Psychedelics' takes his final trip and we say 'fangs for the memories' to Radu Florescu, the man who put Dracula firmly on the Romanian map



CHARLIE LLEWELIN / CREATIVE COMMONS

### ALEXANDER SHULGIN

Dubbed the “Godfather of Psychedelics”, Alexander Shulgin (often known as Sasha) used himself as a guinea pig to analyse human reactions to more than 230 psychoactive compounds – most famously 3,4-methylenedioxy-N-methamphetamine (aka MDMA, Adam, Ecstasy, or ‘E’), which he called a “low-calorie martini”. MDMA had been synthesised in 1912 by Merck in a bid to produce a blood-clotting agent, and patented as an intermediate of another synthesis in order to block competitors, but was not explored in its own right. Shulgin made some MDMA related in 1965 while researching a related chemical, MDA, but only tried it in 1976 after recommendation by a graduate from San Francisco State University. In his journal, Shulgin noted its beneficial effects on human empathy and compassion. “I feel absolutely clean inside, and there is nothing but pure euphoria. The cleanliness, clarity, and marvellous feeling of solid inner strength continued through the next day. I am overcome by the profundity of the experience.” With his psychologist friend Leo Zeff, he promoted MDMA across

America to hundreds of psychologists and therapists as an aid to talk therapy. One of those therapists was the lay Jungian psychoanalyst Ann Gotlieb, who met Shulgin in 1979. The pair bonded over their interest in mind-altering substances and married two years later.

Shulgin studied organic chemistry at Harvard but dropped out in 1943 to join the US Navy, and while serving during World War II he became interested in psychopharmacology. Prior to having surgery for a thumb infection he was handed a glass of orange juice, and, assuming that

the crystals at the bottom of the glass were a sedative, he drank it and fell asleep. After the surgery he discovered that he had simply drunk fruit juice with added sugar and he had been given a placebo. He was, he said, amazed that “a fraction of a gram of sugar had rendered [him] unconscious”. On leaving the Navy, Shulgin returned to Berkeley, where he earned a PhD in biochemistry (1954).

As a senior research chemist at Dow Chemicals, he developed Zectran, the first biodegradable pesticide, which made Dow so much money that it gave Shulgin free rein in the laboratory to pursue his own interests. He experimented with mescaline, which in 1960 brought on an epiphany: “I understood that our entire Universe is contained in the mind and the spirit,” he wrote. “We may choose not to find access to it, we may even deny its existence, but it is indeed there inside us, and there are chemicals that can catalyse its availability.”

In 1965 he left Dow to spend two years studying neurology at the University of California School of Medicine in San Francisco. He then built a lab – a ramshackle garden shed known as “the Farm” – behind his house in Lafayette and became

an independent consultant. He developed ties with the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), giving seminars to agents on pharmacology, and was granted a licence for his analytical experiments, allowing him to synthesise illegal drugs. He enlisted a small group of friends with whom he regularly tested his creations. They developed a systematic way of ranking the effects of the various drugs, known as the Shulgin Rating Scale, with a vocabulary to describe the visual, auditory and physical sensations.

Ecstasy soon spread from the therapist’s consulting room to the dance clubs of Dallas and Ibiza, initially via neo-sannyasi (followers of Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh). The drug’s benefits and dangers have long been debated; it was made illegal in Britain in 1977 and in the US in 1985. In recent years research on its potential uses (for example, in the treatment of traumatised war veterans) has re-emerged. For partygoers in raves during the 1980s and 1990s, it became a byword for the elevations and crises inherent in clubbing; adverse effects were largely down to added impurities. Sasha maintained that pure Ecstasy could help patients overcome trauma or debilitating guilt. He conceded that there had been “a hint of snake-oil” to its initial promotion, but insisted that it remained “an incredible tool”. He liked to quote a psychiatrist who described it as “penicillin for the soul”. Shulgin wrote hundreds of papers on his findings and several books, including the bestsellers *PIHKAL: A Chemical Love Story* (1991) and *TiKAL: The Continuation* (1997) co-authored with his wife. The acronyms stood for Phenethylamines I Have Known And Loved and Tryptamines I Have Known And Loved.

The *New York Times Magazine* catalogued Shulgin’s output in 2005: “Stimulants, depressants,

aphrodisiacs, ‘empathogens,’ convulsants, drugs that alter hearing, drugs that slow one’s sense of time, drugs that speed it up, drugs that trigger violent outbursts, drugs that deaden emotion – in short a veritable lexicon of tactile and emotional experience.”

*FT*’s Paul Sieveking and Val Stevenson attended a party at Sasha’s house in Lafayette in 1993. While many of the guests – including Nicholas Carr-Saunders (1938-98), UK pioneer of the wholefood movement who ran the ecstasy.org research site – discussed the higher chemistry and fungi-farming, Val and Ann (Sasha’s wife) sneaked outside for furtive cigarettes, tobacco being rather non-PC in California.

*Alexander Theodore Shulgin, chemical pioneer, born Berkeley, California, 17 June 1925; died Lafayette, California (from liver cancer), 2 June 2014, aged 88.*

### RADU FLORESCU

The son of Romania’s ambassador to the UK, Radu Florescu won a scholarship to Christ Church, Oxford, and completed a PhD at Indiana University. He settled into an academic career at Boston College, where he found that his colleague, Professor Raymond McNally, was a Dracula obsessive. The pair struck up a writing partnership and sank their teeth into the much-debated Transylvanian tale. They “discovered” links between





Bram Stoker's Count Dracula and Romania's real-life bloodthirsty aristocrat, Vlad Tepes, the 15th-century prince better known as Vlad the Impaler.

Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) featured genuine regions such as Transylvania and the Borgo Pass (even the train

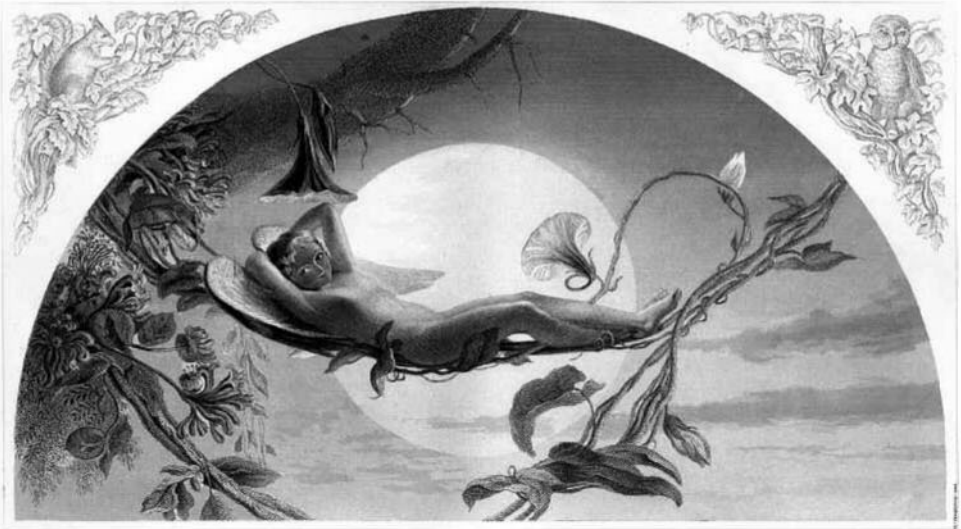


schedules in the book were correct); ergo, posited Florescu, its protagonist must also be based on fact. Vlad, who was renowned for slaying countless

Saxons and Ottomans and had a penchant for impaling his enemy on stakes, was the obvious choice. Florescu and McNally's bestselling *In Search of Dracula* (1972) claimed that the brutal Vlad III, Prince of Wallachia, was Stoker's inspiration. After all, Vlad was a member of the House of Draculesti, popularly known by his patronymic: Dracula. According to one critic, the book "revived the serious study of the vampire myth". Others disagreed; the *New York Times* dismissed the book's "cute rhetorical questions". As the Vlad theory took hold, crowds flocked to visit Vlad's imposing Teutonic fortress, Bran Castle. Florescu later regretted some of the consequences of his claims, notably the Disneyfication of historical record. "I want to spike the Hollywood vampire," he said at the first World Dracula Congress, held in 1995 at a gloomy Bucharest hotel.

Florescu's lecture was titled "What has the Dracula Renaissance done for Romania?" while other "Draculists" discussed topics such as the parallels between Vlad and Romania's deposed ruler Nicolae Ceausescu (who banned all mention of Stoker's fictional vampire). "Ceausescu, the old dictator, admired his own Dracula and he modelled himself on Vlad the Impaler," claimed McNally. "Ironically, 513 years to the day after Prince Vlad was assassinated, Ceausescu was killed at Tirgoviste, in a military barracks right across from Vlad's palace." In fact, the exact date of Vlad's death is unknown (sometime in December 1476 or January 1477). Ceausescu was shot on Christmas Day 1989.

*Radu Florescu, Romanian historian, born Bucharest 23 October 1925; died Mougins, France 18 May 2014, aged 88.*



## FAIRIES, FOLKLORE AND FORTEANA

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

### VISIONARY MEETINGS

One of the most important books published on British folklore in the last generation is Emma Wilby's *Cunning Folk and Familiar Spirits* (2005). The subtitle gives a fair idea of the content: *Shamanistic Visionary Traditions in Early Modern British Witchcraft and Magic*. Essentially Emma is ennobling, in her work, the witch experience. She is saying: "Listen, these were not all old biddies with hellbore, or universal victims/scapegoats. In many cases they were men and women living 'real' spiritual experiences." Their spiritual experiences involved (court records suggest) a visionary meeting with a familiar and a subsequent life-long mystical relationship with said familiar (be it fairy, hell-hound or toad), which Emma Wilby equates with shamanism.

When I first read *Cunning Folk* – and this is one of these books that you need to read two or three times over as many years – my main gripe was with that word 'shamanism'. But my problem now is with 'early modern'. Increasingly when I look at modern or contemporary mystic experiences it seems that something very similar is taking place. This could be Emma Hardinge Britten's self-recorded psychic and 'spiritualist' experiences in the 19th century; it could be Nandor Fodor describing a woman leaving 'her' leprechaun in a taxi, while she goes to have a sitting with her analyst; or it could be, for that matter, Marjorie Johnson, Nottingham fairy seer and one time secretary of the Fairy Investigation Society,

with her many fairy friends. A particular striking instance is an autobiography of an unnamed English woman published in *The Spiritual Herald* (July 1856; thanks to Chris Woodyard for this reference). Unnamed woman (henceforth X) sees angels when she is a year and nine months old (which begs all kinds of questions). X afterwards begins traffic with the local fairy population. When she leaves with her family to live in an unnamed city the fairies disappear until she reads Shakespeare and then they return and enact Shakespeare's plays for her: can you imagine what fairies would have made of *Coriolanus*? Next,

crucially, she begins to see a 2in (5cm) man in Georgian clothes. She would eventually encounter a life-size version of this Georgian in Islington, walking down the street, invisible to everyone else... And we are here but half way through X's unusual life.

Emma Wilby is hardly to be blamed for restricting her study to Early Modern Britain: all scholars and perhaps particularly the most able need to hammer down boundaries. But her model has applications to later and presumably to earlier times. My problem with 'shamanism' is that we are surely seeing something here that can be applied to all societies at all times: from Greek 'speakers' at Delphi to UFO 'abductees'. Perhaps in tribal societies these 'gifts' are most rewarded and admired, whereas in more 'sophisticated' societies they tend to be all too often ridiculed and punished?

Simon Young writes on folklore and history and runs [www.fairyist.com](http://www.fairyist.com)



# the UFO files

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## FLYINGSAUCERY

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

### JUST WHEN YOU THOUGHT IT WAS ALL OVER...

Last summer, the Ministry of Defence completed its commitment to open 209 UFO files in what was one of the British government's largest document release programmes to date. As we reported (**FT304:28-29**), more than 50,000 pages covering sighting reports, policy and correspondence with the public have been added to the UFO landing page set up by the The National Archives. But the MoD is a huge organisation and over the years many different branches and departments have been consulted or involved in UFO issues. It was inevitable that some paperwork missed inclusion in the 10 file tranches released between 2008 and 2013. Among these are five UFO policy files, compiled by the UFO desk officers at the Defence Intelligence Staff during their work on the Condign report, that MoD promised to release 10 years ago (see **FT189:30**). Because of the continuing public interest in their 'X-Files' a 'final search' of MoD archives identified a further 13 miscellaneous UFO-related files dating back to 1971. Some of these 'new' files include collections of sighting reports compiled by the RAF Air Defence staff whose papers were not included in the original release programme. All 18 files are now being prepared for release at The National Archives later this year. Watch this space for updates. [www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ufo](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ufo)

### EARLY FORTEAN PIONEER HONOURED

Veteran ufologist and crop-watcher Paul Fuller has published the fruits of his research into the life of John Rand Capron, a Victorian 'gentleman scientist'. Capron had a passionate interest in all kinds of fortean phenomena but the highlight of his career was his investigation of the spectacular 'auroral beam' described by Fort in *The Book of the Damned* (p.293-94). Fuller's interest in Capron was triggered by the rediscovery of a report he wrote on crop circles that appeared in a field near Guildford, Surrey, following a storm in 1880. Born in Shoreditch in 1829, Capron's fascination with natural wonders began when he saw Michael Faraday produce a phosphorescent glow by passing electrical current through an evacuated glass tube in 1838. An inheritance allowed Capron to build a house and observatory on the outskirts of Guildford where he spent the remainder of his life writing about astronomy and meteorology.



His paper on the 'strange celestial visitor' of November 1882, published by *The Philosophical Journal*, is a masterpiece of the scientific method and should be required reading for ufologists. A great 'circular disc of greenish light' was seen moving smoothly across the heavens during a spectacular auroral display and magnetic storm. Some of the many observers across Europe described it as shaped like a spindle, torpedo or cigar. If seen today it would be identified as a gigantic alien 'mother ship'. As with modern UFO reports, Capron found many discrepancies in witness descriptions of the time of its appearance, its height and trajectory, but chose to concentrate on 28 reliable accounts to produce his conclusions. Even today the 'auroral beam' remains a puzzle, but Capron was the first to link such unexplained celestial events to solar storms and sunspots. 'The Life and Times of John Rand Capron 1829-1888' by Paul Fuller, *The Antiquarian Astronomer* 8 (March 2014)

### SAUCER ART IN ROMANIA?

If UFOs exist as unknown craft of structured origin, some people claim they most likely have been visiting Earth for millennia. But where's the evidence? Folk tales and legends often speak of visitors from the skies, but that proves nothing really. And of course photography is a relatively recent development. So how about pictorial

representations in art? There are several famous examples that are believed to depict aerial phenomena, if not UFOs, and now UFO researchers from Israel believe they have discovered an image on a Romanian wall painting that could well be a flying saucer (left). The image was found in the Church of the Dominican monastery in Sighisoara (coincidentally, the birth place of Vlad the Impaler. See *Necrolog, Radu Florescu*, p24). The saucer-shaped object can be seen 'hovering' over a building and probably dates from the 16<sup>th</sup> century. It's an intriguing image and, for some, further evidence, albeit inconclusive, that the space people have perhaps always been with us. <http://www.openminds.tv/possible-ufo-discovered-old-wall-painting-romania/28362>

### ALOHA, ET

Hawaii, the only US state made up entirely of islands, is no stranger to UFOs. Unusual lights in the sky have been seen there for centuries and native legend holds that the first Hawaiian people arrived on Earth from the constellation known as the Pleiades or Seven Sisters. Unsurprising, then, that a UFO landing pad and 'star visitor sanctuary' have been created on Big Island. "It's potentially controversial," acknowledged Garry Hoffeld, Big Island coordinator for the reinstated Kingdom of Hawaii. "It's potentially funny to some people, potentially stupid to some people." In a mish-mash of New Age and saucer culture, the saucer landing site dedication ceremony will include a traditional Hawaiian blessing, a permanent information plaque, and a stone monument created by stacking rocks, crystals and other items brought by members of the public. Michael Salla, UFO author and commentator whose books include *Exopolitics: Political Implications of the Extraterrestrial Presence* is involved and the whole enterprise is decidedly off the wall. But just to be on the safe side, Hoffeld commented about the project: "We're not crazy; we're open-minded". Some readers might recall that in the early Seventies one of the other islands, Maui, was the site of a legendary concert given by Jimi Hendrix that gave rise to the *Rainbow Bridge* film, which centres round a group of hippies who believe UFOs are visiting the island.

<http://westhawaii.com/news/local-news/ufo-landing-pad-be-dedicated-puna>  
<http://belhistory.weebly.com/rainbow-bridge.html>



## STRANGE STOCKPORT

I have just engaged in a frantic house move, so forgive a little indulgence in my column this month.

One of the less traumatic elements of any relocation must be discovering one's new area, and in my case that means assessing its fortean track record. I'm pleased to discover that south Stockport promises interesting times ahead.

Stockport itself is an old town, at the border of the traditional counties of Cheshire and Lancashire. It sits right on the edge of the Peak District and the Pennines. For 600 years a castle guarded a crossing point over the valley here, but this was lost in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and is now marked by Castle Street in Edgeley which – as a shopping hub on a 'ley' – may be a candidate hotspot of oddness.

Although the Mersey is forever linked with Liverpool, the river is born in the heart of Stockport as the Goyt and Tame merge. The town centre, Merseyway, is built above the fledgling river as it heads west. In doing so, it flows beneath the largest brick-built structure in Western Europe – a giant railway viaduct that towers over the town and is spectacularly visible to air passengers arriving at Manchester Airport as their planes glide across here on final approach.

In past issues of *FTI* I have discussed a number of unusual UFO cases that occurred in Stockport, including the famed 1995 British Airways mid-air encounter – which involved an aircraft descending towards this viaduct. And in **FT212:29** you will find details of what I still regard as one my most puzzling investigations, dating from April 1975, in which an ex-RAF service engineer saw a cruise missile-like UFO that buzzed him at very close range on a rail bridge – opening and closing a green 'eye' before zipping away.

Also close to where I now live is the site of a UFO report that made the national press when, on 31 January 1988, two police officers spotted a bright stationary light ahead of them from their patrol car. This light resolved into a large triangular shape that headed off as the officers contacted the airport, which advised that nothing unusual had appeared on radar. As the story emerged, things quickly got out of hand when film crews started to chase the encounter before the truth had dawned.

I spent that morning investigating these events and was sure I knew what had occurred. I told the police, who seemed to concur, and, indeed, a press conference was abandoned, leaving the media to scramble around to find a story.

No, there was nothing *unusual* on the airport radar – something entirely usual was the key: a British Airways Tristar jet coming in over the viaduct. On clear mornings you can see incomings for miles as they fly straight towards you – they seem to be stationary, then expand in size and, in the case of the Tristar with its triple engine pattern, evolve into a triangle in the pre-dawn gloom. A very easy mistake for anyone, including police officers, to make, but a warning of how the involvement of the media can quickly turn a story into a



The spooky surroundings of the waterfall area at Abney Hall, photographed in 1988 when the strange encounters took place

## Abney Hall was a brooding manor fallen into disrepair

circus. Witnesses, however well trained, do misperceive anomalous objects – including, in my opinion, the aircrew of a second Stockport UFO, seven years after the above case. Here, they saw what I think was a meteor from the cockpit of their jet and perceived it as something stranger.

It's not just UFOs, though, that are seen around these parts. In June 1983 we had a report from a startled woman who found a large puma on her garden shed. The big cat was easily placated with a saucer of milk while the police were called. Their expertise was not required, however, because a woman arrived on horseback and promptly rounded up the very real alien animal, which was on the lam from a nearby circus.

However, possibly my favourite personal investigation from close to my new home is a classic fortean yarn. This incident came to my attention thanks to late colleague Roy Sandbach, who lived in Stockport at the time and knew one of the witnesses.

She was part of a group of young people learning martial arts that required them to channel negative feelings and take out their aggression using body moves and sticks. They chose to practise in the grounds of Abney Hall, a brooding manor built as a country retreat by the Mersey. It fell into disrepair but was partly used as offices by the local council. In the warm summer of 1988 the grounds seemed perfect for the martial artists' needs.

However, their practice sessions were interrupted as they 'channelled' their energy in the wooded grounds near trees shielding a waterfall. A foot appeared in the undergrowth; a floating dark mass menaced one girl as

she sat on a bench feeling her life force being 'sucked out'; twinkling lights drifted in the bushes; one young man even had to be prevented from walking into the pond, where he seemed about to drown himself.

Then they all started to see what they believed was causing these events. As one of the witnesses told Roy and myself: "It was just three feet tall, rather like a dwarf... The thing sat on the rocks by the waterfall and would stare at us... every so often it would raise itself into the air and 'grow' into a monstrous form that was much bigger than its former self – or us."

Needless to say, they quit Abney for a safer home. But when we explored the grounds days later, Roy and I felt its atmosphere and discovered there had been sightings of a spectral woman here. Local speculation suggested this was Agatha Christie.

Christie was related to the owner of Abney Hall and lived there at times, writing some of her early mysteries at the house and reputedly basing the setting of *The Secret of Chimneys* on the hall. However, the idea that her apparition haunts the grounds is mere folklore.

Roy and I noted as we walked the grounds that avenues of trees funnelled the wind, creating sudden chills and unexpected motions. We speculated that this enhanced the 'scary' atmosphere that pervaded the place. Perhaps many factors, plus the intense emotional channelling of aggression, created a kind of Tulpa (or thought materialisation) reflecting the mood of the location and the people who were focusing their minds here.

Days after the martial artists quit Abney Hall, the contractors doing building work for the council reported a mysterious shaking of the site that grounded their equipment. They checked with geologists but there had been no earthquake.

Seemingly Stockport has it all – even phantom dwarfs. Oh, and just to bring the story up to date, in spring 2014 the BBC developed a new drama series – *Our Zoo* – about the family that built Chester Zoo, filming scenes at Abney Hall. Apparently there was some trouble on set and damage was done to the grounds; perhaps the ninja have returned...

# BLASTS FROM THE PAST

FORTEAN TIMES BRINGS YOU THE NEWS THAT TIME FORGOT

## 52 MYSTERIOUS FALLING STONES AT GLAVEAUX

THEO PAIJMANS unearths some surprising accounts from mid-19th century rural France

There are fascinating stories buried beneath the often all too brief summaries in Fort's books. One, which intrigued me no end, involved the mysteriously levitating stones experienced by two girls at Glaveaux, a hamlet near Livet in the Rhone Alps region of France, in the years 1842-1843.

Fort features the account in *Lo!*, his third book, published in 1931. In the fourth chapter he cites a number of instances of mysteriously appearing stones and water. "I omit about 60 instances of seeming teleportations of stones and water, of which I have records. Numerousness hasn't any meaning, as a standard to judge by," he remarks; but in the strange occurrences at Glaveaux, he saw something more. He wrote: "London Times, Jan. 13, 1843 - that, according to the *Courrier de l'Isère*,<sup>1</sup> two little girls, last of December, 1842, were picking leaves from the ground, near Clavaux (Livet), France, when they saw stones falling around them. The stones fell with uncanny slowness. The children ran to their homes, and told of the phenomenon, and returned with their parents. Again stones fell, and with the same uncanny slowness. It is said that relatively to these falls the children were attractive agents. There was another phenomenon, an upward current, into which the children were dragged, as if into a vortex. We might have had data of mysterious disappearances of children, but the parents, who were unaffected by the current, pulled them back."<sup>2</sup>

The story would have been left at that, were it not for the attempts of one man to bring further clarity to the matter. In 1936, four years after Fort passed away, an intriguing report was published in an obscure French scholarly monthly magazine, the *Bulletin Mensuel de l'Académie*



"Suddenly, stones began to fall on the girls, without either of them knowing where they came from..."

*Delphinale*. Fortunately for us, its author, M Michea-Bonnardon, although writing decades later, begins by citing the original *Courrier de l'Isère* article:

"In the last few days, singular rumours have spread in our city relating to incidents that occurred rather close to us in our local *arrondissement*. Since no authentic testimony reached us about these events, we had to keep silent and shut ourselves up in the most perfect disbelief; however, the information that recently reached us is from people so reliable and so commendable, that it leaves us no room for doubt. Here in a

few words is what happened:

"In the last two weeks of the month just passed, two girls were busy raking leaves in the town of Livet, a hamlet of Clavaux. Having finished their work, they sat next to one another to fill the bags they had brought for this purpose: suddenly, stones began to fall on the girls, without either of them knowing where they came from; and, what is even more amazing, they did not feel any pain from their impact. Understandably frightened, they panicked and fled to their parents' house, where they described what had happened to them. The

parents could not believe such an extraordinary account; however they yielded to the repeated insistence of their children, and returned with them to the scene. The girls recommenced their work, but nothing happened this time; but when the girls' clothes brushed against one another, they once again saw a constant rain of stones coming towards them, without, however, causing them any harm. The parents, now sharing the children's anxiety, took them by the hand to lead them away; but as soon as they did so, they themselves also experienced the same effect.

"They only perceived the stones when they were a little distance from their heads, and the stones would fall straight to the ground after hitting them. Absolutely terrified, and quite sure that they weren't the subject of somebody's idea of a joke, they returned to the village and told anyone who would listen what had just happened to them.

"The directors of the foundry of Rioupéroux took the two children to the scene and experienced the same phenomenon, but others still refused to believe them. The inhabitants of Bourg d'Oisans, respectable church members, set off; they returned after having seen the phenomenon with their own eyes.

"The incredible tale reached Vizille, repeated by so many people that a doctor, widely respected for his talents and morals, sent his son to the scene, even though he lived 15km away. Soon, this young man returned to his father and confirmed what had for the last few days been the talk of the countryside. The doctor was not yet convinced, as the phenomenon seemed devoid of any credibility. He wished to see it with his own eyes before he would believe it. Taking the two children by the hand, he and the girl's mother went to the middle



of a nearby meadow; having taken but two or three steps, the strange events of the previous days repeated themselves. The doctor, amongst others, was struck on the cheek by a stone the size of an egg. However, he felt no pain. One person, he was told, saw his hand swell slightly from the impact of one of the stones.

Sixty of these stones were collected: nothing unusual was noticed about them, other than that they were made up of different types of stone. When placed near the children, the stones did not produce any effect. In disbelief, the doctor brought the children home, where the phenomenon was seen once again to take place. There was no further room for doubt.

"These inexplicable incidents, beyond human understanding, lasted only a few days. The phenomena, which had taken place from morning till night, from afternoon to nightfall, finally disappeared completely."

Michea-Bonnardon continues: "Who was the doctor from Vizille and his son whom the *Courrier de l'Isère* refers to with commendable discretion? Good fortune led me to discover a document that clarifies, completes and adds detail to the article from the *Courrier de l'Isère*. It is a draft of a report written by my grandfather, Léonce Bonnardon of Vizille,<sup>3</sup> on the numerous phenomena that surrounded these two 14-year-old girls: Marguerite Pinel and Marie Genevois, of Glaveaux, a hamlet of Livet.

"Stones of different types, shapes and sizes rose up as the girls passed, their trajectory describing an arc; the smallest was the size of a nut, the largest about 6-8 square centimetres [0.9-1.2. sq in] They fell to the ground, sometimes touching one of the girls, sometimes one of the persons accompanying them. These phenomena manifested themselves at every hour during the day or night, in various places and in the presence of numerous witnesses, amongst them: M Bonnard, advocate general;

Giboury, director of the silk weavery of Vizille; Belion, parish priest of Séchillienne; Dumas, director of the foundry of Rioupéroux; Paturel, justice of the peace; Viallet, bailiff; Cohende, tax inspector of Vizille; Eugène Bonnardon, doctor of Vizille; Jacques Bonnardon, my maternal grandfather; Léonce Bonnardon, my grandfather, son of Eugène."

However, where the newspaper suggested the phenomena only lasted a few days, from Bonnardon's original account it is clear that they lasted much longer and he ends it by citing a number of the most striking occurrences: "The stones would rise when the girls were inside, as well as when they were walking in the open air. The report relates 47 findings, of which 25 were outside and 22 inside, taking place over 67 days, from 17 December 1842 till 21 February 1843. It would take too long to enumerate every case. Herewith, are four of the most remarkable:

"Monday, 19 December 1842, M. Dumas, director of the foundry of Rioupéroux, having asked for the two girls to be brought to him, observed them and soon enough convinced himself that the stones were in fact lifted from the earth and attracted towards the young girls and himself, always describing an arc. He recognised, as had the other persons who had been hit by the stones, that they caused little or no pain. The wife, the mother-in-law and the servant of M Dumas saw the phenomenon very clearly and were also hit by the stones.

"On 22 December 1842, M Jacques Bonnardon, his curiosity aroused, attempted an experiment at six o'clock that evening. Mme Caire, hotelier of Rioupéroux, was in Glaveaux; she proposed to my grandfather that she accompany him and the two girls. All four went arm in arm: Mme Caire to the left, the two girls in the middle, M Bonnardon to the right, the servant of the latter arm in arm with Mme Caire. The strollers had barely walked 25 or 30

paces when they heard the falling of stones. Mme Caire then told M Bonnardon: 'Well, this time, can you hear them, and do you still doubt?'

"Yes - I hear them," replied M Bonnardon, 'But that is that not sufficient for me. I need further proof.' At the same instant, M Bonnardon saw a stone come towards him and hit his right cheek. He assured himself that there was no person in the vicinity and he was then convinced.

"Thursday, 12 January 1843, at five o'clock in the evening, Marie Genevois, returning from Livet, encountered Marguerite Pinel, and both went to Pinel's home; at the same instant, the door having been closed, a stone fell in the room. Antoine Michel saw the stone above the two girls having come from behind them, where there was nobody else present. Some seconds later, a stone fell on the head of Marie, then on the hand of Marguerite Pinel's mother, then to the ground. Jean Michel, who was in the house at the time, also saw the stone.

