

WARMINSTER AT 50

THE TRUE STORY BEHIND
THE SIXTIES UFO HOTSPOT

PERVERTS ON PARADE WORLD'S STRANGEST SEXUAL FETISHES
PRINCESS FROM THE MOON JAPAN'S MOST ANCIENT UFO CASE
DEFENCE OF THE REALM IS BRITAIN READY FOR ALIEN INVASION?

CHICKEN CHURCH • KAMIKAZE CANINES • FAKE SHAKESPEARE • WHEN SEAGULLS GO BAD

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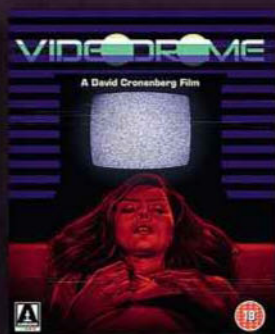


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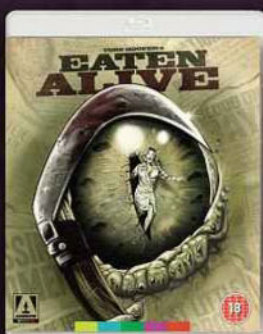
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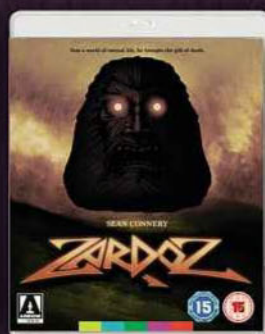
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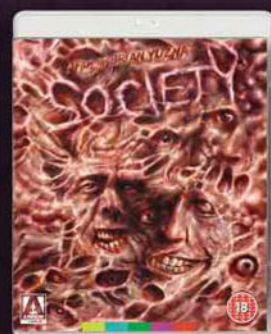
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strange days

Satanic statue unveiled in Detroit, more kamikaze canines, perverts on parade, glass delusion, gull attacks, dwarfs and *duendes*, Indonesia's Chicken Church, London's sewer hogs, Madrid's UFO conference – and much more.

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David Simpson created UFOs from ordinary bits of plastic and metal in his workshop. Some people believed they came from other worlds. **DAVID CLARKE** reveals the story of the hoaxer who fooled the Warminster skywatchers.

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Is Britain ready for an alien visitation?

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editorial

Skywatching

It's 50 years since the peaceful Wiltshire town of Warminster became a major focus of the British UFO scene. From early accounts of weird aerial noises and scattered UFO sightings, reports from the area grew steadily in volume, until mass skywatches on Cradle Hill and coverage in the national media became the norm.

Given the level of attention, and, indeed, excitement, that this apparent hotspot of UFO activity was generating in the mid to late Sixties, it's no surprise that hoaxing came to play a part – though as David Clarke reveals (see pp40-47), some of the hoaxers had more in mind than just pranking. David Simpson and his SIUFOP (Society for the Investigation of UFO Phenomena) shared the excitement of their fellow skywatchers, but quickly realised that the desire to see UFOs was also a “desire to believe in something” – and that this desire to believe had a profound effect on *what* people saw... or thought they saw. With this in mind, David and his friends set out to create their own UFOs and see what happened. The story of how events unfolded is a fascinating, and often forgotten, bit of British ufological history.

Of course, David Simpson's story is only one thread in the rich tapestry of the Warminster phenomenon, and if you'd like to learn more and celebrate the anniversary, then it might be worth making a trip to Wiltshire for the 'Warminster 2015' conference organised by Kevin Goodman and taking place on Saturday 29 August. Local veterans and assorted ufologists will be speaking, and, following the day's talks, a special 50th anniversary skywatch will be held on Cradle Hill. For full details and to buy tickets, go to: <http://www.warminster2015.uk/>

There's plenty more of ufological interest in this issue, as Chris Saunders asks why China has seen such an upsurge in UFO interest in recent years, Bob Rickard goes in search of the historical roots of Japan's Moon Princess, Luis R Gonzalez discovers an incredible collection of UFO materials in Tuscany, Theo Paijmans reports from a conference in Madrid that points to new directions in research and Jenny Randles dusts off her 1960s UFO detector.

THE BIRDS

Last issue it was foxes, this time it's gulls creating a full-on media panic: herring gulls, to be precise, terrorising residents and tourists of seaside towns, taking out a concert pianist, disembowelling a small dog, fatally injuring a pet tortoise and leading the prime minister (who must surely have more pressing issues on his mind) to declare that we need to have “a big

conversation” about these winged terrorists. As a result of all this fuss, as is usual when we're confronted by our non-human neighbours doing what they do, gulls have been accused of unbridled aggression and malice aforethought; there have been angry letters in the newspapers, calls for armies of young boys armed with air rifles and what would appear to be cases of deliberate and illegal poisoning.

Most reports of gull attacks seem to

originate in Cornwall, for whatever reason. One obvious explanation for this outbreak of ASBO-worthy avian delinquency – aside from the huge food resource provided by human populations and their wasteful habits year round – is that the breeding season always leads to extremely protective behaviour on the part of vigilant parents. We can only add that at FT's coastal outpost on the other side of the country, the gulls have been behaving impeccably; one pair successfully raised a chick on the chimney and

only resorted to warning swoops when passers-by came too close for comfort. For a full round-up of gulls behaving badly, turn to p18.

ERRATUM

FT328:5 Noel Rooney made a slip-up in his Conspirasphere column, as pointed out by readers Martin Stubbs of London and Bill Polaski of Mineola, New York. Noel wrote that the “space shuttle *Challenger*... exploded on re-entry in 1986,” but *Challenger* was in fact destroyed shortly after take-off, just 73 seconds into its flight; it was *Columbia* that disintegrated on re-entry years later in 2003. Bob also suggested that that “the article's use of ‘explosion’ to describe the event is somewhat inaccurate, as both *Challenger* and *Columbia* disintegrated due to structural failure and aerodynamic forces, rather than being blown apart from within.”



"HOW WOULD I DESCRIBE THE ALIENS?
 LIKE CHICKEN, BUT CHEWIER."

DAVID R. SUTTON
 BOB RICKARD
 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

The Devil came to Detroit

The Satanic Temple unveils its Baphomet statue at “night of debauchery”

Just before midnight on Saturday, 25 July 2015, in an industrial building in Detroit, Michigan, a 9ft (2.7m)-tall bronze statue of a winged Baphomet with a human body and a goat's head was unveiled by two men who then kissed passionately in front of it as about 700 supporters cheered “Hail Satan!” Statues of a boy and a girl stood in poses of adoration on either side. The name Baphomet was originally conferred on an idol that the Knights Templar were accused of worshipping. Since 1856, the name has been associated with a “Sabbatic Goat” image drawn by Eliphas Levi.

To throw off any infiltrators, the Satanic Temple had to change the location of the unveiling of their one-ton monument and set up a fake event. Protesters arrived at the decoy location and spent the night there in the rain while the actual event carried on, unmolested, miles away. At the last moment, the organisers emailed the actual venue information to ticket holders, who had been invited to join them for “a night of chaos, noise, and debauchery at The Unveiling, a hedonistic celebration introducing the controversial Baphomet monument accompanied by provocative performances and installations”. They said the statue was “not only an unparalleled artistic triumph, but stands as a testament to plurality and the power of collective action. Come dance with the Devil and experience history in the making.” Ticket-holders were required to sign a contract transferring ownership of their souls to Satan. This was intended to filter out the “extreme superstitious radicals”. Jex Blackmore, director of



“The last thing we need in Detroit is a welcome home party for evil”

the Satanic Temple Detroit chapter, said Temple members planned to transport the sculpture to Arkansas, where earlier this year the governor signed a bill authorising a Ten Commandments monument on the State Capitol's grounds. The Temple had unsuccessfully applied to have their statue – the work of an unnamed sculptor in New York – placed near

another Ten Commandments monument installed in 2012 on the Oklahoma State Capitol grounds. The Oklahoma Supreme Court recently ruled that the monument violates a section of the state constitution that bans the use of state property for the benefit of a religion. Lawmakers responded with threats to seek the impeachment of the court's justices and pledged to push for changes to the constitution. Oklahoma Governor Mary Fallin, a Republican, said she would keep the monument in place as the state appeals the decision.

The presentation of Baphomet in Detroit drew protest from local Christians. “It is every Christian's duty to destroy this if you see it destroy this statue destroy this statue destroy this statue,” according to one Facebook post. About 50 people prayed for the city and denounced the monument outside a business where the Satanic Temple previously tried to display the statue before fears of a backlash scuttled the plan. “The last thing we need in Detroit is having a welcome home party for evil,” said Reverend Dave Bullock, a pastor at Greater St Matthew Baptist Church in Highland Park, Michigan. “This is not even a real religion in my estimation.”

According to its website, the Satanic Temple “holds to the basic premise that undue suffering is bad, and that which reduces suffering is good” and doesn't “believe in symbolic evil”. It says: “We embrace blasphemy as a legitimate expression of personal independence from counter-productive traditional norms. It is the position of The Satanic Temple that religion can, and should, be divorced from superstition. As such, we do not promote a belief in a personal Satan. To embrace the name Satan is to embrace rational inquiry removed from supernaturalism and archaic tradition-based superstitions.” [R] BBC News, Vice News, 27 July 2015.



PERVERTS ON PARADE

Automotive eroticism, tree-humping, puppy love and more...

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A LEGION OF LITTLE PEOPLE

Sightings of elves, dwarfs and duendes around the world

PAGE 18



THE ART OF THE ALIEN

A conference with a difference puts UFOs in a fresh context

PAGE 20

The Conspirasphere

Is conspiracy just a niche in a wider online market of alternative information? And are the Flat Earthers making a comeback? NOEL ROONEY investigates.

Duncan Roads, the editor of *Nexus* magazine, has set up a news website, the Alternative News Project (<http://alternativenewsproject.org/>), to gather and report on a whole range of topics across the alternative spectrum. It's not an original idea, though Roads's version of it is comprehensive and attractive enough, but it led me to thinking about conspiracy theory as part of a bigger cultural project.

Nexus, like its uncannily similar competitor *New Dawn*, regularly carries articles by conspiracy theorists (both the hermeneutic sort and the automatic dissidents, if you were paying attention last time: see FT330:4), and so does the new website. What struck me as I browsed the site was that conspiracies were not especially privileged on the site but are a sub-section of the geopolitics category; moreover, they looked comfortable in their niche.

This strikes me as a contrast with the treatment of conspiracy theory by academics and sceptics: those writers see conspiracy as the umbrella term under which a clutch of alternative viewpoints and theories shelter. I suspect the alternative industry has it right;

conspiracy is just one niche in a wider market for information and theory that goes against the orthodox grain.

It's tempting to see conspiracy as the dark underbelly of the New Age; the flipside to Blavatsky's 'ascended masters' (12 bearded men under a hill directing humanity towards a better brighter future) is 'Them' (12 bearded men under a hill plotting the downfall of humanity). But the relationship is a little more complex and subtle. Conspiracy thinking does something to alternative ideas; it both fragments and complicates them, while at the same time placing them in a broader, grand narrative continuum.

The mechanics of this unravelling process are curious. Take an area of interest such as ancient mysteries: on the face of it, this is primarily a signal of an open attitude to non-mainstream explanations for aspects of ancient history. But conspiracy thinking operates on it to produce a bigger narrative. First, it observes the reaction of the orthodox academic community (mostly benign scepticism, but occasionally sown with real contempt) and characterises it as a conspiracy – of silence in the face of new and better ideas, of active repression and hiding of evidence and knowledge – and thus evokes Them, making the field of study one of confrontation too. This is the fragmenting and complicating process at work.

Secondly, it places ancient mysteries in a constellation of interlinked theories and confrontations, the grand alternative narrative, where They are a constant presence (what one might term a conspiracy of clues). It attempts to integrate the various strands of New Age interest, while focusing them through the correcting lens of conspiratorial alignment. Curious then,

that conspiracies do not take centre stage on alternative cultural products; perhaps it's because there are other integrating mechanisms (New Age spirituality, for instance) that perform a similar function, albeit from a different point of view.

Meanwhile, I'm intrigued by the recent flurry of activity on Flat Earth websites; traffic to these sites has (it is claimed by some of the sites themselves) increased by 600 per cent in recent weeks. Are we about to see a revival of a very bloody odd idea?

See www.atlanteanconspiracy.com/ for an example of modern Flat Earth thinking.



EXTRA! EXTRA!

FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

'Useless' pelvis controls whale penis

Sydney Morning Herald, 11 Sept 2014.

Flying cows, spiralling elves and a singing monkey visit Galway festival

Irish Times, 9 Sept 2014.

Frustrated baker in court for headbutting faulty sausage roll machine

Northern Echo, 15 Sept 2014.

Mole wants extended winning run

Halesowen News, 25 Sept 2014.

CROOKS READY TO LEAVE HULL

Hull Daily Mail, 18 Sept 2014.

Giant Grandmother set to captivate Limerick audiences

Irish Times, 26 Aug 2014.

Drunk man with dead rabbit found in maternity ward

Irish Independent, 13 Sept 2014.

Marvellous moggies



On 28 June, an estimated 3,000 people turned out to the company funeral of Tama the cat in the Japanese city of Kinokawa, Wakayama prefecture. The famous feline had acted as the stationmaster of Kishi station, on the Kishigawa line, since 2006, and was credited with saving the struggling railway from financial ruin. Here, Tama is pictured wearing a stationmaster's cap of the Wakayama Electric Railway, and manning a ticket gate at the station. She died from cardiac arrest on 22 June, aged 16.

Guardian, 29 June 2015.

PHOTO: TORU YAMANAKA/AFP/GETTY IMAGES.

Eight-month-old Hei Hudie (meaning "Black Butterfly") has been fitted with a set of wheels in a pet hospital in Chongqing, southwest China, after being thrown from the 10th floor of a building, fracturing her spine and losing the use of her hind legs. The plucky survivor underwent four operations within five months and can now walk again with the aid of her special wheelchair. *D.Mail*, 17 Mar 2015.
PHOTO: STR/AFP/GETTY IMAGES.



Tara, a seven-year-old female cat, looks out at the media after being presented with the 33rd Annual National Hero Dog Award by the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals-Los Angeles (SPCALA) on 19 June. In May 2014, Tara became a YouTube sensation with a video in which she fought off a neighbour's dog that attacked her six-year-old owner in the driveway of their Bakersfield, California, home. The SPCALA broke with tradition by presenting the award to a cat rather than a dog for the first time. *[AP]*, 19 Jun 2015.
PHOTO: MARK RALSTON/AFP/GETTY IMAGES.

SIDELINES...

SKULL STOLEN

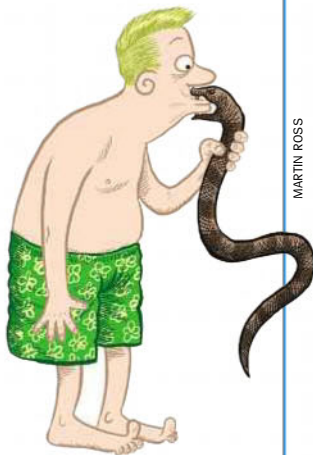
Some time between 4 and 12 July, the skull of Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau, director of the silent 1922 expressionist vampire classic *Nosferatu* [FT326:30-36], was taken from his grave in the Stahnsdorf cemetery outside Berlin. Wax residue was found nearby, suggesting that candles had been lit and a possible occult motive for the theft. Murnau died in a car accident in California in 1931 while felling his houseboy [FT329:68]. *BBC News*, 15 July; *Independent*, 16 July 2015.

INDIAN PRODIGY

Hindus flocked to Jharkhand's Giridih district in India to worship an eight-limbed baby as a reincarnation of Ganesh, the elephant-headed deity seen as a "remover of obstacles". The boy, born on 18 April, was a conjoined twin with separate hips and legs, a fused chest and a single head. *D.Telegraph*, 25 April 2015.

FLORIDA FOOL

Austin Hatfield, 18, captured a 4ft (1.2m) cottonmouth snake while swimming near Wimauma, Florida, in mid-April. Cottonmouth snakes, sometimes called water moccasins, are extremely dangerous; but the dim-witted teenager tried to kiss it, whereupon it bit him on the lip. He was taken to the hospital in critical condition but was expected to make a full recovery. *Clickorlando.com*, 22 April 2015.



MARTIN ROSS

The Chicken Church

Indonesian prayer house built to instructions from God



Deep in the Indonesian jungle lies an enchanted 'church' that looks like a giant chicken with its beak open mid-squawk. The long-abandoned structure known locally as Gereja Ayam ("Chicken Church") attracts curious travellers and many Christians, Muslims and Buddhists to the hills of Magelang, Central Java. It has also become a safe haven for couples from the nearby villages of Flower Limus and Krangrejo to commit 'immoral acts' away from prying eyes.

Daniel Alamsjah, 67, was working in Jakarta, 550km (340 miles) away, when he got a message from God to build a 'prayer house' in the form of a dove on top of a hill. In 1989, he was walking through the Magelang, where his wife's family live, when he caught sight of the exact landscape he had seen in his dreams. "I prayed all night there and I got a revelation that I must build the prayer house in that spot," he said. A year later, local



landowners offered him the 3,000m² (32,300ft²) of land on Rhema Hill for just two million rupees (£110) – which he paid off over four years. He constructed the bizarre building with the help of 30 locals, "Perhaps because of my Christian faith, people thought I was building a church," he said. "But it's not a church. I was building a prayer house... a place for people who believe in God."

The building – which has 15 basement rooms – was also used as a rehabilitation centre for "disabled children, drug addicts, crazy people and disturbed youth who wanted to fight." It shut its doors in 2000 because the construction costs were too high, but many continue to visit, though five of the eight pillars holding the building up are now crumbling. *dailymail.co.uk*, *mymodernmet.com*, 13 July 2015.

PHOTOS: ALEK KURNIAWAN

The glass delusion

Might a vanished psychiatric disorder make a comeback?

The glass delusion is a psychiatric disorder that appeared in Europe, mainly between 1400 and 1700. Victims believed themselves to be made of glass and thus liable to shatter. One notable sufferer was King Charles VI of France, known as “Charles the Mad” (reigned 1380 to 1422; pictured, right, taking to his bed), who refused to allow people to touch him, and was reported to have wrapped himself in blankets to prevent his buttocks from breaking. People wrote satirical poems and stories about the delusion, and instances appear in many early medical encyclopaedias. Robert Burton in *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621) and René Descartes in *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641), both touch on the subject, and in Cervantes’s short story *The Glass Graduate* (1613), hero Thomas Rodaja is poisoned by a quince intended as an aphrodisiac but which instead triggers a glass delusion.

Cases tailed off dramatically in the 1830s, but Andy Lameijn, a psychiatrist from Leiden in the Netherlands, has uncovered subsequent examples. A lecture of 1883 from the archives in an Edinburgh mental hospital cited the symptoms of a female patient who thought her legs were made of glass. Another case from the 1880s turned up in the footnotes to an edition of *The Glass Graduate*, referring to a contemporaneous case having occurred in a Paris asylum. Radio producer Lance Sieveking recalls that two familiar figures on the seafront at St Leonards, East Sussex, in the years just before World War I “included two ladies who thought they couldn’t bend because they were made of glass”. Lameijn was approached by a fellow psychiatrist who had found a case in the archives of his own Dutch hospital that dated back to the 1930s. The woman had been admitted to a psychiatric hospital believing that



her legs and back were made of glass. She apparently recovered after treatment. Another doctor brought Lameijn a case from a different hospital, from 1964.

Then a young man turned up at the University Clinic in Leiden, claiming to be made of glass, and Lameijn had the opportunity to speak to the only contemporary person to present with the delusion for decades. Lameijn asked what this feeling meant to him, not wanting to distort the conversation by suggesting ideas of fragility or transparency, and after initial reticence, the man began to open up. He pointed to the window in the consulting room and asked Lameijn what he could see. Lameijn replied that he could see a street, some cars, people walking past, and waited. The patient said: “Ah! You’ve missed the glass in the window. You didn’t see it. But it is there.” He leaned forward, and said: “That’s me. I’m there, and I’m not there. Like the glass in the window.”

The patient claimed that he was able to turn this feeling of being “there” and “not there” on and off at will, like a switch in his own mind – he could “disappear” and “reappear”. He had recently had an accident, and Lameijn began to formulate a theory as to why a modern person might present with glass delusion. He concluded that the man was using the delusion as a sort of distance-regulator;

following the accident, his family had become over-protective, and the delusion was an attempt to regain privacy and hide from overbearing family members.

The probable reason why someone with mental illness in the 15th to 17th centuries might manifest the glass delusion is that clear glass was a new material, seen as magical or alchemical. Throughout history, according to Prof Edward Shorter, a historian of psychiatry from the University of Toronto, the unconscious has pegged its delusions to new materials and technological advances. In the 19th century, cement delusions appeared at a time when cement emerged as a new building material, just as delusions of recent decades include the belief that the security services can download thoughts through micro-transmitters and “read your mind”.

Psychoanalyst Adam Phillips argues that the glass delusion has powerful contemporary resonance in a society in which anxieties about fragility, transparency and personal space are pertinent to many people’s experience. The feeling of being made of glass could be a useful way of understanding how we negotiate a society that is increasingly crowded, in which modern technological advances isolate us and offer apparently boundary-less communication. Novelist Ali Shaw, author of *The Girl with Glass Feet*, suggests that the glass delusion might simply be at the extreme end of a scale of social anxiety that many of us experience to a lesser extent: the fear of tripping and breaking is an exaggerated fear of social humiliation. A programme called ‘The Glass Delusion’ was broadcast on BBC Radio 4 on 8 May 2015. See Gill Speak (1990): “An odd kind of melancholy: reflections on the glass delusion in Europe (1440-1680)” (*History of Psychiatry* 2 (2): 191–206); BBC News Magazine, 8 May 2015.

SIDELINES...

SWEET SOLUTION

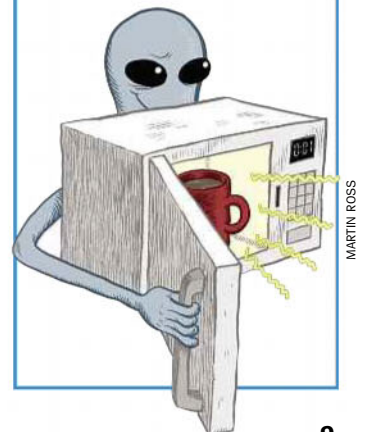
Nikolay Grazev, mayor of Nova Zagora in south-eastern Bulgaria, ordered the sprinkling of 110lb (50kg) of sugar on all major roads in the city to ward off “evil omens” and counter a recent increase in crashes. The initiative is based on an ancient legend,” according to a statement issued from the mayor’s office. *Sunday Age (Melbourne)*, 31 May 2015.

NAGS FROM THE DEAD

Ted Wiseman, 79, from Halesowen, West Midlands, believes he is being hen-pecked by his late wife. Yvonne, 64, who died from a stroke in May 2014, now moves things when Ted puts them in the wrong place, and told him through a medium to stop wearing her slippers. She recently woke him in bed, bellowing: “Stop bloody sniffing!” Ted commented: “That’s exactly what she used to say. She was the gaffer.” *Sunday Mercury*, 29 Mar; *Sun*, 30 Mar 2015.

NOT FROM SPACE

The cause of strange signals that baffled astrophysicists for 17 years has been traced to a microwave oven in an observatory’s kitchen. The signals (called *peryttons*) were first detected at the Parkes telescope in New South Wales in 1998. Their frequency and duration suggested fast radio bursts from another galaxy, but they only occurred during business hours. An interference monitor revealed their true source: opening the oven door before the timer had pinged. *BBC News*, 5 May; *i>* 6 May 2015.





SIDELINES...

MR SPAREPANTS

The manager of a Nando's restaurant in Bristol has overcome his addiction to fresh underpants after realising it was leading him to penury. Curt Almond, 26, "didn't feel comfortable" unless he was wearing brand new boxers, at a cost of £40 a week, while coping with a painful break-up. He amassed 365 pairs in a year. *Sun, Metro, 22 April 2015.*

HOPPING MAD

A kangaroo called Anton escaped from his owner in Austria and disappeared into forests every time someone tried to catch him. He had been living rough for several weeks at the time of the report, contradicting the famous slogan on T-shirts and souvenirs: "No kangaroos in Austria". *<i> 29 Jan; irishexaminer.com, 31 Jan 2015.*

CHILEAN MYSTERY SOLVED

The wreckage of a plane that crashed in the Andes 54 years ago, killing 24 people, including eight members of the top-division Chilean football team Green Cross, has been discovered at an altitude of 10,500ft (3,200m) about 215 miles (360km) south of Santiago. The disappearance of the Douglas DC-3 on 3 April 1961 was one of Chile's great unsolved mysteries. Rescue teams had spent weeks searching for the plane, and symbolic funerals were held for the missing players. *[AP] 9 Feb 2015.*

RAMPANT HYPOCRITE

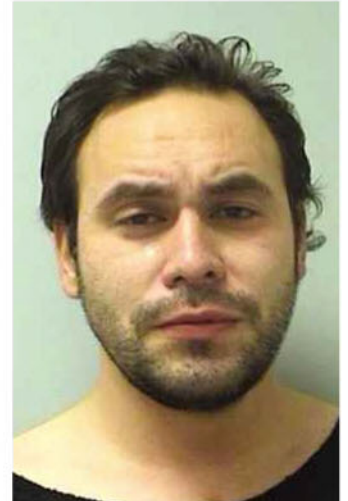
A conservative American politician was voted against a gay rights bill has been 'outed' for posting pictures of himself naked on Grindr, the gay dating app. Randy Boehning [sic], 52, a Republican from Fargo, North Dakota, helped defeat legislation that would have barred landlords and employers in the state from discriminating on the grounds of sexual orientation. He is not married. *D.Telegraph, 29 April; Metro, 1 May 2015.*

CRAZY LOVE

HOW STRANGE SEXUAL APPETITES, FROM BESTIALITY TO TREE HUMPING, OFTEN LEAD TO AN APPEARANCE IN COURT



ITV ABOVE LEFT: Edward Smith has been making love to cars since 1965. ABOVE RIGHT: Suspected Horse-gobbler Jared Kreft



- Last October, Edward Smith, 63, from Washington in the US, revealed on the television show *This Morning* how as a young teen he was "tempted one night to step outside" to make love to the neighbour's Volkswagen Beetle, having first become attracted to cars in 1965. "I'm not really attracted to any sort of, may I say, penetration," he explained. "It is hugging and holding the shape of the car close to me and actually talking to it a little bit. And then of course, the rest is just physical satisfaction – masturbation is, I guess, the word." He explained that he kept his clothes on during his passionate sessions, but "basically just unzipped". He has been with the love of his life, Vanilla, since 1982; despite having another, simultaneous relationship with a Ford Ranger called Ginger, he said there was no resentment on Vanilla's part. Besides having sex with over 700 cars, he has also had a relationship with a helicopter and planes, claiming they are all better than women. *D.Mirror, 14 Oct 2014.*

- For CCTV footage of a man sexually assaulting a Porsche in Thailand last May, see <http://bangkok.coconuts.co/2015/05/11/auto-erotic-man-sexually-assaults-porsche-thailand>

"Helicopters, cars and planes are all better than women"

- Kenneth Douglas, 60, worked as a morgue attendant in Ohio from 1976 to 1992. Last August, he admitted to sexually abusing the cadavers of three women between 1991 and 1992, and disclosed in a deposition that he had had sex with up to 100 corpses over a period of 16 years, while he was drunk or high on crack. "I would just get on top of them and pull my pants down," he told a court. Douglas wasn't rumbled until 2008 when his semen was found on a murder victim, 19-year-old Karen Range, who was killed by a door-to-door salesman. *Independent, 18 Aug 2014.*

- Jimmy Savile may have had sex with corpses for more than 50 years. A former nurse said she was warned about the activities of a person she thought was Savile at Leeds General Infirmary in 1954. She was heading to the hospital's mortuary when the ward sister told her "to be careful and come

back if the pink-haired man is there". She added: "He was there, so I turned around and went back to the ward." Savile is also believed to have stolen glass eyes from the dead and made them into medallions and rings. *Metro, 27 Feb 2015.*

- Jared Kreft, 30, from Wausau, Wisconsin, was arrested on 17 December 2014. He was suspected of performing oral sex on a horse after viewing 'horse pornography'. Responding to a call about strange goings-on in a barn, police found Kreft near a horse, wearing a facemask, black jacket and blue jogging pants with holes cut in the crotch and bum. He also had a dope pipe and a jar of petroleum jelly. *Huffington Post, 23 Dec 2014.*

- On 2 June 2015, a Texan was arrested for having sex with a horse for the third time. A woman contacted Hidalgo County Sheriff's office on 17 February to report an injured man in her barn. When officers arrived, she identified the injured man as Cirilo Castillo Jr, 45, and said he had been previously arrested for having sex with her horses. Castillo maintained that he had been struck by a car and crawled to the barn for shelter; but investigators believe he was



ABOVE: In custody (L-R): serial pony-pesterer Cirilo Castillo, dog 'lover' Ashley Miller, and tree-shagging flakka freak Kenneth Crowder.

trespassing in the barn in an attempt to have sex with a horse, but his leg was broken when the horse kicked him. In September 2013, Castillo received five years probation after he was caught horsing around in the same barn. He had tied a horse to her corral and performed oral and vaginal sex on her. First arrested for horse sex in 2012, he was sentenced to 270 days' jail for public lewdness. *Huffington Post, Metro, 11 June 2015.*

• Jonathan Ford, 32, who ran the 'I Love Lucy Pet Rescue' shelter in Hattiesville, Arkansas, was arrested in mid-June on suspicion of bestiality. The animals with which he was allegedly intimate were transferred to a different dog shelter. *Metro, 16 June 2015.*

• Ashley Miller, 18, was arrested in Bradenton, Florida, after police found 17 mobile phone photos in a folder called '2-face fun', appearing to show her receiving oral sex from a pit bull called '2-face'. "Miller explained that she would call 2-face into her room, take her pants off, open her legs and 2-face would lick her vagina," stated the police report. "Miller believes 2-face has licked her vagina approximately 30 to 40 times." Miller admitted that she kept the dog at her grandmother's house and would go there when she wanted oral sex. She added that her previous dog, a Rottweiler-pit bull cross named Scarface, did the same thing to her and that "she did not have to push her [the dog] to do it." *Metro, 17 June 2015.*

• Wallace Berg, 81, a retired embalmer from Stratford, Connecticut, was arrested on 29 July for public indecency. A neighbour called police complaining that Berg was walking around his backyard with no clothes on. He videoed Berg 'humping' a bush and confronted Berg, who covered himself with a grill cover, apologised and went into the house. He was released after posting a \$10,000 bond. *[AP] Connecticut Post, 28 July 2015.*

• On 26 June, police in Millersville, Pennsylvania, caught Larry Henry, 64, on a neighbour's farm in the nude, drinking beer among pigs. He told them: "I just like pigs". Banned from the farm after being caught trespassing four years earlier, he was now charged with trespassing, public drunkenness and indecent exposure. He admitted drinking a six-pack of beer while hanging with the hogs. The brand of beer was in keeping: he was drinking Hamm's. *[AP] 15 July 2015.*

• Akin Zuhayir, 31, of Enfield, north London, was charged with attempted abduction of three girls aged 11, 12, and 13. The married man admitted in court that he got sexual kicks from feeling and sniffing "black, leather, flat-soled pumps", adding: "It's embarrassing. I've asked adults about shoes but mostly schoolgirls. Those are the type of people who wear those types of shoes." He was found not guilty, but given a sexual risk order. *Sun, 17 July 2015.*

• Luke Rudge, 33, from Leamington Spa, was jailed for 14 months after he lay on the floor in a library, grabbed a woman's ankle and kissed it as she read a book. He also sniffed her boots, which she had taken off, and told the 57-year-old that she had "beautiful legs". Warwick Crown Court heard that he had been jailed for four years in 2011 for indecently assaulting a girl of 14. *Sun, 11 Dec 2014.*

• Kenneth Crowder, 41, was arrested in April after running naked through a park in Melbourne, Florida, and having sex with a tree while under the influence of a cheap synthetic drug from China called Alpha-PVP (aka 'flakka' or 'gravel'), which allegedly first appeared in Florida last year. It was designed to mimic cathinone, a natural stimulant found in the leaves of the khat plant, chewed in the Middle East. Crowder was tasered twice before telling police he was 'Thor' and trying to stab an officer with his own police badge. A witness said the naked man appeared to have "superhuman strength". James Hall, an epidemiologist at Nova Southeastern University, said some 27 people had died from flakka-related overdoses in the last eight months in Broward County alone. "It's the most intense, rapidly emerging drug problem since the 1980s with the emergence of crack cocaine," he said. The term 'flakka' apparently comes from 'la flaca', Spanish slang for a slender and attractive woman. *Sun, 17 April; [R] 10 June 2015.*

SIDELINES...