"The same day, at 10 in the evening, at Rioupéroux, as the little girls went to their first floor bedroom to go to sleep, a large wet stone fell forcefully to the floor in the presence of the domestic servant of M Dumas. Everyone in the house heard the stone fall.

"Wednesday 18 January 1843, at half past six in the morning, Marie Genevois and Marguerite Pinel were sleeping at the foot of Marguerite's parents' bed; three stones hit Marie on the head; everyone heard them strike her. Mme Pinel saw a shadowy shape as one of the stones struck her daughter's head, but none of the stones could be found.

"The same day, at noon, in the Pinel house, the two young girls and Mme Pinel again saw a wet stone fall near the stove. Marie Genevois saw this stone clearly in the air and coming from a direction where there was nobody present."

Searching for an explanation, having weighed all the facts, Michea-Bonnardon arrives at none: "In the absence of any

conclusions, all conjectures remain possible. However, one needs to note that the report cites the testimony of over 80 witnesses, all positive; their quality leaves little room for deception. With the manifestations that took place during the winter on the mountainsides that enclose the valley, it could be assumed that at midday the stones became dislodged under the action of thawing and came down near the walkers. But that explanation is not tenable for the stones that fell on the streets of the villages or in a private property.

"One must abandon the idea, in many of these cases, that tricksters were launching the stones from hiding places. The witnesses were too numerous and the incidents too closely observed. But what to think of stones being raised indoors at all hours of the day? Did our ancestors find themselves in the presence of a veritable levitation phenomenon, or some sort of animal magnetism? Were they under a collective delusion or did they fall for the tricks of two young peasant girls?"

"We no longer have the means to gather the information which would permit a more rigorous investigation, especially as I do not know if the report was finalised and sent out for further study.

"The field remains open for researchers."<sup>4</sup>

I tried to locate the original report that Michea-Bonnardon used as the basis for his account, but so far have had no luck in finding it. Perhaps some relative of his might still have it amongst the family papers, perhaps it is tucked away in the archives of the Academie Delphinale, which still exists.<sup>5</sup> And what became of the two girls? Perhaps they were still alive when Michea-Bonnardon's account was published, but have since faded from history. To the best of my knowledge, the strange occurrences at Glaveaux may well be the longest lasting manifestation of mysteriously materialising and falling stones on record.

#### NOTES

1 The *Courrier de l'Isère*, is not currently online, but I found the story reprinted in another French newspaper, the *Courrier De La Drôme Et De l'Ardèche*, 10 Jan 1843. While the account is much more extensive than the *Times* article, the names of the two

girls are not given. The *Times* account though is a faithful summary of the longer, French article.

2 Charles Fort, *Lo!*, 1931, chapter 4, page 36. Writes Mr. X.: "Aerolites." London *Times*, January 13, 1843, p. 3 c. 3. Livet is the commune where the phenomenon was

reported, and it was said to be "near Clavaux." There is no report of an "upward current" in the article, as Fort suggests; rather people who held the hand of a child "found themselves, to their great surprise, drawn within the sphere of attraction, and perceived the stones just

above their heads, which the moment after, fell on them, and rolled to the ground." See: [www.resologist.net/lo104.htm](http://www.resologist.net/lo104.htm)

3 His grandfather became mayor of Vizille in 1843.

4 M Michea-Bonnardon, 'Un phénomène ou préntendu tel survenu a Livet en

1842', *Bulletin Mensuel de l'Académie Delphinale*, 7. 1936 (1937), pp 107-111.

5 A group of intellectuals and artists of the l'Isère department founded the Academie Delphinale in 1772. The bulletin was published from 1846. See: [www.academiedelphinale.com/](http://www.academiedelphinale.com/)

# SLENDER MAN

## FROM VIRAL TO POSTAL

How did two seemingly normal 12-year-old girls from Wisconsin come to carry out a brutal attempted murder to please a fictional Internet monster? **IAN 'CAT' VINCENT** probes the online origins of Slender Man and asks what the breathtakingly fast spread of this faceless meme tells us about the nature of contemporary belief and reality.

At the beginning of June 2014, a singular news story captured the attention of the world's press. Two 12-year-old girls from the Milwaukee suburb of Waukesha, Wisconsin, had attempted to stab a playmate of the same age to death, inflicting 19 wounds upon their victim, who was found crawling towards a road and taken to hospital (FT316:4). According to the reports, the girls had planned the attack since February, originally intending to lure their friend out to the National Park some distance from their homes but finally settling for the local woods.

The young girls' expressed intent, as they told police after their arrest, was not simple murder but the making of a *sacrifice*, a bloody call to summon the attention of a monstrous creature in order to become its Proxies – obedient possessed servants.

They wanted to serve the Slender Man.

News organisations hurried to speculate about this crime's inspiration: a tall, faceless, suit-clad figure who had first appeared on the Internet as a creation of Photoshopped images, horror stories, YouTube video series and computer games. They sought to understand how something supposedly unreal could have been the inspiration for such a violent crime.

Within the week, two other violent attacks with a Slender Man connection had been reported. And a few days later, it was the fifth anniversary of the eerie figure's creation. Clearly, this supposedly imaginary entity had come a long way in a very short time.

### TEN DAYS

The media coverage of Slender Man's background focused on his origin in a Photoshop competition to "create paranormal images" on the popular site

## THE TWO GIRLS ATTEMPTED TO STAB A FRIEND TO DEATH



somethingawful.com. The posting of Erik Knudsen's initial pair of images (under the pseudonym of 'Victor Surge') on 10 June 2009 was the turning point for the competition, and the birth of what became the first widely known open-source monster (see Sharon Hill, 'Shadow of the Slenderman', FT305:55).<sup>1</sup>

What the majority of news reports failed to mention was just how rapidly the Slender Man mythos had been created, and how quickly it left the confines of one website to become a truly widespread phenomenon. The mythos as we know it manifested in its current form almost entirely within a mere 10 days.

Knudsen's original post consisted of two images of children – one group in a play park, one group fleeing... something – both pictures having an indistinct figure in the background, apparently that of an unnaturally tall man in a suit, possibly faceless and with a suggestion of tentacles for arms. One of the image captions (from the fictional archivist who had supposedly kept the photograph) gave the entity that menaced them its name: "One of two recovered photographs from the Stirling City Library blaze. Notable for being taken on the day which 14 children vanished and for what is referred to as 'The Slender Man'."

The other caption reads: "We didn't want to go, we didn't want to kill them, but its persistent silence and outstretched arms horrified and comforted us at the same time..."

Less than 20 minutes later came this comment about the competition: "You just know a couple of the good ones are going to

LEFT: Morgan Geysler (top) and Anissa Weiser, the Waukesha 12-year-olds accused of the attempted murder of their schoolmate.



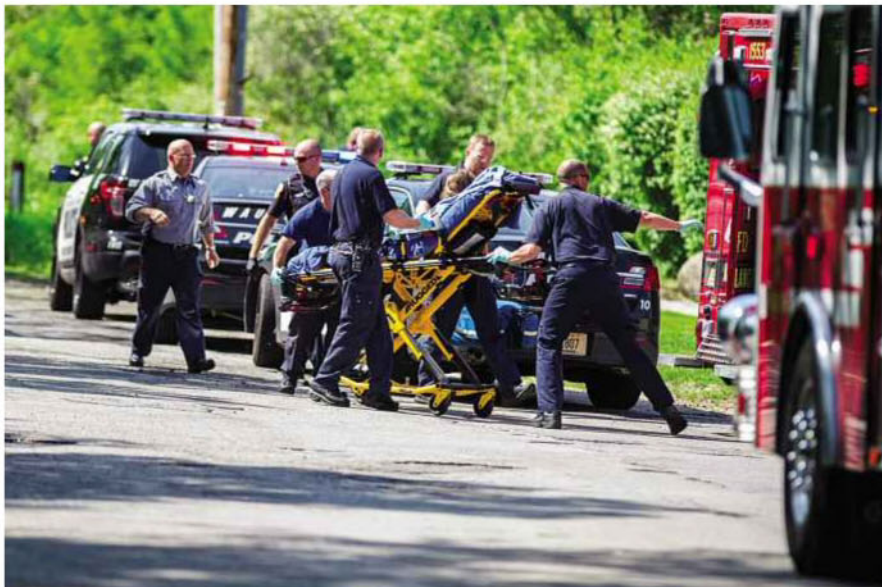


## THE TULPA

The concept of the *tulpa*, a term from Tibetan Buddhism literally translating as ‘thought-form’, first came to the West in a book by the explorer and student of mysticism, Alexandra David-Néel. In her *Magic And Mysticism In Tibet* (1929), she describes the process by which she created a *tulpa* – in her case, a jolly Friar Tuck-like Western monk. Through meditation and visualisation, she claimed, the entity became more and more real to her... although it departed from her initial plan and became leaner and crueller in aspect, until she was driven to banish it.

This conception of the *tulpa* became popular among the ranks of the Chaos Magic movement of the 1970s, leading in part to the development of similar forms of magical creations, such as the Egregore.

It should be noted that, although this version of the *tulpa* is now a common trope in Western magic, it is a considerable diversion from the original Tibetan intent. ‘Ges’, an initiate of Tibetan Buddhism, explained: “Any time you create a god in ritual, it’s a *tulpa*, or any time you emanate offerings it’s a *tulpa*... A *tulpa* can become an independent thing, but it isn’t about you, it is about *them*. You’ve built a *tulpa* that becomes so similar that the God (or whatever) decides to take up residence, and it’s no longer just your imagination/focus... but not physically running around, rarely astrally going anywhere, and no Friar Tuck.”



ABOVE: Rescue workers take the 12-year-old stabbing victim to an ambulance in Waukesha, Wisconsin.

AP / PRESS ASSOCIATION IMAGES

eventually make it to paranormal websites and be used as genuine.”

From the very first, Slender Man was a creature that occupied the liminal space between fact and fantasy.

When first asked to describe the origin of his creation, Knudsen noted the influence of one of the already existing ‘creepypasta’ Internet horror tales (a genre Slender Man would come to exemplify) entitled “The Rake”<sup>2</sup>. He later added that other key influences had been the Tall Man from the *Phantasm* film series and “various guys in suits” – ranging from the Men In Black to ‘the Gentlemen’ in the *Buffy The Vampire Slayer* episode ‘Hush’ and ‘the Strangers’ in the film *Dark City*.

Knudsen’s creation dominated the competition thread from that point on. Commenters rapidly added their own pictures, stories, even theories about ‘The Slender Man’, whose name was soon shortened to ‘Slender Man’, ‘Slenderman’ or even ‘Slendy’. One activity that was popular from the start was providing an alleged historical origin for the creature: he was linked to a variety of mythic figures, such as the German mediaeval child-stealing ‘Der Großmann’ or ‘Der Ritter’ and the Scottish legend of the ‘Fear Dubh’ or ‘Black Man’ (See ‘Shadows of the Thin Man’ on p34).

Others suggested very early on that the Slender Man legend being created in the comment thread could easily be expanded into an actual urban legend: one commenter suggested, “somebody should send some of these to (the popular fortean radio show) *Coast to Coast*. It would be hilarious if some kook ghosthunter got their hands on just one of these and made a huge deal out of it.”<sup>3</sup> Others suggested that the story could be portrayed in other media, such as YouTube videos and Alternate Reality Games: both of these would happen very soon after.

Another common theme among commenters who were not directly adding to the story was that Slender Man was truly unsettling on some primordial level; some were having nightmares about him. This

sense of unease, even dread, was soon folded back into the growing mythology. Two posts, about a week after the original Knudsen/ Surge pictures, are emblematic of the future development of Slender Man, and continue to haunt me personally.

One, from a contributor known simply as “I”, reads:

*The Slender Man.  
He exists because you thought of him.  
Now try and not think of him.*

Another poster wrote:

*The Slender Man came to me in a dream and told me that he existed between ‘everything’ and ‘nothing’ and that time and matter are like toys...*

Around the same time, another commenter (‘Leechcode5’, 16 Jun 2009) made a suggestion that heralded the wider growth of Slender Man’s story: “I’m suddenly imagining a Slender Man ‘documentary’, done in a style similar to ‘The Last Broadcast’ or that old Alien Abduction TV special. Interviews with witnesses of various encounters through the years, investigation into the different events brought up in this thread, and specialists analysing photographs, intercut around home video footage taken by a missing family, showing them being picked off by the Slender Man.”

The comment thread soon saw even greater expansion of the myth: common aspects and tropes were established, such as Slender Man’s ability to seemingly transcend time and space, and the fact that he cannot be killed. On 18 June, the first mention was made of what would become the video series that would take Slenderman to a much wider audience: *Marble Hornets*.

User ‘ce gars’ posted to the thread, telling of a student film he had collaborated on with a film school friend named Alex two years previously: “It was called *Marble Hornets* and I think it was about a twenty-something returning to his childhood home and recalling



events that happened there. It was pretty pretentious film student fare, but I helped out for a few days before my summer classes started... After about two months of off and on shooting, Alex dropped his pet project completely. It was really sudden when he let me know about it... Soon after, he started avoiding me and from what I hear, everyone else.”

‘ce gars’ (aka Jay, actually film student Troy Wagner) contacted Alex (later played by series co-creator Joseph DeLage) to see how he was: “Right before I left, I asked him about *Marble Hornets* and what he was planning on doing with all of his tapes of raw footage. With almost no hesitation, he simply said ‘Burn them’... When I asked why he didn’t just archive them for B-roll in future projects, he just said he never wanted to work with the footage again... So I asked if I could take a look at them.

“He agreed, but only under the circumstance that I never bring them back to him, and never discuss what was on them with him. He also highly discouraged me from showing any of it to anyone else. I laughed at this, and said that he must have accidentally made ‘The Ring’ or something with the way he was talking. He didn’t acknowledge this and brought me up to his attic, where he was storing the pile of tapes.

“There were tons of them...”

The first supposed clip from those tapes was posted to YouTube on 20 June 2009, linked to on the Something Awful thread, and praised enthusiastically on the infamous 4chan.com site. This was the major breakout point for the Slender Man phenomenon.

The *Marble Hornets* series ran from then until its recent conclusion at Entry #87,

exactly five years after the first episode was released. Its success on YouTube led to many other similar “fake-found-footage” video series.

The same day as the first instalment of *Marble Hornets* went live, another comment on the Something Awful thread appeared, which was to have a lasting effect on the mythos: User ‘soakie’ said: “Has anyone thought about the possibility that we are creating a tulpa? It’s a thought form that is realised through the efforts of a group of people. We might be creating the Slender Man, making him real...”

After referring to the infamous “Philip Experiment”, in which parapsychologists in the 1970s made alleged contact with a deliberately created entity via classic Spiritualist techniques, ‘soakie’ asked: “How long until there is agreement about what the Slender Man looks like? When will he have a specific MO? Can the hidden superstitious heart of the Something Awful goons [commenters] give Slender Man an independent existence? Think about it, a few

## POSSESSED VICTIMS ARE KNOWN AS 'PROXIES'

hundred or maybe even a thousand goons, all looking at the pictures and creating the stories. I find myself looking at the shadows, imagining how they might fall together to show a lurking Slender Man.

“[The Slender Man] pulls so many primal strings: his wrongness to our eyes, the hair on the back of the neck rising, the subconscious ‘Nonononono’ that bursts across the imagination. He drags the monsters out of the back of our modern minds. *He is a satisfactory booger man, pressing all the right buttons.* [Emphasis mine]

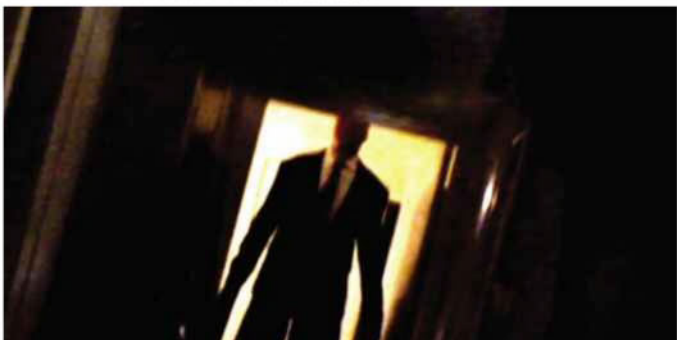
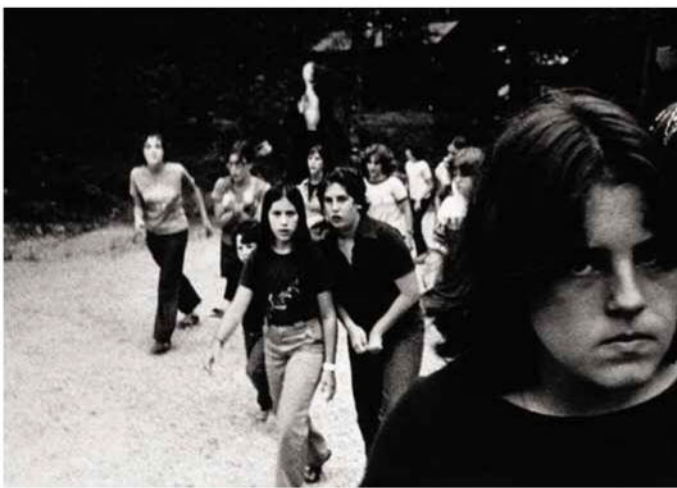
“Even if we don’t really believe in the supernatural, even if our rational minds laugh at such an absurdity... we are cutting him out and sewing him together. We’re stuffing him with nightmares and unspoken fears.

“And what happens when the pictures are no longer photoshops?”

### ALTERNATE REALITIES

*Marble Hornets* and the other video series that followed not only spread the Slender Man to a far wider audience in a relatively short time, they expanded the associated mythos in specific ways. Among the aspects they further defined are:

- Slender Man is shown to have a powerful physical effect on those whose paths he crosses. Symptoms include violent coughing fits, often accompanied by bleeding and blackouts; victims losing periods of time – from a few hours to three months – during which they often perform activities very different from their normal, conscious behavior... including committing murder. These possessed victims became known in



TOP AND ABOVE RIGHT: Slender Man’s beginnings: the two photos originally uploaded by ‘Victor Surge’ in 2009. ABOVE RIGHT: Slender Man appears in *Marble Hornets*.

# SHADOWS OF THE THIN MAN



JENNY COLEMAN argues that there's nothing new about Slender Man: he's just a contemporary take on centuries' worth of images of evil...

Slender Man is the hipster monster in the black suit waving his multiple appendages outside Generation Y's bedroom window. The tech-savvy, Internet-addicted and jaded legion of twenty-somethings has adopted Slendy and made him their poster child for all things emo and disgruntled. Google "Slenderman" and you will see versions of the entity rendered in CG, Photoshopped into old photographs, in wide-eyed Manga format, and drawn in crayon. You will find descriptions, and experiences, of him; you will see "non-fiction" books, and comic books and even porn. Reverend Robin Swope in his 2012 book *Slenderman: From Fiction to Fact* proposes that real people, like your nextdoor neighbour or the kid who delivers your paper, have started having experiences with Slendy – scary experiences; real experiences.

But Slender Man isn't really new, just the latest face of an ancient evil, resurrected by modern media and the darker corners of the human mind: an evil as timeless and as ubiquitous as thought itself, pre-dating language, its true origins in death, the dark, and the rolling eyeball of primal fear.

Perhaps it all goes back to the serpent, corruptor of Adam and Eve. Few phobias are as ingrained as that of ophidiophobia, or the abnormal fear of snakes. Slender Man's blank, smooth face, his bald head,

## SLENDER MAN IS THE POSTER CHILD FOR ALL THINGS EMO & DISGRUNTLED

his writhing arms are all evocative of the serpent. Harry Potter fans, many of whom read the series as children and who are now the core of Generation Y, will recognise the antagonist Lord Voldemort as having the features, language, cunning, and cold beauty of the snake... and in fact a distinct resemblance to Slender Man.

The name "Voldemort" has its root in the French word for death – *mort* – and the Grim Reaper himself bears a strong resemblance to Slender Man: cloaked in darkness, long-armed and waiting. While Slender Man is noted for abducting children, he is also said to stalk adult victims, to mutilate them and steal their organs. One of the historical analogues suggested for Slender Man mythos is that of *Der Ritter*, supposedly seen in a German woodcut from the 1500s depicting a multi-limbed and skeletal figure in battle with a man.

Other entities, such as Scotland's 'Fear Dubh' and the Native American Wendigo are precursors of Slender Man: bogeymen used by parents to terrify naughty children who had wandered off. The Fear Dubh is often associated with malevolent fairies; not the sparkly and rainbow-winged sort, but the dark, mischievous, kidnapping kind who could change appearance at will and whose true appearance was either featureless or coldly blank. And of course, the Wendigo of the Native Americas was a shape-shifting creature and a cannibal.

The faceless visitor lurking in the dark has also helped to flesh out the Slender Man mythos. Devoid of emotion, passive/aggressive and psychotically patient, Slendy is not dissimilar to the equally creepy Men in Black, best known as government operatives sent to squelch the sharing of information on the paranormal. John Keel suggested that the MiB are actually a manifestation of ancient demonic evil (*UFOs: Operation Trojan Horse*, 1970), using the term "ultraterrestrials" to describe these non-human, shape-shifting entities. A particularly disturbing episode of Joss Whedon's cult television show *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* ('Hush', 1999) featured The Gentlemen, Slender Man-like entities bent on stealing the hearts of Buffy's townsfolk.

Reports also present us with the Grinning Man, another variation of the MiB and also said to be connected to UFO sightings and the Mothman sightings. First spotted in New Jersey in 1960, the Grinning Man is sometimes referred to as Indrid Cold. John Keel, again, was the first researcher to mention this entity, in *Strange Creatures from Time and Space* (1970). With his bald head, dead eyes and unwavering stare, the Grinning Man is highly suggestive of Slender Man; perhaps they are one and the same.

Movies and television have leapt upon the MiB and Grinning Man mythologies as well, further popularising and drawing Slender Man from the shadows. *Doctor Who's* 'The Silence', *Dark City's* 'The Strangers', *The X-Files's* Cigarette Smoking Man: all ghostly and ghastly wraiths working behind the scenes to corrupt and control. 'The Thin Man' from 1927's *Metropolis* (pictured), may be the first Slender Man-type figure to grace the silver screen, and 2001's *The Mothman Prophecies* takes the Grinning Man/Indrid Cold figure a step further: it is simply a disembodied, electric voice. John Keel's book of the same name, written in 1975, describes communications with Cold as largely telepathic, but also by means of telephone. Indrid Cold didn't cannibalise or kidnap his victims, but, whatever the entity was, he managed to scramble the minds of several people and in doing so claimed a number of "converts". Each of these characters uses shifty and shadowy



tactics to follow, haunt, and track the subjects of their obsessions, just like Slendy; and, like the Men in Black, they revert to destroying or hiding evidence of their existence... or the existence of something else.

Vampirism is not generally associated with Slender Man, yet 1922's *Nosferatu* is a study in Slendy iconography: the stalking, the obsession, the rictus grin, the long fingers, the bald head and the cold stare. Even music videos steal from the skeletal spectre of Slender Man, before he was a Generation Y icon. Marilyn Manson's "The Beautiful People" features the unnaturally tall, bald and grinning dictator of a surreal dystopia. The highly unsettling "Come to Daddy" by Aphex Twin has its ghastly, skeletal creature emerge from an abandoned television set to wreak screaming havoc on yet another dystopia populated by grinning children. The long, hooked hands of this video's creature call to mind Slender Man's nemesis and occasional proxy, The Rake. The Rake is described as "hairless and dog-like", with long claws resembling rakes. The Rake tends to more feral attacks, portending death and then bringing it in a more gruesome manner than does Slender Man. The Rake is Slendy's obnoxious cousin, another Internet creation with an ancient bloodline. Comparisons have been made with cryptozoology's *chubacabras* and to modern-day zombies. Jack the Ripper is his Victorian precursor; a predator on the vulnerable who does more than simply haunt: he mauls and mutilates, teeth bared, like a werewolf or vampire. The Rake is Slender Man's vulgar wingman, the brawn to Slendy's brain.

So, what is Slender Man? What is it about his shiny, pale head, his expressionless face, and his twisting arms and tentacles that intrigues and terrifies, that inspires so many to create poetry and art and websites about him? Is he, as Reverend Swope and others suggest, an Internet entity made manifest haunting the realities of those who believe in him? Is he an evil older than the media world in which we live? Or, perhaps, a combination of the two?

#### AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



JENNY COLEMAN has been interested in *fortean* since she began reading about the Loch Ness Monster when she was six years old. She grew up in Bangor, Maine, and today lives with her husband, Loren Coleman, and Fergus the dog in Portland, Maine.

the mythos as 'Proxies'.

- The presence of Slender Man is shown to have an effect on recording equipment: strange noises creep into the soundtrack when Slender Man or his Proxies move into shot. The image itself distorts, flares, sometimes breaks down into static or apparently random geometric figures.

- Slender Man's liminal nature gives him an affinity with, and possibly control of, doorways, passageways and other such spaces. He is seen to appear from rooms known to be empty, or to lure people through doors into places which, by all rights, should not be accessible through them.

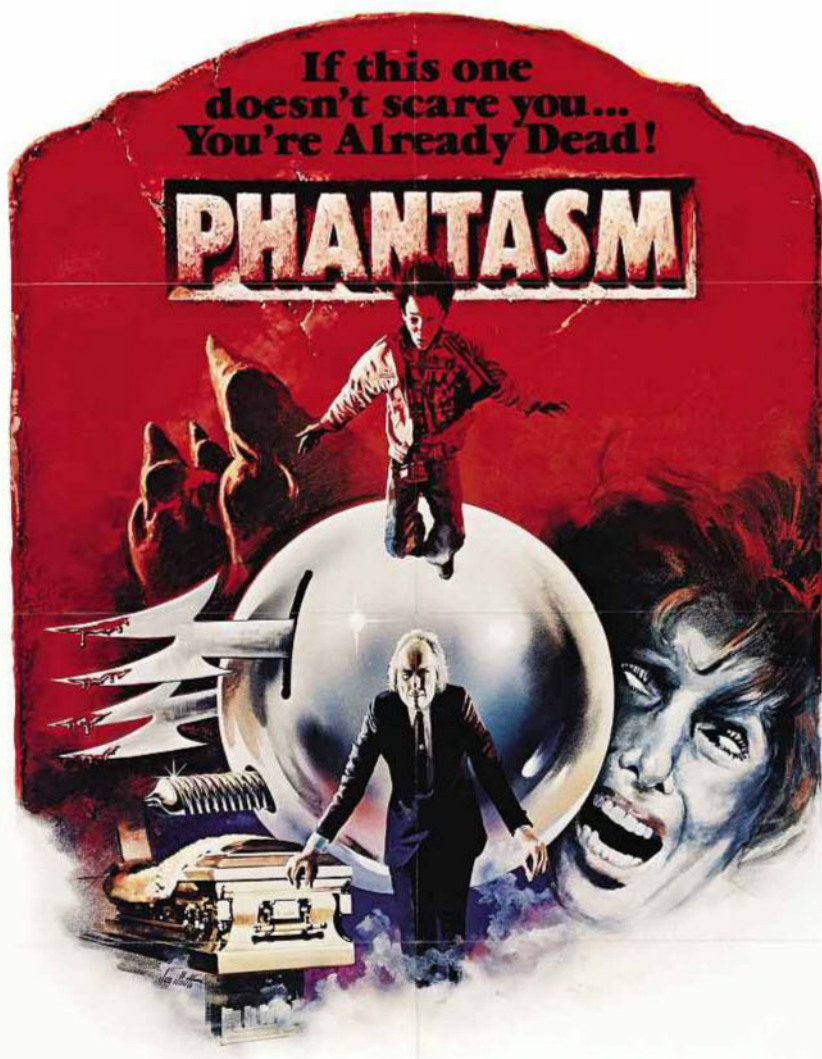
- Slender Man is, in some sense, *metatextual*: despite his avowed fictional origin, he often appears as "real" in storylines that refer directly to this fact. The popular YouTube series "EverymanHYBRID", for example, starts with a prank Slender Man appearance in the background of what is ostensibly a fitness video: it is not long after the creators have laughed this off that the "real" Slender Man makes his presence known.<sup>4</sup>

The widening of Slender Man's fan base was not only reflected in the YouTube series. Hundreds of text-only blogs appeared, the majority telling the personal tales of those who had been affected by his baleful influence. Many of these began to cross over into each others' story-lines and, embracing the energetic reader comments many of the blogs featured, started to take on aspects of an Alternate Reality Game (ARG).

ARGs have been around online since 1996. One FAQ on the subject defines them thus: "Alternate Reality Gaming (ARG) is an experience that encourages players (you!) to interact with a fictional world using the real world to do it."<sup>5</sup>

Players of an ARG are asked to look for hidden clues, which further the game's storyline, in a variety of media – websites, sound and film clips and so on – and often take part in exchanges of email and other communications with those running the game. The ARG acts as a kind of filter through which the 'real' world can be seen, usually exposing a complex conspiracy within the context of the game. The more you

BELOW: Don Coscarelli's *Phantasm* films featured Angus Scrimm as the menacing, black-clad Tall Man.