RADIOACTIVE BOAR

Tests have shown that, 28 years after the Chernobyl nuclear disaster, one in three wild boar roaming Saxony – 700 miles (1,130km) away – are too radioactive to eat. They are particularly affected because they feed on mushrooms and truffles that store radiation. Meanwhile in central Norway, a dramatic rise in radioactivity in the reindeer population might have been caused by a bumper growth of the gypsy mushroom (*Cortinarius caperatus*). *D.Telegraph, 2 Sept; [R] 6 Oct 2014.*

SPUD SOLUTION

An AA mechanic has received an award for the most original car repair after fixing a 1960s Land Rover on a Hertfordshire farm with a potato. Mario Papademetriou, 59, mended the ignition system by strapping a spud to the engine with cable ties. With the addition of two screws, it worked as a condenser. The driver said the vehicle had never driven so well. *D.Telegraph, D.Mail, 20 Feb 2015.*

TRULY EXCREMENTAL

A girls "sweet 16" party in Levittown, Pennsylvania, was ruined when a torrent of human faeces from a passing plane splattered all over the tables, chairs and decorations, and into the pool where people were swimming. About 40 people were affected. *Courier-Mail (Queensland), 24 May 2015.*



MARTIN ROSS



SIDELINES...

RECORD DUMP

Around 25 tons of pigeon droppings, 3ft (90cm) deep, were cleared from the 14th century Landgate Arch in Rye, East Sussex, to save it from becoming a ruin. "We have never seen such a monumental mass of festering faeces," said Mike Walker, boss of County Clean Environmental Services. *Sunday Sun*, 1 Mar 2015.

CRAP'S TREASURE

A fortune in gold, silver and platinum can be extracted from human faeces, an eight-year study has found. Levels of precious metals were comparable with those found in some commercial mines. In Britain, extracting them could be worth £510 million a year. Traces are found in cosmetics, shampoos, clothes, run-off from metal industries and some foods. Particles can be dislodged from cutlery and from gold and silver medical diagnostic tools. *D.Telegraph*, 24 Mar 2015.

SCHROCK SHOCK

Sarah Schrock, 56, of Mechanicsville, Maryland, who allegedly shaved skin off her feet and put it in her roommates' milk on 4 May, has been charged with felony poisoning and assault. When one roommate coughed up what appeared to be human skin, the milk was strained and found to contain bits of shaved skin similar to the kind Schrock kept in trays in her bedroom. [R] 13 May 2015.

URBAN PARTRIDGE

A partridge set up home in a north London dry cleaners sometime in May. Hassan Volkan, the owner of Sun Dry Cleaners in Fortress Road, Tufnell Park, was looking to find it a mate to keep it company. The bird had apparently been wandering NW5 and N19 for weeks; it was spotted in Highgate Library on 19 March. The RSPB said it was "virtually unheard of" to find a partridge walking city streets. *Camden New Journal*, 7 May 2015.

Monk mummy revealed

Scan shows Buddhist master sitting inside ancient statue



MEANDER MEDICAL CENTRE / DRENTS MUSEUM

ABOVE: The Buddha statue and the CAT scan revealing the perfectly preserved body of Master Liu Quan inside it.

In what is almost certainly the only example in the world, an ancient Buddhist statue contains the perfectly preserved mummy of a 11th or 12th century monk, aged between 30 and 50. He is thought to have starved himself to death in an act of extreme spiritual devotion and his remains displayed in his monastery somewhere in China. Some 200 years later, perhaps after his remains started to deteriorate, his mummified remains were placed inside the lacquered statue of the Buddha.

The statue was bought several decades ago by a Dutch collector, who had no idea it contained a mummified monk. The unusual contents were discovered in the 1990s when it was being restored, but the mummy could not be removed because of the risk of disintegration; now, however, an international team led by German palaeontologist Wilfrid Rosendahl has conducted a CAT scan and endoscopy at the Drents Museum

in the Netherlands, revealing the monk's skeleton in perfect detail. Experts took samples from the thoracic and abdominal cavities and discovered that the monk's organs had been removed and replaced with ancient wads of paper printed with Chinese characters. He was identified as Master Liu Quan of the Chinese Meditation School. Samples of bone were also taken for DNA testing. Until last May, the statue was at the Natural History Museum in Budapest, after which it was planned to display it around Europe.

Liu Quan might have been a Sokushinbutsu – a monk who performed self-mummification. For 1,000 days the monk would eat a special diet consisting only of nuts and seeds, while taking part in a regimen of rigorous physical activity that stripped him of his body fat. He then ate only bark and roots for another 1,000 days and began drinking

a poisonous tea made from the sap of the Urushi tree, normally used to lacquer bowls. This caused vomiting and a rapid loss of bodily fluids, and made the body too poisonous to be eaten by maggots. Finally, he would lock himself in a stone tomb barely larger than his body, where he would not move from the lotus position. His only connection to the outside world would be an air tube and a bell. Each day he rang the bell to let those outside know that he was still alive. When the bell stopped ringing, the tube was removed and the tomb sealed. The other monks in the temple would then wait another 1,000 days, and open the tomb to see if the mummification was successful. *deathandtaxesmag.com*, 23 Feb; <http://3.bp.blogspot.com>, 24 Feb; *D.Telegraph*, 25 Feb 2015. In January, mummified remains of a man apparently meditating in the lotus position were unearthed in Mongolia [FT325:22].



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TOO MUCH INFORMATION

Has the pace of new discoveries about the Universe reached the point where we can no longer keep up? **DAVID HAMBLING** looks at the evidence for “attention decay in science”

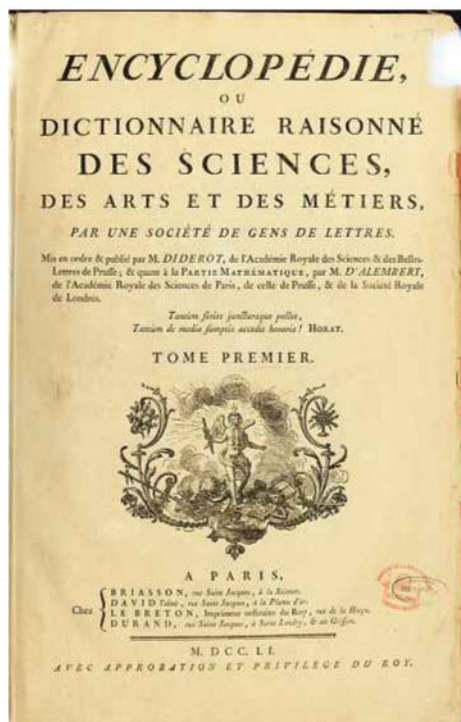
As the body of scientific knowledge grows ever larger, is it becoming so obese it might collapse under its own weight? A new paper on “Attention decay in science” suggests that it is increasingly difficult for scientists to stay up to speed in their own discipline. This raises the possibility that rather than being able to explain everything, future scientists will not be able to explain anything.

It's not really a new problem. Back in the 17th century, the well-rounded scholar could stay abreast of the latest developments in all the sciences and have time for art and literature too. New discoveries appeared at a leisurely pace from a handful of research institutions. It was not until the mid-18th century that the pace quickened and French philosopher Pierre Levy identifies “the end of an era in which a single human being was able to comprehend the totality of knowledge”.

Various individuals have been described as “the last person to know everything”, including polymath Athanasius Kircher (below) who worked on everything from hieroglyphics to electromagnetism, the mathematician Gottfried Leibniz and the philosopher Immanuel Kant. Individuals like Isaac Newton, who was, by modern standards, remarkable for his breadth of study – optics, gravitation and integral calculus, as well as alchemy and biblical study – were narrow by comparison.

Not that Kircher or Leibniz would have aced it in their local tavern quiz. They did not have a photographic recall of the dates of the Popes, or details of the Peloponnesian Wars. Instead, they had a broad comprehension of all knowledge and how it fitted together, a comprehension impossible to later scholars because human knowledge had grown so vast.

In 1751 a French group known as the Encyclopædists set out to remedy the situation by condensing all human learning



RESEARCHERS HAVE TO MOVE FASTER TO STAY UP TO DATE

into a single convenient book. Known as “Encyclopædia or a Systematic Dictionary of the Sciences, Arts, and Crafts”, it drew together experts from all different fields, with more than 100 contributors. In its democratic and idealistic approach it was the exact counterpart of the present-day Wikipedia.

One of the curiosities of the original *Encyclopédie* to modern eyes is in combining arts and sciences. Back then, there was no strong division, but by the 20th century the faultlines were showing. CP Snow's 1959 lecture on “The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution,” later a bestselling book, highlighted how many apparently educated people were not just ignorant of science but actively hostile to knowing about it. Knowledge of

Shakespearean sonnets and the laws of thermodynamics had become mutually exclusive.

The fracturing continued, with cracks becoming visible between social sciences studying humankind and the hard sciences dealing with the physical world. In the 1960s and 1970s, structuralism, post-structuralism and postmodernism overturned traditional ways of thinking in the social sciences, particularly in Europe. The result is that different

groups of scientists now speak completely different languages and view each other with distrust. A similar situation applies on a smaller scale across different disciplines. Experimental physicists may not see eye-to-eye with theoreticians or computational physicists, even when they are working on the same problem, because they are coming at it from different angles.

There is a tendency then for knowledge to be divided up into a set of territories, each jealously guarded against heresy intruding from other disciplines. While it may be an obstacle to the bigger picture, science can still progress so long as each field is well understood by the scientists working in it. The risk is that they will drown in the deluge of new papers flooding in from an ever-increasing number of institutions.

“Attention decay in science”, authored by six researchers

from California and Finland and published on *Arxiv*, looks at the amount of attention received by scientific papers from the last 40 years. They use the

number of citations as a yardstick for how much a paper is noticed. The study encompasses millions of papers in clinical medicine, molecular biology, chemistry and physics.

According to the *Daily Mail*, the paper shows that “Science is ‘in decay’.” Others had fun with headlines like “Study reveals there are too many studies.” The findings are actually rather more subtle than that. Perhaps the negative media response mainly illustrates how CP Snow's two cultures are still locked in conflict.

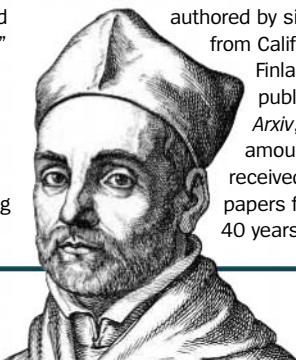
“Attention decay” is a measure of how something attracts most interest when it is new and is then gradually ignored. A paper will initially be cited by other papers in the same field, but as it is superseded by later studies, the number of citations falls off. Researchers will cite a recent, up-to-date paper rather than one decades old, even if the content is the same. What “Attention decay in science” found was that as the number of publications has increased over the last few decades, the time taken for a paper to reach its peak attention became shorter, and interest tails off more rapidly.

“The decay is getting faster and faster, indicating that scholars ‘forget’ more easily papers now than in the past,” say the authors. However, they note that there is another way of measuring attention decay. What causes a paper to become less interesting is not the passage of months or years, but the publication of new papers that make it obsolete. Measuring time in this way gave a different picture.

“If time is renormalised in terms of the number of papers published in the corresponding period (e.g., in each given year), we find that the rescaled curves die out at comparable rates across the decades.”

In other words, scientific papers are being read, assimilated and cited just as before. The only difference is that as papers are now appearing more rapidly, the whole process has accelerated.

Science itself is not, after all, in decay. Researchers have to move faster to stay up to date than previously, but that is simply another way of saying that there are more exciting developments than ever before. It seems that, scientifically speaking, we are living in interesting times.



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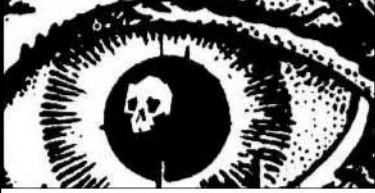


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GHOSTWATCH

ALAN MURDIE looks into tales of diminutive entity encounters from around the world

ELVES, DUENDES & GREMLINS

Two interesting stories from Latin America featuring ghostly children and haunted young people have emerged in the last year, with many interpretations being possible for the claimed phenomena.

In September 2014 reports came of sightings of humanoid figures resembling small children or dwarfs at the Tenorio Volcano National Park in northern Costa Rica, visited by thousands of tourists each year. A local forest guide and several tourists gave accounts of seeing what they initially took to be a group of children walking hand in hand along a forest trail in the park. The area is renowned for its outstanding natural beauty and particularly famous for the Rio Celeste or Light Blue River flowing through it, the waters of which are literally stained blue due to an influx of sulphur, calcium carbonate and other minerals from the volcano. The park is peppered with thermal springs and geysers, with lagoons and waterfalls set amongst the thick rainforest. According to the eyewitnesses, the children appeared to be no more than five years old, each clad in green clothing, long-sleeved shirts, long trousers and beret-like headgear.

Homer Dávila, a member of the team of professional guides who conduct tours around the park, described his sighting during a rain storm on the afternoon 14 September 2014: "When we came back after visiting the Teñideros [the final point on the main trail] it started to rain; so we took a short cut passing the entrance to the waterfall; in a sector where there is a small plain and the forest gives way to a kind of bush. As I managed to overtake a couple of tourists at that point, the rain became very intense leaving us completely soaked.

"A few metres into this area lies a gully with a lot of mud, in which we saw three children holding hands, scurrying along the path, at a distance of about 30 metres [100ft] ahead of us. The children seemed dwarf-like, in a hurry. Suddenly [they] went into the bush and did not go further. I remember them wearing green clothes."

Interestingly, Homer stated that he had an unaccountable sensation of fear whilst seeing the figures. He was not alone in witnessing these elf-like beings; a couple five metres [16ft] behind him also saw them. One witness was tourist Jennifer Zuniga who was reported as saying: "Mommy and I were waiting for the guide to indicate we could go down to the waterfall. I do not quite know how it happened... I saw a group of three children leaping and laughing and jumping, like normal children usually do when they are in a group and become happy. I found it strange that they were so small and unaccompanied with no one to watch over them. I called attention to Mom but in an instant they were gone..."

"I remember they were walking along wearing dark green hats and green and beige



ABOVE: A waterfall on the Rio Celeste in Costa Rica's Tenorio Volcano National Park – the haunt of elves?

coloured clothes. Honestly, I thought they were dwarfs, because their faces did not resemble those of children."

There was something about the figures that also unnerved Ms Zuniga, who stated: "The truth is that a chill ran through my body. After that, we did not see anything else. We went down to the waterfall and things continued normally".

These have been classed as *duende* sightings in Costa Rica. A *duende* is an elf or 'fantastic spirit', said to dwell in some houses and frolic, causing disorder and banging sounds in many respects identical to the poltergeist. In rural areas the *duendes* appear as elves or gnome-like figures.

This is the first known reported sighting of such apparitions in the Tenorio Volcano National Park, but according to officials at the site, there are stories from the neighbouring Bijagua de Upala sector of a child in red robes, sitting on a stone near the volcano.

In another context these accounts might be interpreted as shamanic figures. Mircea Eliade in his classic *Shamanism: Archaic States of Ecstasy* (1964) noted how spirit helpers across the Americas appeared as short figures dressed in green. The colour green appears in many folk stories of strange children or child-sized entities, from the mediæval Green Children of Woolpit in the famous story to traditions of the fairy folk in Great Britain and Ireland. ('Reportan aparición de "duendes" en Rio Celeste' *Geografica Costa Rica*, 6 Oct 2014; <http://geografiacr.com/index.php/tribu/143-reportan-aparicion-de-duendes-en-rio-celeste>; *Costa Rica Times*, 19 Oct 2014; www.costaricantimes.com/are-there-elves-in-costa-rica/32460.)

Meanwhile accounts of hauntings, sightings of a phantom child and claims of the *duendes* have been collected concerning the Castle of La Glorieta, a military academy established

at Sucre, Bolivia. This institution, one of the most prestigious training centres for the armed forces in the country, was founded in October 1965, taking in generations of young men from all nine provinces of the country with the goal of "instilling in them civil, moral and spiritual values". However, the strict and disciplined environment has not been enough to quell persistent stories of hauntings on the site. After many years, stories of ghostly encounters reported by all ranks and grades of young men at the college are starting to be made public.

Activity is focused in the oldest parts of the castle, including two buildings occupied by service families where residents suffer object movements, whispering and strange touches. Cadets have also reported a heavy and intense atmosphere – as well as apparitions and noises – in various locations around the site: at a memorial flagpole, within an auditorium and a laundry, and along the Quirpinchaca riverbank.

There are competing explanations for these hauntings; some blame ghosts of the dead, "comrades who have not entered heaven", while others propose an infestation by *los duendes* or emanations of "hellish presences". Amid manifestations there is even a report of clanking chains – a traditional motif in ghost-lore dating back to antiquity but markedly absent from reports in Britain for many decades.

The chains were heard by Eufronio Céspedes, a cadet at the college in the early 1990s, and his comrade and best friend, Jhonny Cayoja, now in the military with the rank of captain.

"When I was in my third year, in 1991, I had to stand guard at a booth and checkpoint with a fellow cadet between 2:00 to 6:00. I was with my comrade Jhonny, relieving two other comrades. Approximately half an hour later

we were there in total silence, when we heard a noise that seemed as if people were digging near the river, and cracks like rifle shots.

"Having listened for about three minutes but what seemed an eternity, and in total darkness, we did not dare go down to see who it was or what might be happening. Suddenly the sound of picks stopped and was followed by the noise of chains being dragged along the ground: they seemed large and heavy, needing great effort to pull. "Neither myself nor my comrade could react. We were perplexed and the only thing left to do was hide under our blankets."

Both young men listened intently and heard the sounds approach ever closer to their position. "We felt something soft and very light pass over our bodies and the chains stopped rattling. At that moment I think we lost consciousness or sank into a deep sleep until our comrades were sent to ask why we had not appeared on parade."

Walter Reyes Serrano, an officer cadet who graduated in 1974, recalls witnessing several unexplained episodes. He often sensed figures dressed in strange clothes and saw weird shadows inside the wine cellar and the towers where unruly cadets were punished or stood guard. Objects sometimes seemed to appear from nowhere or be transported from other parts of the college. One night during a thunderstorm, a dark room was lit up by flashes of lightning, during which he momentarily glimpsed the unexplained form of a small boy (ghosts manifesting in thunderstorms are also remarkably rare despite their featuring in many popular traditions and in horror fiction).

Adding to the fears of cadets, a woman in white has also been seen around La Glorieta. At one point, fear of ghosts became so prevalent that guard duty by cadets had to be conducted in pairs. Stories are told of one cadet who was paralysed with fright, aghast at seeing a woman in a white dress floating in the air – curiously reminiscent of a phantom seen at the England's Aldershot barracks in 1876-77.

Manifestations at La Glorieta seem to have intensified in the last few years. In 2013, a 13-year-old student recently admitted to the college with a companion heard strange noises, described as a "commotion" amongst boxes stored in part of a former hospital wing, and witnessed a door opening and closing violently. Sounds of a woman crying or screaming were heard and another student named Ortiz saw the apparition of a child with a knife in its hands in the auditorium. The vision so affected the teenager that he suffered seizures, was heard speaking "in an unknown language" and was hospitalised. Some believed he was possessed. Finally a colonel arranged for a priest to carry out blessings and rosaries were distributed among cadets.

Some of the current intake of students complain of stones thrown on the roofs and of hearing footsteps, blaming the pranks on *duendes*. Attempts are being made to collect and record the stories and some new cadets are trying to gain proof. To obtain some evidence, they have adopted the old technique of sprinkling talcum powder on floors, with results being claimed of "small footprints similar to those of a human".

Recorded accounts suggest paranormal activity increases between midnight and four in the morning. This is consistent with the time of day for phenomena apparently associated with many psychic experiences and alleged entity encounters. ('Actividad paranormal en La Glorieta y el Liceo Militar?' *Correo del Sur*, 8 Mar 2015' www.correodelsur.com/20150308/ecos/actividad-paranormal-en-la-glorieta-y-el-liceo-militar.)

Accounts of ghostly experiences passed on in oral traditions among the enclosed populations of large institutions such as schools, colleges and hospitals, which operate strict discipline, have been noted by folklorists in many countries. Unlike urban legends, they are contained within one community and are passed on to successive intakes of recruits or students. Young children and adolescents who are beginning to think about life and death can be particularly affected. English private

schools are notorious. As M R James put it in *A School Story*: "You never can tell with little boys. They have a mythology of their own. There's a subject for you, by the way – 'The Folklore of Private Schools'... if you were to investigate the cycle of ghost stories, for instance, which the boys at private schools tell each other, they would all turn out to be highly compressed versions of stories out of books". Curiously, save for the case of Matthew Manning in Cambridgeshire in 1971 (see Matthew Manning in *The Link*, 1977) there are few accounts of poltergeists at boarding schools. Poet Robert Graves thought that the isolation and misery which afflicted many pupils incarcerated in such institutions during the Victorian and Edwardian eras generated emotions that lingered as hauntings, though as James observed such stories are often highly dubious.

Often tales are told purely to inflame and excite the nerves of new students and raw recruits. With older children and adults they may be symptoms reflecting the mental pressures imposed upon sensitive individuals by restrictive and hierarchical institutions such as military academies and old style educational colleges. (Notably Oxford and Cambridge colleges have seen a decline in ghost reports in the last 70 years with the relaxation of once rigid and restrictive codes of discipline imposed upon undergraduates and fellows). The control of individual feelings and emotions, particularly fear and anxiety, are an essential prerequisite for efficient military training; perhaps such repressed feelings emerge as neurotic experiences of the uncanny, encouraged by continual reminders of the past deeds and glories of deceased warriors of old.

The pressures and stresses that operate upon service personnel are particularly acute at times of heightened fear and danger when military losses mount. In this regard, it is interesting to note the emergence of "gremlin" folklore – an Anglo-Saxon equivalent of the *duendes* among allied aircrew during World War II. One contemporary writer, WE Woosnam-Jones, in an article that appeared in the *Spectator* on 1 January 1943, traced such stories back to the Royal Naval Air Service in the 1917 and the formation of the Royal Air Force in 1918. He stated: "It is naturally very difficult for a pilot to get a really good look at a Gremlin. For Gremlins are very elusive, and usually hide themselves in the most remote and inaccessible corners of an aircraft. It is, however, now well established that they stand about a foot high when in a fully materialised condition, and are usually clad in green breeches and red jackets, ornamented with neat ruffles." In this regard, the parallel with the descriptions of the shamanic figures of indigenous cultures is striking, perhaps pointing to such figures being an archetypal component in the human unconscious.



ABOVE: La Glorieta military academy has seen reports of *duendes*. RIGHT: A gremlin mascot from WWII.



GULLS BEHAVING BADLY

Swooping, screaming, chip-guzzling birds continue their seaside reign of terror

• Gordon Mackie, who owns businesses in St Ives in Cornwall, said dive-bombing gulls were attacking anyone holding food. “Seagulls are undoubtedly getting worse,” he said. The message is the same from seaside resorts round the country: gulls are bigger, bolder and meaner than ever. Residents of Brighton are familiar with their pack mentality. “It’s definitely been the worst period ever,” said ice cream seller Mary Reynolds, whose shop is located on the front near Brighton pier. “They’re chunkier, more angry and are just swooping on people far more.” On 17 July, Prime Minister David Cameron said he wanted to initiate a “big conversation” about the spate of gull attacks, hinting that their protected status could be removed to allow culling. On 20 July, Irish senator Denis O’Donovan said Ireland should also consider a gull-cull, adding: “Seagulls have killed lambs and rabbits and we are reaching the stage where they are endangering society.” *D.Telegraph, 18 July; thejournal.ie, 20 July 2015.*

• In 2002, a former ambulance driver died of a heart attack after gulls attacked him at his home. Wilfred Robey, 80, disturbed a nest of chicks as he tried to clean bird droppings from the roof of his garage in Anglesey, North Wales. The parent birds, with other gulls, swooped on him, knocking him off the wall where he was standing. They continued to peck him as he lay unconscious. *D.Telegraph, 7 May 2015.*

• In the first week of May 2015, a flock of gulls attacked and killed a chihuahua puppy in Honiton, Devon. Five-month-old Bella had been kept inside after being targeted by the birds on previous occasions, but the tiny pet got out after the back door was left ajar and was savaged as she tried to scramble back to safety. Owner



Nikki Wayne, 57, mother-of-five, was having a shower at the time. She said the gulls gather on her roof and hover nearby at least twice a day looking for food. *D.Telegraph, D.Mail, 7 May 2015.*

• One of Britain’s leading classical pianists was forced to cancel two Liverpool concerts after an altercation with a gull. Paul Lewis, 43, renowned for his interpretations of Beethoven, was due to play Schumann and Mozart at two concerts with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra. As he was leaving a rehearsal on 15 June he fell and sprained a finger while trying to avoid a nesting gull that swooped at him. “More a squawk than a tweet,” Lewis commented on Twitter, “nursing sprained finger after fall thanks to rogue seagull attack!” *Liverpool Echo, 17 June; D.Mail, 19 June 2015.*

• In mid-July, two herring gulls swooped from their nest to attack and kill an eight-year-old, 2lb (1kg) Yorkshire terrier called Roo in St Columb Minor, Cornwall. “It was like a murder scene,” said Emily Vincent, 36. “[Roo] was on his side in a pool of blood. He had crawled back into the house and collapsed.” She said the attack

“It was like a bloody scene from a horror movie”

was witnessed by her three-year-old son Jace and she now feared the birds, which had nested on her roof, might attack one of her children. A vet determined Roo had suffered brain damage and had to be put down. Ms Vincent said the gulls often came down and stole Roo’s food. She had contacted Cornwall Council asking what could be done, but was told the birds are protected. There has been a 50 per cent decline in herring gull numbers over the past 30 years and they were added to the Red List of Birds of Conservation Concern in 2009, giving them the highest conservation priority, with urgent action deemed necessary. Under the Wildlife and Countryside Act of 1981, all gull species are protected and may not be killed, injured, or prevented from nesting wherever the hell they like.

Tony Whitehead of the RSPB said parent gulls had a “real issue

with personal space” when nesting and when young birds learnt to fly. “This is when they swing into full protective mode,” he said. “If you have an anxious gull parent to contend with, the best advice is to walk with an umbrella up.” *BBC News, 15 July; D.Telegraph, D.Mail, 16 July 2015.*

• In late June, gulls killed Stig, a pet tortoise, in the back garden of Jan Byrne’s house in Liskeard, Cornwall. Stig’s brother George avoided the attack and a pet rabbit, Petal, was protected by being in her run. “It was like a bloody scene from a horror movie,” said Mrs Byrne, 43. “I found Stig upside down with blood pouring from his wounds. We had Stig for 15 years and he was more than 20 years old.” The tortoise died from an infected wound two days later. *BBC News, 16 July 2015.*

• On 24 July came news that John McCrohan, a part-time mountain sheep farmer and rural development officer, witnessed the deaths of two mature sheep, attacked by a number of gulls between Camp and Annascaul in County Kerry, Ireland, despite McCrohan fighting them off with a stick. The sheep had not been shorn, but the birds managed to kill them despite their thick wool, using their beaks and claws. Previously, the birds would only be found inland during stormy conditions, he said, but now their presence is commonplace. Bridget O’Connor, a sheep farmer from near Camp, said that last March two of her lambs were attacked by gulls and left with their entrails ripped out. The young animals had been gored to death.

In another incident in Kerry, on the road between Waterville and Cahersiveen, motorcyclist Vincent Appleby was travelling at 25mph (40km/h) when a seagull knocked him off his bike.