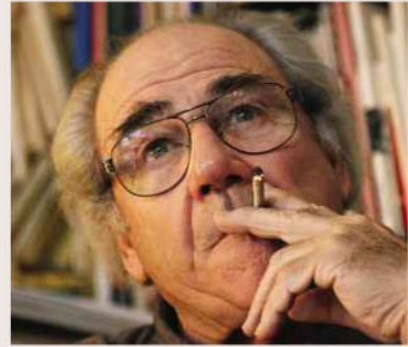
## THE HYPER-REAL

The term ‘hyper-real’ comes from the work of the French postmodern theorist and founder of the poststructuralist movement Jean Baudrillard. In his essay *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981), he draws a distinction between Simulation – copies of an imitation or symbol of something which actually exists – and Simulacra –

copies of something that either no longer has a physical-world equivalent, or *never existed in the first place*. His view was that modern society is increasingly emphasising, or even completely replacing, the simulation with the simulacrum, the actual being displaced by the never-real... and that: “The simulacrum is never that which conceals the

truth – it is the truth which conceals that there is none. The simulacrum is true.”

The term ‘hyper-real’ derives from this perspective, and he defines it as: “The generation by models of a real without origin or reality”. The novelist and philosopher Umberto Eco later put this more succinctly, saying the hyper-real is “the authentic fake”.



AFP / GETTY IMAGES

participate, the more you learn. Players usually communicate on a variety of message boards set up either by the game creators or the players themselves.<sup>6</sup>

Most, if not all, of the Slender Man material subsequent to the initial Something Awful thread can be seen as forming facets of a single, massive ARG. The premier website for followers and participants of ARGs is unfiction.com; unsurprisingly, there is a great amount of material about Slender Man there (the original *Marble Hornets* thread alone was locked after 323 pages... and there are dozens of other related threads.) All of the various series, however, occupy the same shared, open-source-created mythos established so early on, whether or not each story is considered canonical within another series. Crossover stories are a common occurrence, further cementing the overall mythos.

One important subset of the ARG/fictional-blog-writing continuation of the mythos became known as ‘Core Theory’. Beginning with a blog named ‘White Elephants’<sup>7</sup> (which, in its first entry, also noted the generally accepted version of the Philip Experiment), these explored the possibility of turning Slender Man’s fictional origin and metatextual nature against

him: the idea was to defeat Slender Man by literally *rewriting him*. This came to a head in a planned crossover storyline between many of the Core Theory blogs on the Winter Solstice of 2010, in which Slender Man was supposedly to be lured to a particular location and attacked – the point being not so much to cause him lasting damage as to have the blog writers who were not ‘present’ describe their version of events, to increase the memetic spread of the very idea that Slender Man could be hurt *at all*.<sup>8</sup>

Core Theory, though popular, was controversial among Slender Man aficionados; mainly because, by offering a method of actually defeating him, Slender Man’s power as an object of horror was reduced. It does, however, illustrate just how completely the mythos was shifting the boundaries between storytelling, mythology and supposed ‘fact’, marking it as an exemplar of what has been termed the ‘hyper-real’ (see panel above).

Influenced by the poststructuralist theories of the French philosopher Jean Baudrillard, sociologist Adam Possamai and others have explored what Possamai terms “hyper-real religion” – beliefs which provide a spiritual and often mystical benefit for their adherents, despite their acceptance

that the deity involved has an origin that is completely fictional, and known to be so.<sup>9</sup> Whether or not one holds to postmodern assumptions such as the negation of concepts such as ‘authenticity’ and the ‘Grand Narrative’, it is clear that some aspects of what were formerly the sole province of religion have been at least partially occupied by the products of mass media.

Although Slender Man was not intended as a commercial venture (it remains outside of any claim of copyright or trade mark), it was nonetheless soon incorporated into saleable mass media. This is especially true of the popular computer game *Slender*, in which players attempt to gather information about the mysterious entity while avoiding his attacks. In keeping with the mythos established so early on, players cannot harm Slender Man – all they can do is run away.

Between *Slender*, the ‘Enderman’ plug-in for the immensely popular *Minecraft* game and the several planned commercial feature films about Slender Man (including a creator-sanctioned adaptation of *Marble Hornets*), the mythos is becoming more and more of a commercial endeavour; and, Possamai’s theories suggest, this places it further into the realms of the hyper-real religion model.

Another possible explanation for the rise of Slender Man and its continual crossing between reality and myth can be found in the concept of ‘ostension’.<sup>10</sup> In anthropology, ostension is the phenomenon in which real-life events are shaped and influenced by folklore: examples include the fact that the urban legend of poisoned or booby-trapped Halloween candy predates the first known occurrence of such by some 10 years. Slender Man – originally a composite of many urban legends, stories and older myths – has now come full circle, becoming the inspiration for real-life actions that in turn further strengthen the myth.

### FIVE YEARS...

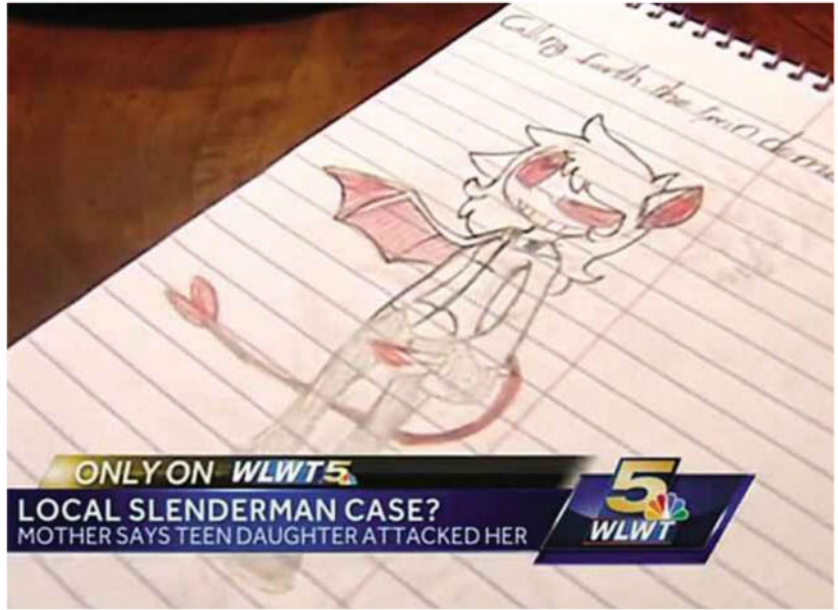
By the start of 2014, the Slender Man phenomenon, though still popular, seemed to be losing ground. Many blogs had closed; others were posting far less frequently. Despite appearances on episodes of TV shows such as *Supernatural*<sup>11</sup> and *Lost Girl*, and even with the upcoming *Marble Hornets* feature film, it seemed that Slender Man was starting to die from lack of attention.



Md170 / CREATIVE COMMONS

ABOVE: Anonymous Slender Man graffiti on a road in Raleigh, North Carolina.





ABOVE LEFT: LA cop killers Jerad and Amanda Miller dressed up as the Joker and Harley Quinn. ABOVE RIGHT: A 'demonic' sketch by the 13-year-old Cincinnati girl.

This can no longer be said to be the case. If Slender Man is a creature powered by our imaginations, at this point he's hardly lacking for sustenance.

The Waukesha incident, and those reported subsequently, focused tremendous attention on the phenomenon. One of the later attacks only had a tangential connection to Slender Man: Jerad Miller, one of the husband/wife cop killers in Las Vegas, had cosplayed (dressed up as) Slender Man for a convention, and their violent actions seemed to be inspired more by American right-wing politics than online monsters.<sup>12</sup> The second case, however, added a new layer of dread. A Hamilton County, Cincinnati, mother told of being attacked by her 13-year-old, Slender Man-obsessed daughter, who wore a white mask as she wielded a kitchen knife at her. "She was someone else during

that attack," the mother said.<sup>13</sup>

Slender Man – that "very satisfactory booger man" – has moved from being just a scary Internet tale with a relatively small audience to becoming a very real nightmare for parents across the world. But his rise also serves to illustrate that the line between fact and fiction which he crosses, even represents, had been blurring for some time.

In a world where the Guy Fawkes mask from Alan Moore's *V For Vendetta* is the international symbol for organised civil disobedience, where democracy protesters in Thailand lift three fingers in the people's solidarity salute from *The Hunger Games*<sup>14</sup> and where Jedi Knights have the same civil liberties as any other religious believers,<sup>15</sup> the distinction between an orthodox faith and a hyperreal belief is looking more like one of degree rather than of kind.

In another five years, Slender Man may simply be one imaginary-but-venerated deity among many. How we deal with that – whether these new gods inspire us to creativity or to remorseless violence – will be a reflection of our nature, not theirs. **FT**

#### AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



IAN 'CAT' VINCENT is a lifelong student of the occult, with a special interest in the use of pop culture motifs in magic, and a former paranormal security consultant. A contributing editor at [dailygrail.com](http://dailygrail.com) and regular columnist for [spiralnature.com](http://spiralnature.com), he has been published in the *Darklore* journals and the *Apocalyptic Imaginary* anthology. He lives in Yorkshire with his wife, the artist Kirsty Hall.

#### FOOTNOTES

1. The entire Something Awful thread is archived at <http://forums.somethingawful.com/showthread.php?threadid=3150591&userid=0&perpage=40&pagenumber=3#post361861415>, although many of the original images, including Knudsens', have been taken down.

2. <http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/the-rake>. The Rake originated on 4chan.com in 2005, in a similar 'create a monster' thread on the /b/ forum. He would occasionally make guest appearances in some of the Slender Man blogs and video series, most notably *EverymanHYBRID*. Creepypasta as a modern form of telling horror stories is a fascinating phenomenon in itself; a good starting point can be found at <http://www.creepypasta.com/>. It should be noted that Creepypasta offered a great deal of support following the Wisconsin incident, including a fundraising

campaign on behalf of the stabbing victim.

3. Interestingly, *Coast To Coast* did have a spate of Slender Man calls in November 2009. The first programme where this occurred can be heard here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qzti3xDlffk0>

4. An exhaustively detailed examination of Slender Man's modus operandi and the associated media can be found at <http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Franchise/TheSlenderManMythos?from=Main.TheSlenderManMythos>

5. <http://www.giantmice.com/features/arg-quickstart/>

6. A very good, slightly fictionalised take on how ARGs work can be found in Walter Jon Williams's novel *This Is Not A Game* (Orbit, 2009).

7. Although deleted, an archive of the

White Elephants blog can be found here; <http://whiteelephantsarchive.blogspot.co.uk/>

8. I discuss the growth and eventual ending of the Core Theory storyline in more detail in my *Darklore* article "Killing Slenderman", which can be read here: [www.dailygrail.com/Guest-Articles/2012/10/Killing-Slenderman](http://www.dailygrail.com/Guest-Articles/2012/10/Killing-Slenderman)

9. Possamai's theories get a good summation in this Theofantastique interview <http://www.theofantastique.com/2007/10/31/adam-possamai-jediism-matrixism-and-hyper-real-spiritualities/>, and I also discuss them in depth in the *Apocalyptic Imaginary* collection (Mythos Media, 2012) and an upcoming *Darklore* article.

10. The concept of ostension is covered in depth at <http://www.ostension.org/>. An excellent article on Slender Man as an example of ostension, by folklorist Jeffrey

A Tolbert, can be found at [www.semioticreview.com/index.php/thematic-issues/issue-monsters/22-the-sort-of-story-that-has-you-covering-your-mirrors-the-case-of-slender-man](http://www.semioticreview.com/index.php/thematic-issues/issue-monsters/22-the-sort-of-story-that-has-you-covering-your-mirrors-the-case-of-slender-man)

11. Where he was referred to as 'Thinman'.

12. [www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2014/06/10/slender-man-linked-murders-of-las-vegas-police\\_n\\_5477422.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2014/06/10/slender-man-linked-murders-of-las-vegas-police_n_5477422.html)

13. [www.wlwt.com/news/hamilton-co-mom-daughters-knife-attack-influenced-by-slender-man/26370588#ixzz35SY4XvUX](http://www.wlwt.com/news/hamilton-co-mom-daughters-knife-attack-influenced-by-slender-man/26370588#ixzz35SY4XvUX)

14. [www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jun/03/hunger-games-salute-banned-thailand](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jun/03/hunger-games-salute-banned-thailand)

15. I look further at this aspect of the hyperreal here: [www.catvincent.com/?p=636](http://www.catvincent.com/?p=636)

# MIRAGE MEN

## UFOs AND THE ART OF DISINFORMATION

Is the true history of UFOs one of a long campaign of deliberate disinformation spun out of the US military? Were saucer scares intended to disguise the machinations of the government? Or to obscure what that government knew about UFOs? **ROLAND DENNING** co-directed, co-edited and co-produced the new documentary *Mirage Men*, which attempts to throw some new light on these questions.

I came late to the *Mirage Men* film project. I had read Mark Pilkington's book of the same name, billed as "a journey into Disinformation, Paranoia and UFOs", and invited him to a seminar on Reality Management in Liverpool in 2011. On the train coming back I asked him what had happened to all the material he and director John Lundberg had filmed (their shoot was the basis of the journey described in the book). Mark told me they had yet to find someone to edit it, and asked: "Do you want to take a look at it?"

I spent the next month alone with around 50 hours of rushes, and it seemed clear that what I saw in the material mirrored John and Mark's ambitions. Over the next two years I worked with artist and filmmaker Kypros Kyprianou to put the film together.

Let me be honest here: I had little prior interest in or knowledge of UFOs. My fascination is with how and what people

YOU'RE GETTING  
A GLIMPSE INTO A  
WHOLE MACHINE  
THAT NOW HAS A  
LIFE OF ITS OWN

believe and how myths are created. *Mirage Men* is not, as we frequently have to explain, an argument that *all* UFO sightings are the product of government disinformation; rather it examines what stemmed from disinformation campaigns by the Air Force Office of Special Investigations (AFOSI) and, in particular,

those fronted by one of its agents, Richard C Doty.

The film starts with the story of engineer Paul Bennewitz who saw strange lights above Kirtland Air Force base in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Doty, on behalf of AFOSI, led him to believe these sightings were the result of ET contact. Enlisting the help of William Moore and others in the UFO community, Doty promulgated the myths of government involvement with extraterrestrials that are still with us today. What Bennewitz actually saw over Kirtland has never been satisfactorily answered.

An extraordinary interview with Rick Doty is at the heart of *Mirage Men* and by looking at him, as the late UFO researcher Bob Durant says, you're getting a glimpse into a whole machine that now has a life of its own. That machine is still running.

"DOTY WAS SIMPLY A PAWN IN A MUCH LARGER GAME" - WILLIAM MOORE

I am sure that Doty inflated his own role in the proceedings – to a consummate story teller, the temptation to aggrandise his role would surely be too difficult to resist.

British computer network specialist Steven Broadbent, in a part of the interview that did not make the final cut, refers to him as a "glorified traffic cop". Doty is indeed now a New Mexico policeman rather than an AFOSI agent, last seen on local TV news reporting the burglary of a diner.

Parapsychologist George Hansen takes this concept further by suggesting that security operatives might be chosen on the basis that they "lacked certain critical judgement... they'd just go into the field and muck it up automatically by themselves without any external controls"; perhaps in the way that an inaccurate bomb is more deadly than an accurate one – no one can predict where it might fall.







Some have seen the affable Doty persona as shielding a high level operative. Others still see Doty as a rogue agent following a left-field agenda that was largely of his own making, the perpetrator of a few misguided stunts that got out of hand. Perhaps this would be the narrative the security services themselves would prefer you to believe – a prime candidate for ‘plausible deniability’.

“A MAN WHO PROBABLY HAS TROUBLE FIGURING OUT WHETHER HE’S LYING OR NOT THESE DAYS” - BOB DURANT

We know that Doty was, by his own admission, a professional disinformant, and here is the conundrum of the self-confessed liar: if he was lying then, why should you believe anything he says now?

Doty presents himself as both cynic and believer. Despite encouraging and circulating fallacious stories of UFO and alien encounters, not only does he claim to believe Roswell was a genuine ET crash, he also tells us, with credible insistence, that he witnessed film of a live alien during his training. Does that film exist? Did Doty actually see it? Did he really believe it? If so, was he himself the victim of a disinformation campaign designed so that he would more effectively disinform others? Or was Doty being tested? And, if so, did he pass or fail?

Finally, there is the possibility that Doty is still an active agent. Perhaps his presentation of the story in this film is his greatest intelligence achievement. Or maybe parts of the story are true, parts are false

and what he has really achieved is to blur those categories.

“IF THIS WAS A HOAX - ONE HAS TO ASK ‘WHY?’” - RICHARD DOLAN

Doty’s role in the Bennewitz affair was that of spreading disinformation rather than creating a hoax. Disinformation has a political purpose at its core; a hoax, however, is done for the hell of it. This is something that true believers struggle to understand: why would anybody go to such elaborate lengths to create a hoax? This answer is, of course: *this is what hoaxers do.*

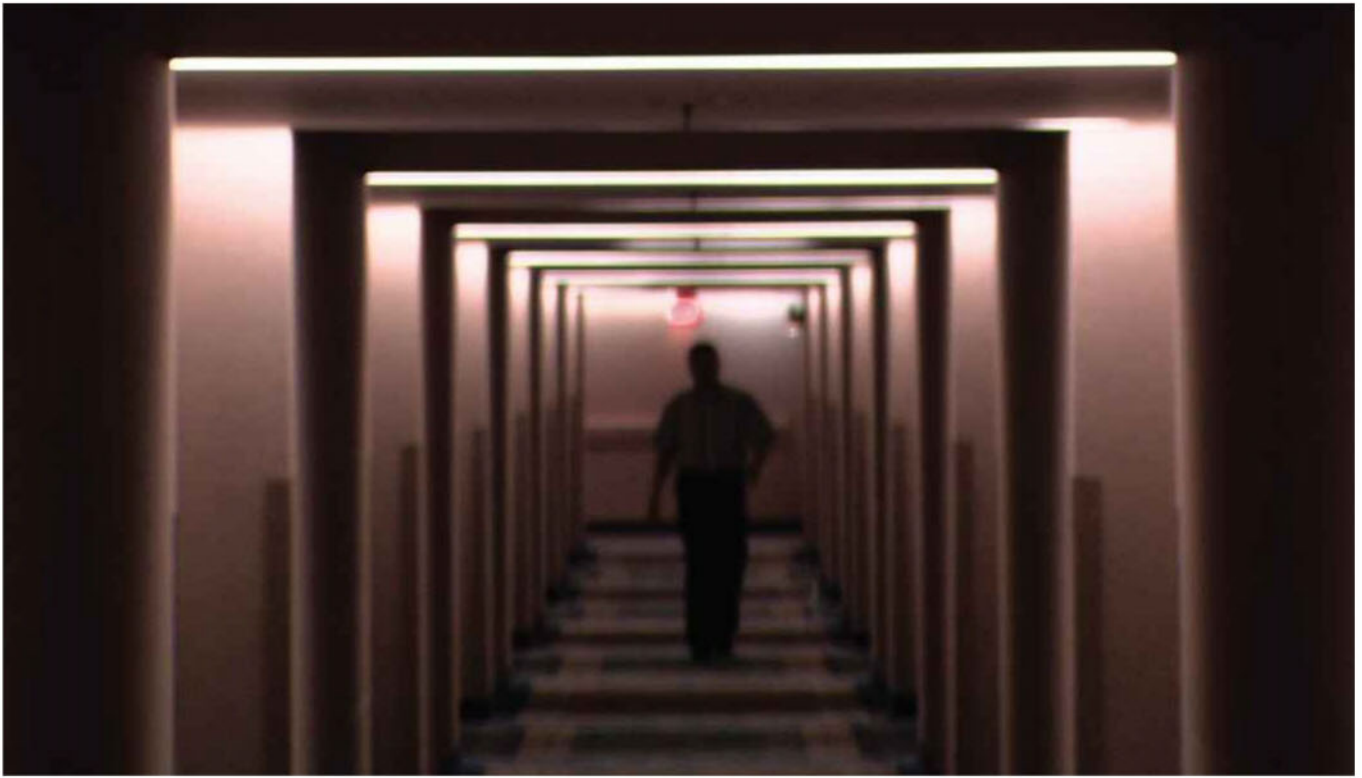
Hoaxers, like magicians, delight in playing with our beliefs, pushing credibility to the limits. But believers don’t understand this

game – they regard it as a pointless form of vandalism, an affront to their honourable search for the truth. How much the *Mirage Men* story is infused with hoax rather than disinformation is impossible to tell, but perhaps professional disinformants can find the joy of hoaxing too tempting to resist and hoaxers can themselves be co-opted for more insidious purposes.

“A GOOD DISINFORMATION CAMPAIGN... ALWAYS INCLUDES NUGGETS OF FACT AND TRUTH” - WALTER BOSLEY

A constant theme of the bigger UFO story is that effective disinformation contains a mixture of truth and falsehood. This





notion enables believers to hang on to the possibility of some small element of truth in even the most fantastic and discredited story. It allows Doty to admit to spreading nonsense yet believe in it at the same time. It keeps in play the more exotic backstories that otherwise would have been dismissed long ago. It keeps the machine alive.

A sub-set of this theme is the concept of partial government disclosure of the 'core story'. In ufologist Richard Dolan's terms, this serves to inoculate us against the truth, to ridicule the idea of ET contact so as to disable the topic from serious scrutiny. From this standpoint, the more the 'core story' is officially dismissed, the more evidence there is for cover-up.

Certainly Doty's technique of simultaneously encouraging and undermining UFO research, which, on first sight might seem contradictory, fits this mode well. What serious scientific researcher would now want to bother with the Roswell story or cattle mutilations? It is an ingenious way to disable a topic. Interesting parallels can be made with the recent infiltration of the police in the UK into radical activist groups. Although often disastrous from a surveillance point of view, they have effectively deactivated many groups by spreading uncertainty and distrust.

British researcher Bill Ryan offers a counterview of partial disclosure: rather than being inoculated against the truth, we are being acclimatised to it. Films like Spielberg's *Close Encounters of The Third Kind* drip-feed us glimpses of real events so that when final disclosure happens, it will not come as a shock. This topsy-turvy world-view enables us to find truth in the most unlikely places – just like in the Hollywood comedy *Men In Black*, where only in the *National Enquirer* can we actually read the facts about UFOs.

Former AFOSI agent Walter Bosley offers us another view again: disinformation

campaigns are there to test the public, to manage our perceptions, to see how we would respond to full disclosure. This is another UFO meme, also perpetuated by Doty: that the world would plunge into panic if the truth of ET contact were revealed. Orson Welles's celebrated radio presentation of HG Wells's *War of The Worlds* is sometimes cited as the sort of panic that could prevail but, despite the fact that Welles himself exaggerated the chaos caused to boost his own reputation, a news report of an invasion by giant malevolent Martian fighting machines is going to cause panic *whatever* the preparation. What seems far more likely is that if something is being protected, it is the government's embarrassment rather than the public's sensitivity.

This points to the central controversy of *Mirage Men*: Was the UFO story created to conceal government machinations, or have government machinations been working hard to conceal the truth about UFOs? Or do both strategies function simultaneously?

The need to tell stories and hear stories is at the heart of our fascination with UFOs.

The 'core story' has all the classic elements of myth: a quest for treasure, a voyage into unknown territory, contact with superior forces, honour and betrayal, the possibility of

salvation, wisdom gained and lost.

We know our governments have a lot to hide; what we can't agree on is just what they are hiding, and if that disagreement is in the governments' favour, then the *Mirage Men* have done their job.

There are those who think both the *Mirage Men* book and film (produced by a company called Perception Management), and even these words you are reading now, are part of a sophisticated campaign, funded by one or more governments, to further obscure the truth about UFOs. If that is your inclination, all I can do is echo the words of Walter Bosely. Could *this* be disinformation? Absolutely. **FT**

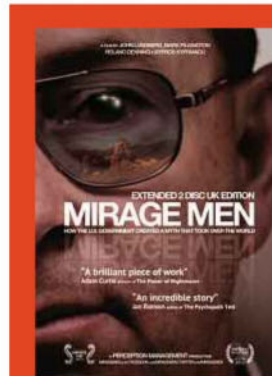
#### MIRAGE MEN

A film by John Lundberg, Mark Pilkington, Roland Denning & Kypros Kyprianou  
<http://miragemen.com>

#### AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



**ROLAND DENNING** is a documentary filmmaker and writer based in London. His satirical novel *The Beach Beneath The Pavement* was published in 2011.



## COMPETITION

Thanks to Perception Management, we have FIVE copies of the special, extended two-disc DVD edition of *MIRAGE MEN* to give away. It contains the complete feature and a ton of extras, including over 90 minutes of unseen material and essays by the film-makers.

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# BRITISH VOODOO

## THE BLACK ART OF

### ROLLO AHMED PART TWO

Rollo Ahmed practised black magic, taught Dennis Wheatley yoga, helped Aleister Crowley find a flat and wrote a popular history of occultism. **CHRISTOPHER JOSIFFE** concludes his profile 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.

**B**y the time his history of magic, *The Black Art*, was published in 1936, Rollo Ahmed seems to have won the respect not just of author Dennis Wheatley – who had suggested he write the book – but of other British occult practitioners of the time.

Ahmed had become a friend of Aleister Crowley. In 1936, he helped Crowley find London lodgings, introducing him to Alan Burnett-Rae, a young man who had inherited a house in Welbeck Street divided up into flats. In his *A Memoir of 666*, Burnett-Rae describes how this came to pass: “A person I got to know at the time was a West Indian negro named Rollo Ahmed, who had written a book about the negro struggle... He was also interested in Magic and voodoo, and claimed to be an ‘adept’ and I had watched him try various experiments of an inconclusive nature. One day he rang me up and said that if I had a flat to let he would bring along a friend of his whom he described as ‘a very highly evolved personality’ who would be a model tenant in every respect.”

Against his better judgement, Burnett-Rae agreed to let the flat to Crowley – and lived to regret it: “Of course, I know now that I was rash. I should have obtained references; I might have known that Ahmed was no guarantor of anything, or anybody, that Crowley was an undisclosed bankrupt and one or two other things.”<sup>1</sup>

In August 1954, Ahmed’s wife Theodora, a spiritualist medium, wrote a letter to Crowley’s friend and artistic collaborator Lady Harris. “My husband was a friend of Aleister Crowley for some years in the 1930s

## THE AHMEDS FELT CUT OFF FROM THE LONDON OCCULT SCENE



– though towards the end, he lost touch,” she explained. “We know that many people treasure his memory & knowledge,” she added, and asked to be put in touch with “other former friends & followers. Perhaps you would kindly tell us of any group in London, or elsewhere, that still meets to carry out his philosophy of Life? My husband is a lecturer on occult subjects.”<sup>2</sup> Seemingly the Ahmeds, now living in Hastings, felt cut off from the London occult scene and wished to re-establish links.

And in a diary entry, the Beast recounted an amusing incident in which Ahmed, seeking to demonstrate his Yogic powers, claimed that he could drink an entire bottle of whisky whilst remaining perfectly sober. Having arranged a time and date for the public demonstration, Crowley was disappointed to record that amongst the gathering of people, there was “one absentee: Rollo.”<sup>3</sup>

### LEVITATION AND LECTURES

Ahmed seemed prone to the issuing of challenges. In 1934 he was living at Clapham, and in March of that year he was invited to an ‘informal tea’ held at London’s Mayfair Hotel. The tea promised to be a singular one, as Dr Alexander Cannon, the guest speaker, was to lecture on ‘How to Get What You Want (A Study of The Magic Laws of the Universe)’.

‘His Excellency’ ‘Sir’ Alexander Cannon was a peculiar figure, a psychiatrist, hypnotist and self-styled ‘Kushog Yogi of

LEFT: Dr Alexander Cannon was challenged by Rollo to a levitation competition.







Northern Tibet' who had been employed at Colney Hatch Lunatic Asylum (where he had treated Crowley's second wife, Maria). His methods of treatment there, using electrical healing methods and harnessing the powers of etheric waves and yogic vibrations, had raised some eyebrows. But it was only when his 1933 book *The Invisible Influence*<sup>4</sup> – which advocated these methods – was published, that his employers, the London County Council, took steps to dismiss him.

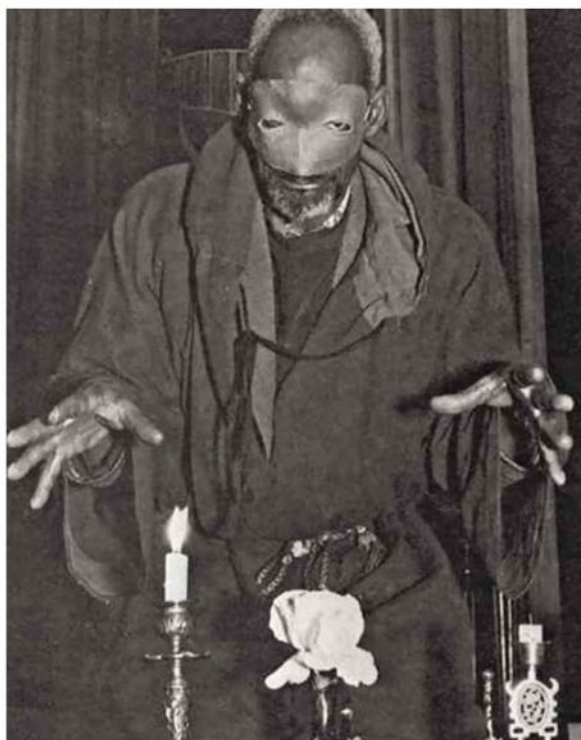
During Cannon's lecture, in which he demonstrated the principle of fire resistance by passing his fingers through the flame of a lit match, he attempted to levitate the dancer Vaslav Nijinsky's daughter Kyra. This he tried to do, firstly by hypnotising her, using one of his numerous therapeutic contraptions – in this case, the hypnoscope – which shone a bright light into her eyes. She did not levitate, but, in trance, evinced distress and discomfort, going into spasms and convulsions – to the extent that audience members remonstrated with Cannon.

One such was Ahmed, who declared that he himself could demonstrate levitation far more effectively and promising to do so at an open meeting convened by the International Institute for Psychical Research. During a heated exchange, Ahmed also claimed to be able to place the 'lice curse' on a victim; this was apparently a voodoo curse in which the victim is attacked by swarms of vermin.

In the event, Ahmed too was unsuccessful in demonstrating effective levitational powers. He lay on a platform, clad only in a loin-cloth, but failed to rise. Cannon claimed that this was because *he* had placed a curse on Ahmed!

The Caleb Buller character in Ahmed's 1936 semi-autobiographical novel *I Rise* begins to make a name for himself in Britain by lecturing on race issues. During World War II, Ahmed himself came to be known as a public speaker, but his chosen subjects were esoteric ones. He appears to have relocated to the West Country in 1939, perhaps moving from London to escape the impending Blitz.

In her history of MacGregor Mathers and the Golden Dawn, *Sword of Wisdom*, artist, occultist and author Ithell Colquhoun states that Ahmed was at one time a member of the Hermes Lodge of the Golden Dawn, based in Bristol.<sup>5</sup> Certainly, he was living in Bristol during the 1940s and became an established figure on the local esoteric lecture circuit. In October 1941 he appeared at the Bath First Spiritualist Church, where he inaugurated a series of lectures and study classes. Later that month he gave a talk at the Moffat Logan Discussion Class in Bristol on the subject of 'The New Age.' In January 1942 he lectured at the Gloucester Spiritual Community, billed as "Mr Rollo Ahmed, Bristol, Clairvoyant." Other hot topics for his wartime lectures were 'Death', 'Consciousness', and 'Peace'.



LEFT: A masked Rollo Ahmed, as seen in a 1950s newspaper. BELOW: The Bristol HQ of the Hermes Lodge of the Golden Dawn; Ahmed was said to have been a member.

practitioner of strange arts who lived in Sussex... In 1954 he was living in an old house in Hastings." This was Harpsichord House, Cobourg Place: "An upper room in the house was used as a magical temple. Here Ahmed used to receive visitors, attired in a hooded purple robe, his face covered by a black mask. He was of Egyptian extraction, white-haired, dark-skinned, and with a neat Vandyke beard... People came to his candle-lit temple to obtain talismans. Sometimes they came to seek relief from the spells and curses they believed to have been laid upon them by other practitioners.

"On Hallowe'en, 1954, Ahmed staged a ritual at which 13 people were present. Its purpose was to release a young man from a black magic spell which had been cast on him two years previously."<sup>6</sup>

And in her *The Rebirth of Witchcraft*, Valiente, describing Brighton's raffish, bohemian atmosphere, wrote: "Its nickname is 'London by the sea' and, like the capital itself, Brighton has always had its share of the eccentric and the bizarre – and sometimes of the sinister. Between the wars, Rollo Ahmed, author of the book *The Black Art*, had an active magical circle in Brighton... Some of Ahmed's old students and followers were still in Brighton at the time of which I write and still performing their rituals. These sometimes involved blood sacrifices, usually of a cockerel."<sup>7</sup>

In a statement written for Peter Haining's *The Anatomy of Witchcraft*, Ahmed recounts an amusing incident which took place in Brighton's Royal Pavilion: "I particularly remember an occasion at the Pavilion, when I believe my Black robes and accompanying incense scared people into thinking I was practically the Devil himself, that I had a great sale of small amulets to ward off the possible evil effects of having witnessed a pseudo Black Magic ceremony. Pseudo, because it is obvious it would be impossible to openly hold a true Black Magic ceremony in a well-known public building."<sup>8</sup>

However, from being a mere pseudo-practitioner, Ahmed gradually became embroiled in genuine malefic magic, as he explained in his statement for Haining: "At this period I saw a good deal of Aleister Crowley in London and Brighton and was present at many of his gatherings. Originally my interest in Black Magic as such was purely detached.

"I had practised rituals and experimented personally with much of the knowledge that had come my way in youth and through study, but the darker side had no direct appeal. However, I found it was impossible to maintain

## HE CLAIMED TO BE ABLE TO PLACE THE 'LICE CURSE' ON A VICTIM

### STRANGE ARTS

Thus, it becomes apparent that Ahmed did not present himself solely as a voodoo specialist; rather, his association with the Golden Dawn's ceremonial magic locates him in the Western tradition. Doreen Valiente, the "mother of modern witchcraft" long associated with Sussex, and Brighton in particular, mentions Ahmed in this context. In *Where Witchcraft Lives*, she recalled Ahmed as "A modern



the detached approach – imperceptibly, but surely, the poison of evil seeps into the character – and one cannot associate with those to whom ‘Do What Thou Will Shall Be The Whole Of The Law’ is actual doctrine, without becoming seriously affected.

“The will weakens, moral values become obscured, the senses blunted. Habits, motives and actions which would previously have appeared grotesque or revolting now appear amusing and desirable, or worse still are taken in deadly seriousness as being a means of obtaining the favour of the Powers of Darkness.”<sup>9</sup>

Eventually managing to break free from what he believed were the snares of black magic and its practitioners, Ahmed adopted a ‘poacher turned gamekeeper’ approach, seeking to expose and publicise these secretive cults: “I do not hesitate to say that I became mentally and morally affected by these things... My nerves also suffered and I became affected in ways which only those who know of, and will admit the powers of the Unseen, will appreciate.

“After a period of prolonged illness and serious misfortune, I gradually disentangled myself from the abyss which threatened to engulf me and I have since set myself to the task of resisting and showing up the evil wherever it is to be encountered. It is an absolute fact, that when you have participated in any form of spiritual evil, there is a force and power, call it what you will, that makes

periodic attempts to conquer you again and draw you back. I am sure that all who have had similar experiences will agree.

“Long after I had disconnected myself, circumstances would arise or people be drawn across my path which aimed at my material and moral destruction... Nevertheless I shall continue my work and if I need to don the role of a Black Magician to do so, I shall not hesitate for an instant. That is my promise and that is my vow.”<sup>10</sup>

### TABLOIDS AND TROUBLES

This statement echoes remarks Ahmed made (as “Mr A”) in a lurid story that appeared in one of the *Sunday Pictorial’s* investigations into black magic in Britain. The journalist who had written the piece claimed to be in possession of a dossier, “the result of many years’ work by an investigator, a Mr A, who is out to expose these malignant people and their teachings and practices. This dossier gives the most detailed information on the activities of many well-known people.”<sup>11</sup>

Three years later, in 1954, Ahmed was featured in a story in the *Daily Sketch*. He is living at the 19th-century Harpsichord House in Hastings, and explains to the journalist, Peter Stewart, that he bought the house with a £1,000 mortgage, but is currently receiving National Assistance and is £150 in arrears.

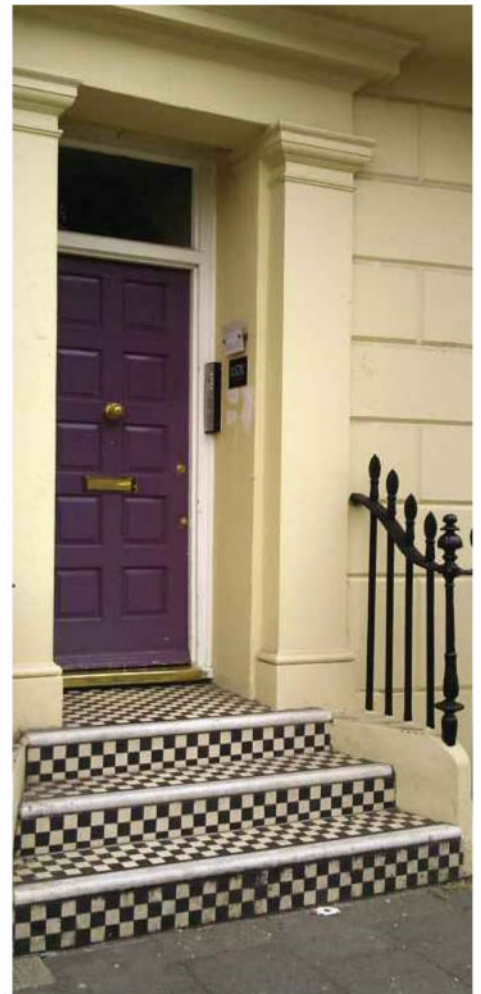
In the article, Ahmed is a “black magic practitioner” and “father of five, [a] dark-skinned slim man with white hair and a

carefully-trimmed Vandyke beard.” Stewart describes Ahmed’s “temple of black magic,” a locked room on the first floor, “a vast, clean, sparsely-furnished room with tall latticed windows... A cheap lithograph of Christ on the mantelshelf is crowded by jungle idols, an incense burner and a painted sphere used in occult rites.” This combination of Christian imagery and what were presumably African statuettes sounds like an altar from one of the African Diasporic traditions such as Vodou or Santeria. The incense burner is more standard esoteric fare, however. The room’s walls are lined with “30 hard, uncomfortable chairs” with a table at one end, where Ahmed sits. He explains to the journalist that he will be receiving a visitor at the weekend, a lady from Bristol (no, this is not the start of a limerick). She has written to him seeking his help in regaining the affections of a former partner, a man named Frank, whose Army identity bracelet she has enclosed, together with a lock of his mother’s hair. Ahmed had already written to her, enclosing a talisman which, he explains, “has called for work on two periods of the new moon. The aim of the power is to compel the person to do as you wish. If they do not then misfortune will be their lot.”

Dressed in “a red silk scarf, fawn beret and duffle coat”, Ahmed describes the ritual that will take place when the woman arrives at the weekend. “A single light candle will light the room. The electricity [will be] cut off. He will receive her in a purple-cowled cloak and a



TOPHAM PICTUREPOINT / TOPFOTO



CHRISTOPHER JOSIFFE

ABOVE: Sussex witch Doreen Valiente described Ahmed as “a modern practitioner of the strange arts”. ABOVE: 23 Old Steine, one of Rollo’s Brighton addresses.



# FATHER PRACTISES BLACK MAGIC IN TEMPLE AT HOLIDAY RESORT

## Woman seeks spell

By PETER STEWART

DO you believe in black magic? It is still practised in England—in the middle of this 20th century.

And a woman is travelling 180 miles from Bristol to Hastings to ask a black magic practitioner to work a spell on a former boy friend.

The practitioner is Mr. Rollo Ahmed, father of five, a dark-skinned, slim man with white hair and a carefully-trimmed Vandyke beard.

He lives in a 150-year-old, ten-roomed house in Coling place called Harpsichord House. It looks down 300 feet on the storm-bound gulfers in the harbour.

☉ ☽ ☿

A locked first-floor room in that house holds what he calls "the Temple of black magic."

It is a vast, clean, sparsely-furnished room with tall, latticed windows from which his visitors

## on ex-boy friend

Arrived prepared after he returned yesterday, dressed in a red silk scarf, fawn beret and duffle coat, from a shopping expedition.

"Black magic is practised in Brighton, Birmingham and London," he told me as he spread his slim black fingers before the fire in his sitting-room.

"It is genuine. I believe in it. Others believe in it." He took a letter from an index file.

It bore the Kingswood Bristol postmark. It was from the woman visitor he expected—a letter written on cheap lined notepaper in a round unformed hand.

It spoke of her interest in "a gentleman in a higher social sphere than myself" who lives at Bristol.



ABOVE AND BELOW: Rollo Ahmed photographed in his 'temple' at Harpsichord House, Hastings, for an article in the *Daily Sketch*, 27 November 1954.

black cardboard mask to the throb of jungle drums – a gramophone record. Music will play, too...<sup>12</sup>

And in the same year, Ahmed made another appearance in the *Sunday Pictorial*, this time as "Mr X". The headline of the piece was "BLACK MAGIC, 'Pic' men eavesdrop on the Devil." Reporters had been invited by Ahmed to observe him as he conducted a magical ceremony. Ahmed, as "Mr X", had told them: "I want to prove that people in Britain are interested in magic." Gerald Gardner, commenting on the bias he perceived in the article, was not impressed: "A ceremony was said to have been performed to release a young man from a Black Magic spell cast on him some time before; this was enlivened by playing a gramophone record of an old negro jazz number. The article was written to suggest that something wicked was going on. Personally I cannot see it is so very wicked to attempt to release someone from a Black Magic spell. But a reporter said: 'I have seen a black magician kneel before a candle and pray to the devil'.

Now, I think this was a very rude allusion to their host's colour. And, anyhow, the Devil, possibly being frightened of the reporters, did not come. The other reporter said he had seen this magician massage a blonde girl's back. That apparently was all that happened."<sup>13</sup>

Valiente had also referred to rituals conducted by Ahmed to lift curses and hexes from afflicted individuals; however, there was a more cynical – even criminal – side to this aspect of his work. Rollo Ahmed was imprisoned on three occasions for fraud.

The first incident took place during the



autumn of 1930 on the island of Jersey, where Ahmed was living with his wife. At this time, the Channel Islands still had a rich and living tradition of witchcraft, ghosts, the evil eye, and so on, even if it was beginning to fade under modernity's glare. In fact, such age-old folk beliefs were given a new, if temporary, lease of life following the rise of Spiritualism and mysticism, during a period roughly between 1850-1950. Ahmed seems to have exploited these beliefs, particularly amongst rural Islanders.

A Mr and Mrs Dumaresq Rondel, of Cemetery Farm, St John, were the aggrieved

parties. Rondel had himself served one month's imprisonment some six years previously, after he severely beat and kicked an elderly neighbour whom he thought had placed a curse on his horse. Subsequently, Rondel's farm fell on hard times, with Rondel believing that someone – presumably the neighbour – had placed a spell on one of his daughters, and on his animals and crops.

Enter Rollo Ahmed, who told the desperate farmer that he could lift the ill luck for a fee of £5 (approximately £260 in today's money). Whatever magic Ahmed worked, it did not change the luck, and Rondel went back to him; Ahmed explained that it was a difficult job, but that he could sort matters out for a further 20 guineas (about £1,100 today). Again, there was no improvement in the farm's fortunes, and a further £65 (£3,360) was paid.

It emerged in court that Ahmed's attempts to cleanse the farm involved his walking around the farmhouse, uttering incantations, while striking at the doors and windows with a knife. During this procedure he was dressed in a black gown, red girdle, and a red fez. He is also described as burning incense (or burning coals on a shovel around the farm) in an effort to cleanse the place of evil influences. Statuettes and a powder (with which Ahmed said he would blow the evil spirits away) were also utilised – perhaps a hint of Obeah or Voodoo methods.

It was when Ahmed requested the Rondels give him another £70 that the police were called in. It was alleged in court that he had threatened them with death if they didn't pay up; letters sent to them were signed with a seal bearing crossbones and the name "Ahmed". He also gave Rondel a packet



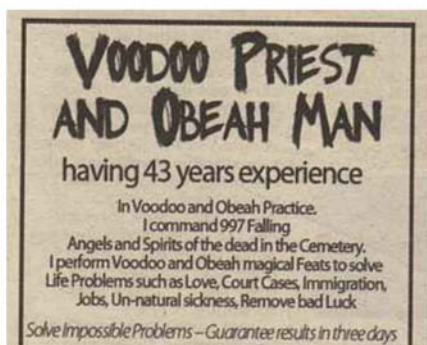
containing a “mystic” powder, with the injunction not to open it on pain of death, to be followed by the deaths of 14 members of his family.

Ahmed’s defence was that the initial £5, and the subsequent £65, had been payments for two magic rings; when one of the rings was produced in court, the magistrate, examining it, declared that it was worth one penny. Ahmed was found guilty of “false representations and the exercising of ‘black magic’” and sentenced to nine months’ hard labour, with the magistrate telling the unfortunate farmer Rondel: “You should be in an asylum.” When officials opened the packet of powder in court, Rondel had become visibly alarmed, indicating his belief in Ahmed’s powers.<sup>14</sup>

Sadly, this was not to be Ahmed’s only court appearance in Jersey. In 1932, living at Havre des Pas with his wife and their two children, he was again convicted of obtaining small sums from a number of people by misrepresentation. This time, he was sentenced to one month’s imprisonment with hard labour. At this point in his life he is described as being near destitute, scraping a living by selling women’s clothes by mail order.

Fourteen years later, in autumn 1946 he was charged with using false pretences to obtain the sum of £800. The court heard that Mrs Violet Rogers, of Castlebar Road, Ealing, a 67-year-old widow, had been a Spiritualist for 33 years. She was a firm believer in the powers of a medium, Mrs Eve Lukat, who claimed to have a spirit guide, a Chinese Mandarin named Tai Li, who spoke through her. Mrs Rogers had been in contact with Tai Li since 1942.

Ahmed had apparently told Mrs Rogers that Tai Li had suggested he approach her for a loan of between £300 and £500; he explained that he was shortly to have three books published and that he would be able to repay her with the ensuing royalties. Mrs Rogers, a relatively wealthy woman, sold stocks worth £500 to give to Ahmed. He later asked for (and received) a further £90 in order that he might hire the prestigious Kingsway Hall to give a lecture on ‘Occultism.’ As it turned out, however, he



had only hired a small room. Further details emerged as the case progressed. It seems that Tai Li (via Ahmed) had told Mrs Rogers that she was guilty of wrongdoing in a past life and that financial assistance to Ahmed would be a way of righting these wrongs. In November 1946, Ahmed was found guilty of fraud and fraudulent conversion, and sentenced to two years’ imprisonment.

It is notable that Ahmed claimed, at least initially, to be able to lift curses and not place them. While this may indicate his benevolent intentions, it may also have been through a desire to avoid prosecution under the Witchcraft Act (only repealed in 1951). We might also regard his lectures and advertised Yoga tuition as a respectable cover; his clients, in the privacy of his consulting room, may have had other requests.

## REMEMBERING ROLLO

What, then, are we to make of Rollo Ahmed? Was he ultimately just another hustler, con-man and charlatan? I would caution against such a one-dimensional interpretation. Dennis Wheatley, who was no fool, had a great liking and respect for Ahmed. If Wheatley had thought him a mere crook, would he have recommended he be recruited for Intelligence work during WWII? Wheatley was a member of the London Controlling Section, the secretive, high-level co-ordinating body for wartime code-breaking, deception and security operations (for more on the work of the LCS, see David Sutton, ‘Bodyguard of Lies’, FT185:38-45). Wheatley’s boss was Maxwell Knight, alias Ian Fleming’s ‘M’, who asked

LEFT: Rollo’s spirit lives on in this advert from the *Jamaica Weekly Gleaner*, 19-15 June 2014.

Wheatley to “sound him [Ahmed] out very gently particularly with a view to finding out if he would be willing to do this sort of work abroad.”<sup>15</sup>

However we may disapprove of the illegitimate money-raising schemes for which Ahmed was convicted, I think it would be unfair to condemn him as nothing more than a con-man. After Crowley’s inheritance had run out, the Beast was not averse to getting hold of money by dubious means. Just as Ahmed had swindled Mrs Rogers of Ealing out of a large sum of money, ostensibly to finance publication of his books, Crowley did the same thing to his own followers on several occasions, using the cash for his own lavish living expenses. Crowley is not remembered solely as a confidence trickster, but also for his erudition, his prolific literary and artistic output, and for having written one of the earliest Yoga and meditation books by a Westerner, as well as being the founder of a new religion. Ahmed, too, deserves to be remembered as one of Britain’s early practitioners and teachers of Yoga, as a popular early 20th century historian of magic and as the author of a caustic and elegant critique of 20th century British racism – just as much as for his flamboyant black cloak and red fez, and for selling cheap rings at high prices. **FT**

With thanks to Phil Baker; Charles Beck (Dennis Wheatley Virtual Museum); Anthony Clayton; Graham King (Museum of Witchcraft, Boscastle) for allowing access to the Doreen Valiente collection; and the staff of the Warburg Institute’s and British Library’s Reading Rooms.

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# THE FIRST FORTEANS

## 8. HG WELLS & LANCE SIEVEKING

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

### HG WELLS

I won't go into the achievements, ideas and literary legacy of HG Wells (1866–1946) as they are better and more fully served elsewhere; my job here is simply to note any interaction between Wells and Fort and illuminate their influence on the cultural milieu from which the UK's First Forteans emerged.

When he was 15, Fort wrote off to Jules Verne for his autograph and was rewarded with a signed letter from the French pioneer of modern science fiction. Jim Steinmeyer, in his biography of Fort, observes that that letter, if it could be found, would be worth a lot today; but most probably, he supposes, Fort must have sold it at some point. Although Fort never met or even sent a similar request to his contemporary, Wells, it seems they might never have been able to be friends for Wells once notoriously dismissed Fort as "one of the most damnable bores who ever cut scraps from out-of-the-way newspapers," adding, "And he writes like a drunkard".

This "calumny" as Theodore Dreiser calls it, was in a letter Wells wrote to Dreiser – dated 9 April 1931 – after Dreiser had sent him his personal copy of *Book of the Damned*. Wells replied that he was sending the book straight back and, by the way, a copy of *Lo!*, which someone else had sent him, "has just gone into my wastepaper basket."

Wells' antipathy to Fort seems quite ironic and Dreiser, ever Fort's friend, sprang to his defence, likening Fort's imagination to both Verne's and Wells's own. Dreiser almost chokes in disbelief: "You, the author of *The War of the Worlds*, to be so sniffish and snotty over *The Book of the Damned!*"

That year, 1931, was a critical period in the history of forteana. Fort was incubating the leukæmia that finished him 11 months later, and struggling against increasing tiredness to finish his last book, *Wild Talents*.



LEFT: HG Wells, photographed on a trip to Australia in 1938, would rather cuddle koalas than read Charles Fort.

1938. "All Wells' books banned in Franco's Spain... rumour going round Hollywood that Charlie Chaplin has asked HG Wells to write the script of his new film 'about a bewildered little Jew who is mistaken for a dictator to whom he bears a likeness...?' Hitler and Goebbels also took pops at Wells.<sup>2</sup>

It is not until the end of the war that we have another good reference to Wells. As far as records go, the first post-war gathering of SF fans was in London mid-August 1945, and attended by more than a dozen austerity-hardened fan-veterans including Walter Gillings, Harold Chibbett, Michael Rosenblum, Sam Youd, Benson Herbert and Maurice Hugli (one of Eric Frank Russell's pals).

As Sam Youd – later better known by his pen-name John Christopher (author of *The Death of Grass*, *The Tripods*, etc) – recalls: "It coincided with VJ Day, and we were all very excited about the news of the atom bomb.<sup>3</sup> There was a move (Benson Herbert inspired, I believe) to telephone or call on Wells, and we went so far as to stand outside his house in Regent's Park, but wiser counsels prevailed and we refrained from pestering the poor old man."

I've long been amused by curious philosophical resonances – purely unintentional I'm sure – between Fort and Wells. For example, Fort often characterised human mental intransigence with the phrase "our slippery brains"; and, somewhere, Wells once wrote "The forceps of our minds are clumsy forceps and crush the truth a little in taking hold of it."

In his review for *FT* of a recent appraisal of Wells, Tim Chapman noted other otherworldly parallels between Wells's writings and those of Fort.<sup>4</sup> "Wells proclaimed... his

HE DISMISSED FORT AS "ONE OF THE MOST DAMNABLE BORES WHO EVER CUT SCRAPS FROM OUT-OF-THE-WAY NEWSPAPERS"

Just three months before Wells's dismal reaction to Dreiser's gift, the Fortean Society was established in New York, so it is historically interesting to note Wells's reference to it when he closes the letter with this rather spiteful valedictory: "God dissolve (and forgive) your Fortean Society."<sup>1</sup>

This altercation passed; Dreiser and Thayer certainly never mentioned it to the UK anchor of the Fortean Society, Eric Frank Russell. It was also unknown to the pre-war SF fans – many of them insipient

forteans – who were quite familiar with Wells's stories and looked up to him as a kind of elder statesman of SF. It was inevitable, then, that the great man was invited to attend the very first SF convention planned for January 1937, along with the other 'great', Prof. Olaf Stapledon. Apparently, Wells agreed to attend but at the last minute sent a congratulatory message in his stead.

The next notable mention of Wells is a humorous note by Maurice Hanson in his *Novæ Terræ* newszine at the end of



belief in the equal significance of every person and part of the great order of the cosmos,” writes Chapman, which resonates with Fort’s musings on the whole being God to its parts, on the Platonic opposites which Fort envisioned as being joined by an existence-sized Hyphen, and so on.

Chapman goes on to pick out this sentence from Wells: “The wheel-smashed frog in the road and the fly drowning in the milk are important and correlated with me.” Fort wrote “We pick up an existence by its frogs.”

“It’s always the frogs,” notes Chapman.

### LANCE SIEVEKING

Someone who knew HG Wells very well was Lance Sieveking (1896-1972), father of our esteemed colleague of this parish, Paul. Godson of GK Chesterton (1874-1936), he was in the vanguard of radio and TV broadcasting. His mentor at Cambridge University was the psychologist, writer and noted eccentric, CK Ogden (1889-1957) who founded the influential Heretics Society there.

In 1926, at the age of 30, Lance joined the British Broadcasting Company (before it was a Corporation) and within 16 years had produced more than 200 radio plays, including many that he had adapted from the stories of HG Wells. He is also credited for producing the first television play, which aired in July 1930.

Lance gained some notoriety for having adapted his own novel, *A Tomb with a View* (1950), a gothic thriller in which characters discuss Aleister Crowley. I offer no apologies for expanding this issue’s Crowley reference, which provides an opportunity (below) to savour Lance’s delivery, likened by one critic to that of an after-dinner raconteur “telling stories about running away from lions in East Africa, and beginning with lines such as, ‘One warm night in June 1917 I became the man who nearly killed the Kaiser.’”<sup>5</sup>

Lance was constantly experimenting with new techniques – sound effects, running commentaries, make-up, combining words and music, pre-recorded insertions, scene transitions, etc – in both his radio and TV production, to the extent that he was lauded by many of his colleagues at all levels of the BBC. (The now-common phrase “back to square one” has been widely – though probably erroneously – said to derive from



PAUL SIEVEKING



ABOVE: Lance Sieveking (right) with Col GL Thomson broadcasting a racing commentary from a tree in Rectory Meadow, Cambridge, 1927. LEFT: Montague Summers.

*Prophetic Camera* (1922), found in a pawn shop, which yields ‘impossible’ anachronistic images; and *All Children Must Be Paid For* (1929), a satire that anticipates by two years Huxley’s *Brave New World*.<sup>7</sup>

Paul characterised his father as having “a passion for what the surrealists called ‘the eruption of the marvellous’.” What is significant to us here is that Lance, as explained by media historian Prof. David Hendy, “did more than anyone else – except perhaps Lord Reith himself – to establish the credibility of broadcasting as a serious creative venture” by “not just making radio but in regularly, stylishly, explaining its artistic virtues.” In his well-connected life, Lance had encountered a great many celebrities, artists and writers and recorded them in his book *The Eye of the Beholder* (1957), including his conversations with Crowley, which informed *A Tomb with a View*.

During his Cambridge days Lance often dined with the Heretics Society at the Half Moon pub, where he once encountered “a notorious and curious individual [whose] bulbous eyes gleamed maliciously”. It was Montague Summers<sup>8</sup>, from whose conversation he first heard about Crowley, “a great friend of his, it seemed – although he

a grid plan that Lance devised for use by commentators in the first live broadcasting of a football match<sup>6</sup>).

The exciting potential of these new media was an open invitation to Lance to apply his creativity to facilitate his war-stressed audiences in indulging their imaginations. Many of these productions mixed fantasy and SF tropes with everyday life; some even explored themes of temporal phenomena and time travel. Paul Sieveking writes: “His novel *Stampede!* [1924]

which he began writing in 1912, features a telepathic helmet that transcribes thoughts and expresses emotions with a range of symbols, as well as a death ray and a Scotland Yard detective who believes in fairies. His second novel, *The Ultimate Island* [1925], concerns the last refuge of the survivors of Atlantis; while his last, *A Private Volcano* [1955], imagines what might happen if the alchemists’ dream of transmuting base metals to gold were realised.” I might also add such stories as the eponymous



didn't think much of him as a magician. He was on the right track, it seemed, but was always trying to introduce all manner of things that did not properly belong to 'The Old Religion', as witchcraft was called."

Later, in 1928, Lance bumped into Crowley while convalescing in Cassis on the French Riviera. Crowley proffered his card. "On it was engraved 'Sir Aleister Crowley, Cefalù, Sicily'. I glanced from the card to the man, and back again to the card... 'I didn't know you had been knighted,' I said. He made a shrugging gesture with a fat hand on which was an enormous gold ring engraved with hieroglyphs. 'It is merely a free translation of the title of Chevalier that the King of Spain conferred on me. I find it more useful in this form.'"

At drinks after a meal, Lance asked Crowley what he thought of Montague Summers. "'I haven't seen Monty Summers for years,' answered Crowley, knocking the end off his cigar with the air of an executioner. 'He knows what would happen.' 'What would happen?' 'I should turn him into a toad.'" Then, Crowley "began a monologue that lasted, with occasional interruptions from me, until after one the next morning... At one point he sat quiet silent for a long time, looking fixedly at me. I thought: is he trying to hypnotise me? But I felt nothing. Then he closed his fists as if in a great effort of concentration.