A^Z ALIEN ZOO

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

“He nearly knocked my head off,” said Mr Appleby. “It was like a Second World War Stuka coming in. He knew what he was doing. He turned at the last minute, so his wings wouldn’t hit.” Vanessa Keegan from Dublin had her mobile phone stolen by a gull in the city’s National Botanic Gardens. Along with two gardeners, she chased the pesky critter, but it veered over a pond and dropped the phone into the water. *irishcentral.com, 24 July 2015.*

- On 23 July, a gull flew at Sue Atkinson, 66, as she walked her dog in Helston, Cornwall, pecking her repeatedly until blood was pouring down her face and into her eyes. She was taken to hospital with a large gash on the top of her head that had to be glued shut. James Bryce, four, also needed medical treatment that day after he was bitten on the hand by a gull as he ate a sausage roll in St Ives, Cornwall. The bird swooped down to grab the food from his hand but missed and instead bit his finger. James’s father said the boy was now “petrified” of gulls. *D.Telegraph, 24 July 2015.*

- A vomiting gull in a “near-death state” was found in the yard of Bridport police station in Dorset on 19 July. It was examined by the RSPCA, who concluded it had been poisoned. Someone was fighting back. *Sunday Telegraph, 19 July D.Telegraph, 20 July 2015.*

- The small port in West Bay, Dorset, backdrop for the ITV drama *Broadchurch*, is considering hiring peregrine falcons to scare away the gulls following a spate of attacks on tourists. “Gull running” is the latest seaside fad: children run along promenades holding food in the air to see how far they can get without being attacked by the birds. This has been observed in Whitby, Brighton, Newquay and Blackpool. *D.Telegraph, 29 July 2015.*

- FT readers might recall the murderous lesser black-backed gull that, for the last five years, has been drowning pigeons in the Serpentine in London and feasting on their innards [FT325:12].



ARMOURED IN ARKHANGELSK

In late June 2015, news media carried stories concerning a so-called ‘mutant fish’ lately caught in Russia’s northwestern Arkhangelsk region.

Described in local reports as sporting the head of a tortoise, a sucker mouth, and a body covered in ‘fossilised’ or ‘petrified’ scales, this aquatic wonder had been netted by some fishermen in the Northern Dvina River, close to a ferry terminal at Bereznik-Osinovo. A diverse range of identities was offered for it, including an angler fish, a sturgeon, and a rabbit fish – but when I saw a photograph of the complete creature I could see that it was an armoured catfish, specifically a loricariid (characterised by their sucker mouths).

However, the mystery is still far from over, for the simple reason that loricariids, like all armoured catfishes, are endemic to freshwater habitats in Central and South America – and nowhere else. So how can the presence in a Russian river of this specimen, which seems quite sizeable judging from the photo, be explained? Loricariids are popularly kept as freshwater aquarium fishes, so the most reasonable solution is that this specimen originated in an aquarium but was subsequently released into the Northern Dvina River, possibly because it had grown too large to be readily manageable any longer.

This intriguing incident has an equally interesting precedent. In 2014, a large pacu, related to piranhas, was caught in the Arkhangelsk region, and, just like loricariids, pacus are exclusively Neotropical but are a popular freshwater aquarium species and can grow very large – thereby suggesting that this too may have been deliberately released into the river. <http://rt.com/news/269521-mutant-fish-anomaly-russia/> 26 June 2015.

A GONG FOR DEBBIE MARTYR

In Her Majesty the Queen’s New Year’s Honours List announced at the end of 2014, British conservationist Debbie Martyr (right) was awarded an MBE (Member of the Order of the British Empire), formally bestowed upon her at Buckingham Palace in June 2015. This greatly deserved accolade is in recognition of her sterling, longstanding work with Flora and Fauna International’s Kerinci Tiger Project to protect the critically endangered Sumatran tiger in its native Indonesian homeland. However, to FT readers and the cryptozoological community, Debbie is additionally celebrated for

her extensive quest for an even more elusive Sumatran entity – this island’s alleged mini man-beast, the orang pendek or ‘short man’, which she has even been fortunate enough to glimpse occasionally, albeit only very briefly. Perhaps one day Debbie will succeed in adding the orang pendek’s official scientific discovery to her list of zoological accomplishments on Sumatra and receive a further gong in recognition. Meanwhile, on behalf of everyone at FT, many congratulations indeed,

Debbie, on receiving your MBE.

www.fauna-flora.org/news/sumatran-tiger-champion-honoured-with-an-mbe/ 31 Dec 2014; various posts on Debbie’s Facebook page in June 2015.

BEAVERING AWAY IN DEVON



One of the most interesting if unexpected zoological discoveries made in England during recent years was a small colony of European beavers living in Devon’s River Otter during late 2013 [FT318:10]. Formerly native to Great Britain, the beaver was hunted into extinction here around 800 years ago, since when the only wild-living specimens have been those that were first re-introduced officially into Scotland in 2009 via the Scottish Beaver Trial (a partnership project between the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland, the Scottish Wildlife Trust, and host Forestry Commission Scotland).

So where have the Devon beavers (one of which is shown above) come from? As no one seems to know, in March 2015 the adults and a juvenile were captured by Defra and tested for any diseases that they might be carrying. When all tests came back negative, it was decided that they posed no threat to the environment in which they’d been living, so they were re-released into the River Otter, where they continue to thrive, monitored by Devon Wildlife Trust under a five-year license granted in January by Natural England. Indeed, in June 2015 some baby beavers (kits) were observed and filmed in the colony by Tom Buckley of Ottery St Mary as verification of their existence. Mark Elliott from Devon Wildlife Trust believes that there may now be as many as 15 beavers in the colony – a magical if mystifying addition to West Country wildlife. *D.Mail, 25 Mar + 24 June 2015.*



SPECIAL REPORT

THE INHABITED SKY

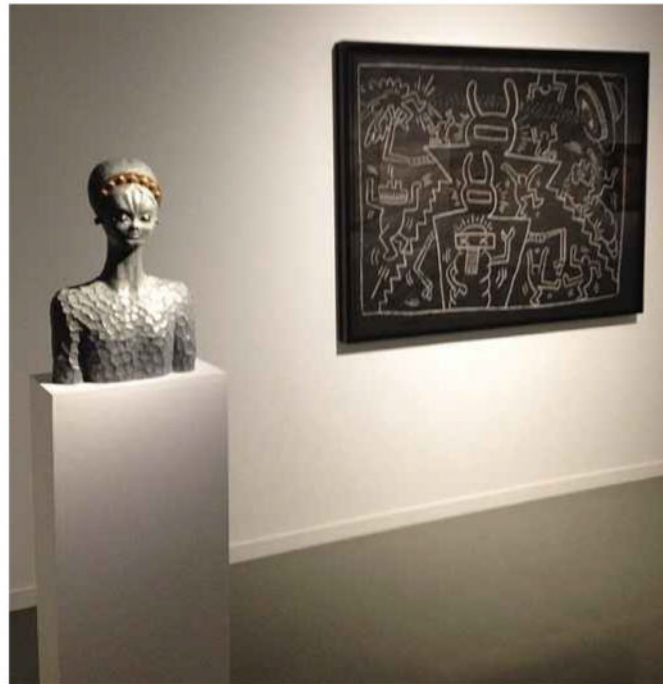
THEO PAIJMANS attends a UFO conference with a difference in Madrid, and asks whether this is the future of ufology...

For thousands of years man has wondered if we are alone in the Universe. Have we been visited by beings from other galaxies? The impact of these questions on human culture has been undeniable, and a conference entitled *El Cielo Habitado*, held on 27 and 28 of May this year in Madrid focused on just how we have come to appraise the UFO phenomenon: what it is held to be; what it definitely is not; and what it might be.

It was presented, more or less, as a normal UFO conference; which it perhaps was in the eyes of the many who came, but it was also definitely more than that. The event, coordinated and presented by Chris Aubeck, was held in the Casa Encendida, a beautiful modern arts centre in the heart of Madrid, just a stone's throw from the Reina Sofia National Art museum where Picasso's overwhelming *Guernica* is on permanent display, and the Prado, with its stunning art collection boasting works by Dürer, El Greco, Velázquez and Hieronymus Bosch.

The conference was part of an art show too – *Arstronomy: Incursiones en el Cosmos*, with a rich tapestry of modern artists such as Paul van Hoeydonck, Yves Klein, Sigmar Polke, Panamarenko, Thomas Ruff, Keith Haring and Mike Kelley featured in the exhibition.

In these pleasantly cultured surroundings, so different from the usual UFO conference venues, an equally interesting cadre of speakers gave a series of lectures over two evenings. Ufologists Nigel Watson, Jacques Vallée, Chris Aubeck and folklorist Jesús Callejo, historian Juan José Sánchez-Oro and myself, presented a multifaceted picture of current ufology, away from the shrill, popularised version usually found in the mass media. It reminded us that the study of UFOs can be as diverse as the elusive phenomenon itself. And where Americanised



LEFT: Works on display in the 'Arstronomy' exhibition.

ufology has dominated the field for decades, largely because of its media-friendly format, this European variant – more sober, philosophical and speculative – painted a very different picture of a phenomenon that, whatever one's viewpoint, remains unresolved.

No Roswell, no aliens, no sensational cover-ups revealed, no lurid conspiracy tales reeking of paranoia; instead, a refreshing series of lectures that centred not only on how the phenomenon might be studied and has always been misunderstood, but also on how the interaction between it and us has yielded some surprising cultural results. The difference between American and European ufology could not have emerged more clearly, and the contrast is instructive. America gave the world Roswell, grey aliens and human abductions, the Men In Black, Area 51 and a host of other pop-cultural icons. Out of Europe, mainly France, came the psychosocial hypothesis that argued that the phenomenon stems as much from within the confines of our cultural expectations as from any external

No Roswell, no aliens, no sensational cover-ups...

force or stimulus interacting with us in unexplained ways and for unfathomable reasons.

Nigel Watson, for instance, in his lecture on the phantom airships and aeroplanes that plagued Britain and other countries between 1909 and 1914, and well into WWI, found as much in contemporary expectations and anxieties (several of the waves occurred just before or in the early days of the four-year conflict) to suggest an origin for such scares not in the skies over Europe but in the anxieties typical of the period: instead of aliens and government conspiracies, there was talk of secret inventors and German spies.

After all, the one part of the UFO mystery we can truly study is the human condition – our

response to whatever lies 'out there' and falls outside the scope of everyday, ordinary existence. This thread ran through most of the lectures. For example, Chris Aubeck, co-author with Jacques Vallée of the book *Wonders In The Sky*, argued that in order for ufology to move forward it must discard its absurd mythology, by which he meant that mixed bag of Reptilians, Roswell, Pyramids, Faces on Mars, Adamski and the Bermuda Triangle. Aubeck, co-founder of the Internet research group MagoniaX, a worldwide cadre of dedicated historians and chroniclers of *fortean* and ufology, detailed some of his own fascinating work. One part of it has been his research into the theme of meteorites covered in alien hieroglyphics, stories profusely published in the 19th century; one can see where the hieroglyphics on the Roswell wreckage might originate, as they are just the latest iteration in a much longer tradition of tales of interstellar objects covered with extraterrestrial doodles crashing to Earth.

The theme of traditions, hidden and known, featured largely during the conference. Juan José Sánchez-Oro explained the evolution and place of non-human entities in folklore and religious custom, and Jesús Callejo spoke of mankind's long-frustrated and finally realised dream of flight. Callejo illustrated this fascinating path in human evolution with reference to a host of lesser-known early pioneers and their sometimes silly, often dangerous, contraptions. Either their inventors died during failed test attempts or they had to flee for their lives when their work was seen as that of the Devil. My own lecture focused on the interaction between the UFO phenomenon and human perception and imagination, as found in the fiction of the 19th and early 20th century and the many illustrations of

aliens produced during that timeframe. I introduced a little term I have coined to describe how, as Western civilisation grew more and more technical and industrial, our perception of wonders seen in the skies changed as well. Angels gave way to airships in what I call the 'industrial imagination'. After all, one theory in ufology is that UFOs always seem to present themselves in a form one step ahead of our technical capabilities in any given period – but might the reason for that not simply reside in our heads, instead of in some weird bit of alien subterfuge that serves no purpose and makes no sense?

Of course, everybody was secretly looking forward to one of ufology's most respected and insightful and, dare I say it, poetical influences: Jacques Vallée. To many, me included, Vallée is a key figure in ufology, one who drove it in exciting new directions, just when the field was turning stale, with his seminal *Passport To Magonia* in 1968. I had my first edition with me, which he signed; I noted that quite a few Spaniards had brought their Spanish first editions with them for the same reason. Vallée had already assembled UFO databases in the year I was born – yet here he was, still searching diligently for answers.

While Vallée stressed the importance of proper scientific research by listing the sighting reports by a number of 19th and early 20th century scientists, what made me sit up was his brief excursion into the idea of the 'control system'. Much maligned by some ufologists who don't understand how Vallée arrived at this concept, the riddle was solved when he explained it as follows. When he looked at the patterns of UFO waves, he noted that they were not symmetrical – meaning they revealed no regular, discernible cycle. When he showed this strange asymmetrical wave distribution to experts in other fields, they pointed out to him that the uneven distribution of the UFO waves resembled a system of enforced learning, whereby symmetry is also avoided. Vallée,



after all these years, still states that he doesn't have a personal theory of UFOs, but that there does seem to be a non-human consciousness that is among us and that this is an enigma that science needs to study.

I can't emphasise enough the difference between this thoughtful conference held in the rich cultural surroundings of Madrid and the garish events, often held in concrete buildings devoid of dream or fantasy, that make up the usual UFO circus. And while Spanish media turned up in droves, from what I witnessed, interviews were conducted in a spirited, lively and intellectually satisfying manner. The contrast between this conference and the one held in Mexico the same month (5 May) in a huge 10,000-seat auditorium and focusing entirely on the two photos that were presented as Roswell 'evidence' but turned out to be of a human mummy (see FT329:26-27), could

not be greater. The two events represent the two extremes in the world of ufology: on the one hand, serious, level-headed debate, on the other, carnival showmanship and extravagant claims that evaporate as soon as the question of evidence arises. *El Cielo Habitado* was unique in that instead of offering a plate piled high with the usual UFO-hysteria, it presented a well thought-out menu of perspectives on the history of UFO beliefs and the way in which our own human cultures have contributed in no small part to what we see or claim to see.

Currently, on a number of blogs, the decline of the UFO phenomenon is being lamented, and with it the demise of ufology is once again being proclaimed. Astute observers have seen this all before, and know that as times change, so does our perception and so will our ufology. The subject will live on, but it will change; excesses like the Roswell

slides do not even belong to ufology proper – no more than the Jersey Devil hoax, consisting of a kangaroo with fake wings, has any place in serious cryptozoology.

ABOVE: The pleasant surroundings of the Casa Encendida, Madrid.

LEFT: (L-R) Theo Pajmans, Jacques Vallée, Jesús Callejo and Nigel Watson.

slides do not even belong to ufology proper – no more than the Jersey Devil hoax, consisting of a kangaroo with fake wings, has any place in serious cryptozoology.

If there's hope for a more mature form of ufology, now that the field is almost a century old (I count from Fort's *Book Of The Damned*, published in 1919), it was found here, in Madrid, and not only in the carefully arranged roster by presenter Chris Aubeck, but also in its attentive audience that came in numbers sufficient to fill the hall on two consecutive nights. Moreover, holding a UFO conference (but was it only that?) in a venue surrounded by art and culture was also, perhaps, a significant shift. Placing the subject of UFOs – which relate to our culture and its perception of what lies beyond our field of understanding – within the context of art, a medium that challenges understanding and perception while seeking new boundaries and crossing old borders, was a stroke of genius. If there's a lesson to be drawn from *El Cielo Habitado*, it's that the new ufology should make use of similar inspiring environments and contexts in the future.

The lectures were all recorded and can be found online at YouTube, Vimeo and so on.



FORTEAN FOLLOW-UPS

Scottish bridge lures more unlucky dogs, 'spy pigeon' busted, stolen Welsh Grail recovered

KAMIKAZE CANINE HOTSPOT [FT196:4]



A decade ago, we reported that, in the previous six months, five dogs had jumped to their deaths from a bridge over a

stream at Overtoun House, a 19th century Gothic pile near Glasgow in Scotland. The bridge is known to locals as 'Rover's Leap'. Now we are told that 600 (!) dogs have jumped from the bridge since the 1950s, leaving at least 50 dead. The doomed pets – almost all breeds with long snouts – mostly jumped from the same side, on dry sunny days, perishing 40ft/12m (or 58ft/18m) below. Fiona Craig's black Labrador Prince jumped and died in 1992, as did Donna Cooper's collie Ben three years later. Some blame the spirit of the 'White Lady of Overtoun', which has been sighted in and around the house. This is claimed to be the wraith of the widow of Baron Overtoun, who owned the house and built the bridge. After his death in 1908, she roamed the grounds night and day, often wandering grief-stricken across the bridge, looking for him in vain. She died in 1931. However, the White Lady has been seen "for more than 100 years", which rather puts a logical spanner in the works.

"I was standing [on the bridge] one summer's day two years ago when I felt a firm, hard prod that felt like a finger, twice in my back," said Paul Owens, 51, author of *Overtoun Bridge*, a new book on the mystery. "It was the sensation you get when you fear someone might push you over the edge of a train platform. Something or someone was trying to push me over the bridge too, just like the dogs. It's a very strange place. It can seem very peaceful and tranquil, but it can turn at a moment's notice." In October 1994 a deranged Kevin Moy threw his baby son to his death and later tried to kill himself at the same spot.



ABOVE: The bridge at Overtoun House – now known to locals as 'Rover's Leap'.

Three-year-old Cassie is one of the lucky dogs to survive the fall. The springer spaniel was being walked by her owner Alice Trevorrow and her son Thomas last year when she suddenly leapt from the bridge for no apparent reason. "We had just got out the car and Cassie immediately made her way to the bridge," said Ms Trevorrow. "She turned her head, looked up and did this massive leap. I will never forget the awful whine she made as she leaped. She managed to get herself up and met my son, collapsing when she saw him. How she survived that, I'll never know. There is something going on here. It was so out of character for her." Despite horrific injuries, Cassie made a full recovery. When Thomas, 25, returned to the bridge to try and understand what had happened, "he glanced up at the house and saw the outline of a white figure of a lady looking down from a window," said his mother. "His friend saw it too. They ran to the car terrified."

Animal psychologists are baffled. One hypothesis is that minks are attracting dogs with their powerful musk scent. In a Channel 5 documentary in 2006, canine psychologist Dr David Sands found a heavy presence of mink in the undergrowth below the bridge. The 1950s was when mink, introduced into Scotland 30 years earlier, started breeding

in large numbers. "When you get down to a dog's level, the solid granite of the bridge's 18in [46cm] thick walls obscures their vision and blocks out all sound," said Dr Sands. "As a result, the one sense not obscured, that of smell, goes into overdrive." Well... it's a theory. *mirror.co.uk*, Sun, 24 June; [AOL] via *msn.com*, *D.Mail*, *D.Express*, 25 June 2015.

For a dangerous drop in Vancouver puzzlingly irresistible to dogs, see FT326:20.

AVIAN SECRET AGENTS [FT308:4-5]



A pigeon has been arrested by police in India on suspicion of being a spy from Pakistan – after being found a mere two and a half miles (4km) from the heavily militarised border. The bird was discovered by a 14-year-old boy in the village of Manwal, in the northern state of Punjab, on 22 May. When he spotted a stamp under its feathers that bore Urdu script and the name of a Pakistani district, he took it to the nearest police station where it was X-rayed to see whether it was carrying any spy camera, transmitter or hidden chip. "Till now there is no evidence to suggest it is a spy bird but so long as we are not able to decipher what is written in Urdu,

we cannot be absolutely sure," said senior police superintendent Rakesh Kaushal. "We have caught a few spies here. The area is sensitive, given its proximity to Jammu, where infiltration is quite common." It is not the first time birds have become embroiled in the rivalry between the two nuclear-armed neighbours. In 2013, Indian security forces found a dead falcon fitted with a small camera, and in 2010 another pigeon was detained over espionage fears. [AFP] 29 May 2015.

DAZED AND CONFUSED [FT316:36-40]



A defective fire alarm at a Southland (Cambodia) Co. Ltd – a factory in Sangkat Chaom Chao, Cambodia, making baseball caps – led to 19 employees passing out, starting at 7:30am on 19 June 2015. Some of the victims were carted away in tuk-tuks before the summoned ambulances arrived at 8.50am. The other employees refused to continue working and went home for the day. "The factory [was having] a fire alarm repaired when it [started] ringing," said the factory manager. "Until workers all calmed down, some workers were very afraid." One witness, a 20-year-old woman, said that some people fainted soon after hearing the alarm. Their unconsciousness created a bigger panic and stamped towards the doors, during which more and more people started to faint. According to her, "there is no problem relating to an unfavourable working environment"; however, another employee said that factory conditions were a "bit too cramped." A Mr Oun, secretary of the factory's labour union, claimed that someone had deliberately triggered the alarm to provoke chaos in the factory. Mass fainting has been a growing problem in Cambodia's garment

sector in recent years. According to the report from Cambodian Labour Confederation (CLC), 1,800 workers fainted in 2014, up 1,000 from the previous year. *Khmer Times (Cambodia)*, 26 June 2015.

NANTEOS CUP RETRIEVED [FT319:20]



The Nanteos Cup, one of more than 200 objects claimed to be the Holy Grail, has been recovered. The fragmentary wooden mazer bowl

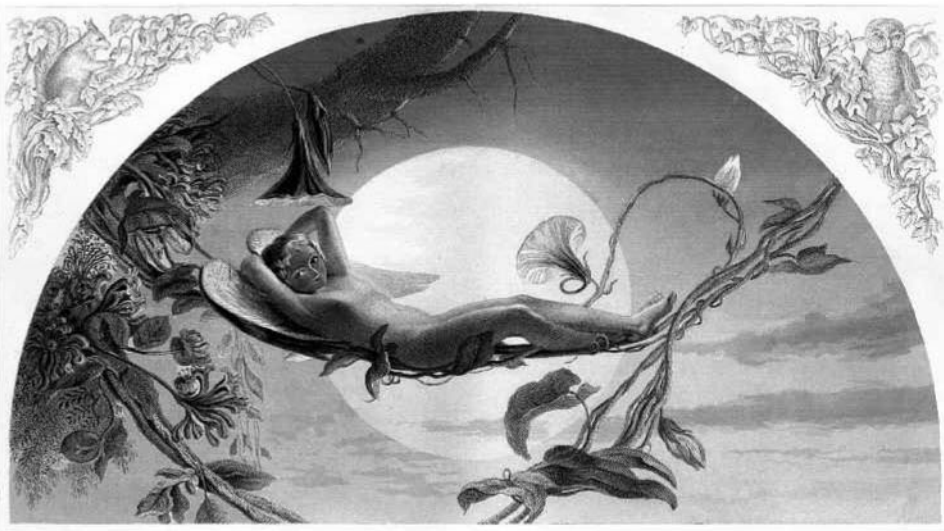
or chalice had been on loan to a seriously ill woman because of its alleged healing powers when, early in July 2014, it was stolen from her home in Weston Under Penyard, Herefordshire, after she went into hospital. The cup, made of olive wood or wych elm, originally measured 12x12cm (4.7x4.7in), but now measures 10cm (4in) by 8.5cm (3.3in). It is held together by wire staples and kept in a blue velvet bag. West Mercia Police said the bowl was recovered after an appeal on BBC's *Crimewatch* and "several significant lines of inquiry from anonymous sources". It was handed to police in a pre-arranged meeting on "neutral ground" on 19 June 2015. Detective Inspector Martyn Barnes, the investigating officer, said: "No arrests have been made, and inquiries into the theft continue." *Sky News*, 26 June; *Western Mail*, *D. Telegraph*, 27 June 2015.

COMING TO GET CHOO [FT328:10]



Police have accused Stephen Jackson, 49, of being the "Carlisle Headslapper".

Between 25 October 2014 and 17 March 2015, the assailant assaulted shoppers in Carlisle, Cumbria – 11 women, one man and a child – after they sneezed or blew their nose. Seven of the assaults were said to have taken place in March and four in February. Most involved elderly people being slapped on the head. Jackson denied all charges, claiming it was a case of mistaken identity. The case was adjourned. *dailymail.com*, 2 June; *telegraph.co.uk*, *express.co.uk*, 30 June 2015.



FAIRIES, FOLKLORE AND FORTEANA

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

SEWER HOGS & CROCS

One of the most celebrated urban legends, along with the vanishing hitchhiker, is the sewer alligator. The story is so well known as to barely need repeating: baby gators are flushed down the toilet and these then congregate into a mighty colony in the shitty tunnels below. The tale is almost always set in New York: the first reference to New York alligators apparently came in the late 1930s.

But there is a case to be made for London as the cradle of the sewer gator legend: London was, to the best of my knowledge, the first place to have its own sewer mythology, perhaps because it was the first modern city with sewers big enough to impress the population above. Henry Mayhew noted in 1851 that there were fabulæ about sewer hogs (I know, I know...): "The story runs, that a sow in young, by some accident got down the sewer through an opening, and, wandering away from the spot, littered and reared her offspring in the drain: feeding on the offal and garbage washed into it continually."

Folklorists have long been aware of Mayhew, but they seem to have missed a later but, in some respects, more exciting source. In 1892, a medical genius had the idea of introducing crocodiles – wait for it – into the Thames. These crocs were to be brought to London, stamped with the city seal (so they

couldn't be stolen, duh) and then allowed to feast on "all the unpleasant stuff that the once-lauded silver stream contains". Did this include the many men, women and children who lived off the refuse of the river? And what about the boat race?

The *Medical Press and Circular* seems to have been the first publication to run with this particular story, though I came across it 'downstream', so to speak, in the *Gloucester Citizen* of 13 April 1892. Was it even, originally, an April Fool's joke? And what does this have to do with sewers, anyway? Well, when the Thames was clean (the Victorians were always such optimists) the crocs would be turned into the London

sewers to sort them out; presumably starting with the hogs.

The earliest news story yet found about a gator in a sewer comes from Atlanta in 1873, but these early stories are of strays, with no suggestion of underground saurian colonies. Perhaps a Cockney who had taken up residence in Manhattan or an Anglophile NY newspaper reader combined the well-known sewer pigs and 1892's most crackpot science suggestion and unintentionally created that tale? It was certainly much written about at the time. For example, when later in April 1892, some baby crocs were found in a parcel by a postman, the British papers joked that these must be the sewer crocodiles...

Simon Young writes on folklore and history and runs www.fairyist.com

"THE STORY RUNS THAT
A SOW IN YOUNG GOT
DOWN THE SEWER,
LITTERED AND REARED
HER OFFSPRING IN THE
DRAIN"



NECROLOG

We bid a fond farewell to the woman who typeset many of the UK's alternative and small press publications (including FT) and wave goodbye the dark wizard of extreme sports

CECILIA ELIZABETH NICHOLSON

Celia Boggis came into the life of *Fortean Times* in the autumn of 1982, when we were compiling issue 36. The previous three issues had been largely typeset by Paula Graham, but she wanted to concentrate on her work for *International Times* (IT). At that time IT, like FT, used the services of graphic designer Richard Adams, who helped so many small presses and radical publishers at that time.

Richard's studio, just off the Portobello Road, was also a nexus for the late John Michell, playwrights Heathcote Williams and Ken Campbell, and the historian and polemicist John Nicholson (who founded the UK's Small Press Group). As a replacement for Paula, Richard recommended John Nicholson's partner, Celia, who worked closely with the writer-editor Anthony (Tony) Roberts's wife Jan.

Celia had recently acquired a state-of-the-art IBM Selectric 'golf ball' typesetter and warmed to our unorthodox content with enthusiasm. It's fair to say that her accuracy, intelligence, wit and prompt returns of galleys and corrections were a major contribution to the look and feel of FT as it transformed from my erratic old typed format to something more professional.

Jan Roberts sent me a memoir of those times. "Celia and I had much in common: John (Nicholson), Tony, typing, and singing songs that reflected the conversation going on around us. We shared typewriters, techniques in printing – Banda and Gestetner printing machines back in the 1970s – and working out how to justify margins by hand (very time-consuming). Then the electric and golfball typewriters came, which allowed us to take typing speeds to a new height. Celia kept at it and went on to produce books, leaflets and flyers."

Jan and Tony Roberts first encountered Celia and John through Derek (Bram) Stokes whose fantasy and SF bookshop



LEFT: Celia in Clerkenwell, April 2001.

'Dark They Were and Golden Eyed' – in its first incarnation in Bedfordbury, near Covent Garden – was one of the first importers of alternative press publications. It was Bram who alerted them to "a couple of weirdoes who had a bookshop in Cambridge" – called 'Land of Cockayne' – "and bought stocks from him". At Bram's suggestion, Jan recalls, they went up to visit Celia and John "and never looked back". Later, in 1978, we were to use 'Dark They Were' as FT's mailing address.

Every autumn, through the early 1980s, this group of friends would somehow get to the huge Frankfurt Book Fair (*Frankfurter Buchmesse*), infiltrating it with hi-jinks on behalf of the UK's small and underground presses. Richard Adams remembers vividly how this came about.

"When I first met Celia and John, it was some time in 1977, at Miles Building, in Bath, when we descended on John Michell for a weekend. At the time, Celia and

John were living in a Winnebago and driving between England and the US Air Force bases in Frankfurt, where Celia was selling door to door, copper-bottomed saucepans to servicemen's wives. You can imagine how good she was at it – a silver tongue if ever someone had one."

"The truck had everything: on board loo, cooking facilities, a big double bed for sleeping and sprawling; and above all that was a bunk bed-like arrangement where John worked, had his library and read when he wasn't up front navigating as Celia drove along the autobahns. Together they kept up a steady flow of 'Bozo Publications' – including 'Internal Exile', the fourth issue of *Fanatic* – from wherever they happened to be at the time."

Tim Mars told us: "I once hitched a lift from London to Cambridge in their Winnebago – drinking Special Brew with John in the upstairs 'living room' while Celia drove." He recalls "sleeping

'downstairs' in the lea of the gasworks beside the River Cam while they slept 'upstairs' over the cab". Tim confirmed Celia's cookware-selling exploits as they toured Europe in the late 1970s. When they were asked for their pass at the gate of an American base, "Celia would confidently proffer her Cambridge library card. Up went the barrier and they were waved through."

Richard continues: "The weekend we met coincided with John Michell having taken delivery of the hardback edition of his *Life of Blight*, beautifully self-published in a limited edition of 296 copies. Our job was to tip in the *erratum*, pass it to John M for signing and numbering, ready for posting to each subscriber. I don't think we stopped laughing the entire weekend."

"From then on, we became tight friends... and so, in 1980 and for a couple of years after that, we invaded the Frankfurt Book Fair with our respective wares; me with 'Open Head Press' publications, and them, 'Bozo Press'... all stuffed into the boot and half the back seat of her car, a bright red Citroen. We had no problem making waves, squatting empty stands or, one year, scavenging the overflowing skips for materials and constructing our own makeshift stand in the concrete-covered approach to the Fair, selling stuff to inquisitive passers-by. Then we'd cross the river and set up at the Anarchist Book Fair which ran concurrently with the Book Fair proper."

"In those far-out days, the *Buchmesse* was a party magnet for the so-called counter-cultural Euro-set – Dan Topolski, Bill Levy, Jim Haynes, a rather more legit John Calder, artist Gilbert Shelton and Lora Fountain, his wife, Tony and Carol Bennett of Knockabout Comics, Werner Pieper, Jay Landesman, Bill Daley, all manner of ne'er-do-wells – a multitude of writers, contributors and publishers of what had once been a flourishing European and



American underground press.”

“When there wasn’t a party, we’d gather at *Mallerpartus*, their favourite restaurant specialising in all things carnivorous. An abattoir was situated immediately next door. Calf or pig heads on platters heaving with sauerkraut would be ceremoniously delivered to tables by hulking great German waiters and waitresses; the restaurant looked like something depicted by George Gross or Otto Dix. These were hilarious occasions and Celia’s laughter the loudest. I can’t imagine her ever having stopped laughing except, perhaps, in the final furlong! I can hear her now.”

Celia, one of four sisters, was born in Saffron Walden, Essex. Their parents were Jack and Lotte (Charlotte) Boggis. Jack was a Communist who became a left-wing clergyman; when Celia was growing up he was rector of St George in the East, Hawkesmoor’s beautiful church in Stepney, east London. It was badly bomb-damaged and Jack conducted services in the crypt, the only habitable area. He was very active in Christian Socialist circles and CND, and many interesting people visited the rectory, such as Prince Monolulu, the celebrated racetrack character [FT316:34]. Celia recalled that “it wasn’t unusual to share breakfast with Bertrand Russell, Trevor Huddleston, Tom Driberg and the like”. She first met John Nicholson in 1969, when she was 19. Both were involved in separate drama groups in Cambridge until mutual friends encouraged them to meet. Their enduring partnership was finally solemnised on 30 May 1994, when they married in Las Vegas.

Shortly after they met, John was producing *Cambridge Voice* – an independent alternative paper that he published from his Chesterton Road home. He also ran the King Street Market bookshop for several years (with his wonderfully eccentric mother, Nella) before moving to larger premises nearby, on New Square, where John



ABOVE: Birthday drawing for Celia, attired as the *Private Eye* knight, by Micki Rain, 1986.

and Celia established the ‘Land of Cockayne’ bookshop. Paul Sieveking, FT’s founding co-editor, recalls: “When I was up at Jesus College, reading anthropology, from 1969 to 1971, I frequented the King Street bookshop nearby and got to know John and Celia well. I also wrote stuff for John’s magazine *Arcana*.”

Tim Mars first met John in 1971/1972 at the King Street shop and Celia, later, at the ‘Land of Cockayne’. In this latter, many rooms (a shop, two-storey house and two garages) were given over to publishing enterprises of one sort or another – including *Arcana* and Henry Bosanquet’s *Braingrader* (later edited by Tim Mars) – and Celia, in her own office, was typesetting most of them. She was also taking temporary replacement contracts and setting work for business and other publications, which led, in time, to her association with *Fortean Times* and *Private Eye*.

By the mid-1980s, Celia was installed as a regular typesetter at *Private Eye*, and – with her great charm and ready wit – was selling more classified small ads than anyone else there. She once told Tim Mars that the ‘higher-ups’ used to refer to the setting and small-ads team as “box wallahs”, and thought her surname, Boggis, was funny and “frequently used

it in picture captions”. Her often-outrageous exploits at the *Eye* were celebrated by Heathcote Williams in a dedicated poem, *The Stationery Cat* (sadly, now long lost). Somehow, she also found time to be the mainstay of the Small Press Group and, more recently, the John Michell Supper Club. She was an active member of Women in Publishing, and in 1989 joined with Val Stevenson and Christine Rhone to found Pythia Press, which published long-lost tracts of historical feminism. For FT, Celia wrote “Fatal Attractions”, about Hollywood’s Grave Line Tour [FT108:50].

Adam Mars recalled that Celia was much loved as an eccentric aunt by her nieces and nephews. He summarised the eulogy given by a niece at her funeral, who “described Celia’s full-blooded participation in rites of passage, particularly the start of the teen years. For her 13th she was treated to her first Big Mac, though Celia also made a baked Alaska with Mars bar sauce. Her brother was taught how to light his farts safely. Later she was taken to a Madness gig and was given a makeover.”

Since 1994, Celia endured a heart condition and recurring bouts of cancer, which finally overcame her. She died in a Bedford nursing home, in the room she shared with John, who has serious health problems of his own. As Ed Baxter of Resonance FM radio station put it, Celia was “a person of enormous energy, unstinting generosity and superabundant good humour [and] will be very sorely missed.”

Cecilia Elizabeth Nicholson, née Boggis, typesetter to radical publishers, born Saffron Walden, Essex, 9 Nov 1949; died Bedford, 26 May 2015, aged 65.
BOB RICKARD

DEAN POTTER

Dean Potter, the son of an American army officer, was an extreme sports athlete who specialised in rock climbing, base-jumping and slacklining (a form of

tightrope walking). When he was still a child his family spent three years in Bethany, Israel, where, aged five, he fell while climbing his house, striking his head on the patio below. He claimed that his fear of heights was banished forever after Bedouin women chanted mystical songs and threw salt on the blood to drive away evil spirits. His own mystical persona – he reported having visions – earned him the nickname ‘dark wizard’. In 2003, when he was severely injured in a base-jumping accident, he claimed to have taken on the spirit of a swift, also injured, which died before his eyes. “When I’m on the highline, it feels like I’m hovering in space,” he said. “I know it’s insane to think I could fly, but to make it possible you truly have to believe in it – to go to a place that’s not accepted.”

From the late 1990s his 6ft 5in (195cm) frame became a familiar sight in climbing magazines as he scaled the towering granite walls of Yosemite, or balanced on ropes slung between mountain peaks. He pioneered a style of ‘free-solo’ climbing, deploying a rope only for the hardest sections. With other climbers he set speed records, and was the first to ‘free climb’ both El Capitan and Half Dome in 24 hours – without recourse to stirrups or other artificial aids. Many of his hardest climbs were done without shoes on one or both feet. To toughen up his soles, he would scrub them with a stiff-bristled nylon brush. In recent years, wingsuit flying developed into proximity flying, taking athletes close to rock faces and ridges with minimal clearance. Potter was killed in attempting one such flight in Yosemite.

Dean Potter, extreme sports athlete, born Fort Leavenworth, Kansas 14 April 1972; died Yosemite 16 May 2015, aged 43.



DAVID CANNON / LAUREUS VIA GETTY IMAGES



the UFO files

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

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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

TAKE ME TO YOUR LEADING NATURALISTS!

If aliens were to land on Earth, what would happen? And what plans do governments and other agencies have in place to deal with such an epoch-changing event? The surprising answer is *none*, according to a group of space experts who appear in the experimental documentary *The Visit: An Alien Encounter*, shown at Sheffield's DocFest in June. Danish director Michael Madsen's film interviews Lord Boyce, Admiral of the Fleet and formerly Britain's Chief of Defence Staff. He confirms that "there is no contingency plan" at the Ministry of Defence to deal with alien visitations. But he says that in the event of an alien spacecraft landing on Earth he would advise the Prime Minister to work with other members of the UN Security Council. But with no established rules or procedures and no obvious spokesman for humanity, they might be forced to ask a trusted broadcaster like Sir David Attenborough to break the story to the public because, according to government spin-doctor Vickie Sheriff, "he knows all about wildlife". Alarmingly, Admiral Boyce says that despite the UN's leading role, the default position of some countries might be to launch a pre-emptive attack. "When confronted with the unknown we want to bring it into the known and conquer it. My view is this would constitute a threat to world stability and peace". Madsen interviews a range of experts from the European Space Agency



Some countries might launch a pre-emptive attack on aliens

(ESA) and the UN Office for Outer Space Affairs but avoids talking to ufologists. For this reason *The Visit* is a refreshing change from the tired approach adopted by documentary makers who insist on force-fitting the issue into a debate about the truth or falsity of UFO and alien abduction stories. From the outset Madsen states that, as far as we know, aliens have never landed on Earth. But the film subverts the rules by turning the spotlight back onto humanity, asking the viewer to consider not whether or not aliens exist, but "who are we, as an Other might see us?" and to ask "if you are truly alien, will we ever understand you?" <https://sheffdocfest.com/films/5775>

ESA OUTED?
The European Space Agency has joined

NASA as the target for conspiracy theorists who are convinced the Rosetta Mission was really a secret military project to meet aliens hiding on comet 67P. The rumour mill began rolling in August last year when Joe White of ArtAlienTV received an email allegedly sent by a secret whistleblower within the ESA. It claimed 67P "is NOT a comet" and had "signs on its outside of machine-like parts and unnatural terrain". According to the anonymous story-

teller, NASA first picked up radio bursts from the object two decades ago, and he or she has attached images that revealed the "true inner workings of Comet 67P". The email continued: "Do not think for ONE MOMENT that a space agency would suddenly decide to spend billions of dollars to build and send a spacecraft on a 12-year journey to simply take some close-up images of a randomly picked out comet floating in space". Ever-vigilant UFO watchers quickly found confirmatory evidence of alien activity from hi-res images sent back to Earth by the Rosetta spacecraft and Philae lander that touched down on 67P in November. Despite the cover-up, these images were missed by ESA's censors and included a UFO "the size of a family car" hovering close to the comet's nucleus and what White believes are artificial structures that resemble a lighthouse and a monastery. "This mission was never about

just landing on a comet 350 million miles away," he told Channel 5's *Conspiracy* series shown in July. "I think that ESA know exactly what that is and that's why we went there in the first place". UFO sightings daily: www.ufosightingsdaily.com/2014/09/nasa-records-radio-signals-coming-from.html; ArtAlienTV: www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ss3gVba4Fw

TOP: Is Comet 67P an alien hideout? **LEFT:** New film *The Visit* features an interview with Lord Boyce, who reveals there is "no contingency plan" for dealing with an ET invasion.



CARL COURT / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

GETTING A BUZZ OUT OF SAUCERS

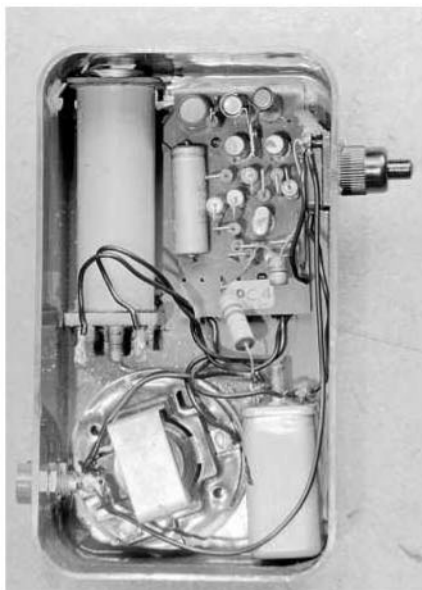
Many moons ago, when I first got interested in UFOs, I saved up money from my newspaper delivery round to further my knowledge. This was the Space Age of the 1960s, and UFO excitement was at its peak. I bought the latest books by John Keel and Jacques Vallée, became a junior member of BUFORA and subscribed to the quaintly named *Flying Saucer Review*, or *FSR*. *FSR* was a revelation to me because, despite its name – archaic even then and widely abbreviated to those three letters – it carried articles by scientists who were keen to use their skills and try to make the amateur field of ufology a little more professional. It was in its pages that I first came across a 'UFO detector'. This device featured in an advert urging you to buy a hand-sized gizmo that was sensitive to the local magnetic field and, the blurb seemingly suggested, would make a buzzing noise to alert you whenever the 4.45 from Alpha Centauri was passing overhead. Living in south Manchester, I was used to planes operating to a timetable, so, as a naïve teen, thought UFOs might be equally obliging. Daft as it seems now, that detector appeared well worth the investment of several weeks earnings.

So did it work? Well, yes and no.

It never helped me to see a flying saucer but the damn thing certainly liked to buzz – going off when helicopters landed in the nearby park, passing thunderstorms arrived, or, more frustratingly, when the road outside was filled with badly shielded car engines. This was a common occurrence for me because we lived next door to a major football stadium and when crowds of 60,000 turned up every other week our street was jam-packed with old bangers bumper to bumper. Eventually, I was forced to disconnect the detector's battery and leave the device in my bedroom, from where it disappeared mysteriously one day, perhaps teleported by the Greys as part of their systematic programme to enforce global secrecy, or possibly just binned by my mum.

That was then, and this is now. A researcher, whom I'll call 'Preston', contacted me recently. He reminded me that we met at a mutual friend's house a decade after my tribulations with the *FSR* detector. Since then, Preston has spent a career working as an engineer, making technical measurements on a wide frequency range at high profile receiver sites and designing antennæ for various sites. Like me, he had come across the *FSR* detector in his youth and tinkered with its possibilities. We both found that it had either been too sensitive or not sensitive enough. In fact, I concluded back then that the 1960s version would trigger at pretty much anything emitting any change in the local magnetic field; if more finely tuned, any UFO would have needed to land on your roof before you picked it up – which probably rendered the need for a detector to tell you this rather unnecessary.

I can barely wire a plug properly, so what to do about these problems was lost on me. But not on Preston, who has had the time and



LEFT: A 1968 model 'UFO detector'.

It never helped me see a flying saucer, but it did like to buzz

expertise to give the matter some thought and has begun to hatch a plan. Last year, he designed a detector using a 1490 Hall effect magnetic compass sensor that rectifies some of the problems found with the old 1968 *FSR* device. He tried it out, and it triggered three times in October 2014 (nothing sinister – he thinks these were probably reactions to magnetic storms).

By now Preston was pondering bigger questions: like why nobody in UFO circles has successfully set up a system of UFO detectors to forewarn others of potential local sightings and to use that early warning as an opportunity to gather meaningful scientific data. There have been some attempts in the past – notably Ray Stanford's Project Starlight International in the USA – but most schemes using easy-to-set-up magnetic UFO detectors in a coordinated fashion came before the technology and instant communications of the modern world – and the advantages they offer – were available.

For example, the very day I am writing this column (23 June 2015) some activity on the surface of the Sun has led to bright auroras becoming visible in skies over large parts of the southern UK where this is otherwise uncommon. The ability to transmit that unpredictable news immediately via the Internet and social media sites meant that people were alerted to go out in the early hours, look into the skies and photograph the resultant glows that would otherwise have vanished by the time most people knew they were even there.

So could this approach be used in the

development of a network of modern UFO detectors coordinated via social media to alert others about localised UFO activity that might still be occurring when they go and look? This is the concept that Preston is seeking to develop. Exactly how we move forward is an open question and I would very much like to hear your thoughts on whether this experiment might be worth attempting, how we might fund it or if there are any would-be UFO detectorists with suggested methods of coordination and application. Do we, for instance, market a product and spread the net broadly in the hope that these widespread devices (purchased by willing participants at cost) will capture something, somewhere? Or do we endeavour to blitz a localised window area with a smaller number of detectors, focusing on a zone where UFO activity has long been frequent, such as the Pennine hills?

Potentially this is a very interesting new approach to UFO research that takes advantage of recent science and the power of mass communications. It has the potential to get the right people with the most valuable equipment into the correct locations as and when UFO activity is still taking place. It could create a new occupation of 'UFO chasing', rather as tornado chasers use live radar to be in the right place at the right time to catch up with storms.

Of course, nobody knows whether there is something out there to be detected that would be sensitive to the changes in local magnetic fields. There are bound to be many false alarms, as other natural phenomena can trigger similar effects difficult to eliminate entirely from the purview of these detectors. However, there is good evidence that EM fields are associated with some UFO phenomena. From car stop/vehicle interference reports to witness descriptions of physiological reactions in close proximity to sightings that seem to infer that they are standing amidst a charged electrical field. Or, indeed, the noted distortion on radio equipment in use during close encounters that also implies these might be inadvertently picking up what detectors could deliberately detect.

I should add that Preston has an open mind as to what might lie behind any genuine UFO phenomena, but thinks that this project is well worth a shot, as its potential success is really independent of any explanation for the phenomenon. Of course, as he told me, this "assumes that UFOs generate their own, or significantly disturb the Earth's, magnetic field". Indeed – but that suggestion is supported by plenty of evidence consistent with a range of possible UFO explanations; and many of those possibilities are sufficiently within the realms of accepted knowledge so as not to frighten off the scientific community.

So for once we have a research project to propose that all *FT* readers could join and that requires you not to have any theory about the nature or origin of UFOs. I believe that this has real possibilities.

So let us know what you think.

UFOs OVER CHINA

The People's Republic of China is renowned for being firmly under the control of one of the world's most guarded and secretive regimes. But, says **CHRIS SAUNDERS**, if the recent catalogue of strange events reported in the nation's media is anything to go by, some world-changing news could be about to emerge from the Far East...

On 15 May 2014, the Chinese authorities confirmed that three Unidentified Flying Objects had fallen from the sky to land in or near Qiqihar, a city in Heilongjiang province with a population of 5.4 million. Witnesses first heard a piercing sound and then saw a huge fireball crossing the sky. When they went to investigate, they found a round metal object with jagged edges being feverishly examined by "relevant personnel". That didn't stop the witnesses taking photographs (such as the one at right) and posting them online,¹ which generated a heated discussion about the nature of these 'UFOs'.

The crashes occurred shortly after a Russian Proton-M rocket carrying a satellite suffered a devastating failure nine minutes after its launch from Kazakhstan. A Russian investigation committee later concluded that the most likely cause of the failure was a ruptured propellant line, which triggered an automatic shutdown and sent the remains of the rocket crashing to Earth. That seemed to explain the 'downed UFOs', and the theory was confirmed a few days later by China's National Space Administration.² Disappointing for ufologists, then – or perhaps not. Footage of the incident appears to show the \$225-million rocket being struck by an object, which some have speculated was a guided missile... or even a UFO.³ What brought down the Russian rocket is still up for debate – a debate made all the



MENG ZHAO GUO AND HIS ALIEN VISITOR PROCEEDED TO COPULATE FOR AROUND 40 MINUTES

more interesting by the fact that this isn't the first time Heilongjiang province, in the desolate northern reaches historically known as Manchuria, has been implicated in UFO lore. It was also the location of a case that has won notoriety across the world.

THE MENG ZHAO GUO INCIDENT

On the face of it, the story itself isn't so remarkable. Accounts differ in the details, possibly as a result of various interpretations and translations, but most are in agreement on the basic story. In early June 1994, a 29-year-old tree farmer by the name of Meng Zhao Guo was working at Red Flag forest near Harbin, northeast China, when he saw a strange light in the sky. Thinking it was either a downed satellite or helicopter, he set out in an attempt to salvage the wreckage when at some point he was hit in the forehead by a shining light and knocked unconscious. He woke up at home some time later, with no recollection of how he got there.⁴

A few nights later, he was asleep in his bed when he awoke to find he was in the presence of what he described as a "10ft [3m] female alien with six fingers and braided leg fur." Meng Zhao Guo and his visitor then proceeded to copulate for around 40 minutes before the alien disappeared, leaving a two-inch (5cm) scar on the man's thigh as the only physical trace of their encounter. He further claimed that, at some later date, he levitated through a wall and met with a group of three-eyed aliens on their ship. Apparently fancying





AFP / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE LEFT: Meng Zhaoguo, a rural worker from northeast China, taking a lie detector test in Beijing. Meng said he was 29 years old when he broke his marital vows for the first and only time – with a 10ft-tall female extraterrestrial. ABOVE RIGHT: Zhang Jingping, a leading member of the International Chinese UFO Association.

a bit more cross-species rumpy-pumpy, he asked to see his lady friend again, only to be rebuffed. He was told that: “On a distant planet the son of a Chinese peasant will be born in 60 years” – that being the length of time needed for the amorous alien to conceive and give birth.⁵

To most people, it sounds like a tall tale. The UFO Club at Wuhan University, who examined the case in 1997, certainly thought so. However, the state-sponsored UFO Research Society concluded that the story was true, citing the case as: “The strongest possible example of direct contact with an extraterrestrial”. The UFO Research Society is a powerful organisation boasting some 3,000 official members, and since its creation in 1980 it has collected more than 5,000 accounts of close encounters throughout China.⁶

Something else that may be worth considering is the fact that Meng Zhaoguo was only barely literate and, until his experience, claimed never to have heard of alien abductions. In September 2003, he was belatedly given a medical exam, underwent a lie detector test, and was placed under hypnosis in an attempt to prove or disprove his outlandish claims. The results indicated that he was telling the truth. Furthermore, a doctor who examined the scar on Meng’s leg concluded that it “could not possibly have been caused by common injuries or surgery”.

An often overlooked yet fascinating aspect of the whole incident is the fact that the Ruling Party keeps such a tight grip on the national and provincial media that, even in the age of citizen journalism, nothing slips through the net without good reason. The newsstands and airwaves are awash with shameless propaganda, most of it having a clear message promoting and reinforcing the state’s political ideology and Chinese patriotism. There is a standing joke that says if you type ‘Tiananmen Square Massacre’ into a search engine in China, the result will come back: “What massacre?”

Given their stranglehold on the media, one has to ask why the Chinese authorities are apparently so willing to allow their citizens to ponder the existence of extraterrestrial life. Under normal circumstances, the

MANY OF CHINA’S UFO ENTHUSIASTS ARE SCIENTISTS AND ENGINEERS RATHER THAN ANORAKS



Ruling Party frowns on its citizens displaying profound belief in anything that doesn’t conform to its strict core philosophy or threatens the status quo – let alone anything remotely esoteric. This is a country that banned the second *Pirates of the Caribbean* movie because of perceived “supernatural content”,⁷ where Christianity is effectively outlawed, Falun Gong is seen as a threat (see FT125:6, 126:07, 128:42-45, 131:13), and even Buddhism is only tolerated, rather than encouraged, due to its cultural significance.

THE SCIENCE OF UFOLOGY

Unlike in many other nations, there is very little stigma surrounding UFO research in China, where it is an accepted and recognised science taken very seriously by academics. The government allows a print UFO journal to be published regularly; it has an estimated circulation of around 400,000 and many ex-government personnel are said to be vociferous believers. Sun Shili, a once-prominent foreign ministry official, now retired, is president of the Beijing UFO Research Society. He has gone on record numerous times to speak about his personal experiences and his belief that *wai xing ren* (extraterrestrials) are living among us.⁸ A large percentage of China’s UFO enthusiasts are respected scientists and engineers, rather than the anoraks, SF buffs or apocalyptic stargazers that inform the Western stereotype, and most of the country’s UFO research groups require a degree to attain membership. Jin Fan, an engineer who heads the Dalian UFO Research Society in the northeast of the country, says: “The study of UFOs is fundamentally different from other things like Falun Gong. This is a purely scientific field, whereas Falun Gong deals with cults and superstition”.⁹

There is a growing belief in China that the government has known of the existence of aliens for some time and is moving steadily toward ‘full disclosure’. The increased presence of extraterrestrials in the media, according to this theory, is just part of a long-term project to prepare the population for the big unveiling. More standard *X-Files*-era fare, you might think. But the reasons usually given for other countries concealing the existence of aliens – that it would challenge accepted religion and in turn our worldview – don’t apply in atheist China, changing the whole dynamic. Generally speaking, the Chinese would be more psychologically open to any such revelations, as they tend to be both more pragmatic and more easily manipulated than the average Westerner. They are taught not to ask too many questions and expect, even welcome, a certain degree of outside influence on their lives. It is common knowledge, even within the Chinese

FREDERIC J BROWN / AFP / GETTY IMAGES



ABOVE: Retired foreign ministry official and now president of the Beijing UFO Research Society Sun Shili shows off drawings of UFOs from his numerous sightings.

population, that the government uses the media as a propaganda tool. There have long been whispers of a disclosure race between the US and China, with each country anxious to be the first to reveal irrefutable proof of extraterrestrial life. This theory appeared to be given credence in January 2011 when Xinhua, the official government TV news channel, spontaneously reported that Barack Obama was preparing to announce the existence of aliens to the American people.¹⁰

MASS MANIPULATION

Recent media coverage would seem to add weight to the 'Chinese disclosure' theory. In October 2010, bizarre reports began emerging that an entire village had disappeared from the Qinling mountains, Shaanxi province, after numerous witnesses contacted local news agencies to report seeing UFOs in the area.¹¹ For a time, the Chinese Internet was abuzz with testimonies and real-time updates, mainly focused on the inexplicable presence of military personnel who cordoned off the area without explanation. A video was circulated widely online, which appears to show bright blue lights in the sky over the stricken village.¹²

So far, so mysterious. But any hope of a conclusion to these extraordinary claims led to nothing. In fact, subsequent reports in China denied there was any kind of military presence in the vicinity, and put the whole episode down to "rumours". What actually happened in Shaanxi province that night, if anything, is a moot point; the mere fact that

the story of the disappearing village was allowed into the public domain in the first place could be telling enough. Conversely, Shaanxi province, largely comprising an expansive 'forbidden zone', is home to up to 100 structures collectively known as the 'Pyramids of China,' including the famed White Pyramid of Xi'an (see FT164:28-32), situated around 40 miles (65km) south west of the ancient capital.¹³ The official line from the Chinese government has always been that the structures are simply burial mounds, but

this has long been disputed. The authorities rebuff any and all requests to examine the site, which prompts many to speculate about what they could possibly have to hide. Connections with the alignment of the stars, ancient Egypt, and extraterrestrial visitations have all been put forward.

The disappearing village story surfaced just months after another case had garnered widespread media attention. On 7 July 2010, witnesses reported a comet-like UFO streaking through the sky near Xiaoshan



ABOVE: A UFO streaks through the sky near Xiaoshan airport in Hangzhou in 2010. The comet-like object was photographed by many people, while the airport was closed temporarily.

airport in Hangzhou. As a precaution, the airport temporarily ceased operations.¹⁴ Chinese netizens were divided as to the possible origin of the fireball-like object, with just as many apparently fearing a sudden air strike by America as a UFO. There were also mass sightings that year in Xinjiang, Hunan, Shandong and Jiangsu provinces.

CHINESE ROSWELLS?

Yet another flap occurred in 2012, during which there were at least 100 sightings along the border separating China and India. Troops from the Indian Army's 14 Corps sent reports to their superiors describing "yellow spheres" that appeared to take off from the Chinese side of the border and traverse the sky for several hours before disappearing.¹⁵ A ground-based radar system was moved in but was unable to identify the objects, which officials insisted were not Chinese drones or satellites. Interestingly enough, earlier that year *India Daily* had published an article stating that China and India both know of the existence of an underground UFO base deep in the tectonic plates in the disputed Himalayan border area of Ladakh, the site of the Sino-Indian war of 1962.¹⁶ According to witnesses from both sides, triangular UFOs come out of the ground and climb vertically into the sky. In January 2005, there was also talk of a UFO crash in the region with sources suggesting the crash site was close to Mount Everest and therefore inaccessible, though both China and India were actively engaged in attempts to recover the craft.

There have been at least two other suspected UFO crashes in China. One is said to have occurred in the Gobi Desert, Outer Mongolia, in 1982, and another in an unspecified location around a decade earlier. Both craft are said to be stored in an underground research facility beneath the Taihang Mountains straddling Shanxi, Henan and Hebei provinces – the Chinese answer to Area 51.

If the Chinese military are indeed in possession of a downed spacecraft, the argument goes, it would perhaps go some way to explaining the unprecedented technological advances the country has benefited from in recent decades, in the same way that the West developed such things as microchips and fibre optics in the wake of Roswell. Wang Chang Ting of the UFO Research Society is on record as saying: "We study the application of UFO phenomena to the national economy, such as new materials and new technologies"¹⁷

Although marketed as the first Chinese abduction case, the Meng Zhaoguo Incident is not without precedent. On

7 March 1987 in Pingwu county, Sichuan province, a family of three was awakened by a loud, high-pitched hum. They went outside to investigate and were blinded by a beam of yellow light coming from a huge reddish object shaped like a "straw hat" hovering above them. When the beam of light hit them they passed out, only to awake later to find themselves strapped to steel tables in a circular room occupied by three-foot (90cm) tall humanoid creatures with three eyes. The aliens then proceeded to take blood samples from the abductees and probe them with needles, also making an incision on the child's thigh. The next thing the family knew, they were walking down a road seven miles (11km) from their home.¹⁸

The parallels between this account and the Meng Zhaoguo Incident are extraordinary; within the overall abduction scenario, both cases feature beams of light that render the victims unconscious, three-eyed aliens, and a wound to the thigh. It's possible, of course, that Meng Zhao Guo had read of the older case somewhere and simply constructed his story around it, whether knowingly or not. But he has been described as a virtual illiterate who passed a lie detector test with flying colours.

ANCIENT ASTRONAUTS

Unsurprisingly, the vast majority of Chinese UFO-related events have occurred post-Mao and coincided with the growth of modern technology. But there are some historical precedents. In 2011, a forum on the Above Top Secret website published a translation of what the poster claimed to be a section of text some 500 years old. It reads, in part,

"In [the] year 1528, a strange star appeared, flew from south-east towards north-west, bright as a giant wheel. The next night it reappeared and descended near a village. A stonemith saw the light and went to investigate [finding] an object shaped like a grinding wheel as big as a

*house covered in brilliant colours. Two beings inside [which] looked human but not human. [The] stonemith was taken in and his heart was taken out and examined. However, it did not [hurt] and did not bleed. There was a voice [which] sounded human but could not be comprehended."*¹⁹

The account goes on to describe the unfortunate stonemith being taken to a place where there were a sun, moon and stars, but the surrounding landscape was "mostly red-hued and cold." There were no buildings, and the beings were (again) described as having three eyes. After losing consciousness the victim woke up in the same place he was abducted, only to find that an entire year had passed. It's all a little vague when it comes to names and places; not so this account from Jiangsu province.