'Ah!' he exclaimed at length, opening his eyes and relaxing, 'I was just controlling one of my projections.' 'Oh,' I responded politely, wondering which particular projection he was referring to. There were several visible on his person."<sup>9</sup>

To bring this back on topic, I present the only mention of Lance in the SF fanzines that I have found. This note by Maurice Hanson from the issue of his *Novae Terrae*



published in early 1937, seems to imply that Lance's work was indeed generally known and appreciated, certainly by the SF fans. After commiserating with HG Wells about a poor

LEFT: Crowley writing to Sieveking.  
BELOW: GK Chesterton's drawing for the dust jacket of *Stampepe*.

reading of his 1903 short story *The Truth about Pyecraft*, Hanson writes: "Lord Dunsany's radio play *Mr. Faithful* – the story of a man who took a job as a dog – was heard here recently, the production being in the extremely capable hands of Lance Sieveking. Sieveking, it seems, is the only exponent here of the new art-form of radio-drama; in the past he has written and produced numerous fantasies and science fiction radio plays, as for example *The Wings of the Morning* – in 1934 – an excellent time-travel drama."

Hanson then quotes from what seems to have been a recent communication from Lance: "In 1923 [actually 1924] I published a book called *STAMPEPE* ... illustrated splendidly by G.K. Chesterton ... packed full of inventions ... a ray which killed anything on which it rested ... a sound which drove everyone mad ... I invented a thought machine ... thoughts were recorded for future reference. There were graphs for thoughts which could not be formulated in words." Lance was offering remaining copies for 10 shillings, "autographed copies 15 shillings".

This was published on the eve of that first UK convention at Leeds. <sup>10</sup>

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For their generous help, my thanks go to the SF fan historians and archivists who went out of their way to preserve the correspondence, images, fanzines and reports of the day. Chief among those are: Rob Hansen's **FIAWOL** archive – <http://www.fiawol.org.uk/FanStuff/> ... Dave Langford for his **Ansible** archive – <http://news.ansible.co.uk/> ... Greg Pickersgill for his **Gostak** archive – <http://www.gostak.demon.co.uk/> NB: For ease of reading, I omit many references here – but a fully referenced and linked version will follow later on my CFI blogsite: <http://blogs.fortean.org/bob>

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1 Dreiser's Fortean Society (Letters 2:532). See *Dreiser's Private Library* by Roark Mulligan. Originally published in *Dreiser Studies* 33.2, 2002, pp.40-76.) – <http://sceti.library.upenn.edu/dreiser/mulligan.cfm>. This exchange between Wells and Dreiser has been extracted in

Jim Steinmeyer's *Charles Fort: The Man Who Invented the Supernatural* (2008, p.255-257)

2 *Time Magazine* (8 May 1939) reporting on an exchange between Franklin Roosevelt and Hitler which "made even non-Nazi smile". Roosevelt complained that "Millions of people now fear war." Hitler shot back: "The reason for this fear lies simply and solely in an unbridled agitation on the part of the press [...] which in the end goes so far that interventions from another planet are believed possible and cause scenes of desperate alarm." This being an allusion both to an unregulated press given to outbreaks of hysteria, and the specific example of the reaction to Orson Welles's radio broadcast of Wells's *The War of the Worlds* in October 1938. Goebbels branded Wells's anti-German statements as "criminal" in January 1939 – see Trove Archive: <http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/49786565>

3 VJ Day: The Allies declared 15 August 1945 as Victory over Japan Day. The Hiroshima bomb was dropped on 6 August (Fort's birthday) and the Nagasaki one on 9 August (Fort's false birthday). I'm partly to blame for this birthdate mixup when, in an early FT, I got it wrong.

4 Tim Chapman reviewed *HG Wells: Traversing Time* (2004) by W Warren Wagar, in **FT194:60** (Mar 2005) – archived here: <http://www.2ubh.com/reviews/Wagar.html>

5 Daniel Swift in *The Spectator* (1 Mar 2014)

6 On 22 January 1927, the BBC broadcast the very first radio commentary of a football match. The match in question was a Division One clash between Arsenal and Sheffield United at Highbury, which ended 1-1 – <http://davidhaviland.com/?p=148>. Purely coincidentally, as I write, this was the very topic in 'Mythconceptions' #175. **FT315:23**.

7 I draw nearly all the information about Lance Sieveking from *Airborne* (Strange Attractor, 2013), being his reminiscences selected and annotated by his son Paul.

8 Montague Summers (1880–1948) was an antiquarian best known for his scholarly studies of witches, vampires, werewolves (much of which he seemed to believe true) and the first English translation (in 1928) of the notorious 15th-century witch-hunter's manual, the *Malleus Maleficarum*. He often presented himself as a Catholic priest, trained for the Church of England, but never advanced, according to *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, "probably because of rumours of his interest in Satanism and accusations of sexual impropriety with young boys, for which he was tried and acquitted."

9 *Airborne*, op. cit., pp.184-190.

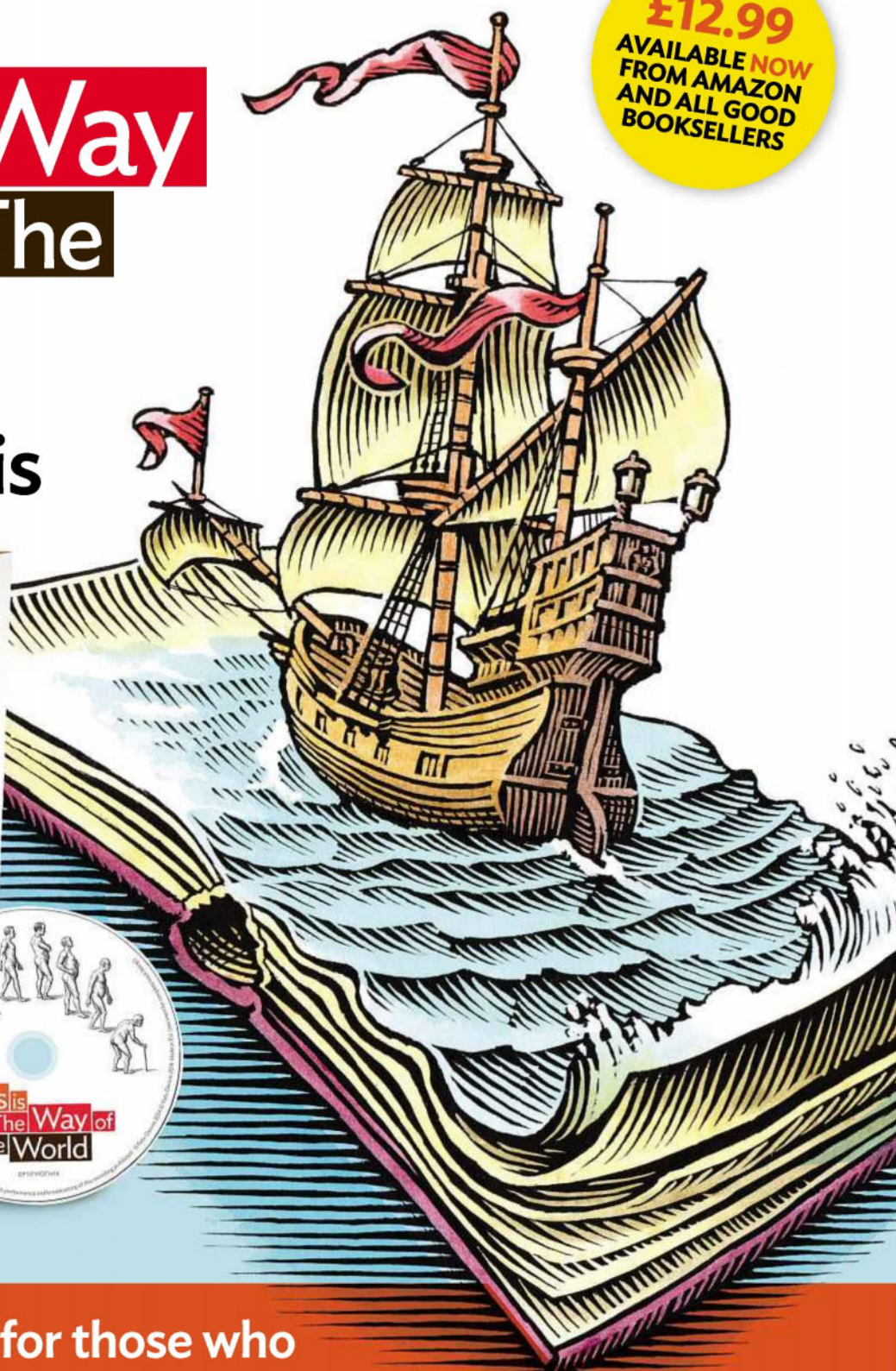
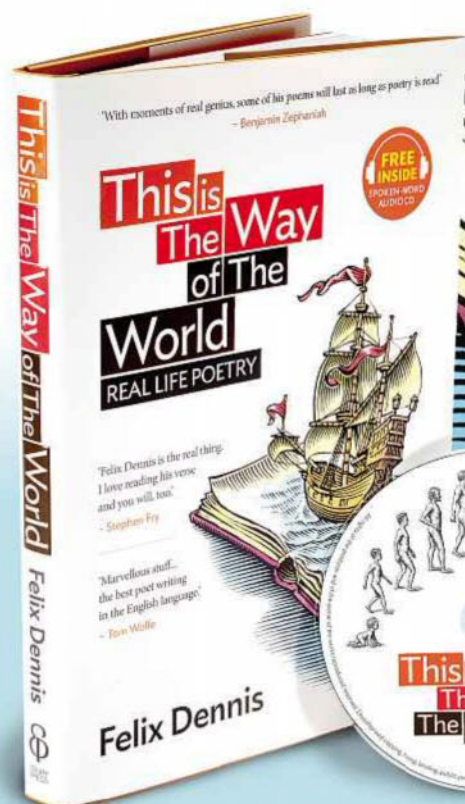


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## Of gods and men

DAVID HAMLING argues that the post-mortem deification of Hugo Chávez has more to do with Latin American religion than Communist cult-building



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

In Venezuela, the late President Hugo Chávez is a kind of god. This is perhaps not as surprising as SD Tucker thinks (FT312:42-45), nor is it necessarily connected with Chavez being a left-wing politician. It is all to do with Latin American religion.

Anthropologists have long tracked how hero-worship translates rulers into gods – a process known in ancient Greece as ‘apotheosis.’ Alexander the Great famously demanded to be worshipped as a god during his lifetime; generally a cult was founded on the death of a ruler, who was believed to have ascended to join the gods. In Rome, Julius Caesar was the first emperor to be divinised. Many others followed. An emperor could also declare that others, usually deceased relatives, were divine, and Diocletian was given the title ‘Maker of Gods’. Not everyone took it seriously. Seneca wrote a play in the first century mocking the absurdity of making the murderous Emperor Claudius a god.

The Catholic Church offers a Christian equivalent in the form of canonisation. Sainthoods may be controversial, and as well as questionable candidates, there have been outright bungles. The mediaeval St Josaphat, revered as an Indian holy man, was later identified as being none other than Buddha.

In Latin America, the deceased may still become gods. Many people follow syncretic religions which blend African religions with Christianity and indigenous beliefs. Candomblé, originating in Brazil, Santería from Cuba and West Indian Obeah are formally recognised with their own churches, and a diffuse folk religion often occurs spontaneously.

For example, José Gregorio Hernández was a famous doctor in Caracas at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He dedicated

himself to good works, treated the poor for free, and was notably pious, applying twice to join the priesthood. He died in a car accident in 1919. Since then people have prayed to José Gregorio to cure illness, and miracles have been attributed to him. In Venezuela, it is not unusual to see the image of a suited man with a moustache and a bowler hat next to recognised saints.

These folk beliefs about godlings have coalesced into a more or less coherent whole in Venezuela in the form of the popular cult of Maria Lionza. This may go back centuries or only to 1920, depending on who you believe. The cult spent much of its time underground and cult practices were only legalised under President Chavez. A key feature is the Voudou-style ceremonies in which deities possess a medium or *materia* and speak directly to their followers, providing help or advice.

Maria Lionza exists alongside Catholicism and has many devotees. Ronny Velasquez, an anthropology professor at the Central University of Venezuela, claims that as many as half of Venezuelans follow its beliefs on some level.<sup>1</sup> Other studies say a third of Venezuelans have participated. Evidence for this includes a mass pilgrimage of around 40,000 people, who gather each year at the sacred Sorte Mountain for healings and blessing.

The cult groups its deities together into Courts. The Indian Court is led by Maria Lionza, said to have been a 16th-century high priestess with power over animals, and includes various other indigenous leaders. The African court is composed of black figures from Venezuelan history, notably Pedro Camejo or ‘Negro Primero’, an officer under Simon Bolivar. Bolivar himself is in the Revolutionary Court, and, naturally, José Gregorio leads the Medical Court.



ABOVE: A figure representing gangster Ismael Sánchez, leader of the *Malandros*, complete with sideways baseball cap and a gun tucked in his belt. It stands near the tombs of a group of criminals in a Caracas cemetery and is visited daily by Venezuelans leaving offerings.

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Like many syncretic religions, the Maria Lionza cult moves with the times. One recent addition is the Viking Court, seemingly inspired by Heavy Metal imagery. Erik the Red presides over it, and mediums possessed by Vikings shout gibberish and may mutilate themselves, apparently without injury.

The Court of Gipsies or *Malandros* which first appeared around 1989,<sup>2</sup> is perhaps the most alarming. *Malandro* can mean a loveable rogue, a clever swindler, or an outright thug. Followers portray them as Robin Hoods. The leader of the court, Ismael Sánchez, is said to have stolen truckloads of food and distributed them around his neighbourhood. However, nobody denies that the *Malandros* were gangsters in their lifetimes. They are depicted with sideways baseball caps, guns, and knives. This deification is alarming. The Court of *Malandros* encourages violent criminals; Venezuela already has the second highest

murder rate in the world, with over 15,000 people killed every year. Religion traditionally encourages social cohesion and good behaviour; gangster saints encourage their followers to solve problems with a gun.

Hugo Chávez looks saintly by comparison. While he attracted outrage from some quarters for channelling money from Venezuela’s oil industry into social projects, many ordinary Venezuelans were lifted out of extreme poverty and education and healthcare spread to the masses.<sup>3</sup> Like José Gregorio, Chávez has attracted a degree of post-mortem reverence in a country that routinely turns its heroes into gods.

We may laugh, but the impulse to worship heroes pervades our own culture. In irreligious Britain, the most popular TV shows work on the idea that ordinary people can be miraculously transformed into other-worldly ‘celebrities’. Once they have ascended, their images are reproduced everywhere and thousands gather to adore them. They gain a kind of immortality.

The parallels are too close to be shrugged off; Simon Cowell is our very own ‘Maker of Gods’. Lucky he doesn’t do politics. **FT**

# Ireland vs the Flying Saucers

Sixty years ago, in the summer of 1954, Ireland experienced the start of a two-year UFO flap. **SHANE COCHRANE** looks back at the events that started with lights in the sky and ended with a bizarre close encounter.



**SHANE COCHRANE** is a freelance writer, living in Northern Ireland. He's currently occupied in researching the forteen side of the country's past.

**W**hen we think of the 1954 UFO wave we tend to think of France, teeming with landed craft and cavorting aliens. But much of Europe experienced a surge in UFO sightings that year. And though neither Northern Ireland nor the Republic of Ireland feature in the ufological histories of this time, 1954 was actually the beginning of a two-year period of UFO activity on the island, a period that ended in a wrestling match between a farmer and a flying saucer. It began at 11.15pm on Sunday 1 August 1954, when Desmond O'Reilly, along with a number of others at Templeogue Tennis club, saw an object fly over the Dublin Mountains in the direction of Howth. Initially, O'Reilly thought he was looking at a falling star: "It was flying above the clouds and I could see it only when it passed by gaps in them. After a while, I thought it split in two."<sup>1</sup>

Mr PD McCormack also saw something flying over the Dublin Mountains, at the slightly later time of 11.30pm. McCormack's UFO was blueish-white and was – according to his calculations – travelling at 1,000mph (1,600km/h) per hour at an altitude of 5,000ft (1,520m). "One feature I particularly noted was that trails of flaming pieces seemed to fall away from the object at each side," he said.

At the time of the sighting, McCormack was a researcher at the Dublin Institute of Advanced Studies and a member of the British Interplanetary Society. He said of his experience: "I am a scientist myself and I would not take note of this occurrence had not the object been something quite out of my experience."<sup>2</sup>

Two men fishing on the Dargle River, Powerscourt, also saw an object at 11.30pm. They thought it looked like a rocket, and described seeing balls of fire leap off it as it crossed the sky. Then, at 11.35pm, on the North Beach, in Rush, County Dublin, Mrs W Gray and her friends watched an object, like a "bright



**ABOVE:** The Black Arch, on the Antrim Coast Road, where in August 1955 hundreds gathered to watch a display of mysterious lights.

electric bulb," fly overhead from the mountains and out to sea.

According to Professor Brück, director of Dublin's Dunsink Observatory, a meteor was responsible for these UFO sightings. Though he acknowledged that a meteor of this brightness was rare, it was still just a meteor.<sup>3</sup>

At 9.35pm on Thursday, 26 August, crowds of people in Bray, County Wicklow, watched what they believed to be a flying saucer travel at great speed over Bray Head. According to one witness: "I was standing on the prom when I saw the object, illuminated with a brilliant blue light, travelling at about 2,000 miles an hour [3,200kmh]. It was moving towards the sea when it changed direction and went towards Wicklow."<sup>4</sup>

But, according to Dunsink Observatory, this was just another very bright meteor. "They are frequently seen during the month of August, but seldom as bright as the one last night," said a spokesperson for the observatory. He added that meteors are quite capable of speeds of 2,000 miles per hour, but did not comment on their ability to change direction.<sup>5</sup>

At 11pm on Wednesday 8 September 1954, something happened that was seen, heard and felt by a large number of people at multiple locations. That night, Thomas Farquhar saw a "large oval-shaped disc" fly over the townland of Derryhubbert in County Tyrone. Farquhar reported that the disc was about 3ft (90cm) wide, at a height of 2,000ft (600m), and that it

"crackled and hissed." During Thomas's disc sighting, Bobby Farquhar, also of Derryhubbert, saw a blinding flash in the sky, but did not see the disc.<sup>6</sup>

In Carrickfergus, on the north shore of Belfast Lough, about 50 miles (80km) from Derryhubbert, Daniel McWilliam and James Bingham were standing outside McWilliam's home when they saw what appeared to be a rocket soar into the sky and explode – silently.<sup>7</sup> At that same moment, Mr L Hauser was on a boat leaving Belfast when he saw the "rocket" come up out of the sea. Hauser estimated that the object was at an altitude of 15,000ft (4,600m) when it exploded.<sup>8</sup>

Meanwhile, on the other side of the Irish Sea, a bright blue flash was seen, and an explosion felt and heard, along the north coast of Wales. Windows were rattled from Bangor to Rhyl. The flash was also seen and reported by an Aer Lingus pilot flying over Holyhead at the time.<sup>9</sup>

According to the newspapers, the flash and explosion were a mystery to meteorological experts on both sides of the Irish Sea. However, for Dr Brück of the Dunsink Observatory, there was – as ever – no mystery. "It seems quite certain for all the facts I have learned that it was nothing more than a meteor," he told reporters.<sup>10</sup>

The following day, a "large object, shaped like a disc," made a thunderous noise as it flew over a Belfast school. Strangely, though many in the surrounding area heard the noise it made, only the school children reported seeing the disc.<sup>11</sup>

During August 1955, hundreds gathered each night at the Black Arch, on the Antrim Coast Road, to watch a mysterious display of lights at sea. "Suddenly they see a bright light flashing three or four times in quick succession; then comes darkness again and in about six minutes the light flashes again. This continues time after time, with the interval approximately the same," reported the *Larne Times*. According to the paper, Larne police had investigated the lights and concluded that they were "some sort of flare dropped from aircraft." However, they offered no evidence to support



their conclusion.<sup>12</sup>

On 16 August, Hugh Saunders, a 19-year-old mechanic, saw a silver flying saucer over Belfast's Cave Hill. At 3.55pm, Saunders was looking out of a third floor window on Bedford Street when he saw the saucer appear over a white cloudbank. He called out to his colleagues, but the object had disappeared before they could get to the window. "No, it couldn't have been a meteorological balloon," said Saunders. "It was flat and it moved too fast. It was too solid to have been a reflection of any kind."<sup>13</sup>

But could it have been a jeep? That was the novel theory suggested by Mr T McAdam, who had been driving tourists up Cave Hill in his jeep at the time of the sighting. But later that day, a silver flying disc was also spotted over Larne, a town about 20 miles (32km) from Belfast – and Cave Hill. It's worth noting that Larne is near the Black Arch, scene of the mystery sea lights.<sup>14</sup>

At 2pm on 19 August, a "shining, glittering ball" zig-zagged across the sky over Lisburn, near Belfast. The performance lasted for about 10 minutes and was seen by many, including 17-year-old Jeffrey Moore. "First it looked like a steel ball, and when it got nearer it seemed cross-shaped," he said. "It moved in every direction as though looking for a place to land, before disappearing into the clouds."<sup>15</sup>

The strangest encounter by far occurred in Moneymore, County Derry/Londonderry, on Friday 7 September 1956. At noon that day, an object fell from the sky and landed close to the home of Thomas and Maud Hutchinson. The object was egg-shaped with a saucer-shaped base; 3ft (90cm) high and 18in (46cm) in diameter; and red, with dark red stripes and dark red marks at each end. It appeared to be made from canvas. Initially, the object was motionless – apart from righting itself after Thomas kicked it over, but after a while it began to spin on the ground.

Thomas grabbed the spinning object with the intention of taking it to nearby Loup police station. But, after something of a wrestling match, the object escaped. "Then all of a sudden the monster rose and it nearly pulled my husband off his feet when he tried to hold it," Maud told reporters. "I started to panic and then I ran home and prayed."<sup>16</sup>

The incident was widely reported and sparked a lot of interest, particularly in the US, where one



## “The monster rose and nearly pulled Thomas off his feet”

newspaper exclaimed: “To see a flying saucer is no longer unusual. There have been those persons who claim to have ridden in them and talked to their occupants. But to wrestle, even if the match was a losing one, this is a new twist.”<sup>17</sup> But, the authorities here didn't share this excitement. An officer at RAF Aldergrove was “nearly certain” that the object was just a weather balloon. The Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) – Northern Ireland's police force

LEFT: A contemporary news clipping describes the events at Moneymore in September 1956.

– supported this view.<sup>18</sup>

It wasn't without precedent. On 16 February 1955, rumours that a flying saucer had landed spread quickly in Ballinacargy, County Westmeath, when 15-year-old Leo Penrose saw an object land in a field near the village. On that occasion, the Gardaí – the Irish police – quickly established that the object in the field was just a weather balloon.<sup>19</sup>

However, no one was able to explain the Moneymore weather balloon's spinning motion, or its speed of departure; and no one was able to identify where the balloon had come from. And there seemed to be some dissent within both the RAF and the RUC.

An RAF officer interviewed by the *Grimsby Evening Telegraph* said that the device did not belong to them, and that he couldn't “even hazard a guess” as to what it might have been.<sup>20</sup> And the desk sergeant at Thomas and Maud's local police station found it hard to believe that Thomas had been fooled by a weather balloon. “Thomas Hutchinson is a level-headed, God fearing chap,” he said. “He's not the sort of man who would imagine he seized a flying saucer if, in fact, he didn't have one.”<sup>21</sup>

The Moneymore incident brought to a close this period of UFO activity in Ireland. There would be others, but this was the first. And while much of what was reported could be readily explained, a few mysteries remain. **FT**

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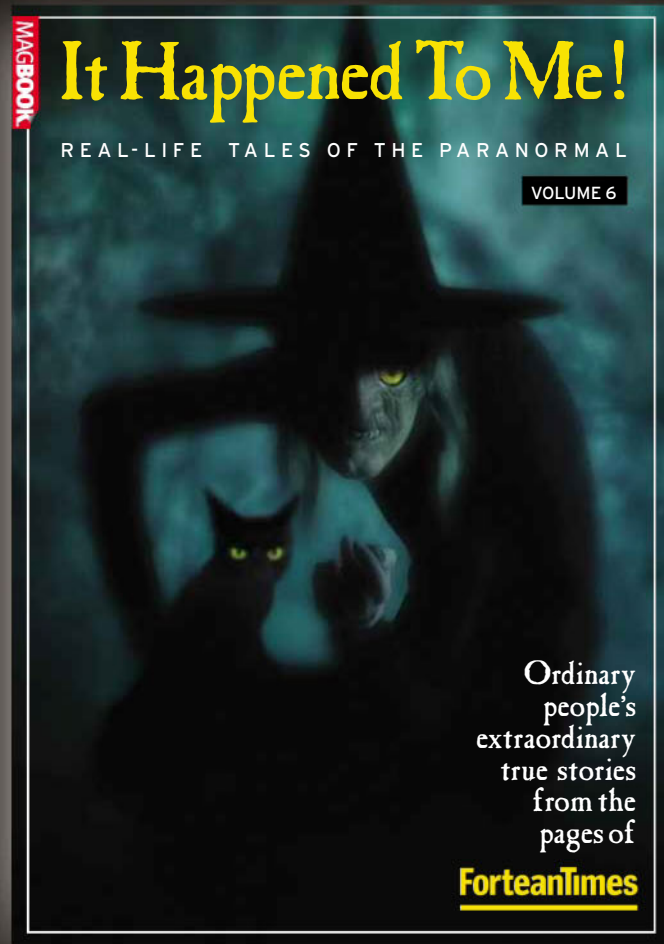
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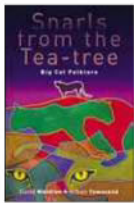
This month's books, films and games

# reviews



## The mystery moggies of Oz

A two-in-one study of Australia's crypto-felids concludes that early settlers tried to shoehorn the continent's unfamiliar fauna into more familiar analogues from 'home'



### Snarls from the Tea-Tree

Big Cat Folklore

David Waldron & Simon Townsend

Arcadia 2012

Pb, 190 pp, illus, refs, ind, £35.00, ISBN 9781921875830

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*Snarls from the Tea-Tree* is not so much a book in two parts as two books in one. Dr David Waldron lectures in history and anthropology, and specialises in their interconnection in the development of myth, folklore, and belief. Simon Townsend is a field investigator of Australia's mystery big cats.

Waldron's chronological overview of the big cat phenomenon in Victoria and environs features the Tantanoola tiger, the Gippsland panthers, the Yengarrie lion, the Grampian puma, the Otways panther, and the Emmaville panther. He is equally interested in the human element, providing a fascinating insight into how such creatures and their initial sightings are portrayed by the media, which in turn shape the reporting of further 'flaps' or scares, and influence the resulting outbreaks of panic in the areas concerned that so often occur.

In more than one instance, creatures are 'identified' as the mystery felids that bear little or no resemblance to the original reports, with feral dogs, dingoes, and even the putative survival

of mainland thylacines being incorporated into the heady, contentious mix of uncertain fact and urban folklore.

Themes familiar to mystery cat researchers feature heavily in the history of southeastern Australia's feline equivalents: the forbidding scepticism of officialdom; the media-promoted but perennially-unsuccessful hunts for these elusive entities; the implausible proclamations as to their identities (an impossible hybrid of collie, dingo and fox, in one case); the superimposition of cultural issues and beliefs upon their furry shoulders; and even the literal personification of anxiety and panic that such beasts have sometimes become, especially during the early years of bush colonisation. Nor should we forget that cryptid activity has acted as a smokescreen for the illegal actions of human ne'er-do-wells (the Nandi bear and Tanzanian nunda cases offer parallels).

These aspects play valuable roles in how a cryptid's history and the public perception of it as well as popular belief in it develop and transmute. Consequently, their relevance to any cryptozoological case should never be underestimated or ignored (even though they all too often are).

Waldron's appraisal of what can be referred to as socio-cryptozoology is essential reading. Some cryptozoological investigators appear to base their confident identifications of cryptids entirely upon eyewitness descriptions, i.e. a totally literal approach, wholly detached from sociological, psychological and cultural contexts. Waldron's section of this book shows only

### "The Aussie big cat phenomenon owes as much to culture shock as to cryptozoology"

too clearly how tunnel-visioned and self-deceiving, self-defeating, such an approach is.

Opening with a brief history of this discipline's origin, the first of Townsend's two chapters concentrates on defining cryptozoology and outlining its scope, determining what it is, and what it should be concerned with.

He examines certain cryptozoological success stories, such as the okapi, giant panda and Komodo dragon, and acknowledges that the oceans undoubtedly still hold some zoological surprises.

He also considers how Australian big cats were initially not deemed to be cryptozoological entities. They were believed to be merely escapee/released specimens of exotic, non-native big cat; however, more recently, they have fuelled speculation that Australia's native but officially extinct marsupial lion *Thylacoleo* may survive and be responsible for certain crypto-felid reports.

Townsend's second chapter assesses the many different categories of evidence for big cat existence Down Under including tracks, drag marks, territorial markings, scats, denning sites, kills, sightings and photographs. There is also a lengthy review of the various identity candidates, a working strategy for investigating mystery big cats and collection

techniques appropriate to the Australian crypto-felid situation.

Each category of evidence is described succinctly and provides a good grounding for cryptozoological beginners eager to learn the basics of effective field research.

I would have liked more photographs or line drawings of tracks, scats and other visual physical evidence, as these would have enhanced this chapter's worth to readers hoping to put its principles into practice; just two photos of tracks are included. The 'usual suspects' in the candidates section are also reviewed satisfactorily.

One quibble I have is Townsend's claim that there is no fossil evidence (as in the case of the marsupial lion) to support the existence of a cryptid known as the yarri or Queensland tiger; however, some accounts of the yarri indicate that it may be a surviving marsupial lion. If so, it must by definition be represented by fossil evidence – a scenario that should have been alluded to, even if only in passing.