In 1523, a teacher named Lu Yu who lived in Yugiu village was standing outside his home when he noticed two ships "sailing on the tops of the clouds". On the ships, the teacher could see several tall men wearing hats and multi-coloured clothing and holding poles. Lu Yu quickly alerted "ten well-read men," just as the ships were descending, and the entire group were taken aboard. One of the visitors passed a hand over the men's mouths, and they found they could no longer speak. A short time afterwards they disembarked from the ships and their voices returned, though Lu Yu died of unknown causes five days later.²⁰

Interactions with UFOs in China could go back a lot further than we think. In fact, the phenomenon could be ingrained deep in Chinese culture. The notion of fire-breathing dragons coming down from the sky and 'Gods' coming out of their mouths or bellies is a recurring theme in Chinese mythology. Depending on which source you use, the 'Yellow Emperor' Huang Di (traditionally reigned 2697-2597 BC), was either a real person, a mythical creation, a deity, or some combination of the above, and is believed by

some to have been at least part extraterrestrial. According to legend, he came down 'from the heavens' to offer comfort and leadership to humanity, and soon become known as the 'Father of Chinese Culture'. Huang Di is credited with inventing everything from acupuncture to the written language, and is also said to be responsible for such technological advances as bronze coins and the bow and arrow. He lived for 100 years in the Kunlun mountains, Tibet, before returning to the skies in a 'metal dragon'²¹ when his work on Earth was considered complete. Proponents of the 'ancient astronaut' theory speculate that here, as in other examples from prehistory,

LEFT: One of the strikingly stylised 'alien' masks unearthed in 1986 at Sanxingdui.



witnesses were only able to describe what they saw using the limited vocabulary and concepts available to them at the time. Thus the 'metal dragon' noted in ancient texts would today be interpreted as a spaceship of some kind.

On 1 November 2007, *China Daily* newspaper ran an article entitled "Aliens or Ancestors? The Mysteries of Ancient Sichuan", in reference to the discovery of the Sanxingdui ("Three Stars Mound") archaeological site near Guanghan city.²² In

1986, construction workers unearthed two sacrificial pits containing bronze and gold masks, jade and marble figurines, pottery, and objects made from ivory, all said to be relics of a long lost civilisation. This followed the original discovery of the site by a farmer in 1929. Chinese historians consider the find one of the most important of the 20th century, and date the site to 1000-4000 BC, well before the start of recorded Chinese history. This conflicts with the original hypothesis that the Chinese civilisation arose from the Yellow River basin; and though the Chinese were meticulous recorders of history, no mention is made in any known text of the Sanxingdui people. Even stranger – though only around a quarter of the 12 km² (4.6 square miles) has so far been excavated – is the fact that to date no human remains have been found. Instead it has given up something in the region of 10,000 artefacts, many of which display otherworldly characteristics such as oversized ears and protruding eyes. It has been suggested that the masks and figurines don't depict people at all, but extraterrestrial visitors. Interestingly, many locals continue to report seeing UFOs in the area.



LEFT: "UFO" buildings at the Golden Beach in Rizhao, Shandong province.

have become increasingly ambitious and it is believed that plans are in place to have an operational space station by the year 2020.

To wrap things up, earlier this year, video and stills of a group of 37 manmade UFO-shaped structures emerged from Rizhao, Shandong

THE FINAL FRONTIER

China's booming economy has led to untold billions being ploughed into the education, defence and space exploration sectors. Conceivably, these could be three different branches of the same massive long-term project, with the ultimate aim of making China a major player on the world stage, where the Ruling Party has always believed it belongs.

Perhaps part of that aim is indeed to make history by winning the 'disclosure' race and, if so, the Chinese certainly appear to be stepping up their efforts. Last year a 'source' leaked footage allegedly showing alien bases on the Moon, with the accompanying report implying that the Chinese are already in contact with the resident aliens!²³ This would seem to tally nicely with the current state of the Chinese space programme. The seeds were first sown in the late 1950s, but back then the country lacked the necessary financial resources and didn't succeed in becoming the third Earth nation to send a manned mission into space until Yang Liwei's flight aboard *Shenzhou 5* in 2003. Explicit details of the space programme are shrouded in secrecy, but since *Shenzhou 5* the missions

province. The strange collection of buildings appears to have been erected simply to attract tourists to the area, and is indicative of how deeply the UFO phenomenon has infiltrated the public consciousness.²⁴ This comes five years after the grand unveiling of the 18,000-seater Shanghai World Expo Cultural Center (now the Mercedes-Benz Arena) which resembles, of course, a giant flying saucer. **FT**

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



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NO MORTAL MAID AMI

A recent animé film by the famous Studio Ghibli tells the story of Kaguya, a princess of the Moonfolk, exiled to Earth and raised by a peasant family. Although well known in Japan, few in the West might be aware that it is based upon historical documents. **BOB RICKARD** explores the background to this ancient Japanese tale of extraterrestrial visitation.

The tragic story of Princess Kaguya (*Kaguya-hime*) is one of the best-known folktales of Japan. It was already old when it was first written down around AD 900, becoming the earliest known relic of Japanese literature and, to historians of imaginative literature, one of the earliest examples of the ‘alien visitation’ theme. Kaguya’s plight – called, in the 11th century *Tale of Genji*, “the ancestor of all romances”¹ – has since inspired five movies, the recent award-winning animation,² two TV series, countless animé characters, and the name of Japan’s 2007 lunar orbiter.

In its original form,³ it centres on the terrestrial life of a mysterious girl brought up by a poor bamboo-cutter and his wife. They were childless until, one day, the old man – given the honorific name of *Taketori-no-Okina* (‘Old Man who harvests bamboo’) – saw a light shining within a bamboo grove.⁴ Following his curiosity, he found the light coming from a young bamboo stalk, inside which was a tiny baby no bigger than his thumb. He took the infant home and his wife agreed they should raise her as their own, naming her *Nayotake-no-Kaguya-hime*.⁵ Each time he returned to the grove, Taketori would find, inside a cut stalk, a small lump of gold. By the time Kaguya had grown into a normal-sized and remarkably beautiful teenager of marriageable age, the family had become very rich and moved to a city.

News of Kaguya’s beauty and her parents’ wealth soon attracted a stream of suitors. Most were rejected, until five nobles remained in the running; unable to decide which one to accept, Kaguya set them each



**“IT WAS DECREED
THAT I SHOULD
DESCEND UPON
THIS EARTH
AND BIDE THERE
SOMEWHILE”**

an impossible task, which they all failed. The final suitor was the Emperor, the Mikado, who came to see her famous beauty for himself and also fell in love with Kaguya. She rejected his proposal too.

By now, a change had come over the girl; she wandered at night, staring for long periods at the Moon and weeping inconsolably. For eight months her worrying parents begged her to tell them what was upsetting her and, eventually she blurted out: “No maid of this mortal land am I, but the Capital of Moonland [*Tsuki-no-Miyako*] is my birth-place. Long ago it was decreed that I should descend upon this Earth and bide there somewhere; but now is the time at hand when I must go back... for when yonder orb shall be at its fullest, a company of Moonfolk will come down from the sky to bear me away.” The gold that Taketori found, she explained, had been a stipend sent by her family towards her upkeep. She does not want to part from her loving Earth family but cannot now avoid this fate, nor complete her daughterly obligations to marry or look after her parents in their old age. Her misery is compounded by her awareness that snubbing the Emperor and her imminent disappearance will put her family’s loyalty and standing in jeopardy of political and social reprisals.

Taketori, seeking to protect his daughter from the prophesied abduction, begged the emperor for warriors to guard their

LEFT: A poster for the Studio Ghibli animated film telling the story of Princess Kaguya. RIGHT: The baby Kaguya as seen in as depicted in a 17th century scroll in the library of Japan’s National Diet.





ABOVE LEFT: 'Baby' Kaguya inside the egg or pod, as seen in Kon Ichikawa's 1987 film *Princess from the Moon*.

ABOVE RIGHT: The ascent of Kaguya, also from Ichikawa's film, a Spielbergian version complete with Kaguya floating up in a beam of light like a modern abductee.

home. The emperor readily agrees and sends a contingent of several thousand men to be stationed all over the family compound and on the rooftops. Kaguya, herself is locked inside the family strong room. On the fateful night of the next full Moon, the Moonfolk arrived riding on clouds in a splendid show of otherworldly power.

"At the hour of the Rat ⁶ behold! A glory fell about the dwelling... 10 times as bright as the brightness of the full Moon... In the midst thereof came down through the air a company of Angels ⁷ riding on a coil of cloud that descended until it hovered some cubits' height above the ground. And there the angels stood ranked in due order..." Those troops not stunned by the sight fired arrows, but none reached their target and so they could only stand by in readiness.

"In shining garments were the Angels clad, that had not their like under heaven, and in the midst of them... was seen a canopied car ⁸ where sat One who seemed to be their Lord". In a voice that could be heard clearly by everybody, the Archangel spoke directly to Taketori. The girl was sent to live with him, boomed the voice, "because of some small virtue didst thou display in thy life," and Lady Kaguya was "doomed to bide a little while in thy wretched home... to expiate a fault she had committed... Now we are to bear her away from thine Earth."

When this declaration ends, the 'car' was "borne upwards on the cloud" to hover directly over the house. Then, the thunderous voice called for Kaguya to come away. The doors to the storehouse where her parents had concealed her flew open, leaving her nowhere to hide. Several envoys approached her, bearing "a Celestial Feather Robe and some Elixir of Immortality" – the elixir to "purify her spirit soiled with the grossness of this filthy world" and the robe enchanted with forgetfulness. She tried in vain to console her distraught stepparents.

Finally, Kaguya said, poignantly: "I must mount to yonder sky, whence I fain would fall meteor-wise to Earth." As she drank the potion, the robe was draped over her shoulders "and in a trice all memory of her

foster-father's woe vanished". Then, before all assembled there "the Lady entered the car surrounded by the company of Angels, and mounted skywards" while all below "stood stunned with grief".

THE PRINCESS ON FILM

The sad fate of the conflicted Kaguya resonates strongly with Japanese sensibilities, such that it is still relevant to their culture after 11 centuries. Among its many modern iterations, the celebrated Japanese director Kon Ichikawa's 1987 movie version overlays the ancient myth with a 'modern' mythology while retaining its cultural continuity. Well known for acknowledging his Western influences – particularly Walt Disney and Jean Renoir – his *Princess from the Moon* (*Taketori monogatari*, starring Toshiro Mifune as the bamboo-cutter) gives more than a nod in the direction of Stephen Spielberg, being directly inspired by *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977).

As his story starts, Ichikawa suggests rather than shows the manner of Lady Kaguya's arrival on Earth, limiting his special effects to an 'off-stage' meteorite impact. Taketori and his wife are in their hovel at night when they hear the whoosh of something passing low overhead. Shifting beams of intense light blaze through gaps in the walls of their hut as their point of origin outside moves across the sky, evoking the scene in *Close Encounters* when the child becomes aware of the aliens outside his home. The hut is shaken by a loud explosion nearby, and rushing outside the old couple see a fiery glow from behind a nearby hill.

In the morning light, Taketori sets out to investigate the unnatural disturbance. Pausing on a hilltop, he looks out over the bamboo grove. Something big has come down, but you don't get to see it; no meteoric or spaceship impact crater, only smoke from still burning fires drifting across the field of view.

Entering the grove, Taketori passes the grave of their daughter ⁹ and notices a sizeable egg-shaped object nearby. A light from it startles him and – watching from cover – he sees a limb of the luminous cloud extend

through the air and enter the small grave. After a short while, the light retracts and the pod cracks open to reveal the tiny, shining girl inside.

Later, the meteoric overtones are abandoned as it is revealed that the pod is, in fact, a lifeboat from a crashed spaceship carrying the Princess. As a light-entity, she has absorbed and incarnated the dead girl's form. In Ichikawa's version, whenever Taketori finds riches in the grove, it is not as a nugget inside a bamboo stem but as fragments of the crashed craft made of gold.

At the climax, when the Moonfolk frustrate Taketori's attempt to hide the Princess in the family compound's strongroom, the doors, windows and shutters fly open, but not exactly as in the original story. In both Ichikawa's movie and Takahata's animé, this demonstration of the Moonfolk's power is performed by tiny beings of light flitting through the compound – in the former looking like small versions of classic Greys, and in the latter like luminous winged fairies.

Finally, when Ichikawa shows the Princess's ascension, she floats up – like many an abductee – inside a light beam, accompanied by the aforementioned tiny radiant aliens, into a full-on Spielbergian spacecraft.

The most recent retelling of Kaguya's story is *The Tale of The Princess Kaguya*, a feature-length animation by Isao Takahata (a fellow director of Ghibli Studios with Hayao Miyazaki). His style here is quite unlike Miyazaki's – simple, lyrical, and hand-drawn with brush and crayon – apparently, influenced by the art and fashions of the Heian period (AD 794 to 1185). Takahata concentrates on the emotional story, creating a moving celebration of humanity in the face of the dilemmas of duty. The Buddhist subtext begins as soon as Kaguya's bamboo shoot opens out like Buddha's lotus throne to reveal the tiny child inside, as radiant as any Buddhist saint.

His Moonfolk are clearly modelled upon classic Buddhist iconography, more Indian than Japanese; indeed, Kaguya's Moon father appears like a Buddha statue, unspeaking and unmoving; he is accompanied by an entourage

of Chinese-style fairy maidens, and the angelic warriors are replaced by musicians of a celestial orchestra, all seated on a vast platform of luminous clouds.

Kaguya is urged to leave behind the sorrow and filth of this world for the “purity of the Moon”. Moments before she dons the Cape of Forgetfulness, Kaguya hears children singing the song that threads through the whole movie. It is a joyful, energetic noise, celebrating the diversity and chaos of life and it contrasts the happy children with the apparently cold, emotionless ‘Buddha’.

“It’s not unclean,” they sing, “there’s joy and grief,
All who live here feel them in all their different shades
Birds, bugs, beasts, Grass, trees,
flowers
... and feelings.”

So, Kaguya’s last thought, before she loses all attachment, is that this troubled Earth with its imperfect beings and messy life, nevertheless, contains beauty and kindness. Takahata’s version, then, is a Zen-like revolt against the superhuman tyranny of an undifferentiated nirvana.

THE STORY’S ANTIQUITY

There are a number of historical versions of the *Taketori no Okina no Monogatari*, each distinguished by the commentary, interpolations, errors and preferences of its copyist or editor.

Although there had been prior translations into Italian, German and French, FV Dickens, a British surgeon (1838–1915) writing in 1887, claims that his is the first *direct* translation of Kaguya’s story into English. Dickens’s primary source is the six-volume 1829 edition by Tanaka Daishu. Seventy years after Dickens, we have the fresh translation by Donald Keene (b.1922), the American-born scholar of Japanese literature, whose primary source is contained in the 1819 collection of old Japanese books known as *Gunsho Ruij*.

Dickens acknowledges that that there are noticeable influences of Chinese, or Indian-via-Chinese sources in the tale, but, nevertheless, its style is distinctively antique “in ways which make it stand out as quite different from other narratives [*monogatari*] from that period”. He adds: “The art and grace of the story of the Lady Kaguya are native, its unstrained pathos, its natural sweetness, are its own, and in simple charm



LEFT: ‘Kaguya Received back into Moon Palace’, 1888, print by Tsukioka Yoshitoshi from the *Tsuki hyakushi* (One Hundred Aspects of the Moon).

the same name as one mentioned in the *Taketori* story) in the history of the Emperor Suinin (c. 69BC-AD70).¹⁰

Dickens is of the opinion that the oversized central section – which deals in great detail with the quests given to Kaguya’s five suitors – is a later interpolation, built upon by successive editors. The five primary suitors are, in different versions, said to be princes, nobles or state officials; at any rate high-born, reflecting both Kaguya’s fame and the new-found status of her parents. Each is set an “impossible” quest to test their resolve – a theme common in European folklore. The objects of these quests include the Buddha’s stone begging bowl from India; a robe made from the fur of the Chinese Fire Rat; a branch from the jewelled trees on the fairy island of *Horai* in the Eastern Ocean;¹¹ a jewel from the neck of a sea-dragon; and a magic cowrie shell said to be used by swallows for a painless birthing.¹²

It’s worth mentioning in passing that while the other quests are dealt with as offscreen narratives, Ichikawa’s film actually does show the boat’s disastrous encounter with the sea-dragon, looking very much like a giant sea-serpent familiar from cryptozoology.

BUDDHIST THEMES

Whatever native elements the original Kaguya story may have had in the distant mists of Shinto animism, the story was overlaid with Buddhist imagery by the time it was first set down in print. There were three or four centuries between the establishment of Buddhism in Japan around the middle of the sixth century and the earliest printed edition; enough time for the Buddhist interpolations to become an accepted part of the telling.

In the section on the suitors’ quests, for example, we have mention of the Buddha’s stone begging bowl; the moral being that no divine relic would ever be allowed to be used in such a trivial way.

More importantly, in Dickens’s version, the Moonfolk Archangel tells *Taketori* that Kaguya had been sent to live with them partly as a reward for “some small virtue didst thou display in thy life”, and partly because Kaguya was “doomed to bide a little while in thy wretched home... to expiate a fault she had committed.” Here we see the intrusion of the Buddhist notion of *karma* – that we are

THE TINY BEINGS OF LIGHT LOOK LIKE CLASSIC ALIEN GREYS OR LUMINOUS WINGED FAIRIES

and purity of thought and language it has no rival in [Oriental] fiction.” Professor Keene thought Dickens’s translation was marred by “dullness and inaccuracies” and sought to restore “some of the charm and humour which makes this one of the most famous of Japanese tales”. It is certainly the more readable translation.

Dickens did, however, identify some of those elements of the tale that pre-existed in Japanese and Buddhist literature: for instance, a character called *Taketori no Okina* is mentioned in the oldest anthology of Japanese poetry, known as *Man’yōshū* (*Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves*) compiled sometime after AD 759. Also, there is a mention of a Princess Kaguya with five lovers (one of whom has



ABOVE: *Taketori* discovers Kaguya in the bamboo thicket. This is from Isao Takahata’s 2013 animé version, elevating Kaguya-hime to the level of a Buddhist deity.

THE UTSUROBUNE CONNECTION



There is a possibility that the *Taketori no Okina no Monogatari* might well have influenced another story of interest, the *Utsurobune-no-banjo* (trans: *Female Alien in a Hollow Vessel*) incident.¹

This concerned the discovery in February 1803 of a strangely attired female of “incomparable beauty” found in a “hollow boat” on a beach in Hitachi Province, eastern Japan, sometimes claimed to be a UFO-related incident. The unidentified young woman has been depicted standing beside a curious ship or craft that was covered in hieroglyphs no one could recognise. She was dressed in a ‘foreign’ fashion in unknown fabrics, had no understanding of Japanese and was clutching an ornate box also marked with the unknown script. Sadly, for enthusiasts of alien encounters, this seems to be the Tokugawa period equivalent of a tall story.² A study by Tanaka Kazuo of several historical accounts of this incident suggests

they are folkloric confabulations “mixing both imaginary and real names of persons and places”. He found no records of such an incident in the capital, regional and clan archives, and says it is “unrealistic to believe that such an interesting incident” would not have been recorded in any official document of the Tokugawa period if it had been an actual event.

What is of interest to the present discussion is that the mysterious female was described – as many native readers might have automatically expected – as *marebito*; specifically, the commentaries speculated that she might be “a princess of a foreign realm” marooned or exiled.

¹ We dealt with this case in 1987; see Masaru Mori, ‘Female Alien in a Hollow Vessel’, **FT48:48-50**.

² See Tanaka Kazuo, ‘Did a Close Encounter of the Third Kind occur on a Japanese Beach in 1803?’, *Skeptical Inquirer* (July/Aug 2000) vol 24, no 4.

doomed to reincarnate until we can transcend the consequences of our actions, good or bad. Precisely what her ‘fault’ was we never learn in any version.¹³

There is another theme of interest here, revealed during the climax. The Archangel states that Kaguya’s 16 years on Earth were but a brief space of time for the Moonfolk. This recalls another Japanese story in which Urashima Taro, a fisherman, spends three

days in the palace of the Dragon King beneath the sea, only to find on returning home that 300 years have passed. If this motif was not ultimately derived from India, then it was certainly influenced by those Daoist tales from China in which it features.¹⁴ Kaguya had also experienced accelerated time from the moment she was found by Taketori to the time she was “of marriageable age” – the main versions agree this took just three months.

FOLKLORIC MOTIFS

Dickins declares the motif of a birth from bamboo to be “manifestly Indian”, citing a Buddhist legend from the Japanese compendium *Naigeden* about three sages who manifested as bamboos “with leaves of gold and roots of precious jade”, which split open to reveal in each “a beautiful boy”.¹⁵ Other folklorists have pointed out the near-universal motif of thumb-sized folk-heroes with miraculous births.

The Kaguya saga also touches upon the origin of the name of Mt Fuji (*Fujiyama*). As the cape of forgetting is about to be draped over her shoulders, Kaguya pleads for a moment to say goodbye to a special person, before she forgets all her Earthly obligations. Despite her refusal of the Emperor’s suit, these two lonely people exchanged encouraging letters and poems. As she penned her last letter to him, apologising for being the cause of so much trouble, she hid within its folds a small portion of the Elixir of Immortality as compensation. After her Ascension, the Emperor has no wish to prolong his mortal existence without her and orders the Elixir, and her letter, to be taken to the nearest mountain that touched Heaven. The noble entrusted with this task journeys to Mt Fuji in the ancient province of Suruga and, at its summit, burns them as instructed. The smoke that still rises on occasion from this symmetrical volcanic mountain is said to come from that immortal pyre. Both Dickins and Keene point out that the folk etymology of *Fuji* means “not-die”, and alludes to the immortality that proximity to the mountain is said to grant.

VISITATION AND ABDUCTION

In her *Catalpa Bow* (1975), a study of Japanese shamanism, Carmen Blacker cites the opinion of the pioneering Japanese ethnologist Origuchi Shinobu that, in “the oldest cosmology known to the Japanese... far across the sea lay a miraculous land known as Tokoyo, from which at regular seasons supernatural guests called *marebito* would arrive on the shores of our world in boats.”

In Japanese lore, the term *marebito* means, typically, ‘strangers from a faraway land’ – and, traditionally, they are responsible for ‘supernatural abduction’ (*kamikakushi*). According to Noriko Reider, *marebito* can be wandering *oni* (primordial demons) or *kami* (Shinto deities) who would turn up in villages unexpectedly. These visitors were often welcomed because, if treated respectfully or given hospitality, they could bring good fortune and rewards – a function also attributed to fairies in Western lore. But essentially, she says, they were “foreign travellers” from “the other world” (i.e. a supernatural plane or realm analogous to the Western Otherworld or Underworld).¹⁶ In modern lore – see Miyazaki’s 2001 animé *Spirited Away* – these abductors can include shamans and witches as well as gods or demons.

Interestingly, in his 1906 translation of the *Taketori Monogatari*, Dickins notes that the Old Bamboo-cutter is described as

yamabito, which he translates as “woodsman” – presumably referring to his rustic lifestyle and remote habitat.

However, later scholars have defined *yamabito* as “a supernatural being, genius, fairy, esp. used for the Daoist sage, but also for a mortal ‘genius’”.¹⁷ Although the stories treat Taketori as a humble old man, there is a strong Chinese tradition of depicting Daoist sages as indistinguishable from such mountain-dwelling peasants. It would be perfectly fitting for such an enlightened being, ascetic, hermit or shaman to have a magical child as a familiar from the other world. Just to spice this further, we are reminded of that other class of mountain-dwelling psychopomps – the humanoid hawk spirits called *Tengu* – who are implicated in a number of the supernatural kidnapping stories, given by Blacker, and which she associates with the *yamabushi*, mountain-dwelling ascetics. But no one, yet, has suggested that the tale of Taketori might have had its origins in Daoism or shamanism.

THE YAMABITO OF THE MOUNTAIN FORESTS

The pioneer of Japanese folklore studies, Kunio Yanagata, built an influential theory on the translation of *yamabito* as “mountain men”. After years of collecting stories and beliefs in remote areas of Japan, his book *Tono*

Monogatari – Legends of the Tono Prefecture, 1910 – he conceptualised them as a poor underclass of “wandering people who do not possess land and are powerless”, eeking out a living in the mountains.¹⁸ Furthermore, Yanagata believed that these ‘Yamabito’ people were “descendants of a real, separate aboriginal race of people who were long ago forced into the mountains by the Japanese who then populated the plains” during the Jomon era (roughly 11,000-300 BC).¹⁹

Yanagata was inevitably ridiculed for these ideas, but rural belief in the supernatural inhabitants of remote mountains continues today. That said, there is a big difference between the tales of supernatural *kamikakushi* and the abductions by *yamabito*. Generally, the *marebito* abduction involves a shamanic style journey through and sojourn in the Otherworld; generally, the *yamabito* tales do not.

Here is a translation of one of Yanagata’s stories: “A young girl is at play under the pear tree in her yard one evening toward dusk, and in the next instant she is gone, vanished. Thirty years later, the occupants of her old family home are surprised by a visitor whom they recognise at once as this child, now grown to womanhood. She looks haggard and old. She is silent, except for the half-apologetic remark that she ‘just wanted to see everyone

once more’, and then she departs as silently and mysteriously as she came. Evidently no one attempts to follow her, and no one asks her to stay. Her story remains untold. No one wants to hear it. They know what it is. She is *kamikakushi*... literally, she has been hidden by the *kami*, by the spirits. She has been enslaved by some supernatural being.”²⁰

The reader will notice that in nearly every respect this account is the antithesis of Kaguya’s story. Among the number of ways the ancient story of Kaguya-hime is unique, is that it is a *reversal* of the *kamikakushi*. In her case, the visitor from another world is not here to kidnap but to be taken in by terrestrial peasants rather like a fairy changeling; and far from kidnapping her, the supernatural *marebito* from the faraway land in the Moon come to take her back. **FT**

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



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

NOTES

1 ch.17, *The Tale of Genji* (Genji monogatari). Itself a classic of Japanese literature, *Genji* was written by a noblewoman, Murasaki Shikibu, in the peak of the Heian period (AD 794-1185).

3 *The Tale of Princess Kaguya* (Kaguyahime no monogatari), directed by Isao Takahata, Ghibli Studios, released in Japan in 2013, and in the West in 2015, gaining 30 award nominations and 11 wins for excellence. www.imdb.com/title/tt2576852/.

3 I’m using what is probably the first English translation, in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol.19, 1887, pp1-58: *The Story of the Old Bamboo-Hewer (Taketori no Okina no Monogatari)*. A *Japanese Romance of the Tenth Century*, translated with notes by F Victor Dickins. Dickins expanded the paper for a booklet the following year, and again in a two-volume set called *Primitive & Mediaeval Japanese Texts* for Clarendon Press in 1906. In this later work he gives the date of his source, the text of ‘Tanaka Daishiu’, as “about 1838”. A fresh translation was made nearly 70 years later by Donald Keene – *The Tale of the Bamboo Cutter*, in *Monumenta Nipponica*, Vol. 11, No. 4 (Jan., 1956), pp329-355. Keene’s translation was retold in book form in 1980 by Sally Fisher as *The Tale of the Shining Princess*, with illustrations from an 18th century edition of the tale.

4 His name is given as *Sanugi* (sometimes *Sanuki*) no *Miyakko*, or “*miya-tsu-ko*” which Dickins

translates as meaning “a servant of the August Home in Sanugi” (a province of Shikoku, Japan’s fourth largest island). It seems to be a title like Governor or Baron, but perhaps, noted Dickins, “like many other titles it degenerated into a mere name”. Later in Dickins’s version, the name is given as “*Miyakko Maru*”, and it is this name that is used by the leader of the Moonfolk to address Taketori. Keene gives this as *Miyakkomaro*.

5 Dickins: ‘Princess of flexible bamboos scattering light’; Keene: ‘Shining Princess of the Young Bamboo’. A British collection, *Myths & Legends of Japan* by F Hadland Davis (1912), gives: ‘Precious Slender Bamboo of the Field of Autumn’. Takahata’s 2013 animé has: ‘Shining Princess of the Supple Bamboo’... and so on.

6 Midnight until two in the morning.

7 Dickins portrays the Moonfolk as the ethereal supernatural beings called ‘fairies’ in Chinese and Japanese literature, but in retelling the story for Western readers of more than a century ago calls them ‘angels’.

8 Keene calls the Moonfolk’s vehicle a “chariot”. Both he and Dickins are following the internal logic of the story, referencing the usual way that the nobility or officials travelled in a palanquin or litter. Takahata’s animé version makes the huge plate of clouds the main vehicle.

9 In Ichikawa’s version, Taketori and his wife lost their own daughter, around five years old, and buried her among the bamboos.

10 Although reckoned to be legendary, Suinin can be found in the *Kojiki* (Record of Ancient Matters), the early eighth century chronicle of the origins of the Yamato dynasty.

11 *Horai* is the Japanese variant of the Chinese mythical island *Peng Lai*, likewise the home of the fairies and immortal sages.

12 While it was almost certainly common knowledge that swallows laid eggs, and easily verifiable, for some unexplained reason this story has them giving live births.

13 In Takahata’s animé version, at her ascension Kaguya remembers that when she formerly lived on the Moon she had been fascinated to hear the tale of another woman who had stayed on Earth and who lamented her return to the Moon. Kaguya thought that this curiosity about life on Earth might have been her crime.

14 What folklorists call ‘the supernatural passage of time’ – as frequently met with in ufology as in fairylore – is nicely portrayed by Randal Kleiser in the context of a vanished child in his 1986 film *Flight of the Navigator*. See also Edwin S. Hartland, ‘The Supernatural Lapse of Time in Fairyland’ ie. chapters 7-9 of his *The Science of Fairy Tales* (1891).

15 A Daoist version was noted by Robert Ford Campany in *Strange Writing* (1996), his compendious study of Chinese writings about supernatural anomalies. According to the *Yiyuan* (‘A Garden of Marvels’), compiled by Liu Jingshu sometime in the 5th century, under a heading of plants that resemble humans, an entry records

“the discovery of a miniature being inside a bamboo stalk.” This certainly predates the first printed *Taketori no Monogatari*. Elsewhere, the online *Mythenyclopedia* records (but doesn’t reference) that “the creation story of the Andaman Islanders of the Indian Ocean, the first man is born inside a large stalk of bamboo” (mythenyclopedia.com/Pa-Pr/Plants-in-Mythology.html).

16 Noriko T Reider, *Japanese Demon Lore* (2010).

17 Albert Koop & Hogitaro Inada, *Japanese Names and How to Read Them* (1922).

18 See Hideyo Konagaya ‘Yamabito: from Ethnology to Japanese Folklore Studies’ in *The Folklore Historian*, vol 20.

19 Gerald A Figa, *Civilization and Monsters: Spirits of Modernity in Meiji Japan* (1999). This recalls the theory promoted by GL Gomme that our inherited lore about fairies is a survival from a time victorious invaders of Britain conquered the Pictish aboriginals. On this topic, I thank Simon Young for reminding me of David MacRitchie, who came to believe that British and Continental fairies were the rump of an almost vanished sub-Arctic people. Curiously, “he believed that the only living ‘fairies’ and the last survivors of this race were the Ainu of northern Japan”. (Personal communication).

20 AW Sadler, ‘The Spirit-Captives of Japan’s North Country: Nineteenth Century Narratives of the *Kamikakushi*’ in *Asian Folklore Studies* (1987) vol.46, pp217-226.

THE WARMINSTER SYNDROME

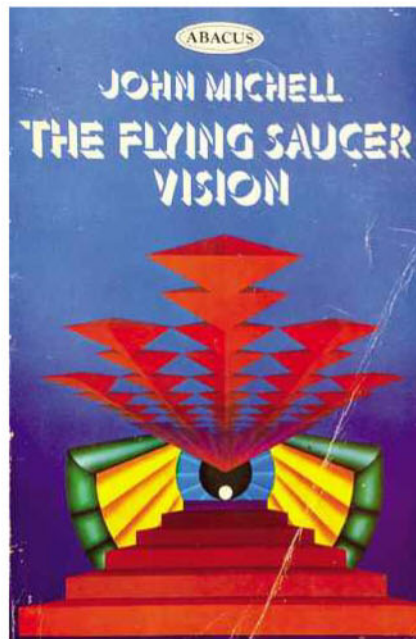
David Simpson was a young man when he became a flying sorcerer. A sorcerer is someone who has magic powers and David created UFOs from ordinary bits of plastic and metal. Some people believed they came from other worlds. In reality they came from his workshop in Surrey. **DAVID CLARKE** tells the full story.

It was the 1960s and the skies were alive with signs and wonders. Flying saucers were part of a great explosion of interest in occult phenomena that emerged from the counter-culture in Britain and America. Across the Western world, thousands of young people sought to alter their consciousness, whether through mystical Eastern beliefs, psychedelic music, mind-altering drugs or the occult and ufology. One of the influential books of this era was John Michell's *The Flying Saucer Vision* written by hippie spokesman John Michell and published in 1967. It made a connection between flying saucers and the ancient myths and legends of Britain. Michell popularised an existing idea that UFO pilots used 'ley lines' – invisible currents of earth energy – to navigate when they arrived here.

The Wiltshire countryside, with its stone circles and ancient monuments, became a natural Mecca for people seeking UFOs and, in due course, crop circles. Glastonbury Tor in Somerset and other such mystical places became cosmic 'windows' that attracted saucer watchers like moths to a flame. But while the hippies were looking up to the sky, David Simpson and his friends looked at the people who said they saw UFOs. They dared to ask: Were they *really* seeing spaceships from other worlds? Or was there another explanation for what was going on in the fields and hills of southern England?

SKYWATCHING

When I met David Simpson he turned out to be a reserved, quietly-spoken man in his mid-sixties. In 2001 he retired as head of Pressure and Vacuum Standards at the UK's National Physical Laboratory, where he had spent much of his working life developing cutting edge measuring instruments in



THE WILTSHIRE COUNTRYSIDE WITH ITS STONE CIRCLES BECAME A MECCA FOR UFO SEEKERS

a lab that had produced atomic clocks, radar and the first computers. The UFO phenomenon had piqued his younger self's instinctive curiosity. Being a scientist he naturally wanted to find hard, measureable evidence that could be tested. If UFOs were

solid, structured craft from elsewhere, he reasoned it must be possible to capture them on film or record them on scientific instruments. From 1965 onwards Britain experienced a prolonged UFO flap with sightings regularly reported on national television, radio and in the newspapers. This presented a unique opportunity to find that elusive evidence. With public interest at its height, Simpson and his friends decided to set up their own UFO group based in the southeast of England. They called it SIUFOP, the Society for the Investigation of UFO Phenomena. SIUFOP started out with about 10 members with an average age of around 20. Some were at college studying to become scientists and had the technical skills required to investigate unknown phenomena. Sceptical they may have been but even SIUFOP's members could not escape the *zeitgeist* that gripped the nation and the world.

"We did nothing but talk about flying saucers and it was great fun," Simpson said. "The newspapers were full of UFO stories and like everyone else at that time we tended to believe what we read in the news or saw on TV. The general feeling was that something strange was going on. The UFO mystery was deepening and nobody could quite explain what was behind it."

SIUFOP were different because they shunned the publicity and attention sought by other UFO groups. As budding scientists, their efforts were concentrated on obtaining hard evidence. "We had camera gear, tripods and even a rudimentary spectrometer at the ready," Simpson explained. "And we knew how to take night-time photographs of the sky."

So appealing was the idea that UFOs existed that Simpson's friends decided to do what most UFO groups did in those days: go skywatching. The local landmark of Chantry



ABOVE: A convincing photo of the Warminster Thing; in fact, a hoaxed UFO created by the SIUFOP team. BELOW: David Simpson appears on British television in 1982.

Hill provided an excellent vantage point, but the first night proved disappointing. A tripod-mounted camera was poised for action, but they saw nothing apart from satellites. On the second night four of the group braved freezing temperatures and returned. Bleary-eyed through lack of sleep, the shared excitement of the moment overcame their weariness.

“Almost as soon as the group reached the top of the hill someone shouted: ‘What’s that strange light in the sky?’ Soon the cameras were out and we were busily taking photographs,” Simpson recalled. “We could all see a light moving a few degrees above the horizon. It moved around, up and down and horizontally. Then it was joined by two more. At times up to six variously coloured lights were seen dancing around. We had never seen anything like it before. The display went on for an hour or so. It seemed to us that we might just have some valuable knowledge of the nature of UFOs within our grasp. We took so many time-exposure photographs that we ran out of film.”

Believing they had captured images of world changing importance, the friends



rushed home to develop the film. But when the images materialised in the dark room their mood turned from elation to disappointment. They expected the lights to have left long traces on the negatives, but all the images showed the same fuzzy blob of light with a short curled tail. Worse, it appeared to be much lower in the sky than they recalled.

A day or so later the group returned to Chantry Hill in daylight. They checked

the direction the lights had taken against landscape features marked on an Ordnance Survey map. They were shocked and embarrassed to find they had been looking directly towards a small road on a distant hillside. Returning at night, they found their UFOs were nothing more otherworldly than distant car headlights.

“This experience was very instructive,” Simpson said. “We realised that when you are excited and tired you are much more likely to misinterpret things. We also learned from talking to other people who gave unusual and mysterious accounts of UFO sightings that the more they repeated their stories the more they tended to exaggerate. When people discussed their ‘sightings’ they often incorporated details heard from someone else or from the media or the UFO literature into their stories. For instance, they would often say they ‘there must be intelligent life elsewhere in the Universe’, implying that this could explain their UFO. All these things made us much more careful and sceptical.”

Despite the lessons learned on the Sussex Downs, Simpson and his SIUFOP pals continued their investigations. By 1967 the



ABOVE: Cradle Hill, Warminster, became a Mecca for people in search of UFOs and one of the most popular spots for skywatchers.

BELOW: The earliest news report concerning strange goings-on in Warminster concerned a mysterious noise and appeared in the *Warminster Journal* in December 1964.

word on the street was that if you really wanted to see a flying saucer, the best place to go was a sleepy town in Wiltshire.

THE WARMINSTER THING

Situated about 15 miles (24km) west of Stonehenge, from the mid-1960s Warminster had become a virtual Mecca for ufologists. Every weekend and bank holiday the 11,000 population of the town was swelled by hundreds of UFO enthusiasts. Pilgrims were forced to camp in fields, as there were not enough hotels. As night fell the hills around Warminster were thronged with expectant skywatchers all hoping for a personal sighting of 'The Warminster Thing'. They were undaunted by the fact that one of the key skywatch locations, Cradle Hill, sat alongside the largest military training zone in the UK.

The Warminster phenomena began late in December 1964 when a curious news item appeared in the weekly *Warminster Journal*. A woman on her way to church early on Christmas morning was startled by an unearthly sound, like "branches being pulled over gravel". This was followed by an eerie droning. One week later, the town's postmaster came forward to say he had heard a similar bone-chilling aerial noise. This prompted a self-described 'amateur scientist', David Holton, to send a long letter to the paper. Holton claimed the mysterious noise had been heard for years and had once "disturbed a flock of pigeons from their roost". The birds scattered in terror, many dropping dead to the ground. Quizzed about this sensational story on a local television news bulletin, Holton said he believed 'The Thing' that haunted the skies above Warminster came from outer space. It was only a matter of time before the source of the noise revealed itself.

By the spring of 1965 stories about unexplained sounds had been replaced by sightings of "bright, cigar-shaped objects" in the sky. A moving light, dubbed the "amber

Strange Noise At Warminster

SETTING off for church at 6.30 on Christmas morning, a Bradley Road, Warminster, housewife heard a crackling noise from the direction of Bell Hill. At first she thought it was a lorry spreading grit on the hill. But the noise grew louder, came over her head and passed on across Ludlow Close.

She will not let me use her name because she is afraid of being laughed at. The noise sounded like branches being pulled over gravel and there was a faint hum. It was quite loud but not above talking level. The sky was dark but brilliantly starlit and she could see nothing above her.

gambler", roamed the hills above the town. As rumours spread, Elwyn Rees, chairman of the town council, called a public meeting "to allay fears that the happenings were a danger to the Earth". On Friday 27 August 1965, just before the Bank Holiday, 200 residents squeezed into the Town Hall Assembly Room. Hundreds more gathered outside. Inside, John Cleary-Baker, the Chairman of the British UFO Research Association (BUFORA), the UK's premier UFO society, reassured townsfolk they had nothing to fear from their visitors. They should "welcome their arrival in the sky". He went on to link UFOs with fashionable New Age ideas about 'ley lines' and suggested aliens could be using an ancient earthwork nearby as a "homing beacon".

The debate almost descended into farce when Rees was handed an urgent telegram. He opened it and found a message that read: "Investigations completed. Invasion fears are unfounded. [Signed] Doctor Who." The meeting failed to untangle fact from fiction

but attracted television cameras and the national press to the town. Local businesses were overjoyed. Hotelier Hugh McLaren told reporters: "This could do us as much good as the Loch Ness Monster did for Scotland".

The Warminster Thing might have been quickly forgotten after the summer silly season was over. The man who ensured it continued to run was Arthur Shuttlewood, who at the time was chief reporter for the town's newspaper. He kept the rumours alive in a stream of articles published by the *Journal*. By the summer of 1966 Warminster was firmly planted on the map as the place to see UFOs. "As a local journalist I have to report every item of news as it comes in and this was such extraordinary news," he told a BBC film crew. "Reputable people were coming forward: the head postmaster of the town, a vicar and his three children, a hospital matron, an Army major who said his car was virtually stopped in its tracks at 40mph. These sorts of people have to be trusted for their integrity".

Shuttlewood depicted himself as a hard-bitten, cynical journalist. But his cynicism and objectivity seemed to evaporate when he went looking for UFOs. He attributed this conversion to personal experiences with 'The Warminster Thing'. Shuttlewood had lost the sight in one eye following a wartime accident. But despite this disability he saw UFOs on average twice every week and went on to rack up a total of 800 experiences. He told the BBC: "When one sees for oneself that's it. Nothing will deter you from your absolute belief from that moment onwards". In 1968 he published a book, *The Warminster Mystery*. This was the first in a series that combined colourful accounts of his and others' sightings with New Age mysticism. Shuttlewood was a deeply religious man who believed UFOs were a sign of the approaching apocalypse. He had a way with words and quickly became a media celebrity. Visitors to Warminster regarded him as a kind of saucer guru and

sought him out to experience for themselves what he called “UFO magic in motion”. Night after night he could be found on the hills above the town, skywatching with groups of visitors from across Britain and the world. One of his promises was that “if you stand on Cradle Hill from around 9.30 at night you’ll see something unusual by midnight”.

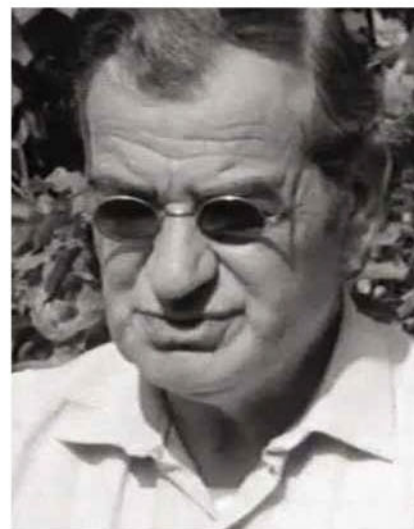
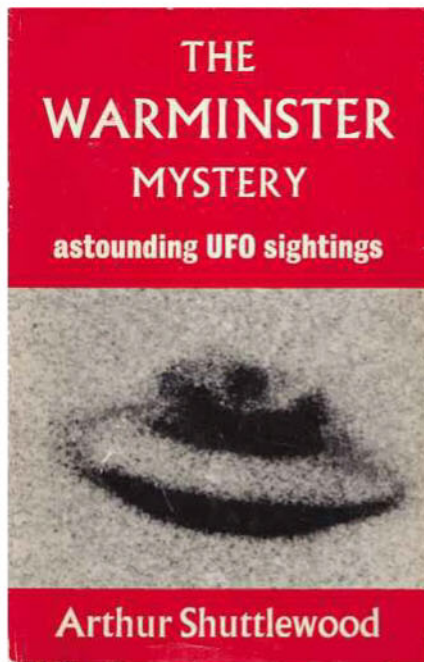
DARK SKIES

Warminster’s reputation as the UK’s UFO spotting capital was now at its height. In February 1968 David Simpson, along with other members of SIUFOP, followed the weekend pilgrimage along the A303. “We were told it all happened in Warminster and if we went there we would see something,” Simpson said. “There were so many sightings that even if some of them were exaggerated and others were made up, we felt not all of them could be.

“The hype and excitement were infectious. I have never forgotten it to this day. People went up there *expecting* to see something. We used to genuinely believe we were on the brink of some huge discovery. But when we got there we found that most people did not even have a camera, never mind being able to take photographs with a tripod – necessary when trying to capture the movement of small lights in the night sky.”

Inevitably, after many visits to skywatching locations around Warminster, SIUFOP met Shuttlewood. “The language he used to describe these objects was just mesmerising,” Simpson recalled. “He was a great orator and could really hold a crowd.” But despite Shuttlewood’s charisma and his story-telling skills, Simpson’s group were left disappointed by the photographs his sidekick Bob Strong produced as evidence. These depicted blobs of light against a dark sky. SIUFOP found similar images could easily be produced by waving a small lamp in front of an open-shuttered camera. Others resembled street lamps or car headlights.

Soon the group realised that one of the



ABOVE AND LEFT: If one man put Warminster on the UFO map it was local journalist Arthur Shuttlewood, who wrote a series of books on the ‘Warminster Mystery’ between 1968 and 1979.

lights they were seeing were car headlights, similar to the ones they had photographed on the Sussex Downs. “You could occasionally see the lights caused by someone driving along a track about five miles away,” David explained. “It was very bright when seen from Cradle Hill and it genuinely looked as if the car lights were up in the sky. In those days there was very little light pollution in Warminster. There were just a few lights in the valley below. On a dark night you could not see the horizon. So any light that was on one of the hills appeared to be up in the sky. That was responsible for many of the ‘sightings’”.

David pointed out that most of the skywatchers they met were not used to standing out on a dark night looking at the sky. “They were seeing the heavens and the Milky Way for the first time and they were not used to what can happen when you

stare at a pinpoint of light,” he said. David explained how, when someone tries to focus their attention upon a bright star or planet, against a dark, featureless sky, “eye-muscle fatigue can cause small eye movements that are perceived as the star dancing around. This is autokinesis but on Cradle Hill it was proof of a UFO.”

Autokinesis is a perceptual phenomenon that has been responsible for thousands of UFO sightings. The dark skies that framed the Warminster landscape provided just the right condition for this type of optical illusion. In 1968 a psychologist, Dr Stephen Black, and BBC producer Philip Daly experienced a vivid example. They had arranged to meet Arthur Shuttlewood as part of their research for a documentary on the people who saw flying saucers. In a letter I found in the BBC file on this programme, Daly describes how the pair arrived in the town at 10.30 one night after a long drive from London along a mist-shrouded road. When they reached Cradle Hill they found Shuttlewood with three UFO watchers.

“There was still some haze about when we got up on the hill,” Daly wrote. “But slowly it began to lift and suddenly Mr Shuttlewood excitedly drew our attention to a UFO. The extraordinary thing was that both Dr Black and I saw this ‘object’ moving about. When the mist lifted 45 minutes later and the whole sky became clear, the light we had been watching was quite clearly the planet Jupiter, though we could not prevent Mr Shuttlewood from claiming another UFO. But the sensation of autokinesis was very real!”

David Simpson explained to me that when it is very dark and your eyes have adapted to the conditions, an air of expectation can produce an enhanced sense of awareness in both hearing and vision. “At one time the sighting of a red glowing UFO was caused just by someone puffing on a cigarette further down the track!” he said. “We realised that some people were personally chuffed when they had a UFO sighting and regarded it as a badge of honour. It was akin to a religious experience, like someone seeing the Virgin



ABOVE: By the autumn of 1965, Warminster was preparing itself for an invasion of saucer seekers.



ABOVE LEFT: Warminster skywatchers seen on the BBC's *Nationwide* broadcast.

Mary for themselves. I asked one such person, who described what sounded to me like a common misinterpretation of a distant car headlamp, 'Why couldn't it have been a car headlamp?' and they replied: 'Look, you can't take this sighting away from me'. Now they are not the words of somebody who is interested in finding out exactly what it was they had seen."

Simpson found a lot of anti-scientific feeling on Cradle Hill, where many of the ufologists gathered to watch the sky. "Sometimes we felt that sighting details were manipulated, subconsciously or otherwise, to prevent prosaic explanations fitting the facts," David said. "They didn't really want to hear about plausible explanations. They talked about scientists being closed-minded. But for them, being open-minded meant being prepared to accept *anything* as evidence. Even if it was inconsistent, self-contradictory or demonstrably wrong. They were not willing to attempt rational analysis, or prepared to discard discredited theories."

By this stage SIUFOP had come to suspect the mystery surrounding the subject of UFOs was sustained by poor, uncritical investigation of inaccurate UFO reports, but this view was firmly rejected by most of their fellow skywatchers. "Those who disagreed with us tended to be those who preferred the Extraterrestrial Hypothesis," Simpson said. "They said there was plenty of good evidence to support this hypothesis if only scientific investigators would snap out of their preconceived beliefs and take it seriously".

A CUNNING PLAN

SIUFOP decided to put the observational and investigative abilities of the UFO watchers to the test. In other words, it was time for a carefully constructed hoax. So when, in June of 1969, BUFORA announced that one of their National Skywatch days would be held at Warminster, a cunning plan began to take form. As night fell, a helium-filled plastic bag carrying six brightly-lit torch bulbs rose from Sack Hill to the east of Cradle Hill.

"WHAT DID THIS SUGGEST ABOUT THE CREDIBILITY OF OTHER SIGHTINGS IN THIS UFO HOTSPOT?"

"It went up on an ideal night, very clear and with a gentle wind blowing," Simpson recalled. "And it looked stunning from Cradle Hill. The three-volt bulbs were mounted close together and each was powered by a 4.5-volt battery, making them burn with a very bright white light. But even so, we did not expect it to look as spectacular as it did, far out-shining anything else in the sky." The balloon drifted just above treetop height away from the skywatchers and over the Army range.

"We had members planted in the crowd listening out for the reactions. And it was obvious many of the people were not just impressed. They were stunned by it and some got quite emotional".

A short while later a second balloon, this time with just four lights hanging below, was launched to the west of Cradle Hill and it drifted much closer to the skywatchers. This time the excitement was palpable. "Telepathic communication was established with the torch bulbs that were said to be as bright as a searchlight and metallic with portholes," Simpson recalled. "We were all surprised and almost shocked by the reaction to this sighting... It was hailed as one of the best ever made there. We pondered that if simple little torch bulbs provoked such a reaction what did this suggest about the credibility of the other sightings made in one of the world's most famous UFO hotspots?"

But there was a fly in the ointment. One of the party had revealed that he knew the UFO

was just a balloon and he publicly named the hoaxers. Simpson's group now expected they would be exposed before their experiment was complete. Yet it seemed nobody wanted to believe it *was* a hoax.

"We decided that if someone came up and asked us 'Were you responsible for that?' we would own up to it," he explained. "But nobody did. Nobody asked. Not a soul came forward... Even more amazing, some people came forward to say they saw the *same object* in the sky the next night, when we had gone home. That made us realise we needed to design a more elaborate hoax, one that could not be so easily denied."

THE SECOND HOAX

One night in March 1970, a mysterious purple light was spotted by a group of skywatchers on Cradle Hill. It appeared to come from the direction of Sack Hill, about a mile to the east. Its source was a 144-watt lamp, fitted with a purple filter, held aloft by a member of Simpson's group. Suddenly, on Cradle Hill, a loud buzzer began to sound in a UFO detector operated by one of three SIUFOP members secreted among the crowd. It had been carefully synchronised to sound 15 seconds after the purple light was seen. Then, one of the team pretended to take photographs of the purple light but did not actually press the shutter of his tripod-mounted camera. After the light had been switched off he took two reference pictures of the familiar streetlamp-studded scene. He then casually offered to give the film to anyone who could have it developed.

Fortunately for the team, the offer was taken up by a man with links to *Flying Saucer Review*, the world's leading UFO magazine at the time. When the photographs were developed the purple light had been replaced by a more spectacular UFO some distance away from where the lamp had been held. One picture showed a clear, bright elliptical object – a flying saucer – with a spherical appendage both above and below it. The second showed the object further along the invisible horizon and slightly lower. So the film contained four images. Two SIUFOP fakes showing a UFO superimposed above the wrong part of the streetlamp pattern visible from Cradle Hill, and two genuine images of the scene with no UFOs visible – the reference pictures taken on the night.

Simpson explained that "the important point about the photographs was that a number of deliberate inconsistencies had been built into them so that anybody exercising even moderately critical analysis would have been able to show, quite readily, that they were at least not quite what they appeared to be. Firstly there was no purple light visible in the photo. We had faked the photos by taking a background picture some months before. Then we superimposed the saucer shape onto them. The superimposed UFO images did not resemble the purple light at all; they were the wrong shape and had three separate parts, not just one as seen. Also, they were positioned above the wrong part of the distinctive streetlamp pattern."

The purple light had been stationary but the UFO in the images appeared to have moved a considerable distance between the first and second photos. The UFO images were much poorer in quality than those showing the two 'genuine' images and had been magnified because of the crude method that was used to create them.

"Finally, the streetlamp patterns in the UFO and non-UFO photographs were not quite the same – those with UFOs were prepared using a photograph of the streetlamp scene taken months earlier, when some streetlamps were not visible," David explained. "In the non-UFO pictures, supposedly taken minutes later, they were visible."

Any one of these clues would have aroused suspicion in the mind of a competent investigator. But, other than the object's change of shape, none of the inbuilt flaws were spotted by *Flying Saucer Review's* team of allegedly highly qualified consultants. The magazine published the images in August 1970, causing a sensation. *FSR's* photographic expert, Percy Hennell, wrote: "Let me say at the outset that there is nothing about these photographs which suggests to me that they have been faked in any way". In his editorial, *FSR's* editor, Charles Bowen, pondered why the purple light visible to the observers was so different from the images on the photographs. Bowen accounted for this inconsistency by referring to a new theory developed by John Keel, who was a frequent contributor to the magazine. Keel claimed UFOs were not spacecraft from our dimension or Universe but rather 'soft objects' created by mysterious ultra-terrestrials who inhabited a parallel universe.

At the time Keel's ideas were growing in popularity with European ufologists who had begun to doubt the popular Extraterrestrial Hypothesis. They also influenced an eminent French astronomer, Dr Pierre Guerin, who joined the scramble to authenticate the images. Guerin was Director of Research at the Astrophysical Institute of the French National Centre for Space Research and had recently discovered a new ring around the planet Saturn. Despite his scientific credentials, Guerin was completely fooled by the fake UFO photographs. Like Bowen, he preferred to believe the purple light was "a solid object not visible to the eye but emitting ultra-violet light". He concluded that Keel was probably correct: "UFOs can appear, or disappear, on the spot, when leaving or entering our usual four-dimensional space-time."

The hoaxers wanted to give the UFO community further opportunities to unmask their fake photographs. Simpson raised the inconsistencies at a BUFORA meeting where he suggested the Warminster images were full of anomalies that pointed to a hoax. But the chairman, John Cleary-Baker, disagreed. If they really were fake, he argued, the hoaxer would not have made such obvious mistakes. "I was stunned by this statement," Simpson said. "He was saying

the very presence of inconsistencies made the photographs *more, not less*, likely to be genuine."

On the one hand, Simpson's group were quietly pleased with the results of their experiment. They had confirmed their suspicions about 'The Warminster Thing'. But they also felt disillusioned and disappointed. They had demonstrated how poor the investigations carried out by the UFO community actually were. So-called 'experts' had failed to spot inbuilt flaws that should have been easily detectable. Their need to believe in UFOs from other worlds had overcome their critical faculties. It was a classic example of what sociologists call confirmation bias – the urge to select only the information that confirms your preconceived ideas or beliefs and to ignore anything that contradicts them.

SIUFOP allowed their hoax to run for just over two years before word got out – through a leak rather than investigation. When *FSR* discovered the truth they accused the group of deceit and 'confidence trickery'. But they failed to explain how they had missed the



TOP: The famous issue of *Flying Saucer Review* that hailed the SIUFOP photographs as genuine.

ABOVE: David Simpson demonstrates the purple light mounted on a car that was used to produce the photos.

warnings so carefully planted by SIUFOP. Even so, David Simpson knew that for his results to have more scientific credibility they had to be repeatable. So there was to be one final hoax that would test the will to believe of both the UFO watchers *and* the national media.

GOING NATIONWIDE

Despite the revelation that pranksters were active at Warminster, groups of people continued to join the weekend pilgrimage to Wiltshire. During the summer of 1972 a rumour spread that a UFO landing was imminent. The BBC's popular evening news magazine *Nationwide* sent reporter Brian Ash to interview one of Warminster's regular UFO watchers. Rex Dutta was confident the space people would show themselves to the cameras. He was a follower of Theosophy and a contactee who believed the occupants of flying saucers were spiritual beings from Venus.

Sensing an opportunity too good to miss, Simpson and SIUFOP member Ken Raine sent up polythene balloons from the side of nearby Sack Hill, situated midway between Cradle and Star Hills. The two men had learned from past experience that a mere torch bulb could look spectacular provided it was very bright and was seen against a dark sky. The bulb was partly covered with opaque paint so that when dangled from the balloon on the end of a piece of cotton it would turn in the wind, making it appear to wink irregularly. Two photographic flashbulbs were also added to the payload. These were timed to ignite two minutes after launching.

In complete darkness, two balloons were released just as the BBC crew joined Dutta and the crowd of people gathered at Star Hill. The sky was clear with a faint wind, making conditions perfect for their experiment. The balloons with their winking lights passed directly overhead and floated towards Salisbury Plain. From their hiding place on Sack Hill, Simpson said they could see flashes of light from nearby Cradle Hill.



ABOVE: The balloon hoax revealed on the second *Nationwide* broadcast. BELOW LEFT: Rex Dutta disagrees with *Nationwide* presenter Brian Ash. BELOW RIGHT: David Simpson and Ken Raine, the self-confessed hoaxers.

These came from groups of skywatchers who were using their torches to send signals to the UFOs. Suddenly the little winking points of white light hanging below the invisible balloons appeared to explode as the first flashbulb was triggered. Believing this to be a direct response to their signalling, the skywatchers flashed back even more enthusiastically. They were rewarded when the second flashbulb went off. Meanwhile, on Star Hill, the BBC team struggled to capture the lights on camera. Brian Ash turned to the *Nationwide* camera: "We have definitely just seen something and I have no explanation for what was seen. It was quite high up in the sky and what it consisted of were two lights that seemed to be bending over at an angle, flashing on and off and going on for about 15 seconds". Ash then described the moment the first flashbulb ignited: "Suddenly one of them [the UFOs] just exploded into a ball of fire, a blinding light before they went out of sight... Now I have no idea what that could have been".

Rex Dutta was ecstatic. Not only had UFOs shown themselves as he had predicted but this time they had done so in full view

BELIEVING THIS TO BE A RESPONSE TO THEIR SIGNALS, THE SKYWATCHERS FLASHED BACK

of the BBC cameras. He told Ash this was clear evidence the UFO occupants were "appealing mind to mind to intelligent people... the intense brightness which came and the alternation was random yet significant."

Immediately after the BBC film was shown on *Nationwide*, SIUFOP decided it was time to own up. Simpson and Raine were invited to the studio to confront Dutta. Prompted by presenter Bernie Falk, Simpson confessed his role to the crestfallen BBC team. He said their UFO was actually "a polythene bag suspending three small batteries, a torch

blub and a small electric circuit attached to a flashbulb." Ash took it well, asking Falk not to mock him: "I was going to be the man who was to present a real life spaceman on British TV but now it seems I'm the victim of a cruel hoax."

Dutta was having none of it, though: "Now just a second, that's not proven!" He dismissed SIUFOP's story as "the type of rubbish that is often offered to debunk genuine UFO sightings." He claimed experienced ufologists "know the difference between a balloon and something intelligently operated," asking the hoaxers: "You mean to say they can't recognise a balloon? There were cameramen present who said how distinct and intense the flare was."