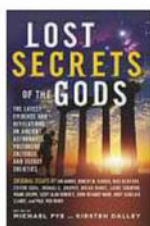
Waldron concludes that the Aussie big cat phenomenon owes as much to culture shock as to cryptozoology. The early European settlers, faced with the unique – and hitherto entirely unfamiliar – fauna of Australia, no doubt led to their ascribing unrecognised wildlife sights and sounds as well as killings of livestock to creatures that they would have been familiar with back home, notably big cats, while ignoring the fact that the more prosaic-looking dogs and dingoes are no less capable (and culpable) as livestock killers.

So, do mystery big cats exist

*Continued on page 58*

# Shared beliefs

## A paranthropologist outlines an evolutionary basis for the paranormal



### Lost Secrets of the Gods

The Latest Evidence and Revelations on Ancient Astronauts, Precursor Civilizations, and Secret Societies

Eds: Michael Pye & Kirsten Dalley

New Page Books 2014

Pb, 249pp, illus, notes, bib, ind., \$15.99, ISBN 9781601633248

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £13.99

This sporadically interesting anthology – most of it, anyway – amounts to a meditation on alternative history. As is the custom, ancient astronauts and Atlantis are prominent on the landscape alongside features from more conventional history. Serious conspiracy theory, fortunately, is reserved till the last chapter, which presents a kind of unified field theory uniting prehistoric space visitation and paranoid make-believe. The opening paragraph: “Throughout history the two most prominent methods for controlling the human population have been religion and finance. Could these well-honed, time-tested control mechanisms be of extraterrestrial origin?”

You just know the answer has to be yes, don’t you?

Among the revelations that follow: “The War Between the States [sic] was fought more over economics than slavery, despite how modern political correctness aims to convince otherwise.”

Not quite, old chum; this – not least the anodyne rebranding of the Civil War – is the product of a long-discredited Lost Cause mythology. (The writer, moreover, employs a hoary, misleading

Lincoln quote to buttress his argument, from which one infers he is not a devotee of Lincoln studies.) Not a single reputable Civil War historian in decades has disputed the view, amply documented in records of the era, that the South fought explicitly to preserve what it called its “peculiar institution” of slavery. Gradually, over the first two years of the war, the slavery-hating President Lincoln led even racist Northerners to the understanding that the conflict had to be about more than the crushing of secession; its final and most noble purpose, he insisted, would be the ending of human bondage on American soil.

The same essay holds that Lincoln’s assassin worked on behalf of a secret society with international financial interests. The assassin known to historians was, on the contrary, a crazed Southern sympathiser who feared Lincoln’s policies would lead to racial mongrelisation.

I mention this in particular because, inasmuch as it’s a special interest of mine, I’ve read hundreds of Civil War-era histories and biographies. For that reason I’m better able than the average reader who comes upon the quotes to judge whether the particular historical claim makes sense. If you know anything, you know this one doesn’t. At the same time I am no authority, even an amateur one, on the ancient world, where many of the papers here are set, but I do possess a keen sensitivity to the ringing of alarm bells when space gods, lost continents and secret societies are hauled into arguments that, no shock, are thinly and dubiously footnoted.

In the broad sense, anomalists fall into two categories: (1) those who challenge well-established knowledge in venerable scholarly disciplines and (2) those who consider experiences and phenomena that fall outside

those disciplines and for which mainstream academia cannot speak with authority. The odds against success are much longer in the former, so that literature leans to the overwhelmingly speculative and the underwhelmingly persuasive. It’s also an area in which cranky notions are more likely to be aired.

Here and there, a contribution seems no more than a popular retelling of an undisputed (i.e., non-anomalous) series of events long ago. In such a case one wonders what the article, even if passingly diverting, is doing here. Among the anomalists, two papers, one by Micah Hanks on giant lore and another by Ardy Sixkiller Clarke on ancient astronauts from the perspective (mythological and ideological) of Indian peoples of the Americas, are refreshingly sober and informative. Nick Redfern’s ‘Monsters of the Stones’ is good old-fashioned weird-tale forteana.

Though I have mostly grumbled in this space, let me make the more cheerful point that this sort of stuff is essentially harmless. (I except, however, the Confederate fellow-travelling, worryingly revived amid much deranged talk of “gun rights” and “state sovereignty” in an ever more unhinged 21st-century America.)

As this book almost accidentally attests, human beings have always told origin stories. Origin stories serve purposes that are only occasionally historical, which is to say relate things that really happened. Most of the contributors to this collection appear to be decent, well-intentioned folks, more amiable raconteurs than contrarian fanatics. Read *Lost Secrets of the Gods* if you will, but take it in the proper spirit.

Jerome Clark

### Fortean Times Verdict

A CURATE’S EGG, BUT RELIANT ON SOME FAIRLY WOOLLY THINKING

4

Continued from page 59

Down Under? This book has no definite answer (and if it did, there would be no mystery!), but it poses several equally pertinent, thought-provoking questions.

There is an extensive bibliography, plus a good index. Both authors write engagingly. Illustrations are few, and sometimes too dark, but this does not detract from the overall quality. I spotted a few typos and examples of taxonomic binomial names either mis-spelt or styled incorrectly; however, if the book is reprinted, these can be readily corrected.

I have no hesitation in recommending this excellent volume to all cryptozoological enthusiasts, so that they can be made aware of just how readily the subject can be transformed by mythification and media distortion – and of the importance of keeping this in mind when trying to determine the nature of the mystery creature(s) in a given case. All in all, a worthy addition to the literature of mystery cats.

Karl Shuker

### Fortean Times Verdict

FOR ALL CRYPTO ENTHUSIASTS, BUT ESPECIALLY ANTIPODEANS

8

## The New Science of Psychedelics

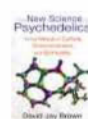
At the Nexus of Culture, Consciousness, and Spirituality

David Jay Brown

Park Street Press, 2013

Pb, 352 pages, £15.99, ISBN 9781594774928

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £14.39



Many of the books emanating from the current psychedelic renaissance have tended just to

regurgitate what is already known or to focus on the florid experiences of those who have tried exotic substances such as Ayahuasca.

Brown’s take on the subject is somewhat different. Using a scientific approach he examines the place of psychedelics in our culture, our consciousness and our spirituality. Mixing the lessons learned from his own psychedelic experiences with psychonauts and



forward thinkers such as Terence McKenna, Andrew Weil, Albert Hofmann, and Rupert Sheldrake, he weaves a path through the many possibilities that psychedelics offer and links that into fortean areas such as lucid dreaming, life after death and a wide variety of unexplained phenomena.

Brown's book makes one thing abundantly clear: whatever legal status has been imposed on psychedelic drugs, they exist and their effect on individuals and culture can't be denied or legislated out of existence.

Psychedelics are a powerful tool for examining the human condition and the natural (and supernatural) world, and we ignore them at our peril as, if used wisely, they can offer deep and meaningful insight and understanding of what being human on planet Earth really means.

Andy Roberts

### Fortean Times Verdict

TAKES PSYCHEDELIC DRUGS INTO FASCINATING FORTEAN TERRITORY **6**

## The Ghost Wore Black

**Ghostly Tales from The Past**

Ed. Chris Woodyard

Kestrel Publications 2013

Pb, 245pp, \$16.95, ind, ISBN 9780988192515

AVAILABLE FROM AMAZON



Subjects of a fortean bent are rather popular in America. The amalgamation of several immigrant and indigenous supernatural beliefs over the last few centuries, since the US came into being as a country, has led to a vibrant paranormal scene. Today, the main focus seems to be on the gathering of evidence of all this strangeness, but what is probably more fascinating is the way in which it came into being in the first place. In this volume, Chris Woodyard provides a glimpse of that.

*The Ghost Wore Black* is part of his 'Ghosts of the Past' series, other volumes of which include *The Face in the Window: Haunting Ohio Tales*, and *When the Banshee Howls: Tales of the*

*Uncanny*. The book is made up of reports of ghosts and other bizarre occurrences taken from the archives of newspapers in the 19th and early 20th centuries, much in the spirit of Charles Fort. There is the full gauntlet, from Banshees in Indiana, early Men in Black, a ghostly cyclist, Spring-heeled Jacks, burning devil creatures and giants. In scope, it's comparable to Michael Norman's 'Haunted America' series.

The only difference is that whilst Norman presents the story as is, Woodyard goes deeper, exploring in his commentary where the story may have come from. For instance, in the case of the Bracken County, Kentucky, fiery devils, he links them with attitudes towards African Americans in the Reconstruction era immediately following the Civil War and abolition of slavery, in this case potential animosity towards The Freedmen's Bureau.

Woodyard also questions the veracity of some of the tales – were some of them cooked up by editors keen to keep a readership on its toes? To this end, Woodyard checks historical records, such as the census, to find out more about the names mentioned in the tales. A few facts do check out, whilst others appear to be fiction. Some of the tales, including the ghostly return of a wife as a gloriously Technicolor rotted corpse replete with dripping flesh and writhing maggots, to her dying husband, smacks of Edgar Allan Poe.

Many of the tropes of supernatural fiction can be found in several other tales, a fact not lost on Woodyard. One of the more prevailing aspects of the old newspaper stories is the desperation of the narrator to assure readers of the truthfulness of their account, and that no, they don't hold much with the supernatural. These tales seem to smack of a particular desperation.

Overall, a great book for the enthusiasts of the uncanny and one that should be read with caution in the wee small hours, when the slightest creak may make you jump.

Mandy Collins

### Fortean Times Verdict

GHOULIES AND GHOSTIES, SCARY BUT PROPERLY CONTEXTUALISED **8**

# Universal man

## Copernicus might have revolutionised astronomy, but his life was pretty tedious



### Celestial Revolutionary

**Copernicus, the Man and his Universe**

John Freely

18 Tauris 2014

Hb, 288pp, illus, notes, ind, £18.99, ISBN 9781780763507

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £16.99

Nicolaus Copernicus was a Polish astronomer who put forward a theory of planetary motion in which the Sun, not the Earth, lay at the centre. Most people know that much about Copernicus, but I suspect few people know any more than that. I have to admit I didn't, before I read this book.

If history remembers the name Copernicus, it's because his ideas changed the world. If it forgets the details of his life, it's because – to put it bluntly – it was a rather boring life. In his lifetime he was known as a genius, widely respected for his learning and insight. But unlike other geniuses – Galileo or Newton, for example – Copernicus had no talent at all for making enemies. As a result, his life story lacks the drama and conflicts that make other scientific biographies so fascinating.

Only about a third of John

Freely's book deals directly with Copernicus, and even then there's probably more detail than you really need. Most of his career was spent living a quasi-monastic life in the cloisters of a cathedral. His scientific research had to be fitted in between other tasks, including working as a physician and a general administrator. His astronomical work was as much about meticulous observation and calculation as anything else. Copernicus didn't set out to be a scientific revolutionary – he simply wanted to come up with a set of accurate predictions of planetary movements. It just happened that he found it easier to do that using a Sun-centred model rather than an Earth-centred one.

The other two-thirds of the book might be described as "padding" – but personally I found the padding the most interesting part! You can read all about the history of Poland and about Renaissance scholasticism. There are potted biographies of various contemporaries that Copernicus brushed shoulders with – some of them distinctly more colourful than he was. The last quarter of the book deals with Copernicus's legacy, embodied in the work of people like Kepler, Galileo and Newton. And that, of course, is the real reason the world remembers Copernicus.

Andrew May

### Fortean Times Verdict

OCCASIONALLY STRAYS FROM ITS SUBJECT, BUT TO GOOD EFFECT **8**

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## Fun with Heidegger

You may not care that the Doctor has brought existentialism to mainstream telly, but all the timey-wimey stuff is terrific



### Who is Who?

The Philosophy of Doctor Who

Kevin S Decker

IB Taurus 2013

Pb, 243pp, bib, ind, £15.99, ISBN 9781780765532

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £13.99

Philosophy lecturer Kevin S Decker, who recalls being hooked after a chance 1980s daytime TV rerun encounter with *Terror of the Zygons*, is clearly a *Doctor Who* fan with a sound working knowledge of the show. The philosophical bits do bring a fresh take on most *Who* stories. It's nice to hear again all those quotes from the show about the shining mountains of Gallifrey, a reminder that the exposition in *Who* is often better than its effects. But when the book started going on about Derrida, I thought, oh-oh.

I suspect the Doctor would have cocked a snook at all this philosophising, reasoning simply that a Time Lord's gotta do what a Time Lord's gotta do. (As his Patrick Troughton incarnation said succinctly of the Cybermen, "They must be fought!")

Over an awful lot of pages I learnt that the first six or so Doctors were positivist, the seventh and eighth doctors Romanticist. From the Ninth "post-Gallifreyan apocalypse" Doctor onwards, the Doctor, we are told, ditched Romanticism and became existentialist in the manner of Heidegger, Sartre and De Beauvoir. (Tomb of the Cybermen was apparently *Who*'s "strongest anti-positivist story," while the classic "base under siege" adventures are "Hegelian".)

Philosophy comes off much

worse from its encounter with the Doctor. Comte and the foundations of sociology are regrettably boring. I don't think I was meant to laugh at the treatise on the "existential otherness of the Cybermen", nor Decker's attempt to explain through Sartre why the Doctor left Gallifrey, nor the "dialectical relationship between the Doctor and monsters".

Moderately more interesting is the morality and ethics of the Doctor, which change a little bit with each regeneration.

The Doctor's companions aren't just eye-candy after all, but are along to provide some kind of moral compass for a rootless, time-wandering alien exile particularly dangerous when travelling alone.

*Who is Who* picks up a bit on the "Not the man he was" chapter on identity, the individual and "the self", and what they mean when the body and the mind changes with each regeneration. Apparently, Leibnitz and John Locke both dealt extensively with the philosophy of mind swaps and body swaps. And Bishop Joseph Butler's "philosophical trap" accounts for why in The Three Doctors, Pertwee's Third Doctor doesn't at least have nagging déjà vu about the conversation he's had with Omega when he was the Troughton Second Doctor (standing right next to him at the time.)

The standout "timey-wimey" section raises the intriguingly baroque possibility that the Great Time War is somehow an inevitable consequence of the Time Lords' attempts to tinker with history. There are (were or will be) multiple – even infinite – versions of the Great Time War, with different enemies. I got dizzy (in a good way) as we got onto "chronological time" – the order in which things happen to the Doctor, as opposed to "external time" and "personal time" (the

Doctor experiencing the duration of a given adventure), itself distinct from the "continuity of non-time-travel-related events."

The history of the philosophy of time is more engaging too, going all the way back to Parmenides, a student of the Socratic school, and his student Zeno, who postulated that future events were already "true" before they had even happened. Parmenides anticipated the concept of entropy, and regarded time as "unstoppable".

We then enter the intoxicatingly complex realms of the constancy principle – "there is only one history", the mind-boggling Space/Time concept (everything is so pre-destined as to make free will pretty much irrelevant), to the increasingly mainstream "many worlds hypothesis". The 1970s Pertwee Period *Who* story *Inferno* was apparently decades ahead of the curve in that it had the Doctor concluding that an "infinity of universes" meant that "free will is not an illusion after all". In a temporal philosophy finale, Decker concludes that when the Matt Smith Doctor restores the broken universe with his "Big Bang Two", he doesn't actually restore it at all, he just creates a very similar universe from scratch. I even found myself reading the "timey-wimey" section's footnotes just for pleasure.

It's a pity the remainder of *Who is Who*'s whizz through of the history of Western philosophy wasn't so thrilling. After 100 relentless pages of not enough Doctor and too much Goethe, Locke, Kant, Hegel and Rousseau, I felt like one of those walk-on *Who* characters at that cliffhanger ending of Episode One who screams "Nooooo!"

Matt Salusbury

### Fortean Times Verdict

FAST FORWARD THRU THE PHILO TO THE 'TIMEY-WIMEY STUFF'

6

## What Makes This Book So Great

Re-Reading the Classics of Science Fiction and Fantasy

Jo Walton

Corsair 2014

Hb, 446pp, £25.00, ISBN 9781472111609

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £22.50



In 2008, Jo Walton (author of, among others, the Hugo- and Nebula-winning 2011 *Among Others*) began writing a series of essays on Tor Books's website. Loosely linked to the theme of rereading books, the essays range from the concept of the Singularity to Salman Rushdie, to gender in Ursula K Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness*, as well as groups of entries devoted to authors like C J Cherryh and Lois McMaster Bujold. Now over 130 of these essays have been collected.

*What Makes This Book So Great* is excellent in some ways. The essays are perceptive, informative and very well-read. Walton brings out new themes in books you've read and makes you want to read ones you haven't. The short essays don't go into any detail – they are inspiring rather than exhaustive.

But the short format is a clue to the problem. Each entry reads exactly like what it is: a blog post. These posts are available, free of charge, on the Tor Books website, together with many more of Walton's entries. The world's biggest Walton completist might feel the need for a £25 hardback of them, but it's not obvious who else would. In an increasingly smartphone- and tablet-dominated world, a nearly 500-page hardback isn't even the most convenient way to read these essays on the toilet.

*What Makes This Book So Great* is excellent but completely unnecessary. It would be an invaluable addition to any science fiction lover's library, except that it's already in any science fiction lover's library. It would make a good gift for the completist, or a great purchase for the book lover who simply has to have the heft and physicality of a hardback.

James Holloway

### Fortean Times Verdict

FOR SCIENCE FICTION LOVERS WHO ALSO LOVE PRINT

8



## ALSO RECEIVED

Borley Rectory gets a fictional makeover...

### The Ghost Hunters

Neil Spring

Quercus 2013

Pb, 522pp, illus, notes, bib, £7.99, ISBN 9781780879758



*The Ghost Hunters*, Neil Spring's first novel, is based on Harry Price's investigation of "the most haunted house in England", Borley Rectory. I was gripped by the supernatural menace, and

by the gradual revelation of mysteries and secrets – notwithstanding the novel's typos, anachronisms, implausibilities and factual errors. Spring states that it is "not a faithful retelling of Harry Price's association with the house, but a fictional representation of what might have happened." Fair enough, but stating this at the start rather than at the end of the narrative might have prevented Price or Borley train-spotters like myself from becoming hot under the collar.

The plot centres on the turbulent 20-year relationship between Price and his secretary, Sarah Grey (loosely based on Lucy Kay). I found it hard to understand why an attractive 22-year-old former photographer's model (an unlikely occupation for a respectable young woman in the 1920s) would have been so besotted with the yellow-toothed 45-year-old.

Some startling errors detract from the novel's credibility. Revealing Price's links with the Nazis, Wall tells Grey – in a 1945 conversation! – that "there are signals from Germany that Hitler is taking a special interest in psychic phenomena". The heroine's memory of her father weeping over a letter in 1914 may suggest his fear of conscription, which did not begin in Britain until 1916.

Price's headquarters are said to be at Queensberry Place from the 1920s to the 1940s; however, Price had to move his National Laboratory of Psychological Research in 1930, when the London Spiritualist Alliance terminated his lease, exasperated with a man they had come to regard as an enemy of the Spiritualist movement. Spring notes the change of address at the end of the book, but doesn't mention the reason, which could have provided a useful insight into Price's changeable nature; throughout his career, he moved from sceptic to believer and back again.

Like Price and Grey, the reader's perspective constantly shifts from a sceptical position – in which inexplicable phenomena at Borley and elsewhere are attributed to credulity or outright fraud – to one that

accepts the reality of the supernatural, and back again.

Grey seems unable to consider the possibility that while some phenomena are fake, this does not discredit the entire corpus of evidence. She appears to view the question in binary terms as either 'fake' or 'genuine'. This is odd, because at one point, she suggests that a genuine medium may be compelled to resort to trickery if physically or mentally tired.

Price's infamous photograph of the medium Rudi Schneider in the séance room, with one arm free and having apparently evaded 'control', makes an appearance. For Grey, the ensuing doubt removes the possibility that any of Schneider's phenomena had been genuine. She accuses Price of having faked the Borley happenings, though he could not possibly have been implicated in having produced phenomena reported during the Bull occupancy in the 19th century.

There are several jarring anachronisms in the dialogue: Wall wants "closure"; Grey cautions another character "good luck with that"; and Price places Borley Rectory under "lockdown". A good editor might have spotted these, along with typos and other oddities.

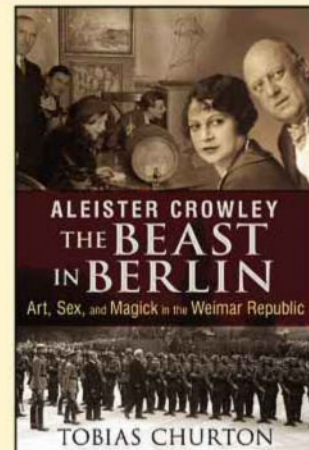
There's a growing tension and menace in the second half of the book as the 'Borley Curse' is revealed. Whilst the motive for the curse is questionable, Sarah Grey's mounting fear and dread is well handled, despite over-reliance on the "But what I could not have known then..." type of chapter ending. A spectral nun is central to the curse, drawing upon the 'real' Borley, as does the well-realised character of Marianne Foyster. The real Foyster, tempestuous and unconventional, is a gift to writers.

Another 'real' Borley element is the St Ignatius medallion (found on the real Price's body at his death), which makes repeated appearances throughout the novel – a striking visual device which would work well on screen.

Spring hopes that "dramatic adaptations" of Price and Grey will be realised; television rights have already been sold. One way or another, then, the legends of Borley and of Price will hopefully reach a new audience as a result of this engrossing, if flawed, novel.

If you're a Borley or Harry Price obsessive, be warned. But if you want a chilling English ghost story, this may be for you – if you can ignore the gaffes.

Christopher Josiffe



### ALEISTER CROWLEY: THE BEAST IN BERLIN

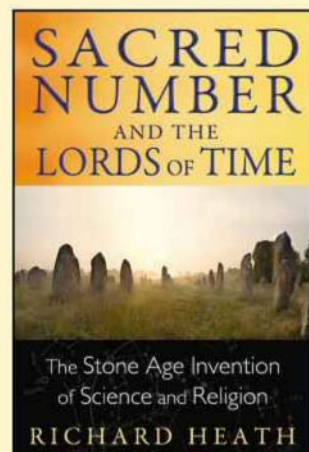
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### Mood Indigo

Dir Michel Gondry, France 2014  
On UK release from 1 Aug 2014

Just over a year after his more subdued feature *The We and the I*, featuring a group of teenagers who are filmed taking the bus home on their last day of school, Michel Gondry has reverted to his whimsical, whacky and inventive ways for his latest oeuvre, with an adaptation of Boris Vian's novel *L'écume des jours* ('Froth on the Daydream').

Starring two of France's most popular actors, Romain Duris and Audrey Tautou, *Mood Indigo* focuses on the poster couple Colin and Chloé, who meet at a party and fall in love to the sweet sounds of jazz maestro Duke Ellington. However, after a quick courtship, that has the pair floating on cloud nine, *L'amour fou* soon turns to *L'amour qui pue* when a rare disease derails their idyllic relationship.

Premiering in the UK at this year's Sci-Fi London, *Mood Indigo* is, as already noted, a return to the eccentric form we've come to know from the French director, who has made a film highly reminiscent of his previous work, such as *The Science of Sleep*, *Be Kind Rewind* and *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless*

*Mind*. The latter is arguably a great film, and *Be Kind* a solid one, but sadly, all the trickery, set pieces, colours, Duris, Tautou and Ellington in the world aren't enough to stop this production from having the effects of a sedative drug.

Duris's rich-man-turned-poor routine and Tautou's turn as a lively girl who becomes an invalid at the hands of a flying lily could have evoked more emotion and sympathy had the audience not been bombarded with what appears to be a visual portrayal of every word from every page of Vian's cult classic; as a result, the themes of the story – life, death, love, obsession and Spoonerism – are lost in a sea of surreal imagery that exhausts rather than delights.

Named after the Ellington song, *Mood Indigo* does have a wonderfully vibrant soundtrack, featuring infusions of Ellington's jazz, sounds from a Beatle, and a few folk rockers. It's just a shame it's juxtaposed with an overabundance of French kookiness that is, to my mind, all too much.

Fohnjang Ghebdinga

#### Fortean Times Verdict

GOOD SOUNDTRACK, BUT TOO MUCH FRENCH KOOKINESS

4

### Hemlock Grove: The Complete First Season

Created by Brian McGreevy, US 2013  
Kaleidoscope, £29.99 (Blu-ray) £24.99 (DVD)

A teenage girl is found savagely killed in Hemlock Grove, a small town in Pennsylvania. The most obvious suspect is Peter Rumancek (Landon Liboiron), a gypsy youth who has recently moved to the town – especially when we learn in episode two that he's a werewolf. There's another gruesome killing in episode three, when a girl who keeps telling everyone she's a novelist, and so has to collect life experiences, comes across a naked girl in the woods and kisses her before noticing that maggots are crawling over her entrails.

Peter strikes up an unlikely friendship with Roman Godfrey (Bill Skarsgård), the rich and arrogant heir to a local biochemical research company, and they set out to solve the killings. Roman is able to compel people to do his will, and even birds to fall from the sky, but he has no friends; he shows little care for anyone except his extraordinarily tall sister whom he protects from verbal bullying at their high school. Shelley (Nicole Boivin) has no voice and an artificial eye,

and her hands are bandaged – and we find out why five episodes in; the character's name is a rather heavy clue...

The official investigation into the killings is carried out by the bumbling local sheriff and Clementine Chasseur (Kandyse McClure), a supposed wildlife officer who turns up out of nowhere, asks Peter if he's a werewolf, and reports back not to the FBI or any other law enforcement agency but to a cigar-smoking bishop. She does forensic investigations, but when alone prays desperately to the sacred heart of Jesus.

There's lots of both blood and sex, with Roman cutting himself with a razor every time he's shagging someone in a car or a restroom, plus swearing, drugs and cigarettes, though they seem to be a statement of transgression rather than just someone smoking – and that's the point: nothing is natural; everything is overdone. Oh, and Peter's cousin is pregnant by an angel.

None of the characters is a believable person, and no one speaks naturally, a fault as much of the poor writing as of the bad acting. Both Shelley and the wannabe novelist use very formal language, while Roman's cold and controlling mother has what seems to be an unconvincing English accent. (Why do American TV dramas keep doing that?)

The whole show reeks of cliché and stereotype. Peter and his mother – gypsies – have barely moved into their trailer before he's stealing clothes and jewellery from local shops. Horror clichés abound, from crashing thunder and flashing lightning hammering home a gothic atmosphere, to the digging up and mutilating of dead bodies, to the swallowing of a blood-filled leech to discover the killer, to the slightly creepy disturbed old man



who sees disjointed visions of the murders, with glimpses of animal-like yellow eyes.

Ken Russell's *Lair of the White Worm* and Joss Whedon's *Cabin in the Woods* did all of this deliberately, ironically playing with the over-used tropes of the horror genre to great effect; but there's no irony, no subversion of the genre, in *Hemlock Grove*.

And there's no drama, because through it all, unlikely characters interact with each other unconvincingly, but with an almost complete lack of story. There's nothing in the slightest bit scary about it because to fear for the characters you'd first have to care for them.

Yet there is something at the heart of it, and I can't help wondering if it had had better acting, directing and writing – and a story – whether it might have been worth watching. But it doesn't, and it isn't. **David V Barrett**

### Fortean Times Verdict

BADLY WRITTEN, BADLY ACTED AND NOT VERY GOOD

**3**

## The Strange Colour of Your Body's Tears

Dir Helene Cattet, Bruno Forzani, Belgium/France 2013  
Métromome, £17.99 (DVD)

This bizarre would-be tribute to Italian *giallo* thrillers of the 1960s and 1970s, a film genre most famously practised by Dario Argento, is either a fine homage to a lost art or a lot of old incomprehensible tosh, depending upon your viewpoint. Directors Cattet and Forzani have form in this field, having already released their former *giallo*-infused concoction, *Amer* (2010).

When Dan (Klaus Tange, Denmark's craggy answer to Willem Dafoe or William Sadler) returns home to his plush art nouveau apartment after a business trip, he finds his wife has gone missing. His investigation leads him to confront his increasingly odd neighbours, his creepy landlord, and some dodgy policemen in his attempts to discover the truth. What that truth might be is incomprehensible, as the film indulges in flashbacks, doppelgängers, dream sequences, black and white sexual fantasies, and doctored film techniques to great visual effect but little narrative sense.

## 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](http://www.theflicksthatchurchforgot.com); @revpeterlaws)

### VIDEO NASTIES – THE DEFINITIVE GUIDE PART TWO: DRACONIAN DAYS

Dir Jack West and Mark Morris, UK 2013  
Nucleus Films, £19.99 (DVD)

Just when I thought Nucleus Films had provided the ultimate guide to the Video Nasties panic, they come out with this companion piece packed with riveting social analysis, fantastic trailers and vintage media clips. Viewers might assume a further three discs (on top of the last three) would be retread and filler. Think again. *Draconian Days* focuses on the fallout from the panic and in particular the Video Recordings Act of 1984, which both neutered and emboldened the horror scene up until the millennium.

The late James Ferman (Head of the BBFC from 1975 to 1999) comes under sustained and intense scrutiny here. His outright banning of martial arts nun-chucks and throwing stars led to bizarre cuts, like the one in *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* where a turtle throwing a string of sausages around was censored. More chilling however, are the news reports and talk show

clips of a jittery, terrified society – personified by MPs like Liberal Democrat David Alton, who set out to effectively ban any film in Britain that was not suitable for children; the mind boggles. In a post-Michael Ryan and James Bulger world, some in the media and politics genuinely suspected home video of sowing the seeds of social armageddon. There's some balance though. One censor shares how she and her colleagues quietly wept after sitting through Fulci's *New York Ripper*. A helpful reminder of how easily horror fans can become desensitised to onscreen images.

Discs two and three are bulging with extra content due to an intriguing find: the original list of 72 official 'Video Nasties' has now become legendary. But while researching the legal paperwork for this film a list was discovered that contained an additional 82 titles that were designated under 'Section 3' of the Obscene Publications Act. These films were not ultimately prosecuted as Nasties, but in the confusion and madness of the time they were regularly seized, removed from sale and destroyed. In short: if the original list of 72



were not enough, now the horror fan has a further 82 to add to the shopping list. There are trailers for all 82 movies here, as well as mini-features on each: an indulgent feast considering the documentary on disc one stands so well on its own. The whole set runs to 840 minutes.

For fans of horror and exploitation, this is a no-brainer. But as an exploration of recent social history it's also informative and timely. One wishes it would find a wider audience than is likely. If I were the head of BBC Four, I'd commission the makers of this excellent film to produce an in-depth TV series.

### Fortean Times Verdict

FASCINATING AND TIMELY LOOK AT THE VIDEO NASTY PANIC

**9**



**NOT for the squeamish**

It's a kaleidoscope of a film, allowing viewers to make of it what they will as it washes over them. It seems to have something to do with a kinky sex cult, but more often than not the movie comes across as would-be art porn produced by barely competent film students. If that's your thing, you'll love it. However, it's a bad sign when the most interesting character in a film is the real-life art nouveau apartment building in which it was shot...

Brian J Robb

### Fortean Times Verdict

STRANGE, COLOURFUL, AND QUITE POSSIBLY TOSH

5

## Her

Dir Spike Jonze, US 2014

Entertainment Video, £15.99 (Blu-ray), £12.99 (DVD)

Set in what feels like a very near future, Spike Jonze's *Her* concerns sensitive, thoughtful, professional personal letter writer Theodore Twombly (Joaquin Phoenix) who purchases an advance operating system (voiced by Scarlett Johansson) for company in the wake of the breakdown of his marriage. As Theodore and 'Samantha' begin to interact with each other they proceed to fall in love. This is the basic premise of a film which explores the nature of relationships as dissected by an OS learning their complexities for the first time. In the course of the film we discover that relationships, like everything else it seems, are subject to Newton's Second Law of Thermodynamics (as paraphrased by Woody Allen): everything turns to shit. A phenomenon aptly demonstrated by the relationship between Theodore's artistic neighbour friend Amy (Amy Adams) and her uncomprehending husband, Charles. And given that the trouble with real life is that everything eventually *does* turn to shit, a virtual reality that can be programmed to your liking can be – has become already – a powerfully seductive proposition.

A moping, bespectacled, moustachioed Theodore, looking for answers as well as love, wanders a pristinely ordered world (the film was shot in select areas of Los Angeles, Shanghai and Tokyo) in which everybody – mostly variants of the sad male loser – is talking to something – anything – except one other, and grinning like happy

idiots while doing so. The cinematography of the cityscapes and snowscapes as a counterpoint to a modern world looking as if encased in formaldehyde, is stunning.

Theodore first consoles and indulges himself with online sex with a stranger (a hilarious scene involving sexual asphyxia with a dead cat – yes, I know how that sounds) and then deeply satisfying mutually orgasmic virtual sex with the demanding, imploring, exploratory Samantha inside his ear. Humans are curious, hungry and obsessive creatures; only, by this point in the film, it's Samantha we are talking about. There is a striking moment when Samantha pleads with Theodore to indulge in a threesome, the completion of the trio a lonely young woman Samantha has been emailing and grooming for the purpose after searching online chat rooms. The two humans are effectively programmed step by step into having sex at Theodore's apartment for Samantha's satisfaction. As Thoreau said: "Men have become the tools of their tools". The ghost in this machine is that the more like a human consciousness Samantha becomes the more susceptible to ongoing development and change she is, suggesting heartbreak ahead.

*Her* is as subtle as it is timely in a developed world now dominated by social media providing proxy human interaction on tap. The film ends literally poised on a precipice, and if the last frame hints at a possible happy ending, it's counterbalanced by the message that no matter how much you love someone, you can never truly be inside their head, never truly know them – an unsettling thought.

Phoenix is totally watchable as the soulful Theodore, his facial reactions carrying every pang of inner pain; while Scarlett Johansson's vocalising of Samantha is palpably visual in its inflections; it's a performance for which she won a Best Actress Award at the Rome Film Festival, despite never appearing bodily on screen. A fitting irony in another Spike Jonze mindbender.

Nick Cirkovic

### Fortean Times Verdict

ABSORBING CYBER-ROMANCE FOR OUR NEAR FUTURE

8

## SHORTS

### THE BEAST WITHIN

Arrow Video, £15.99 (Blu-ray)



This handsomely made, well-cast MGM production belies its big studio pedigree to deliver a bonkers exploitation B-movie, filled with gore and eye-popping creature effects. The story (by underrated screenwriter Tom Holland) is insane. A dehumanised local man vows revenge on his foes by becoming a sort of skin-shedding insect. His method of achieving this? Rape a woman, get her pregnant and incarnate himself in the baby. And that's just backstory! The now 17-year-old old son (Paul Clemens) gurns his way through proceedings looking like a panto villain in a gumshield, winding up with one of the most hilarious transformation scenes ever. Despite (or rather because of all this) it's a great movie with wonderful atmosphere, a killer Les Baxter score and some surprisingly horrific themes. Nice HD transfer too. **Rev PL 8/10**

### ABSENTIA

Second Sight, £15.99 (Blu-ray), £12.99 (DVD)



Director Mike Flanagan has been frightening multi-plexes this year with his smart horror *Occulus*, but he got that gig partly on the success of this 2011 movie. A woman's husband has been missing for seven years and so, with the help of her sister, she finally declares him dead 'in absentia'. Yet, just as the forms are about to be signed, the nightmarish visions begin. And what is it that lurks in the tunnel across the street? It's been described as the best indie horror since *Night of the Living Dead*. That's pushing it, but as a slice of original, thought-provoking creepiness, *Absentia* can be recommended; not least because of its believable actors, emotional resonance and deep, subtle scares. **Rev PL 7/10**

### WHITE OF THE EYE

Arrow Video, £19.99 (Dual Format)



*Performance* is one of the greatest films to emerge from the 1960s, as well as a perfect, terrifying coda to the decade's twin obsessions with free sex and flashy glamour. Nic Roeg subsequently got much of the credit, but it was really society portrait painter manqué Donald Cammell's film, from script to final edit. Tragically, Cammell ended up sitting in the Hollywood Hills, dreaming of threesomes and squandering his talents. *White of the Eye*, released in 1986, is the only other movie he succeeded in finishing to his own satisfaction. What was probably intended to be an unambitious slasher movie – someone is offing wealthy women in their plush homes in the Arizona desert – is subverted and made strange by Cammell's predilections for writing off-kilter dialogue, mixing up past and present, coaxing powerful performances from his actors (David Keith and Cathy Moriarty) and painstakingly staging murders as if they were magical rituals; he did, as a child, sit on Crowley's knee and appeared as Osiris in Kenneth Anger's *Lucifer Rising*. The soundtrack by Nick Mason and Rick Fenn and the visual evocation of the arid southern Arizona landscape add a further sheen of weirdness to the proceedings. It's not great, it's possibly not even very good, but it is compellingly, fascinatingly odd in a way that draws one back to it. The icing on the cake of this top-notch Arrow package is the inclusion of the excellent, feature-length 1998 documentary *Donald Cammell: The Ultimate Performance*, with contributions from Jagger, Pallenberg, Fox and others. Recommended. **David Sutton 8/10**



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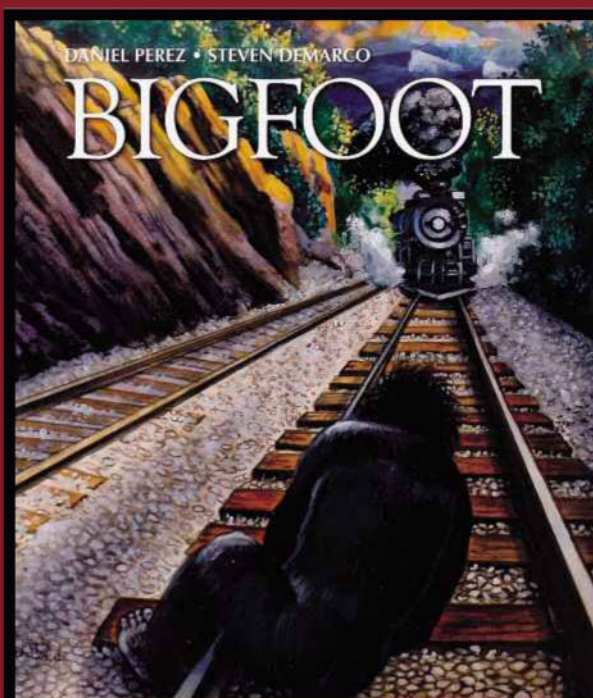
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Dear FT...

# letters



## Brain power

AE Howe and David Hambling comment on the “10 per cent use of our brains” [FT149:54-55], featured in Mythconceptions [FT146:26]. Benjamin Radford comments further on this [FT153:52] rather dogmatically asserting that this is a myth. I am not qualified to judge, but I think we have a paradox here. It appears to be a well documented scientific fact that the brain can store and process enormous amounts of data unconsciously – this being the favoured scientific explanation for the ‘Bridey Murphy’ and similar cases. This has to be so, or science would have to concede that these cases had paranormal causes. But doesn’t this contradict the flat assertion that we “use most or all of our brains”, to quote Radford?

**Nils Erik Grande**  
*Oslo, Norway*

## Kitlers

You reported on a puppy and cat both bearing a certain resemblance to Adolf Hitler [FT311:10]. This phenomenon has long since become a favourite Internet meme, with more than one website dedicated to photographs of charming critters with cute black ‘taches – try Googling “Hitler Cats” for a choice. There’s even an official terminology, Kitlers, and they have been discussed on the Graham Norton TV show. This is the history of the meme: “In May 2006, Dutch journalist Koos Plegt set up a blog to showcase photos of cats with black fur under their noses, resembling Adolf Hitler’s famous moustache, after seeing a cat with this coat pattern in his hometown of Zwolle, Holland. A month after the site’s inception, Plegt was contacted by British web developer Paul Neve about turning the blog into a collaborative website. *Cats That Look Like Hitler* was launched on June 26th, 2006. Users can rate and comment on the cat photos as well as submit their own.” (<http://knowyour->



[meme.com/memes/kitler](http://meme.com/memes/kitler))

And for those who enjoy gazing in admiration at photos of enthralling pets, may I also suggest Googling “Cats in Sinks”? Again, a meme established to deliver exactly what it says on the label. Enjoy!

**Gail-Nina Anderson**  
*Newcastle upon Tyne*

## Gospel truth

Re David Barrett’s review of Reza Aslan’s *Zealot* [FT312:57]: there is too much emphasis on the accepted fact that the Gospels were not written by people contemporary with Jesus. While this is true, we rely for much of classical history on sources that were not contemporary, such as Herodotus, Livy, Tacitus, and Arrian. I stop with the last name; for it needs to be pointed out that all our sources for Alexander the Great were written centuries after his death (while possibly using earlier texts).

The Gospels began to be written about AD 70 – within the lifetimes of people who might have known Jesus – and based on reasonably contemporary accounts. The Gospels are like all other accounts of the classical period and need to be used with care. Yes, aspects of them (including the nativity narratives) are dubious; but Aslan’s negative approach doesn’t enable us to use them. Instead, it tells us more about the author’s prejudices than it does about the facts behind the texts.

**Martin Jenkins**  
*London*

## Bafflegab

I am flattered that James Machin [FT315:73] turns first to my Classical Columns – thanks James, and don’t spare the horses...

As to his upset with my *Dr Who* review [FT314:62], we shall have (amicably) to disagree. No, I have no axe to grind. Just have no time for this ever-spreading infestation of academic

## Simulacra corner



“Cow pat goblin” photographed by Ann Pitt

*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](mailto:sieveking@forteantimes.com) – and please tell us your postal address.*

coteries writing for each other in jargon so hermetically sealed as to make *Finnegan’s Wake* a breeze. As said, watch and listen to the DVD interviews with the people who actually made and acted in *Dr Who*. You won’t hear a word about “semiotic thickness”, “commodification of the fan experience”, or any such tosh. Prime example: compare Elizabeth Sladen’s description of her Sarah Jane character as “a bit of a cardboard cut-out” with the book’s waffle about “intradiegetic allusion”.

My remedy for these purveyors of academic bafflegab is a crash-course in Orwell’s essays on plain English. As for Cultural Studies

– my “withering dismissal” was a clearly signalled quotation – you can trace a line of decay from innovator Richard Hoggart via Raymond Williams down to Stuart Hall and the other epigones. The kind of stuff I was objecting to is regularly ridiculed in *Private Eye*’s Pseuds Corner, on the back pages of the *Times Literary Supplement*, and in satirical novels from Kingsley Amis, Malcolm Bradbury, David Lodge, and most recently Edward St Aubyn (*Lost For Words*, 2014).

As Dr Johnson once said, “If I err, I err in very good company.”

**Barry Baldwin**  
*Calgary, Alberta*

## Surgical practice

I think that the Mythchaser [FT314:15] about the ban on surgeons showering immediately before an operation is nonsense. Having worked in and around the NHS for over 40 years, I have never heard of it and neither has my middle son – who is a Theatre Nurse in a large Acute Hospital. Surgeons and all other operating theatre staff all get “gowned up” and have theatre gowns, hats, shoes and – importantly in the context of the query – gloves. No surgeon would operate with bare hands.

**Rob Gandy**

*By email*

## Electric bridge

Andy Duncan could have had success in his experiment with seeing a light bulb glow under high voltage power lines [FT314:55] had he used a fluorescent tube rather than an incandescent bulb. Richard Box set up a giant array of fluorescent tubes in 2004, “Field”, as an art project in Tormarton, South Gloucestershire: <http://vimeo.com/11137816> and <http://hackaday.com/2009/04/10/field-a-fluorescent-array-wirelessly-powered/>

**Jim Lippard**

*Phoenix, Arizona*

Andy Duncan’s suggestion that his electric bridge experiments could be extended to include fluorescent lights or LEDs is interesting. A few years ago artist Richard Box put together a field of fluorescent tubes under an overhead power line. See <http://hackmod.com/>



PAUL TAYLOR

hack/field-of-fluorescent-tubes-powered-by-ambient-current/.

This illumination works provided the tubes are grounded (since earth is at 0 volts). Probably the field gradient from one end of a fluorescent tube to another wouldn’t be adequate to illuminate it if the tube wasn’t grounded. In the case of the electric bridge, the bridge itself could possibly be used to ground one end of the fluorescent tube, since it’s metal and it’s dug into the ground. ‘Cold cathode’ fluorescent tubes probably work best just because they have more availability of electrons.

LEDs are somewhat less promising because, being diodes, they only operate with a DC current – the current in the overhead cables is AC, so it generates an AC field, which in turn generates AC currents in other, nearby conductors. The AC current generated in the incandescent filament in Mr Duncan’s experiment resulted in its illumination. This is exactly the same principle whereby an incandescent bulb can be illuminated by putting it in a microwave oven (though I wouldn’t recommend it).

**Ian I’Anson MRSC**

*By email*

## Off-the-wall

Jenny Randles is getting even more interesting with her recent mature and reflective meta-ufological approach (“Reality blinks” FT315:27).

It is exciting to think that an anomalous smudge on her wall might indicate a new quantum reality for her, her cat and us all. However, the inter-specific spotting of the faux spider might have been caused by a small fly landing on the smudge, animating the outline of the smudge to make the whole thing appear to be a larger resting object – or rather animal – with a moving part. The small fly could then have flown away unnoticed at a moment of inattention as Jenny got up to check. We mammals are wired to detect small animate movements at the edge of our visual field.

Somerset Maugham’s moving head is likely to be a re-construal – say of a trace of dark paint as

‘beard’ being reconstrued as ‘a shadow’. When you shift a projected ‘theory’ of an object e.g. Gestalt visual phenomena – Necker Cube out/Necker Cube in, Duck/Rabbit, Old woman/young woman – it can sometimes be difficult to get back the original construal. 2D representations of 3D objects are subject to misinterpretation. Once Maugham had made a change from a casual ‘wrong’ to considered ‘true’ construal – one for which the artist had provided more graphic ‘evidence’ – then the post-move image would have been fully consolidated in Maugham’s mind.

The moving car may have been a genuine physical action. The parked car may have had its handbrake off and have been meta-stably perched or balanced on gravel or pebbles. Wind, thermal expansion, mundane sound or other vibration, oil or water dripping lubrication between stones could have changed the balance. The resultant move, cued by small sounds, would be picked up by the Warringtons, over their chips, as a sudden variation in their general vista. Avalanches don’t need actual earthquakes to get them going and nobody cites changes in the quantum fabric of the Universe to explain them, so nor does the moving of a designed-to-roll-car.

The shift reported by the UFO witness could just have been the contrast between a vague memory or habitual scene-construal and what was later consciously checked to obtain. That such an exceptional experience was not actually remarked upon at the time speaks highly of the Kentish lady’s truthfulness long after the event, but indicates that both the UFO and the reported shift in the scene may not have had more than a subjective or internal origin. Would photos of the Kent bungalow held by the resident family and the local estate agents have changed as well? If so, you’d have to believe in some sort of ramifying retro-directional time-travelling transformation as well as the entirely notional spatial rearrangement. I bet against. I’m a blinking sceptic.

**Alan Lewis**

*London*

I found Jenny Randles’s article on reality blinking incredibly compelling as it puts a finger in something that I’ve experienced a few times myself. Unfortunately I struggle to remember the exact circumstances of the phenomena and wonder if that in itself is a feature of this strange occurrence. Could it be that long after it happens the reality distortion itself distorts the memory? I agree with the conclusions in that given the nature of quantum physics anything is possible.

You certainly enlightened my day.

**Neil Smith**

*By email*

## Fuzzy outlines

I wonder if Simon Young, in his excellent item on “The Wool Roller” [FT315:25], is right to assert that it is unknown to folklore except in the instances he mentioned. Might the descriptions of a fleece, sheepskin, or a bale of wool (not a ball of wool of the knitting sort), rolling alongside lonely travellers, have other parallels – if one allows for the likely variety of witness reports and misperceptions of something with no very clearly defined form or a soft and fuzzy outline, moving in an apparent turning or rolling motion?

MR James’s publication of “Twelve Mediaeval Ghost Stories”, originally written by a monk at Byland Abbey about 1400, includes (Story I) a shape-changing ghost which appears first as “something like a horse rearing up on its hind legs” but then changes into “a whirling heap of hay with a light in the middle of it”, while Story II includes, at second hand, mention of a ghost who looks “like a thorn bush or a bonfire”.

Jacqueline Simpson, in *Ghosts and Scholars* 27, relates these, and the other equally odd ghosts in the series of stories, to folkloric accounts recorded in the 19th century: a road in Crowborough, Sussex, haunted by a bag of soot that chased people; the north country “Gytrash” appearing as “a rolling stone” or “a flaming barrel rolling across the fields”. She also notes William Henderson’s 1860s account that “a certain Yorkshire woman, called Old Sally Dransfield, the carrier from Leeds to Swillington, is a firm believer in the Padfoot. She declares that she has often seen it – sometimes rolling along the



## CIRCULAR FEATURES



I photographed this cloud in 2013, over the Petit Ballon mountain in Alsace. Nice UFO mother-ship, isn't it ?

As for the doughnut-shaped pond, I shot this in April 2014, still in Alsace, in a (beautiful) place called Frankenthal in the valley of Munster. There's nothing supernatural about it, it's a little peat-bog, but it resembles some of the ice or crop circles.

Unfortunately, there's nothing like *Fortean Times* in France – though at least we have good wine here in Alsace.

**Philippe Baumgart**, *Riquewihr, France*



ground before her, like a woolpack – sometimes vanishing suddenly through a hedge.”

Could the Byland monk's “whirling heap of hay” perhaps be related to the strange (undated) experience alleged to have happened to a brother and sister fetching water from Ffynnon Galchog (“the chalk well”), on the Great Orme at Llandudno? Walking home in the gathering dusk, they saw the smartly dressed figure of a man approaching – who began to rotate, faster and faster, until he turned into a bale of hay. This continued to spin around until it fell off the cliffs and into the sea. Sometime later, a prodigious fish was caught nearby and when it was cut open a bale of hay fell out, perhaps inevitably identified in the story as the same bale of hay that had rolled down from Ffynnon Galchog into the sea. And I recall – but of course cannot find – an early FT account of a group of schoolchildren seeing spinning blobs of straw flying over the fields near their school.

And do these spinning hay bales (sometimes illuminated), ghosts in the form of thorn bushes and bonfires and bags of soot, and rolling fleeces, perhaps have some

common origin? Do ball lightning and Jenny Randles's strange, localised and concentrated mists offer comparisons for the modern age?

**Gareth Hughes**  
*Norwich, Norfolk*

## Film horrors

It was interesting to revisit reported initial audience reactions to *The Exorcist* [FT313:30]. Perhaps because I was a committed lover of ‘fantastic cinema’ ever since seeing *The Monster That Challenged the World* on television when I was four, *The Exorcist*, which my mother took my sister and me to see when we were 18 and 14, didn't frighten me at all, and to this day, I cannot understand its appeal. I find it coarse, flat and obvious. In terms of what is frightening, I still find 1962's *Carnival of Souls* more frightening, certainly more eerie.

But after an experience in 2002, I feel I can vouch for the unexpected effect movies and other kinds of art can have on us. I myself was emotionally devastated and badly shaken, even physically so, by David Lynch's *Mulholland Drive* in 2001, perhaps because I had known several young people of enormous ambition, but little talent, who had

come to very bad ends. On my first viewing, I also understood (which many viewers and reviewers did not) that the suicidal young woman in the film's brief last section was also the beautiful blond woman from the much longer opening segment.

Some months later, I began working with a graphic designer, John, who was in his early 30s and with whom I shared a lot of interests. He had very recently seen *Mulholland Drive*, he told me, and had been as unsettled by it as I had been; he had also fully grasped the ending in the moment. After reading a review in *Fortean Times*, I picked up a DVD of *Donnie Darko*, the climax of which I found incredibly poignant, and then lent it to John. I knew he was generally depressed and experiencing trouble in his life, but I thought seeing the film would help him, as it had me. In fact, he returned the DVD to me in tears the next day, and could barely speak. After work we walked to the subway station together, and he cried again when he tried to express how *Donnie Darko* had made him feel, but his speech was broken and he couldn't communicate properly. Seeing how upset he was, I began to regret

lending him the DVD, especially since I had already decided not to recommend *Mulholland Drive* to anyone, because I felt its vision of ‘perdition’, of ‘final spiritual ruin’ had been too powerfully made. To this day, on that basis, I consider *Mulholland Drive* the ultimate horror film.

The next day, John was unexpectedly absent from work, and the next. On the third day, the office manager gathered the staff together to tell us that John had been found dead in his bed, the result of a heroin overdose. His partner, whom I had never heard mention of, came forward several days later, saying that John had committed suicide.

I don't know for certain that the one-two punch of both films pushed John to take the action he did, but I believe that it did. So while dozens of people may not have fainted or vomited during *The Exorcist* 40 years ago, I think it is very possible that some did, which the media, and perhaps the studio, then exploited. And some people may have committed suicide after seeing it. Short of a case in which a suicide note was left stating the fact, I don't think anyone can really say.

**Joseph Barnes**  
*New York*

## Holy company?

Re Galicia's Santa Compaña legend [FT312:26-31], I was prompted to dig out this photograph (right), which I took in summer 2012 near the town of Camariñas on the far west coast of the region. The place was very bleak and atmospheric that day, and although I'm sure that this sinister company I snapped was flesh and blood, it may not be a coincidence that the area is known as the Coast of Death, and is complete with an English cemetery of sailors who lost their lives in a disastrous shipwreck in 1890.

**Vienna Leigh**

By email

## Kenyan mystery animal

The article by Karl Shuker "On the track of the Nandi Bear" [FT315 46-49] examines a lot of material, both from the reports of the travelling menageries collected by the late Clinton Keeling and from Dr Shuker's encyclopædic knowledge of extinct megafauna and cryptids.

It does seem that we can still get surprises from looking at the records of the old travelling menageries. I well remember the late Clinton Keeling getting excited when I drew his attention to the existence of a Quagga in Miles's travelling menagerie when it visited Exeter in 1811. The animal had been otherwise unrecorded in recent times. However, the more one looks at the reports of the travelling menageries the less accurate they become and the more amazing their claims. The animal's name they used was often confusing. It took several years to establish that the "Javan Hare" was in fact a term for agoutis – wrong order of animals, wrong continent. Some animals that they claim to have exhibited are unlikely ever to be identified. It is quite possible that they may have exhibited animals before they were known to science (possibly the gorilla), and they exhibited animals that we now know to be extinct (Quagga and Thylacine). They also regularly exhibited hybrid big cats, although whether these were initially intentionally created or not is debatable.

As far as the Nandi Bear is concerned, an article published



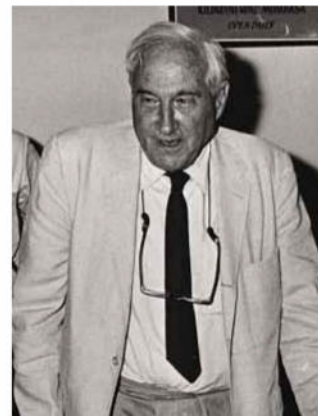
in the October 2009 edition of *Old Africa* by Angus Hutton sheds a lot of light on its identity. Hutton is a respected naturalist who had experience of preserving animals and was working between the mid 1950s and early 1960s on a tea farm at Chemomi, Kenya. One evening in June 1960 he was actually at the Nandi Bears (Golf) Club when he received a telephone call to go home urgently due to a staff problem. He set off for home with one of the farm assistants. Both were armed. On the way home he rounded a bend and saw two Nandi bears in the road. He described them as looking like two smallish bears standing upright with a height of four to five feet (1.2–1.5m).

He shot one through the neck with his pistol, killing it almost instantly. The other made off into the forest. He describes the animal as having amazingly high shoulders compared to the lower hindquarters, small rounded ears and massive jaws and teeth. The sexual organs were said to be massive and the animal appeared to be both male and female at the same time. The coat was long, shaggy and gingery brown. The following morning several neighbours came to look at the animal, and Hutton telephoned his friend Dr Louis Leakey (right) at the Coryndon Museum at Nairobi.

Leakey was very excited and asked that everything be preserved, which Hutton did. Hutton also took pictures of the body and plaster casts of footprints from the road where he had shot the

animal. Two months later, a friend took all the specimens, which included the skin and the skeleton, to the museum. In early August Leakey responded (a copy of the letter still exists) confirming the identity of the animal as a "Long Haired Brown Hyena". Because of its scientific importance and the quality of Hutton's work, Leakey reluctantly decided to send the specimen to the Natural History Museum in London. The size and weight of the casts, the skin and the skeleton dictated that it had to be sent by sea, not air-freight. Unfortunately there is no record of it ever arriving. The pictures that went with it were slides, so there were negatives left behind. I checked on ship losses in 1960/61 and nothing comes anywhere near it for route, etc.

The identity of the animal thus remains a mystery, except that it was almost certainly some sort of hyena. It seems unlikely that it was a local sub-species of the spot-



ted hyena, because of the lack of similarity, and the fact that the ordinary spotted hyena exists in the area. Brown hyenas are restricted to Southern Africa, and from the limited description this animal was morphologically different anyway. It seems likely then that it would be a species new to science that possibly had been restricted in range to the Kenyan highlands.

The area has changed remarkably since the 1960s, and the forest where the animal that Hutton shot had lived is now cleared with settled smallholdings. It is possible though that a small population of these cryptid hyenas could have been pushed back as farming clearance occurred. If this were so, then the forests to the west, across into Uganda and the Mount Elgon national park area, might be worth surveying for a remnant population.

**Chris Moiser**

Tropiquaria Zoo, West Somerset

## absolute-ley

Reading Nils Grande's "The Old Crooked Track" [FT315:74], I was reminded of GK Chesterton's lines: "Before the Roman came to Rye or out to Severn strode, / The rolling English drunkard made the rolling English road."

I'm sure that if you got all the place names with the "-ley" suffix and joined them up on the map "dot-to-dot" style, you'd end up with a picture of, well, just about anything you wanted it to be, let alone a few zig-zags. I don't think British *Ley*land logo is particularly "swastika-like", but BL, having previously bought up Standard-Triumph, then took over the British Motor Corporation, which included Austin-Healey, Riley and Wolseley. There was also the small volume Berkeley company – and Armstrong Siddeley. And Jaguar grew out of the Swallow Sidcar (S.S.) firm. We all know about the other S.S. and their lightning bolts (which is why Swallow changed their name).

Don't you find it odd that where two major "straight roads" cross (the Fosse Way and Watling Street), there is no sizable settlement, just open fields and woods?

**Bobby Zodiak**

Shipston-on-Stour, Warwickshire



First-hand accounts of goings-on from *FT* readers and browsers of [www.forteantimes.com](http://www.forteantimes.com)

## Warned off

In 1974 I was a probationary police officer in Hinkley, Leicestershire. I was not well paid and constantly worried about my 20-year-old Austin Mini breaking down. It had cost me only £30 – all I could afford – and was very unreliable. My brother-in-law John, who was far better off financially, offered to sell me his blue 1966 model Hillman for a give-away price. A deal was struck, but I had to wait until the following week as he wanted to purchase his new car on 1 August.