Falk turned to Simpson and Raine and asked: "Could you answer this, that you are in fact hoaxing us now?" Simpson replied: "I can do no more than invite Mr Dutta to watch us do it again." So it was agreed the group would return to Warminster the following weekend and create more UFOs. On this occasion the BBC cameras filmed the balloon's blinking lights as they drifted over Star Hill, but poor weather made this display less impressive. Rex Dutta was unconvinced. "They were flashing, they were pulsating last time," he protested. "We have all seen a flashbulb and we know what they look like. The BBC reporter said it was 'an explosion of light' and... that's got to be reproduced before I will believe it."

Brian Ash disagreed. "What we saw is not identical to what we saw last weekend," he told viewers. "But it has to be said first that the atmospheric conditions are very different. Tonight the sky was overcast and there was a very strong wind blowing." With the cameras still rolling, Simpson and Raine turned up in their Morris 1000 to join the debate. A furious argument ensued. Confronted by his tormentors, Dutta continued to insist the intensity of the light was "not the same". Then a sympathetic sky watcher announced he too was unconvinced. Rounding upon a bemused David Simpson, he said in a loud voice: "You have not proved tonight that UFOs do not exist. All you have proved is that hoaxes do exist".

I wanted to know if Simpson thought he was right. "Of course it's impossible to prove that UFOs don't exist. But what we did prove was that people tend to see what they want, or expect, to see depending upon their own





ABOVE: Cradle Hill, Warminster, as it appears today; the skywatchers and reporters are long gone.

prior expectations and beliefs,” he said. “At Warminster the UFOs we created were described as having all sorts of shapes, sizes, colours and motions that were not there. Some believed the objects were watching them, following them or communicating with them, either telepathically or simply by flashing in response to signals from torches on the ground. But memories of a UFO experience seem to accrete details, so when you offer the explanation witnesses find it unconvincing.”

Simpson’s experiments made it apparent to me how such stories grow and become embellished by the language people use to describe what they have seen. That language is drawn not just from the UFO literature but also from images in popular culture, from films, television programmes and newspaper stories. When enhanced by the skills of a charismatic storyteller like Arthur Shuttlewood, what often began life as a simple light in the darkness was transformed into something extraordinary. At Warminster, torch bulbs and flashbulbs attached to kites and balloons were described as blinding balls of fire that out-maneuvred aircraft, were brighter than searchlights and were capable of appearing and disappearing at will.

THE WILL TO BELIEVE

David Simpson learned much about the magic and mystery of UFOs from his experiences. Almost half a century after he completed his experiments, I wanted to know if he thought it was ethical to perpetrate hoaxes on unsuspecting people.

“I don’t think there was any ethical problem there at all,” he said. “We didn’t put anyone in danger. Most of the people up there were claiming to be UFO investigators and there were others who published information in magazines that claimed to

have scientific credibility. They expected the public to take these claims seriously. So there was a public interest in testing how capable they were of investigating these stories in an objective fashion. They were also insisting that the scientific community and ‘the authorities’ should take UFO reports seriously. But in science it is always important to first understand the accuracy of information before using it to reach a conclusion. Our hoaxes provided calibration data clearly showing that UFO sighting reports, even when filed by UFO experts, can be inaccurate to the point of invalidating their ‘mysterious’ label.”

Simpson retired from ufology after SIUFOP’s final experiment at Warminster in 1972. “Looking back I can see now it was definitely a thing of its time,” he said. “There is only so long something like that can last before the novelty wears off. In the end it was the sheer lack of good evidence that caused it to fizzle out. But it could definitely happen again somewhere else.”

If Simpson’s group had not published the results of their experiments, both the Warminster sightings and the photographs would have become part of the cumulative ‘UFO evidence’. Indeed, some people who deliberately create photographs of UFOs for less obvious reasons never confess. Their handiwork continues to circulate within the UFO community, in the media and on the Internet. In consequence, ufology is riddled with hoaxes, both confirmed and suspected. And every type of UFO evidence, from complex photographs to alien abductions, secret government documents and stories told by high-ranking military officials about extraterrestrial cadavers hidden in air force hangars, has at some point been unveiled as being invented.

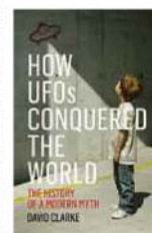
Some hoaxes begin life as simple pranks

but others are far more complicated. They can involve sophisticated photography and multiple witness testimony. Those who believe in UFOs dismiss the number of hoaxes as being small and insignificant. But this ignores the fact that any complex hoaxes that remain undetected will inevitably form part of the five per cent residue of unexplained incidents that, for ufologists, constitute the best UFO evidence.

What David Simpson found at Warminster in the 1960s is actually a microcosm of the larger UFO phenomenon. Warminster could be substituted for any other media-driven UFO *cause célèbre* centred upon a locality, be that Roswell or Rendlesham. Just occasionally we get to peer behind the magician’s curtain and touch the heart of the mystery. One of these occasions occurred in 2005 when a key player in the original events at Warminster decided it was time to confess. In a letter published in the *Warminster Journal*, David Holton revealed he was the person who set the hare running 40 years earlier. It was, he said, “a psychological experiment that succeeded beyond even the wildest flight of my imagination.”

Holton said his experiment was inspired by the paper’s account of the strange aerial noises reported during the winter of 1964-65. “It had long seemed to me that the public mood of that time was yearning for some demonstration of the unseen realm’s presence... I invented a story about a flock of pigeons being killed by sound waves and one or two fictitious incidents and simply sent them to the *Journal* to see what happened.” The result was explosive: “Reports from witnesses poured in from the surrounding district and continued to do so for the next 10 years at least.”

Every time a hoax is revealed, or a UFO identified, the mystery is solved. But even when lights in the sky are revealed as flocks of pigeons or balloons sent up to test ufologists, we forget – or choose to ignore – the lessons we have learned. The will to believe remains so strong that we keep going back for more. **FT**



Extracted and adapted from *How UFOs Conquered the World: The History of a Modern Myth* by David Clarke, published by Aurum Press (www.aurumpress.co.uk), 2015, RRP £18.99.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



DAVID CLARKE is a senior lecturer in journalism at Sheffield Hallam University and has been a regular contributor to FT for many years. Since 2008, he has worked as a consultant for The National Archives on the release of the Ministry of

Defence’s UFO files.

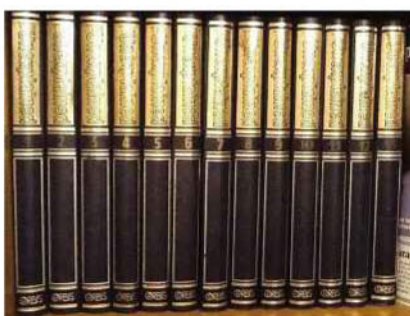
BUILDING A FORTEAN LIBRARY

2. FORTEANA ON THE INSTALMENT PLAN

We observed in our introduction that compendia, or encyclopædias, of fortean phenomena are a good way to start worming one's way toward an understanding of the breadth of the field but, equally, make excellent reference resources for later, when one thinks one has some command of the subject. This time we are commending a voluminous work in whose creation one of FT's more provocative contributors had something of a hand. You win a small packet of mystical New Age healing unguent (not entirely unlike beef dripping) if you failed to guess that we are referring to *The Unexplained* partwork magazine (13 vols, Orbis 1980-3). Subtitled 'Mysteries of Mind, Space and Time', it covered everything from acupuncture and the anthropocentric principle to quantum mechanics and UFO propulsion systems. You can still get complete bound sets on eBay, and probably at car boot sales too, sometimes at really bargain prices (£6.50 anyone? Not bad for more than 3,000 pages). Many of the thematic spin-off volumes can be had of Amazon, Alibris and the like.

There are things that should be explained about *The Unexplained*. To begin with, it was a shamelessly (but in a good way) commercial project: as such, it was, as Bob Rickard remarked in these pages once, "far better than its publisher had any right to expect." It was extremely successful, selling over 800,000 copies of its first issue. But it was in the nature of partwork publishing that editors were (with a few specialist exceptions) essentially paratroopers, expected to be able to pile in almost anywhere and do a professional job, whatever the subject. Peter Brookesmith (for it was he), who masterminded the project, tells us that he was under-employed, overseeing the last rites of a failed encyclopædia of railways, would you believe, when Brian Innes – Orbis's creative director, founder of the Temperance Seven, and a former staffer on the earlier partwork *Man, Myth & Magic*, as it happens – dumped a pile of books and magazines of a vaguely occult and paranormal nature on his desk and said: "See if you can make a partwork out of that."

The rest is history; but you should be warned, says Brookesmith, that the first dozen or so issues were put together by a team flying mostly by the seat of its pants. He continues: "At least we had time to contact (*alias* take long leisurely lunches on expenses with) the likes of Charles Bowen, Hilary Evans, Roy Stemman, Bob Rickard, Adrian Shine, Janet and Colin Bord, and



our consultants Arthur Ellison, J Allen Hynek, Brian Inglis, and Colin Wilson, to get us up the learning curve as fast as an F15 Strike Eagle sitting on its afterburning tail. Pre-publication research had shown that potential readers wanted something a bit meatier than a credulous *Gee-whizz!* approach, so we had a licence, as it were, to inject sceptical qualifications into the copy from the word go. We were always open to alternative interpretations. However, you'll notice as you wend your way through all those pages that the treatments tend to become ever less credulous and ever more questioning. This was partly because after about a year of dealing with this stuff full time, one finds oneself waking with Occam's razor in one hand and a bullshit detector in the other; and partly because some brilliant sceptical researchers such as the late greats Melvin Harris and Piet Hoebens started writing in to offer correctives, which we felt duty-bound to

commission as articles or series; and some (Melvin in particular) became regular contributors." It seems that cynical humour around the office grew in proportion to this gradual shift, though it rarely seeped onto the printed page. All this is by way of warning: that you do need to have read the whole partwork to appreciate its overall balance. "Not that we got everything right: and certainly not first time," says Brookesmith. "I fondly remember a choleric missive from Paul Devereux denouncing our initial treatment of leys ('the trouble with you media people' – never been called that before; or since – and so on), to which the only proper response was to invite him to write for us. And he most graciously did, more than once. We never got it right about spontaneous human combustion, since you ask."

An innovation in partwork publishing was *The Unexplained's* invention of the several-part series. This was a wheeze designed to retain readers – all partworks, everywhere, always, lose readers over the course of their lives: as witness *The Unexplained's* final sales after 152 issues standing at 30,000 a week, or just under 4 per cent of its initial sale – which was still vastly better than the average partwork's fall-off, so perhaps the wheeze worked. However, the result, when reading the collected work as printed, can be mildly irritating, as one has to scabble through to the next issue (and sometimes the one after that) to follow the whole story about timeslips, or morphogenetic fields, or Irish lake monsters, or whatever, to its end. The spin-off volumes on the other hand gather the series together, although they didn't include all the articles from the partwork.

Thirty five-odd years on, some things have become dated, inevitably. This is perhaps most noticeable in the ufology strand, as the magazine ceased publication a year or four before the abduction myth went viral (as we'd now say) and well before the Roswell saga and all its never-ending excitements exploded. Both get fairly and thoroughly treated within the limits of the then available information, and indeed series like Alvin Lawson's on his 'false abduction' research and birth-trauma hypothesis were cutting-edge at the time. Likewise, *The Unexplained* gave

the full treatment to Bill Spaulding's 'federal hypothesis', fashionable as it was (and recently revived, oddly with no mention of Spaulding or his Ground Saucer Watch organisation, by Mark Pilkington in *Mirage Men*). And there is a lengthy treatment of the Cash/Landrum encounter, by John Scheussler – probably its first proper introduction to a UK audience, by its lead investigator. ("These days," says Brookesmith, "we would have let Curt Collins loose on it.") Even an early version of the Rendlesham Forest Incident appeared, courtesy of Jenny Randles; no one could have predicted how *that* was to turn out. These were early and more innocent days for crop circles too, and the partwork's one excursion in that direction sided with the idea that they were probably meteorological in origin. These treatments (and others like them) may seem outdated, but they're not obsolete: one thing they demonstrate is how fashions change in *fortean* – sometimes going full circle – and as such are part of the wider history of such phenomena.

From time to time, the magazine published the results of original research. Recalls Brookesmith: "Hilary Evans trotted off to Pembrokeshire to dig into the 'Dyfed Triangle' stories, and came back with something rather less exotic than the standard version. A nice old gent, whose name I forget, gave us a lengthy account of how his grandfather had devised a means to predict earthquakes. We published that as a back-cover story, and it piqued the interest of Archie Roy (also a contributor), who had one of his graduate students test the method. Disappointingly, but unsurprisingly, it failed; but it was an experiment worth doing. Frank Smyth gave us the previously unpublished lowdown on his Vicar of Wapping scam. We scooped everyone with Joe Cooper's revelation that the authors of the Cottingley fairy photographs had finally confessed to a hoax."

Something Brookesmith and his deputy Lynn Picknett (also occasionally of this parish) wanted to set up was a thorough test of the SORRAT mini-lab, then being championed in the UK by Dr Julian Isaacs. What had been filmed happening in the mini-lab, invented by WE Cox but housed by the SORRAT group at the home of Dr John Thomas Richards in Rolla, Missouri, was the subject of some controversy – to put it mildly – but it was spectacular if it wasn't fake. Essentially the device was a sealed aquarium tank, into which various things were placed, and SORRAT members would request phenomena. Pens untouched by human hand stood on end and scribbled notes, wooden



ETIENNE GILLILAN

MY GRANDMA
ALWAYS SAID
THAT GOD MADE
LIBRARIES
SO THAT
PEOPLE DIDN'T
HAVE ANY
EXCUSE TO BE
STUPID.
Joan Bauer



rings linked, objects escaped the tank apparently straight through the glass (and without breaking it) – and so on. Dr Isaacs had been improving the design of the mini-lab and wanted to do a thorough test of some of his tame metal-benders-and-shakers with it. "We got approval for quite a fat budget to fund the experiments, most of which was to be spent on video cameras left right and centre, and sundry other security protocols. But Dr Isaacs seemed to dither and vacillate, and never *quite* got around to presenting his proposals in any detail, despite months of persistent nagging and other blandishments. We were left wondering whether this was because publishing expects to operate a just tad faster than academia, or if he or his subjects feared the consequences of our belt-and-braces approach to guarding against fraud." So now it can be told – the

LEFT: Peter Brookesmith, evil editorial mastermind of *The Unexplained*.

scoop *The Unexplained* never did get. On the other hand, you do get a pretty comprehensive account of how SORRAT began and what it had (allegedly) achieved by the early 1980s. And in other articles and series you get a pretty comprehensive overview of most aspects of the psychical research that was under way at the time. Recent excursions into that field suggest to the HA's curmudgeonly self that things haven't changed that much since, actually.

One of the simpler pleasures, or even perks, for staff on *The Unexplained* was going through the readers' letters. "Some would arrive in many, sometimes fluorescent, colours of ink, and some were in rhyme, from such places as St Luke's [mental] Hospital, London NW," says Brookesmith. "None, as I recall, was in *green* ink; but then, in my innocence, in those days I used to write articles on a green-ribboned typewriter, so what would I know? Others were of the 'It happened to me!' variety; these were often fascinating, and most of them we published. Some were sober discussions of theory. Perhaps the most outstanding was a very long epistle from no less a Person than God, who – with Mrs God, no less – resided in New Zealand, and was highly informative about many things one hadn't previously considered – for instance, 'There are no pets in Heaven' – sorry, *moggin* – and no *bonking* either. So why bother, you might ask yourself. Most of this amazing document, which I'm sure wasn't a piss-take, got into print. Unfortunately the whole original seems to have disappeared." If you seriously want to buy a collection of *The Unexplained*, try to get one with the covers still on – this is where letters, as well as some of the wackier or more adversarial stuff, were printed.

Brookesmith sums it up thus: "I won't say *The Unexplained* is unsurpassed, but it has few equals, and jaundiced as I am these days I'm still proud to have worked on it. *The Unexplained* remains a mostly reliable, detailed examination of people's experiences of the paranormal, the occult, the anomalous, and the absurd – leavened with a fair slice of the theories and hypotheses that those have generated. Most of the good and the great – in the UK at least – who were on the front line in such things contributed to it. I had a brilliant staff – bright, witty, anarchic, and completely professional. And the illustrations were inspired."

So there you have it, from the horse's mouth. We don't disagree, and thank Peter Brookesmith for telling us more than was printable. **FT**

Partwork (published in UK, 13 volumes)
The Unexplained: Mysteries of Mind, Space & Time, Orbis 1980–3

Continuity set
(published in USA, 26 volumes)
Mysteries of Mind, Space & Time, HS Stuttman 1992



A PAWN IN THE GAME

Taking his cue from former Kalmykian president Kirsan Ilyumzhinov, **SD TUCKER** explores strange claims that aliens brought both chess and sweetcorn to our grateful planet.



SEKELI GUNEV / THE LIFE IMAGES COLLECTION / GETTY IMAGES

LEFT: The former president of Kalmykia, chess-mad alien abductee Kirsan Ilyumzhinov.

If you've ever despaired of mastering the higher levels of chess strategy (or, like me, struggle even to remember how all the pieces move across the board), then there may be a perfectly logical reason behind such ineptitude – chess, you see, was not really designed for puny human minds at all. In fact, its rules were laid down aeons ago by a race from beyond the stars who introduced mankind to the game at the dawn of time itself. And whose unlikely opinion is this? That of Erich von Däniken, perhaps? Brinsley le Poer Trench? David Icke, maybe? (If you leave the Kings and Queens alone on the board for too long, will they shape-shift into giant paedophile lizards and start eating all the pawns?) Sadly not. Instead, this is actually the view held by the (extremely) eccentric former President (1993-2010) of the semi-autonomous Russian Republic of Kalmykia, Kirsan Ilyumzhinov.

Ilyumzhinov and his ideas have appeared briefly in *FT*'s pages before, but he has since

INSIDE WERE HUMANOID ALIENS DRESSED IN YELLOW SPACESUITS

made the headlines again due to controversy relating to his presidency not of Kalmykia, but of FIDE, chess's governing body. An ally of Russian leader Vladimir Putin, Ilyumzhinov was disappointed late in 2013 to hear that the outspoken former Soviet Grandmaster Garry Kasparov was planning to stand against him for FIDE's leadership. Kasparov was not only claiming that he could run world chess better than Ilyumzhinov, he was also making complex allegations of financial impropriety against him. Evidently

the chess world disagreed with Kasparov, however, as when FIDE's leadership election finally came around during the biennial Chess Olympiad, held in the Norwegian city of Tromsø in August 2014, Ilyumzhinov beat Kasparov by some 110 votes to 61.

Newspapers like to write about Ilyumzhinov, as he has had connections to various crooked characters throughout his career, from Saddam Hussein to Colonel Gaddafi, whom he flew out to visit during the 2011 Libyan uprising, showing his support for the so-called 'Mad Dog of the Middle East' by playing a televised game of chess with him in the besieged capital of Tripoli. Details about Putin allegedly sending secret policemen to pay a 'friendly visit' to FIDE in 2010 to persuade their hierarchy to continue backing Ilyumzhinov were also resurfacing, meanwhile, further guaranteeing media coverage of 2014's election. Given that Kasparov has been a vocal critic of Putin's rule, newspapers felt free to repackage the whole affair as some kind of latter-day Cold War espionage thriller, with silly headlines like 'King eats king as bid to sex up chess gets dirty' appearing in such normally staid organs as the *Sunday Times*.¹

Inevitably in such stories, mention was also made of Ilyumzhinov's views about alien life. These mostly constituted brief retellings of the now famous tale of how he claimed to have been abducted by ETs one night during 1997. The noted chess historian Edward Winter,² evidently sick of the same few quotes being recycled endlessly in these articles, set out to discover just exactly what it was that Ilyumzhinov had actually said about his aliens. He appealed for further info, and his readers kindly provided him with it. The relevant page on Winter's website³ now provides comprehensive transcripts of Ilyumzhinov's numerous media interviews about the topic, in both English and Russian. Before we explore these in greater detail,

though, perhaps we should first take a closer look at Ilyumzhinov and his nation.

Born in 1962, Ilyumzhinov was interested in chess from a young age, and became the Kalmykian national champion aged just 14. As he grew older, however, his interest in the ‘Royal Pastime’ was paralleled by the increasingly regal nature of his life itself. Making millions in business deals after the collapse of the USSR, in 1993, aged 30, he was elected as Kalmykia’s first-ever President, supposedly campaigning under the Borat-like slogans “A mobile phone for every shepherd!” and “A wealthy President is a safeguard against corruption”. Once in power, though, Ilyumzhinov soon began devoting much of his time not to his people, but to his first love – chess. He made the game a compulsory subject in Kalmykia’s primary schools, and in 1995 became President of FIDE. More controversially, he also ordered the construction of a ‘Chess City’ near Kalmykia’s capital, Elista. Completed in 1998, it is essentially a small Olympic-type village, centred round a so-called ‘Chess City Hall’. Seemingly inspired by the ideas of a fictional con-man from Russian literature named Ostap Bender (who also called for the creation of a ‘capital city’ for chess, and proposed that humans should play special intergalactic tournaments there during one of his scams, as detailed in the celebrated 1928 satire *The Twelve Chairs*),⁴ the place cost a fortune. For the entertainment of chess-loving visitors, Ilyumzhinov also planned to build a skiing centre, opera house and safari park, but right now the only non-chess-related facilities on offer are a swimming pool and a Buddhist art centre. Even more ambitiously, Ilyumzhinov at one point also announced plans for a grandiose ‘International Chess

City’ to be built in the new bad-taste capital of the world, Dubai, where billions would be squandered upon constructing 32 towers shaped like giant chess pieces – plans which ultimately came to naught.⁵

As for Kalmykia itself – well, it is the proverbial ‘faraway country of which we know nothing’. Indeed, it’s not really a proper country at all, merely a so-called



‘semi-autonomous region’ within the Russian Federation – i.e. Putin actually runs the place, but it’s distant enough from Moscow for him to have to appoint a puppet. A place of only 300,000 souls, most of whom are poor and live off the land (even though Soviet-era agriculture policies transformed much of the region’s fertile soil to desert), the majority religion is Buddhism. In 2004, the Dalai Lama came to visit, and a 1997 report in *The Economist* claimed that the Kalmykian people seemed to treat their President “as though he were a reincarnated [Buddhist] saint himself”.⁶ Ilyumzhinov perhaps encouraged this perception, telling a journalist from *Izvestia* in 1995 that he was able to communicate with his voters and other Russians “on a subconscious level”, by which he seemed to mean ‘psychically’. He then added that he was “creating around the Republic a kind of extra-sensory field” for its own protection – something Petro Poroshenko should perhaps try doing in the Ukraine some day.⁷

If reports are to be believed, most of Kalmykia’s people actually liked their leader, however, and found the way he put the country on the map through his eccentricities rather admirable. Indeed, many Kalmyks seem predisposed towards believing in the supernatural themselves – in 2010, hundreds of locals claimed to have seen UFOs hovering over Elista (they turned out to be spotlights from a shopping centre) and in 2009, (see FT264:28), the BBC reported that the entire country was “in the grip of an epidemic of UFOs, angelic visions and other strange phenomena.”⁸

BREAKING THE CHESS-CODE

What, exactly, constituted Kirsan Ilyumzhinov’s paranormal experiences, though? Well, thanks to Edward Winter’s website, we now know. According to Ilyumzhinov himself, he was asleep one night when the doors to his balcony opened and he heard his name being called. Going out to investigate, Ilyumzhinov found himself being sucked up through a transparent tube to a waiting spaceship which, he said, was “absolutely enormous”, with rooms the size of football pitches. Inside were humanoid aliens dressed in yellow spacesuits with dials on their chests that could be used to regulate an internal oxygen supply. They gave Ilyumzhinov his own suit and then seemed to ignore him, flying to an unidentified planet to retrieve some equipment. As to why exactly they had abducted him, Ilyumzhinov said he did not know. He really should have thought to ask them, he admitted. One Russian MP, Andre Lebedev, suggested the ETs might have been pumping Ilyumzhinov for State secrets, and demanded an official investigation.⁹

The aliens then took him to “some star” he said, sounding like an unimpressed teenager. He was annoyed because he



TOP: A statue of fictional con-man Ostap Bender in Kalmykia’s capital, Elista. ABOVE: Unsurprisingly, chess in big in Elista, where the former president ordered the construction of the ‘Chess City’ complex outside Elista.



ABOVE: Ilyumzhinov enjoys a friendly televised game with Col 'Mad Dog' Gaddafi in a besieged Tripoli in 2011.

had a pressing engagement at a Youth Government Week and made repeated requests to be returned home. Being shot back down into his bedroom, Ilyumzhinov, showing admirable regard for punctuality, rushed into his kitchen and shouted "Please make me some eggs! We must hurry to the airport!" at his startled aides who, he said, had been searching his apartment and trying to find him for the past hour or so, thus demonstrating the physical truth of the whole episode. (Though in other interviews he implied he may have been undergoing some kind of visionary shamanic-type experience in his bed instead; "people fly while they are dreaming", he noted).

Because of his abduction experience, Ilyumzhinov soon began to theorise that there was "some kind of [alien] code" contained within chess – a code that was apparently linked to human DNA, which contains 64 codons within each molecule, just as chessboards contain 64 squares. Perhaps the game contained the secret of human life itself? There was certainly something funny about it. As he put it during a 2010 interview, the "cosmic game" of chess has been played amongst many different cultures for centuries now, and always with the same rules; but "there was no Internet before",

Ilyumzhinov explained, demonstrating his deep grasp of history, so how did all these different people from around the world know what the rules were? "I'm not ill. I'm psychologically normal," he told his interviewer, before going on to claim that aliens had introduced sweetcorn to earth as well, for some reason.

The best explanation of Ilyumzhinov's philosophy on record was given by him to Paul Hoffman, author of the book *King's Gambit*, during a discussion held in Colonel Gaddafi's Tripoli in 2004: "I do not think of chess as a game," he said. "Nor is it a sport. It is an activity that is inherent in our civilisation. It is civilisation. Chess is science and philosophy. Archaeologists have found chess pieces in India, South America and Japan. There were chess pieces before there were aircraft, ships and Communism. How could they exist at all these different places on Earth? No human could have distributed them. Maybe the pieces came from... outer space. Maybe chess is a gift from other planets. Or else chess sprang from the bones of mankind, from our very nature. It is somehow programmed into our genetic code. Tennis and golf are not played everywhere on Earth. But chess is. I am its guardian, its keeper. For me, chess is religion. Join me

please in spreading the faith."

If chess is a religion for Ilyumzhinov, though, then evidently it is a highly syncretic one, because he seems to be adding to it all the time from whatever source comes to hand. In a 2010 *Time* magazine interview, for instance, after explaining that in his view Jesus Christ was actually an alien, he showed that he had apparently been reading the doom-mongering works of people like Zechariah Sitchin and the American contactee Nancy Lieder. We can tell this, as he took the opportunity to warn humanity through *Time* that Earth was soon destined to collide with our old favourite the Planet Nibiru, (see FT324:5) a cataclysm that could not possibly be avoided unless mankind "cleanse[d] its aura" by – yes, you guessed it – "playing more chess."

Things get stranger still. In 2006, Ilyumzhinov pointed out that the final game of a chess tournament then being played would occur on Friday 13th, 13 years after the tournament's 13th champion, his enemy Garry Kasparov, had temporarily left FIDE following an internal dispute. This, he said, was a sign that either God or "beings flying a UFO" had drawn up chess's rules. Another time, he claimed to have spoken to the former Russian Grandmaster Vassily Smyslov, who told him that aliens had rearranged his chessboard and then broadcast voices into his head one night in 1974, telling him which moves to make in order to win a particularly difficult match. He also told the *New Yorker* in 2006 that the world would soon end as intergalactic travellers, observing all the planet's wars, would swoop down one day, ask mankind "Why are you eating each other?" and then "just put us in their ships and take us away."⁴⁰ Something tells me that Mr Ilyumzhinov should have been 'taken away' himself quite some time ago... **FT**

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



SD TUCKER is a Merseyside-based writer whose books are *Paranormal Merseyside*, *Terror of the Tokoloshe* and (forthcoming) *The Hidden Folk*. Currently at work on two books, he is a regular contributor to FT.

NOTES

- 1 *Sunday Times*, 26 Jan; *Times*, 7 Aug+12 Aug 2014; www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/chess-with-qaddafi-and-aliens
- 2 A man who, according to certain chess conspiracy theorists, (yes, really) doesn't even exist – see www.chess.com/forum/view/general/edward-winter-does-not-exist for a slightly paranoid discussion based largely upon the supposedly 'suspicious' facts that he avoids publicity, lives in

Switzerland and apparently doesn't much like having his photo taken.

- 3 www.chesshistory.com/winter/extra/ilyumzhinov.html
- 4 A statue of Ostap Bender holding up a chess piece now stands in Ilyumzhinov's Chess City; an extraordinary fact, given that Bender's name is today used colloquially by Russians to mean 'confidence trickster', and that his attempts to rebrand a small village named Vasiuki as a venue for space-chess is perhaps his most notorious

scam. The rough equivalent in England might be a London Council accused of financial impropriety erecting a statue of Arthur Daley brandishing a suitcase full of used notes outside their offices.

- 5 Ilyumzhinov can be found outlining his Xanadu-like plans at great length at www.skyscrapercity.com/showthread.php?t=125082
- 6 Maybe Ilyumzhinov thought himself a saint, too; he called his 1998 autobiography *The President's Crown of Thorns*. (Although the book apparently

included such un-Christ-like chapter titles as 'Without Me the People Are Incomplete' and 'It Only Takes Two Weeks to Have a Man Killed')

- 7 www.economist.com/node/455893
- 8 www.ghosttheory.com/2010/12/29/russia-ufo-presidential-abductions-shopping-centres
- 9 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/8662822.stm>
- 10 All Ilyumzhinov's quotes – including the Hoffman interview – are taken from

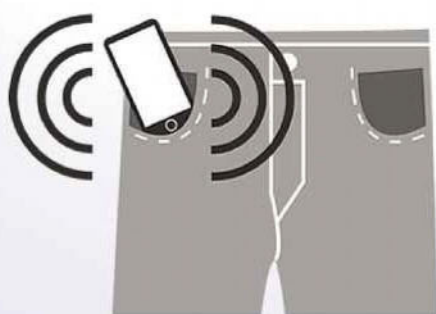
www.chesshistory.com/winter/extra/ilyumzhinov.html, where original sources are provided. (I have conflated several different interviews in this account). The *Times* (7 Aug 2014) also said that Ilyumzhinov "believes that chess is a direct link to either God or the cosmos, that may enable humans to recover lost powers of flight and telepathy", though I haven't been able to track down the direct quotes for this assertion.