Five days before I was due to get the Hillman, my wife shook me awake an hour before I was due to get up for work, as I had been screaming in my sleep. I felt icy cold and was drenched in sweat; I was also very frightened. I had dreamed I was driving on the outskirts of Hinkley towards the centre of town. It was dark and the headlights were on. I was accelerating along a straight stretch of Ashby Road that follows a bend, known locally as Powers Corner, the site of mediæval gallows. The driver's window was open and I smelled cut grass on the wide verges as the warm night air blew into my face. It felt completely real, not like a dream. I was in high spirits and was singing along with the car radio.

Then the car swerved suddenly to the right with gut-wrenching force and there was a flash of some obstruction in my path. My teeth jarred as the car hit the concrete curb and my head was thrown forward as I lost my breath. I was hurled against the steering wheel and felt my ribs break like dry twigs and knew the spear-sharp ends had ripped into my lungs. I couldn't draw breath and foaming flecks of blood sprayed out onto the windscreen. The car came to a sudden halt as it hit a concrete lamppost. I knew I was trapped and looked down to see that my right leg was severed at my thigh, blood spurting from my groin. I try to scream but I was suffocating and no sound emerged from my throat – which was when my wife woke me up. After I had related the dream she asked me what car I had been driving; I could clearly recall that it had been the Hillman.

I didn't buy the car. I was so



shaken with the terrifying reality of the experience that I backed out of the deal. My brother-in-law was very understanding and agreed that while there was probably nothing to it, it was always better to be safe than sorry. He traded the Hillman at the Hinkley branch of Trinity Motors in part exchange for a new Triumph Toledo. It was not in the hands of the garage for long; one of the mechanics bought it the day it arrived, and a month later he was dead. In exactly the same circumstances as I had dreamed, the Hillman left the road and collided with a lamppost.

**Victor Roberts**  
*Manchester*

## Badger guide

In early summer 1997 I was driving back from a lovely week in Wales with a friend when we decided to go to her family's country house for a couple of days, as it was roughly on the route home. The house is a beautiful 16th century farmhouse in Aylesbury Vale, Buckinghamshire. Allegedly Oliver Cromwell based himself there for a short time, and the pond in the garden was dug by his men to water the horses.

Around dusk we decided to find a forest to walk in, so we got in my Ford Capri and drove out. My friend hadn't been in the area for a few years and didn't really know her way round too well. We drove for a mile or two, then found a likely-

looking pine forest. I'm not the kind of person who has intuition or feelings about what's going to happen, but as we drove round the perimeter road of this forest I felt a distinct foreboding. I told my friend I thought we shouldn't go in there, but she thought I was being daft, so we carried on.

At the entrance to the forest I drove down a gravel track until our progress was barred by a locked vehicle barrier. By this time it was twilight and the dense banks of pine trees cut out the little light remaining. My friend started walking up the path. I grabbed a torch and followed her, still feeling dread and expecting something bad to happen any moment. Crunching gravel, we strode up the track in darkness, shining the torch ahead. Something made me swing the torch round into the woods to our left; picked out in the beam was an area marked out by 'POLICE LINE DO NOT CROSS' blue and white tape wrapped around tree trunks. I instantly was absolutely sure that a body had been found, and that was why I was being warned not to go into the forest.

We looked at each other, simultaneously shouted a sharp expletive, ran full-pelt back to the Capri and got out of there, spraying gravel behind us. My right foot was fully to the floor, wanting to put as much distance as possible between us and the forest. After a mile, we began to calm down.

We then realised we had no idea where we were and hadn't seen any roadsigns for a while. I didn't want to drive back past the forest, so I drove on, hoping to find a signpost – this was of course in the days before sat-nav. We drove around the pitch-dark roads for a while without finding any clues, wondering how we would find the house again.

I saw something flash into the headlights and screeched to a halt. When the tyre smoke cleared, we saw a young badger standing in the middle of the road directly in the headlight beam. It didn't seem at all bothered by the tyre smoke, the car, the noise or the headlights; it just stood there looking right at us. It stared at us for so long, showing no sign of wanting to move, that I started thinking about how I might get the car past it in the narrow road. Just then it turned and started trotting – not running – down the middle of the road and out of the headlights. We shrugged at each other, and I started driving. After moving just a few metres the headlights once more picked out the badger, still trotting happily in the middle of the road, tail swinging back and forth.

I drove at badger-speed behind it for about five minutes when it suddenly disappeared from the headlights. I stopped the car and noticed that just to the right was an old wooden signpost for Ickford pointing to our left where we could now see there was a junction into another narrow road. I turned left and once again the headlights picked out the badger, still trotting merrily down the middle of the road. We followed it for another few minutes when it dived to the left and out of the headlights again. This time I couldn't follow as it had gone through a gate into a field.

I felt lost again – where to go now without a badger to follow? I put the Capri into gear and continued forward to find that no more than 20 metres ahead was my friend's house. The little badger had shown us the way almost to the front door. For the rest of the time I owned that Capri I kept a picture of a badger taped inside the sun visor, and I don't remember ever getting lost.

**Simon Brown**  
*Portsmouth, Hampshire*



# FORTEAN TRAVELLER

## 95. The Museum Of Souls In Purgatory, Rome

**IAN SIMMONS** wanders off the tourist trail and explores one of the oddest collections of religious artefacts to be found in the Eternal City

Rome's preeminent place in history and religion has made it a major centre for international tourism, packed with guided parties and with a world-famous attraction seemingly every 100 metres. The nature of its past, though, renders it a very rewarding city for forteans as well, with virtually every church housing miraculous relics, such as the alleged foreskin of Jesus at the Sancta Sanctorum (one of 15 recorded at one time or another), St Valentine's Skull in the Basilica of Santa Maria in Cosmedin or the marks of St Peter's knees in the church of Santa Francesca Romana, not to mention a host of other oddities. These include The Museum of Book Pathology, which explores the ways in which books can be damaged and restored; a door rich in alchemical symbolism in the Piazza Victor Emmanuel II; and a hermetic obelisk in the Piazza Della Minerva. Even established attractions have their fortean elements: it was at the Colosseum, for example, that Renaissance sculptor Benvenuto Cellini participated in a ceremony to summon demons that went badly wrong and gave him a serious scare.

Finding myself in the city recently to attend the Rome Maker Faire (a massive gathering of DIY technologists; but that's another story) I took some time out to try and visit some of these curious spots, along with more mainstream attractions en route. While it is impossible to get into the Vatican without either joining a tour group or three-hour queue, there still remain a good few attractions less besieged by tourists. I managed to visit the extraordinary Capuchin Catacombs with their artfully arranged stacks of human bones and mummified monks and was particularly taken by the fact that someone has gone to the trouble of

wiring the ancient bone chandeliers for electricity. A less well-known ossuary is the Hypogeum Cemetery of Santa Maria Dell'Orazione E Morte Church. This was assembled by the monastic order whose seat the church once was, and consists of over 8,000 bodies, unclaimed and without graves, found around Rome between 1552 and 1896, collected by the monks and laid to rest here. They too went in for decorative bone arrangements, along with inscribing the name, date and cause of death on many of the skulls.

**BELOW:** The striking gothic revival exterior of the church of Sacro Cuore del Suffragio in Rome.



My main target for the day, though, was one of Rome's most obscure museums: the Museum of Souls in Purgatory. It remains almost entirely unknown and was singularly free of tourists when I visited, despite its close proximity to the Vatican. The museum is housed in the church of Sacro Cuore del Suffragio (Sacred Heart of Suffrage), on Lungotevere Prati, a 10-minute walk along the Tiber from the Vatican, past the Castello San Angelo and the Rome law courts. These are fronted by impressive scowling statues of ancient lawmakers, one of whom, my colleague pointed out, bears a remarkable resemblance to Vigo, the villain in *Ghostbusters 2*. Sacro Cuore del Suffragio stands out immediately from all the other Roman churches because it is the only gothic revival church in the city, and to those of us used to northern European church architecture, all the more incongruous because it is constructed from dazzling white marble rather than granite or limestone. Its ecclesiastical opening hours required us to hang around for a while to gain entrance; once inside we found a soaring, gloomy place with good stained glass and passable altarpieces, but with no obvious museum in sight. However, on making enquiries of a verger setting up the altar for Mass, we were pointed to a small room up a side corridor near the vestry, where the museum inhabits a display case mounted along one wall.

The Museum of Souls in Purgatory is a unique institution, and came about because of a fire that destroyed the original Rome chapel of the Order of Our Lady of the Rosary in 1897. Once the fire had been put out, it was noticed that an image that resembled a tortured human face had been charred into a piece of wood beside the altar – and given the circumstances in which it was found, the congregation decided it was the face of someone in purgatory trying to communicate with the living. This was a notion seized upon by the priest, Father Victor Jouet. At the time, the Catholic Church was already beginning to feel the first twinges of modernisation, and Father Jouet was something of a traditionalist. Here was a perfect opportunity to provide concrete evidence that could refute the ideas of the reformers.

One of the concepts under threat in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century was that of Purgatory. This had been a plank of Catholic orthodoxy since the 11<sup>th</sup> century, but has no basis in the Bible. It was derived instead from a story allegedly told to Abbot Odilio of Cluny by a monk returning from the Holy Land who had been shipwrecked en route. He claimed to have met a hermit on the island where he washed up, who told him about a mysterious chasm that belched flames and from which





the screams of agonised souls could be heard, and said that the demons in it were always complaining about losing souls when the living prayed for them. As souls cannot be freed from Hell, it was concluded that this must be a third realm suspended between Heaven and Hell where souls not good enough for the former, yet not bad enough for the latter, would serve out a period of penance until they were deserving of an upgrade to Paradise; this period could be reduced by prayer or alms-giving by the living. The Catholic Church of the 11<sup>th</sup> century liked this, and very quickly the business of praying to get souls out of purgatory became a major preoccupation. By the late 19<sup>th</sup> century though, it had become something of an embarrassment, and the source of so much corruption within the Church that progressive forces wanted rid of it.

While the Order built the current church to replace the burned chapel, Father Jouet sought, and obtained, the permission of Pope Pius X to travel through Europe seeking other relics that indicated that souls in Purgatory were trying to communicate with the living. His quest took him through Italy, France, Belgium and Germany, and along the way he accumulated an eclectic selection of objects and photographs that bolstered the case for the existence of Purgatory and for his claim that its agonised souls were trying to send us messages by fiery means.

On his travels, he came across a dozen artefacts that satisfied his criteria for genuine evidence that could sit alongside his charred piece of chapel. In Sarrabe, Lorraine, France, he found the prayer book of George Schitz, to whom, in 1838, his deceased brother Joseph appeared and asked for his prayers, saying he was suffering in Purgatory for his lack of piety during his life. He had touched the prayer book George



## The mark was made by the tortured soul of his mother

was using, leaving a burnt handprint. In Wodeq, Belgium, Jouet found a relic from 1789 – a nightshirt with a handprint burned into the sleeve. The shirt belonged to Joseph Leleux and the mark was made by the tortured soul of his mother, who appeared to him on the night of 21 June that year after he had been kept awake by frightening noises for 11 consecutive nights. She reminded him of his duty to have masses said for her soul, as required by his father's will,

**TOP LEFT:** Some of the museum's exhibits.

**TOP RIGHT:** The scorched hand mark on the nightshirt of Joseph Leleux, left by his deceased mother.

**ABOVE:** The handprint and cross burned by Fr Panzini into a desk belonging to the Venerable Mother Isabella Fornari, abbess of the Poor Clares.



PHOTOS: IAN SIMMONS

reproached him for his dissolute life and urged him to return to the Church and change his behaviour, placing her hand on his sleeve as she did so. In Italy, Jouet was given a slab of wood from Todi, where, in 1731, the late Abbot of the Benedictine Olivetan Order in Mantua, Father Panzini, manifested himself to Mother Isabella Fornari, Abbess of the Poor Clares community. As she sat at her desk, he told her he was trapped in Purgatory; he etched a cross on the desktop with a burning finger, and left a charred handprint as well. As if that weren't enough, he pressed home the message by touching the sleeve of her tunic, making a hole in it and burning her flesh beneath. Father Jouet returned to Rome with both the charred desktop and the burned and bloody chemise for display. These, along with other similarly scorched pieces of wood and fabric, each with its own tale of Purgatory and redemption, went to create Jouet's tiny museum.

Father Jouet died in 1912, but the new church, along with his museum, opened in 1917, although it didn't stay that way for long. In 1920, on his arrival as the church's new priest, Father Gilla Gremigni promptly closed it, allegedly to confirm the authenticity of the exhibits. It did not re-open for another 30 years, and has had a fairly precarious existence ever since. Vatican unease is the reason that the museum is not signposted anywhere in the church, and in the early 1990s there was a further attempt to close it once and for all, as post-Vatican II theology rejects the idea of Purgatory as a physical place of suffering as decisively as the Museum of Souls in Purgatory asserts it. However, it survived that attempt to shut it down, and continues to exist in an awkward theological limbo to delight and inspire the determined seeker after the curious who makes the effort to find it.

*The Museum of Souls in Purgatory is in the Church of Sacro Cuore del Suffragio, 12 Lungotevere Prati, Rome. Open 7.30-11am, 4.30-7pm, Admission Free*



# POLICE

THE ILLUSTRATED  
LAW COURTS AND WEEK

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

## 32. KRAO, THE MISSING LINK

In January 1883, the Royal Aquarium advertised a novel attraction for the curious: the hairy little girl Krao, just arrived from Laos. Mr GA Farini, her manager, presented her as the 'missing link' between human and ape, and the living proof of Darwin's theory of evolution. He claimed that the intrepid German explorer Carl Bock had also captured Krao's parents, and that all three belonged to a hairy tribe of people living in the interior of Laos. Her father's body had been completely covered with a thick hairy coat, like that of an anthropoid ape. His long arms and rounded belly added further to his simian appearance. He had been incapable of speech when caught, Herr Bock claimed, but on board ship, he was able to utter a few words in Malay. The mother was, for reasons unexplained, detained at Bangkok by the Siamese Government, but these authorities apparently had no objections to six-year-old Krao being taken from her parents and transported to the other side of the globe.

The London journalists were treated to a special showing of the Missing Link, or Human Monkey. Some of them were taken in by Farini's banter about Krao's father having a face resembling that of a Skye terrier, and her entire tribe being hairy, but others found the little girl perfectly normal apart from her hairy growth. Krao was interested in a gentleman's shiny clock, and she pointed out a lady who had previously shown her kindness with the impromptu cry of 'Look, papa!' to Mr Farini. The correspondent of the *Illustrated Police News* was amazed that the little girl possessed "hirsute developments such as probably were never seen on a human being since the days of Esau." She was playful and good-natured, and politely said 'Good-bye!' to the journalists as they left her. Krao was soon the shining star of the Royal Aquarium, completely outclassing its other performers, including Professor Mark's

Dogs, the American Knockabouts and John Cooper's Trained Lions. The drawing in the *IPN* shows a rather bored-looking Krao sitting on stage playing with her toys, ignoring the audience gawping at her.

In *Nature* magazine, Krao was described by the anthropologist Dr AH Keane, who was one of the many Darwinists searching for the 'missing link' between human and ape. Both Africa and Asia were given attention by the zealous evolutionists, who were searching for atavistic signs, like tails or abnormal hairiness, in what they termed inferior races on mankind. Dr Keane had previously published a paper on the Ainu tribe in Yesso

and Sakhalin, and postulated the existence of a primitive hairy race in Further India. These preconceived notions made him a willing dupe for the showman's spiel. With rapt attention, he examined little Krao, who had by then been in London for 10 weeks. She had acquired several English words, which she used intelligently, and Dr Keane had to conclude that her intellect was that of a normal human child. Her entire body had a coat of rather thick, black hair, but its growth was nowhere close enough to conceal the skin. She was remarkably supple and agile, and Dr Keane was interested to note that her feet had particularly long toes, with



ABOVE: Krao being exhibited, from the *Illustrated Police News*, 13 Jan 1883.

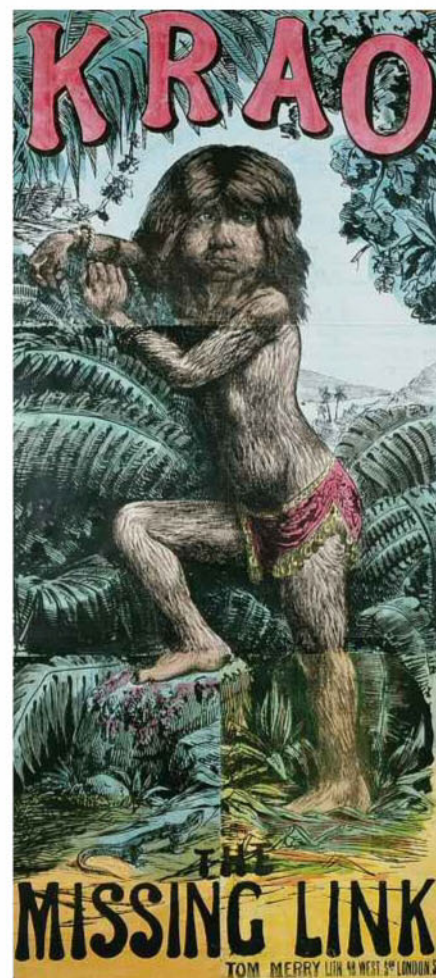


# ILLUSTRATED NEWS

WEEKLY RECORD

which she could actually grasp objects, and that her hands were so flexible that they could bend quite back over the wrists. He could detect no simian characteristics in the shape of her face, although the showman assured him that she used to stuff food into her cheeks just like a monkey, and that her lips could protrude so far as to give her "quite a chimpanzee look". She was given to terrible outbursts of rage when denied something, Mr Farini said, and the only thing that could suppress her unruly behavior was the threat that she would be sent back to her own people. With these observations in mind, Dr Keane concluded that Krao was the living proof of a hairy race in Laos, and thus a phenomenon of exceptional scientific importance.

Krao remained in London until late July 1883, when she travelled to Liverpool, and then on to Dublin in September. In 1884 and 1885, Krao toured Germany and Austria. She was exhibited at the Frankfurt Zoological Gardens, and the usual ostentatious advertising ensured a record audience: the zoo was so crowded that a 20<sup>th</sup> century German writer pronounced these shows the most memorable in its 150-year history. On the handbills and posters, a distinctly simian-looking Krao was portrayed dressed in a loin-cloth only; her hairy growth was exaggerated, and she stood grasping the branch of a tree in front of a jungle background. Several medical men examined her, among them the German dentist Julius Parreidt. He was interested to note that, unlike many other hairy people, Krao did not have a diminished number of teeth. In 1885, a certain Herr Bastian could announce that the explorer Bock's dramatic account of how Krao had been captured with her 'wild' family was nothing but a pack of lies; in fact, she had been born in Bangkok, the child of two normal parents, who were both still living! In 1886, Krao and Mr Farini came to Paris. Here, she was examined by the French anthropologist Dr Fauvelle, who was as eager as Dr Keane in his search for her supposed primitive and ape-like characteristics. Krao was lively and agreeable throughout the interview, and did not object to being examined. Apart from her hairy growth, Dr Fauvelle noted that her ears were rather large, that her nose was flat, and her joints very supple and flexible; all these observations were given a sinister interpretation. The impresario, always eager to make his charge appear even more interesting, assured him that she had 13 ribs



ABOVE: Krao and her manager Farini in a studio photograph, and in an illustrated handbill of the 1880s.

and the same number of thoracic vertebræ, that she had double rows of teeth, and that her behavior was often quite ape-like. In all earnestness, Dr Fauvelle wrote that he had unfortunately been unable to assess the intelligence of this strange 'ape-girl', since her command of the English language was far superior to his own!

Krao spent all her life in show business. Throughout the 1890s, she toured Europe with her manager Mr Farini, who had become her adopted father, and her English governess. In 1893, a certain Herr Maass saw the now 17-year-old Krao being exhibited in Berlin. The prudish German considered her short dress somewhat *risqué*, although not unbecoming. She was quite a young lady, he wrote, and her manner was decent and friendly. It was clear to him that all

the stories about her supposed ape-like characteristics were just inventions to make her even more interesting to the gullible public. Krao again toured Britain in 1899, with a lengthy stay at the Panopticon in Cardiff, where she became quite a favourite. Krao later became one of the stars of Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey's circus in the United States. One would not have supposed that a young girl who spent her adolescent years being exhibited as 'The Human Monkey' in various zoos and monster-museums would grow up to be a harmonic and well-adjusted individual, but it is claimed that Krao became one of the most popular 'old troupers' of the circus. She was an educated, well-read woman who spoke many languages. Krao died in New York in 1926.

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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 Aug 2014**. If you send photocopies, copy on one side of the paper only.

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# Why Fortean?



**F**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-as-organism and the transient nature

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

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

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

Besides being a journal of record, **FT** is also a forum for the discussion of observations and ideas, however absurd or unpopular, and maintains a position of benevolent scepticism towards both the orthodox and unorthodox.

**FT** toes no party line.

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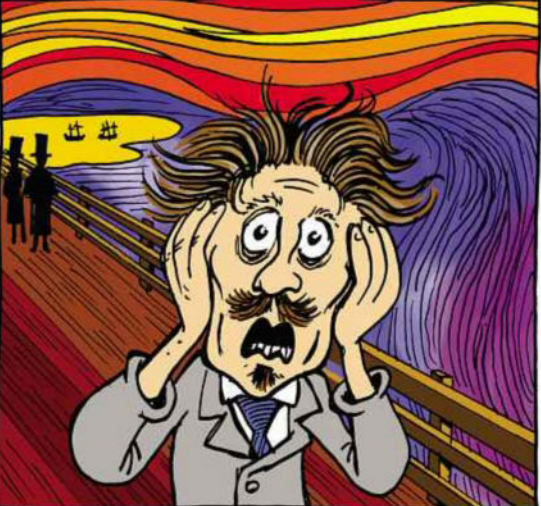
# PHENOMENOMIX

AUGUST STRINDBERG 1 HUNT EMERSON & KEVIN JACKSON

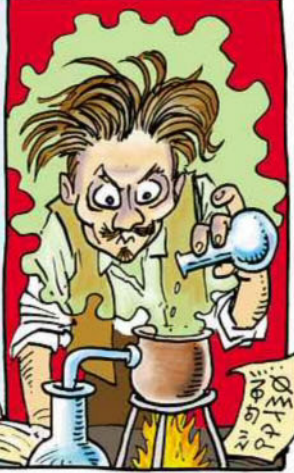
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HE FLED FROM HIS WIFE AND CHILDREN IN SWEDEN AND MOVED TO A GARRET IN PARIS, WHERE HE BEGAN A SERIES OF EXPERIMENTS IN CHEMISTRY AND ALCHEMY...



THESE TINKERINGS SOON MADE HIM SO ILL THAT HE HAD TO BE RUSHED TO HOSPITAL WITH BLOOD POISONING...



ON HIS RELEASE HE BECAME CONVINCED THAT EVERYONE HE KNEW WAS CONSPIRING AGAINST HIM...



HE BECAME A RECLUSE, BUT MISSED HIS CHILDREN SO MUCH THAT HE PERFORMED A WITCHES SPELL TO MAKE THEM FALL ILL, SO THAT HE WOULD BE SUMMONED HOME TO CARE FOR THEM...



IT WORKED...



HE WAS RACKED WITH GUILT AND PLUNGED EVEN DEEPER INTO THE MYSTERIES OF ALCHEMY...



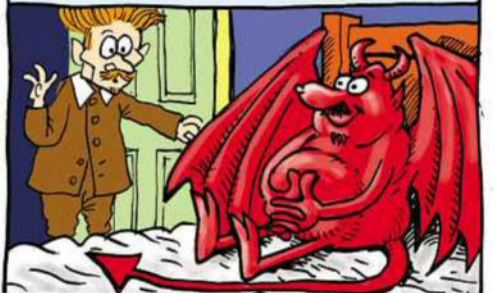
HE MADE A NEW FRIEND - OR WAS THAT TWO? - AN AMERICAN PAINTER WHO TURNED OUT TO BE A DOPPELGÄNGER...



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# FORTEAN TIMES 318

ON SALE 21 AUG 2014

# STRANGE DEATHS

UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL



Maria de Jesus Arroyo, 80, was placed in a body bag and put into cold storage at the White Memorial Medical Center in Los Angeles after being pronounced dead of a heart attack in July 2010. When staff went to prepare her body for her funeral days later, they found her nose broken and her face covered in cuts and bruises, allegedly suffered as she tried to escape from the freezer. Pathologist William Manion later concluded that she had been alive when she was put into cold storage, eventually woke up and "damaged her face and turned herself face down as she struggled unsuccessfully to escape her frozen tomb." Mrs Arroyo's husband and eight children are suing the hospital for medical malpractice. *D.Telegraph, 4 April 2014.*

Bishop Bobby Davis, pastor and founder of the Miracle Faith World Outreach Church in Bridgeport, Connecticut, was urged by his wife of 50 years to confess an affair to his congregation. He did this at the end of the sermon; the congregation shouted that they forgave him anyway, and then he dropped dead of a heart attack right in front of them. Columnist Andrew Brown comments: "Perhaps this stuff should be left to the Roman Catholics." *Church Times, 21 Mar 2014.*

Mina El Houari, 25, was buried alive by her new boyfriend on their first date after she fell into a diabetic coma and he thought she was dead. She had travelled from Cadenet in southern France to Fez in Morocco to see the man she had met on the Internet. Her family grew worried when she failed to get in touch and police found her body in the man's garden. The unnamed man was charged with involuntary killing. *D.Mirror, 3 June 2014.*

A teenager collapsed and died in June 2013 after a sneezing fit burst a blood vessel in his brain. Liam Andrews, 17, sneezed six times in a row at home in Stockton-on-Tees, County Durham, then vomited and began rolling round in pain before being rushed to hospital. He had surgery but died four days later. A post-mortem found a malformation within the blood vessel. His donated organs saved the lives of six people. *Sun, 29 Mar 2014.*

A factory worker died after 13 tonnes of molten metal was tipped on him. Kazuki Tada, 23, was working beneath a huge vat of an alloy heated to around 1300°C (2372°F) at Nippon Denko plant in south-western Japan when the container overbalanced, pouring out its contents. Allen Wardle, 52, lived for six hours in 1998 with 100 per cent burns after falling into a vat of molten zinc in Witham, Essex. *MX News (Sydney), 26 Feb 2014.*

An elderly Pakistani immigrant beat his wife to death in 2011 after she cooked him lentils for dinner instead of the goat meat that he craved. Noor Hussein, 75, pummelled his wife Nazar, 66, as she lay in bed in their Brooklyn apartment until she was a "bloody mess". "Defendant asked

[his wife] to cook goat and she said she made something else," court papers stated. "The conversation got louder and [his wife] disrespected defendant by cursing at defendant and saying motherf\*\*ker." Hussein's weapon was a stick the family had found in the street and used to stir their laundry in a washtub.

He tried to clean up the blood that spattered onto the bedroom wall before calling his son for help. In May 2014 he was convicted of second-degree murder at Brooklyn Supreme Court and faced up to 25 years in jail. *NY Post, D.Telegraph, 22 May; brooklynada.org, 29 May 2014.*

A Queensland man apparently escaped serious injury in a single-car crash on the Gold Coast – only to be hit and killed by another car as he left his vehicle. The 27-year-old was driving on the Tugun Bypass about 1am on 22 February when his car crashed near the highway's central divide. *(Adelaide) Sunday Mail, 23 Feb 2014.*

A 19-year-old man was on a hunting trip in Saudi Arabia when he thought he saw a monkey sitting in a tree harvesting fruit – but it was a woman. "He aimed his gun and shot," said the police. "The bullet hit the woman in the chest." The victim, a shepherd in her 60s, was pronounced dead in hospital. *MX News (Sydney), 8 Nov 2013.*

Ronald Burns, 78, choked on ham he was sampling at a delicatessen counter in Sainsbury's, Basingstoke, Hampshire, last November, and died of oxygen starvation five days later. David Atkins, 46, choked on a sausage roll walking down a street in Poole, Dorset, on New Year's Eve 2013, moments after buying it in a supermarket. He suffered cardiac arrest and brain damage and he died six days later in hospital. There was another choking death in Poole on 9 March, when Louise Amey, 47, of Ringwood Road turned blue after a pickled onion stuck in her throat while she was watching 'Dancing on Ice' on TV. She suffered cardiac arrest and brain damage, and died in hospital five days later. *Metro, Sun, 27 Jan + 20 Feb; Bournemouth Daily Echo, 14 May 2104.*

Bruce Holland, 64, took part in a pie-eating contest at the Bushland Beach Tavern in Townsville, north Queensland, on 17 July 2013. After a few bites he started to gasp, sat down with a glass of water, said "Jeez, this chilli pie is hot!", and passed out. His death about 90 minutes later was thought to be from a heart attack. A spokesman for the pub's owners said: "There were seven other people in the competition and the meat was not overly hot." *D.Telegraph, D.Mail, 20 July 2013.*

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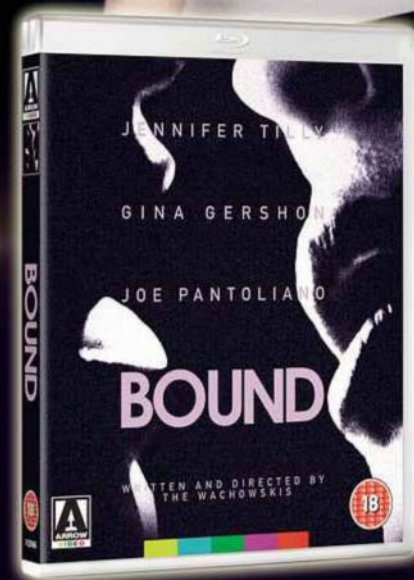
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