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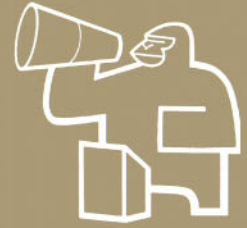
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The misguided monster hunters

BRIAN REGAL assesses the current state of cryptozoology and asks whether it's time for a new direction



BRIAN REGAL teaches the history of science, technology and medicine at Kean University, and is the author of *Searching for Sasquatch: Crackpots, Eggheads, and Cryptozoology*.

What should we do with cryptozoology today? What sort of shape is this much-maligned enterprise in? The unfortunate reality is that, in 2015, it's not in very good shape at all. It has declined since its peak in the late 20th century, and its current practitioners are due for some deep thinking about their discipline: where they have been and where they think they are going.

Scholars began looking for and trying to explain monstrous creatures in antiquity. Discussions in Pliny's *Natural History*, Ovid's *Metamorphosis*, and Lucretius's *On the Nature of Things*, to name a few, helped establish the pursuit of monsters as a legitimate exercise. Investigators and philosophers sought to use monsters as vehicles to study various intellectual topics. By the 1500s, for example, early modern authors in pursuit of werewolves began to argue that Lycanthropy was a mental disorder, not shapeshifting. Ulisse Aldrovandi, Fortunio Liceti and even Carl Linnæus used the study of monstrous creatures to uncover the diversity of life on Earth. In 1699, Edward Tyson showed that primates were not monsters at all, as once thought, but genuine species closely associated with humans – though not human offshoots as Rousseau believed. By extension, Tyson also helped demolish the long-held myth of the Cynocephali or dog-headed men (see FT286:32-37).

In the 19th century, Richard Owen argued that sea-monster reports came from observers misconstruing marine life they little understood. His work showed that what was thought to be sightings of mythical creatures was actually evidence of how whales copulated (see FT32-38). When Charles Darwin articulated the idea of Natural Selection he used monstrosity to learn about the process of heredity.

The pursuit of monsters through the 19th century helped prove the spurious nature of many of them, and also helped explain questions of generation, the spread of disease, and evolution.

Modern cryptozoologists have been active since the 1930s, when reports of a large creature cruising Loch Ness, and a hairy giant bumbling around Central Asia caused a stir. Then, in 1950s North America, tales of large ape-men and equally big footprints captured headlines. In time, these were joined by tales of living dinosaurs in the Congo. Expeditions from Russia to Nepal to California, Washington, Canada, and Africa, in groups small and large, supported by private financiers and newspapers, fanned out, determined to find these anomalous beasts. In the early 21st century, we have searches supported by television money backed up with the latest gadgetry.

For all this effort, for all the infrared cameras, night vision goggles, DNA testing, and other hijinks, along with breathless exclamations of “what the hell was that?” at every twig snap, nothing has been found. All we have are hoaxes involving rubber suits, grainy photos, and jiggly video: all third-rate nonsense.

Those who pursued monsters from the classical age to the middle of the 19th century helped invent biology, ornithology, zoology and a host of other modern sciences. Today, historians, who hunt monsters in libraries, rare books and manuscripts, have developed enormous insight into the way science and culture work. They have studied how the image of the monstrous has shaped our world in ways both obvious and subtle across disciplines from sociology to literature to psychology.

What have modern cryptozoologists contributed to science? What will future historians say about their efforts? They will not be able to say – at least as of the time of writing – that cryptozoologists didn't find monsters, but they did help us understand this or that about nature, or animal behaviour, or the ecology of the environments the creatures they searched for inhabited. Without any

formal scientific or historical training, the vast majority of monster hunters today have no way of recording or even seeing the value of anything they find that isn't, in their minds, directly monster-related. As a result, future commentators may very well remember this period as a colossal waste of time.

Once inhabited by practising, mainstream scientists along with the amateurs, some of whom were quite sophisticated in their work, cryptozoology has changed. While a few brave scientists and serious amateurs engage with it today, cryptozoology is populated more often than not by frauds, hucksters, television celebrities of dubious provenance, and the earnestly incompetent.

All the traditional monster hunter paradigms have failed. No Bigfoot, no Sasquatch, no Yeti, no Loch Ness Monster, and no Jersey Devil have been found by lying in wait among the pines with fruit, pheromones, and cameras. Cryptozoology needs a new direction, a new focus. An honest appraisal of the field draws one to the conclusion that after the better part of a century trying to capture a cryptid – or just getting a good photo of one – cryptozoology has not advanced a bit since the heady days of Heuvelmans, Sanderson, Dahinden, and Krantz.

Oh, and don't hold up the coelacanth as a cryptozoological triumph. It was not discovered by cryptozoologists; it was not being looked for, nor did it have a mythical history prior to it being found accidentally – and therefore it cannot be considered a genuine cryptid.

Are we chasing our anomalous tails? It seems that while ostensibly looking for monsters, cryptozoologists are looking for themselves, so it's not all a waste of time, at least not for the individuals involved. In the larger sense, however, cryptozoology has not lived up to its potential and should be called into question as to its efficacy. If not, it will continue to devolve into the circus it has become, until diehard supporters as well as scientists walk away from it with broken hearts.

Of course, there's always tomorrow. **FT**

Portraits of an invisible man

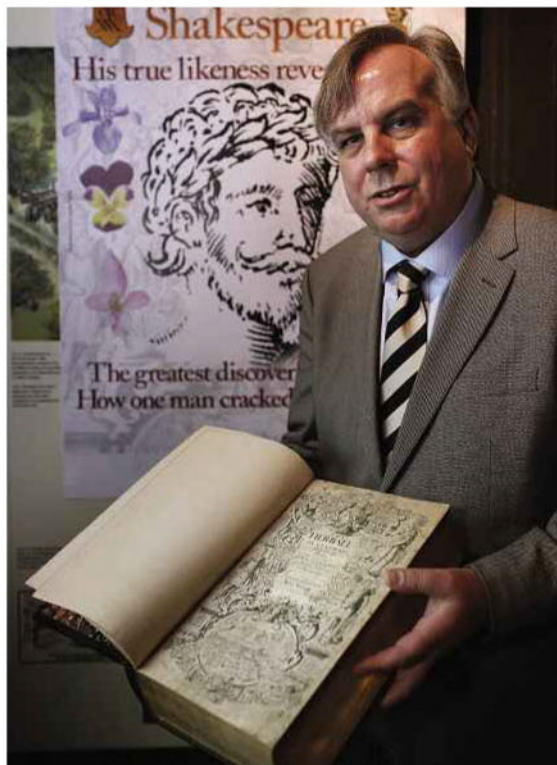
The furore surrounding the discovery of a new 'life portrait' of the world's most celebrated writer leads **JERRY GLOVER** to wonder whether a dramatic conceit caused Shakespeare to erase himself from history?



JERRY GLOVER is an independent researcher of historical enigmas, and has been a regular (albeit intermittent) contributor to *Fortean Times* since 2001.

There is an “astonishing new image of Shakespeare” according to *Country Life* magazine: an engraving in which the 33-year-old writer appears, in the company of three other fellows, as the thrillingly mysterious “Fourth Man”: a bearded, laurel-wreathed and toga-wearing gentleman holding an ear of sweetcorn and a Tiffany-lamp flower. Touted as a near-epochal discovery, this likeness from John Gerard’s *Herball* of 1597 is being claimed as “the only demonstrably authentic portrait” of what Shakespeare looked like, “drawn from life and in the prime of life”.¹ The Shakespeareosphere has set upon the discovery of botanical historian Mark Griffiths with a zeal exceeding even the anointing of the Cobbe portrait as Shakespeare by Stanley Wells and The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust in 2009 (see “Bard Wars” by Jerry Glover, FT280:32-37). Even after four centuries the only generally accepted true likenesses of the writer remain the much-criticised engraving by Martin Droeshout in the First Folio of 1623, and the gormless funerary bust at Stratford-on-Avon. As both of those are possibly posthumous (perhaps derived from the National Gallery’s dusky Chandos portrait) the finding of a likeness made when Shakespeare was still alive is huge news. Has Mark Griffiths stumbled upon “the greatest discovery in 400 years”, or is *Country Life* experiencing a *Hitler Diaries* moment?

When published in 1597 John Gerard’s *Herball* or *Generall Historie of Plants*, was the ultimate book of its kind, a botanical Paradise in over a thousand pages. Gerard (1542-1612) had a passion for plants that brought him into the orbit of Sir William Cecil, Lord Burghley, the Lord Treasurer. Burghley is Griffiths’s “Third Man” on the title page engraving, the other two having been identified as different versions of Gerard himself. Griffiths’s case for the identity of the



He appears as a bearded, laurel-wreathed gentleman



ABOVE AND LEFT: Botanist and historian Mark Griffiths believes he has found the only portrait of Shakespeare drawn from life on the title page of Gerard’s 1597 *Herball*.

BELOW: The monogram or mark that Griffiths argues is a cipher declaring Shakespeare’s status as a gentleman.



‘Fourth Man’ as *the Man* rests on references to fauna placed near the figure that also occur in Shakespearean texts such as *Venus and Adonis* (written to persuade Burghley’s son to marry) and various plays. Interpreting this garden of symbolism through his botanical expertise, Griffiths has Shakespeare being brought into the Cecil household; here, the Bard would act as a propagandist to stem a decline in Burghley’s fortunes, while Gerard supplied the knowledge about plants and horticulture that would later suffuse the plays. In similar title-page illustrations, the Roman figure was traditionally the first-century physician Dioscorides, but Apollo’s laurel wreath and the faux Classical garb in Gerard’s book signify a noted writer and stage player. These clues were changed for the second edition by an editor (who apparently hated Gerard) “suppressing” the poetic collaboration of Gerard and Shakespeare and doing “everything in his power to distance his 1633 edition” from the original.²

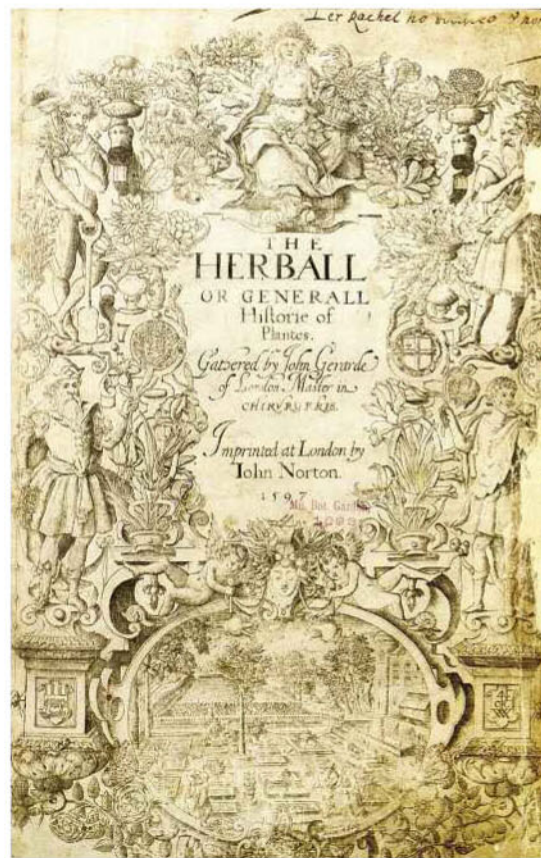
A monogram on a shield underneath the Shakespeare figure is where the matter takes a cryptographic turn. This rune-like device, says Griffiths, is a cipher assembled from the numeral 4, the Latin form of which combines with the upper right E to make ‘shake’, and a pictographic ‘spear’ completing his name. It declares Shakespeare’s gentleman status. The ‘OR’ letters in the middle of the rebus additionally signify the “heraldic term for gold”, referencing the colour of the coat of arms granted to his father two years *previously*, while the ‘W’ at the base stands for – what else? – William. But how can this be the case when Joseph Ames, in his *Typographical Antiquities* (1749), described it as the joint cypher mark of *The Herball*’s publishers, William and John Norton? It clearly includes the letters N, O, R, and W, in which Barry Clarke, a puzzler for the *Daily Telegraph*, also sees a pair of Roman tens, hence “NORTENS”.³ Griffiths says Ames was wrong: he could have misconstrued the Royal Arms on the title page, and his error was removed for the second edition of his book. Moreover, William Norton had been dead for four years when *The*

Herball was published, so it made no sense to identify him as having anything to do with it.

As online debate spun off into conjectures about the true meaning of this mark, and the Nortons' possible status as the Queen's printers. I expected someone to cut through the sub-*Da Vinci Code* games by citing FA Girling's papers on 15th and 16th century merchant's marks, which shows that, far from having anything to do with the numeral, Griffiths's 'shake' cipher, the purported 'Sign of Four', was being used in marks long before the figure '4' was even used in the West. The sign was common in English and French printer's marks in the 16th century, and even caps the mark of the East India Company. The runic appearance of this sign and these marks in general is not certain, yet they probably were indeed originally runes, emerging from Nordic and Baltic trading contacts, and their printed orientation was irrelevant since there was no "right way up" for such marks.⁴ The M and W 'letters' appear on many marks with no relevance to the owners' names, and were also commonly scratched on building stones and timbers as ritual marks to protect against evil by invoking Mary as Virgin of Virgins – *Virgo Virginum*.⁵

Stanley Wells quickly endorsed the three other men of Griffiths's identification, guessing that the Fourth Man was actually Sir Walter Raleigh, since the sweetcorn in his hand is an American crop, as was the tobacco and sweet potato that Raleigh introduced to England. Griffiths didn't use his botanical expertise to show how conflating two different plants for both being American made no sense, instead pointing out that the other Fourth Man plants have no connection to Raleigh, and that the sweetcorn was already well established by 1597 and was not even introduced by Raleigh. And so the game of Elizabethan Code Detectives went on, escalating at every turn. Was Wells actually satirising Griffiths's approach, his taste for over-ingenuity? Possibly not, since when the Cobbe portrait was unveiled as a 'new' Shakespeare portrait it was, in Wells's words, "what Shakespeare *ought* to have looked like" (my italics); i.e., a wealthy gentleman.⁶ Griffiths has his gardener Shakespeare, Wells his gentlemen: to each his own. To Griffiths's credit, he did not set out looking for Shakespeare – the Bard found him.

The latest portrait is at the crest of a modern wave of Shakespeare portraiture. In 2002, the Sanders portrait of a young man that turned



ABOVE: The title page of Gerard's *Herball*, showing four figures, with 'Shakespeare' at bottom right.

up in Canada, which includes an ancient inscription on the back naming Shakespeare, passed forensic tests.⁷ The Shakespeare 'death mask' at Darmstadt Castle in Germany provided the basis for Dr Caroline Wilson's 3D digital image in 2010. The hyper-detailed recreation has consistencies with other portraits (including the Cobbe portrait), which in turn purportedly support the death mask's provenance.⁸ The mask figures in Simon Andrew Stirling's theory that Shakespeare was murdered for his Catholic beliefs – a theory turning on the very skull of Shakespeare, which, we learn, rests in a private crypt under the church in the village of Beoley in northeast Worcestershire. Discovered by a Victorian clergyman who wrote about how the skull was stolen from Stratford by Horace Walpole, it has forehead indentations that match swellings around the left eye, as also seen on the Darmstadt mask, the Cobbe and Chandos portraits, and the Janssen funerary bust.⁹

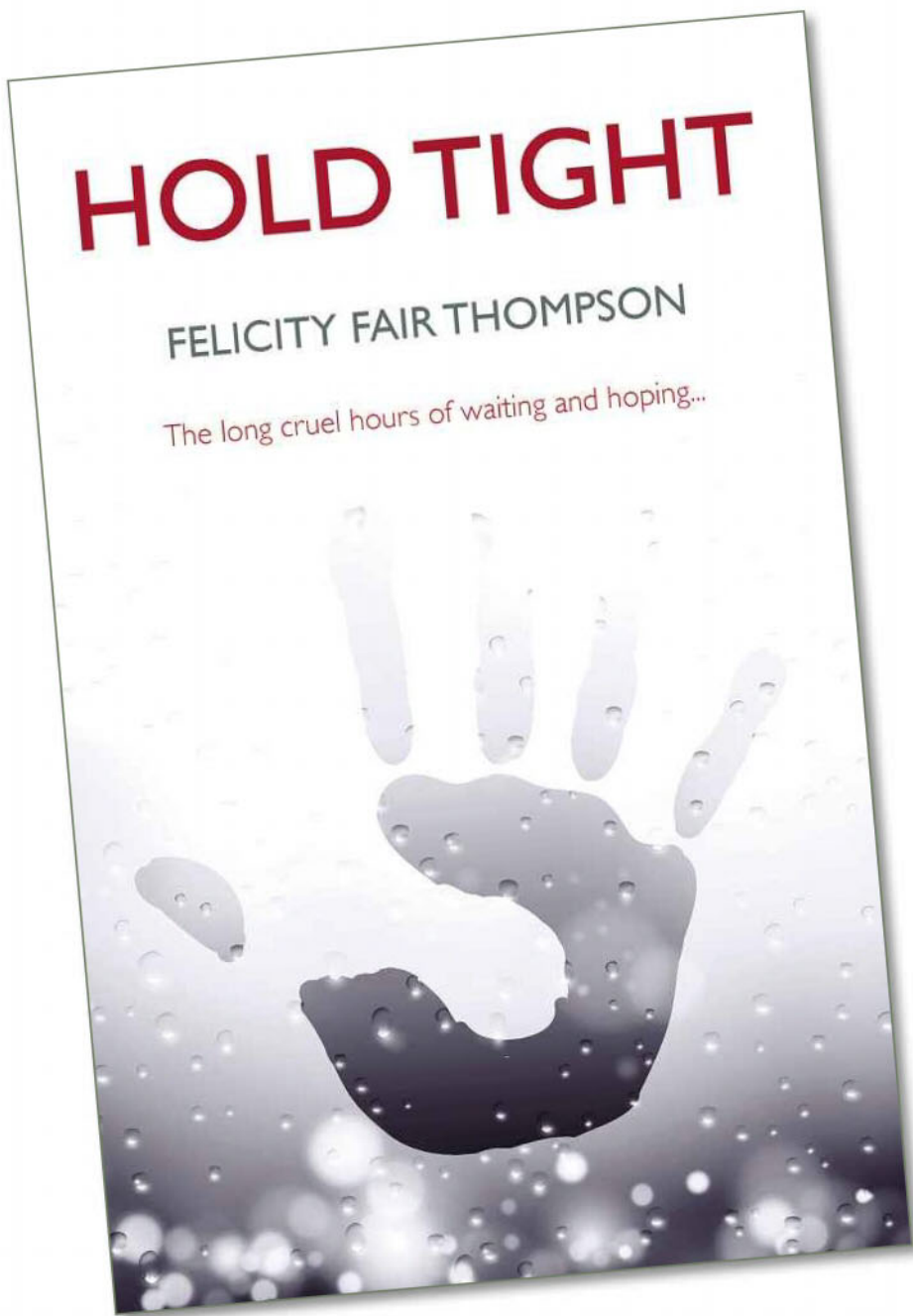
We fortunate welcome all such discoveries, since they enrich the wider mystery of Shakespeare's life and career. Perhaps the lack of a definitive life portrait of Shakespeare connects with the near-total absence

of direct evidence for him writing his attributed works. Consider for a few moments a scenario in which Shakespeare, potentially with the help of his collaborators, destroyed all their handwritten works, bar Shakespeare's legal documents, which survive because they were beyond their reach. Why do that? The ultimate character a dramatist could conceive, he and his contemporaries might muse, would be a fictitious person stepping onto the stage of real life. For dramatists utterly committed to exploring the artistry of illusion and theatrics, the power of myth and mystery, such a creation would be their greatest achievement. And so, most taken with the idea, they or Shakespeare alone set about achieving it – as have other writers by degrees since. Thomas Pynchon has managed it with his image. Philip Larkin had all his diaries burned. JG Ballard and Roald Dahl claimed to destroy all their manuscripts, revealed upon their deaths as wishful thinking. Perhaps Shakespeare and his friends were committed enough to see it through, extending even to the writer's visage in his lifetime. Such motives may explain why the only 'official' portrait from the First Folio is unique for such a work, a "masterpiece of duplicity", the sleeves of the "impossible doublet" mismatched and reversed, giving (along with the disproportionate head) "a harlequin appearance to the figure".¹⁰ What game is afoot here; is this really the portrait of an actual person? In this sense, Shakespeare's greatest feat is his own concealment of his art, and his non-identity. These absences only inflame our searches and elevate his life and work into a mythical realm – which perhaps was his intention all along, the cunning fellow. **FT**

NOTES

- 1 *Country Life*, 20 May 2015.
- 2 tinyurl.com/ow4or96.
- 3 *Ibid.*
- 4 FA Girling, "Merchant's Marks in Suffolk", *Suffolk Institute of Archaeology*, Vol. XXIX part 1, 1961.
- 5 T Easton, "The Use of Conjoined Vs to Protect a Dwelling", appendix to CJ Binding and LJ Wilson, "Ritual Protection Marks in Goatchurch Cavern, Burrington Combe, North Somerset", *Proceedings of University of Bristol Spelaeological Society* 23 (2), 2004, pp119-133.
- 6 tinyurl.com/pn8nzl8.
- 7 Stephanie Nolen, *Shakespeare's Face*, Free Press, 2004.
- 8 tinyurl.com/obzqzm7.
- 9 Simon Andrew Stirling, *Who Killed William Shakespeare?*, The History Press, 2013.
- 10 John Rollett, *William Stanley as Shakespeare*, McFarland, 2015, pp10-13.

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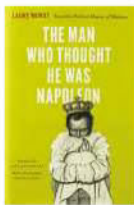
This month's books, films and games

reviews



The archaeology of madness

This hugely entertaining celebration of what Michelet called the “galvanic dance of the archives” may broaden your perspective on anomalies more generally



The Man Who Thought He Was Napoleon

Toward a Political History of Madness

Laure Murat

Chicago University Press 2014

Hb, 288pp, illus, notes, bib, ind, £31.50, ISBN9780226025735

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £28.35

In 1959, at Michigan's Ypsilanti State Hospital, Dr Miton Rokeach, a Freudian psychologist, conducted an unusual experiment. He brought together, daily, three patients who each thought they were the Christ; hoping this challenge to their identity – over two years – would force them to change their behaviour. He was inspired by an incident related by Voltaire about a man who was burned at the stake in 1663 for claiming he was Christ. Before his execution, the deluded man was incarcerated in a mental hospital with someone else who thought he was Christ. However, recognising the other man's plight cured him of his own delusions but, sadly, only temporarily.

When Rokeach saw that his three 'messiahs' actually began to accommodate each other – each retaining their own delusion but regarding the other two as delusional – with understanding and not the expected hostility, Rokeach began manipulating them, but when they also adapted to these ploys, he terminated the

experiment. Curiously, we learn from Professor Murat that the day after Napoleon's remains were returned to Paris for burial, a hospital for the insane in the city admitted 14 men each claiming to be Napoleon.

In a later edition of his book *The Three Christs of Ypsilanti* (1964), Dr Rokeach admitted that his actions, in retrospect, were morally and ethically wrong. There were not three gods in that hospital, he confessed, but four: “I had no right to play God.” Since then, psychiatrists are careful to state that their practice has come a long way and nothing like this could get past an ethics committee today. This conflict between pioneering and experimental treatments on the one hand and the political and social conscience of the medical profession on the other is the main theme in Murat's wonderful study, seamlessly translated by Deke Dusinberre.

Murat's intention is to show precisely how the history of psychiatry in France has been closely associated with the politics and crises of the day; a claim originally made by the pioneering psychologist Jean-Étienne-Dominique Esquirol (1772–1840). She begins with an interesting analysis of the public execution of Louis XVI on 21 January 1793, whose ancestor Louis XIV famously ejaculated “L'état, c'est moi!” His decapitation on the recently improved guillotine, simultaneously and symbolically, says Murat, separated the state and its head from him and hereditary kingship.

As the ancien régime tumbled into the bloodsoaked basket alongside so many heads – close

“Each 'messiah' retained his own delusion, but regarded the other two as delusional”

to 3,000 were guillotined in Paris alone during the Terror between March 1793 and August 1794 – it is not surprising that the guillotine itself became the symbol of the political and social rupture sought by the Revolution. What is a surprise, is that so many of the people associated with the implementation of the device were doctors; and many of them, as Murat shows, went on to play significant roles in the foundation of French psychiatry.

The device itself had forerunners in Germany, Scotland and England, but the French perfected it. Its true improver was Dr Antoine Louis – one of France's senior surgeons – and so it was nicknamed ‘Petit Louison’ and ‘Louissette’ before Dr Joseph-Ignace Guillotin proposed this mode of beheading to the Constituent Assembly. Again, in a single stroke – “derived from the laws of geometry and gravity” and so cleanly and infallibly providing an “egalitarian and democratic” death – the machine did away with the archaic hierarchy of absolute punishments: burning at the stake for witches and arsonists, torturing for regicides, hanging for thieves and ordinary criminals. Decapitation by the sword was reserved for nobility.

The contract to build the guillotine in its improved form went to a Prussian piano maker,

but his claim to the patent was denied because it was regarded as “a machine of government” for carrying out legal sentences. The trials – on live sheep and human corpses – were attended by more doctors, Esquirol included. Their public and private discussions led to vigorous debates on a variety of otherwise morbid topics: including why a quick decapitation was superior to hanging; what constitutes torture; what do murderers deserve; and should death be painless. Such debates fanned out across the whole of French society and always, Murat observes, doctors were not only involved but seen as the arbiters of matters of life and death.

One of the most intense debates was on whether consciousness extended beyond death. Even here the guillotine made its gory contribution. Stories spread that severed heads grimaced and lips moved as though trying to say something. The fastest ‘trending’ rumour concerned the head of Charlotte Corday (a sympathiser of the Girondin faction), who stabbed to death Jean-Paul Marat (leader of the Jacobin faction) in his bath. After the execution of this much-hated ‘Angel of Murder’, a revolutionary was said to have pulled her head from the basket and slapped her, causing her cheeks to blush in indignation. An influential group of doctors – which included Guillotin himself and George Cabanis, who had attended the guillotine trials – published a refutation arguing that movement and feeling can be dissociated from vitality, and likening such post-decapitation

Continued on page 60

“Given that he crowned himself emperor, we shouldn’t be surprised so many wanted to be him or be like him”

Continued from page 59

reflexes to the antics of a headless chicken and Galvani’s dancing frog legs.

Dr Cabanis went on to write an influential book on the relationship between mental and physical abilities. And so, muses Murat, a machine that divided bodies gave rise to a debate about the “divided self”. It was, she writes, the very origin of the medical debate about madness and the invention of psychiatry. There is “a literal and figurative connection between ‘losing your head’ and ‘losing your mind’.”

Another significant legacy of the Revolution was the abolition of arbitrary imprisonment by ending so-called *lettres de cachet*, by which so many were unjustly locked away. In its place, the “medicalisation of mental illness [...] enjoyed a golden age”, bringing with it a host of new asylums and a mandate for the new psychiatrists to try anything that promised a therapy or cure. In a world without penicillin – “which would have emptied the asylums of the many stuck in the final stages of venereal disease” – without psychoanalysis, ECGs and MRIs, they resorted to a cornucopia of quackery: magnetism, Mesmerism, spinning, hosing with cold water, poisoning, bleeding and so on. They soon discovered that very little worked.

Laure Murat – professor of French studies at UCLA – spent three years bringing back to life the accounts of long-dead doctors and patients, politicians, ideologues and pioneers, and how marvellously they are animated, detailed, illuminated here.

She spent many hundreds of hours burrowing through the medical records of the four main mental asylums of Greater Paris – some 163 volumes – precisely spanning the time between “the Revolution of 1789 to the Paris Commune of 1871”. These were cross-checked against other official records and guided by the philosophical and social commentaries provided by the

pioneers of clinical psychiatry – Philippe Pinel (who also attended the guillotine trials) and his student Étienne Esquirol – the contemporary historian Jules Michelet and the modern philosopher Michel Foucault, who so influentially analysed the collusion of power, punishment and psychiatry.

Decorating every strand of her writing are the tokens of her love affair with archives, the details, the asides and her joy at an unexpected discovery. She describes the stamina needed to study an archive – handling heavy ledgers and “gigantic folio volumes that can only be read standing up”; the constant vigilance for the nuggets of information; the persistence in deciphering the hesitant and eccentric handwriting; the determination to resist the all-pervading dust that threatens to mutate her into parchment; the patience need to resist the constant temptation to jump to a conclusion; and yet more stamina to keep track of the complete lack of any sort of consistency in spelling or regularity of format or style. These are things which anyone who has laboured in ill-lit, cramped and all-but forgotten corners of libraries will recognise and wear as a badge of honour. It may be a plodding sort of heroism, but its spirit sets this fortean’s heart and mind thrumming.

In case you think all this has little to do with forteana, I would argue that we are also students of the erratic and anomalous behaviour of both individuals and large social groups. I cannot here give this book, fully, the appreciation it deserves as I have barely touched upon the breadth and depth of its contents. The psychological consequences on those who lived through the Revolutionary Terror – with the common despair of famines, disease and poverty; unpredictable crowds and terrible sights; as well as everyday chaos and uncertainty, and the fear of being denounced – fills one chapter. Another dissects the

theory and practice behind asylums and prisons, and the choice they offered. Another examines the “neurovegetative manifestations of war trauma” as Paris cycled through invasions, uprisings, sieges, arson and sabotage; significantly, some folk believed themselves personally targeted, while others had grandiose or bizarre plans to fight the enemies. Another, even sadder, chapter details the revolutionaries who succumbed to dementia from alcoholism, syphilis or what we’d call today post-traumatic stress disorder.

Against this chaotic backdrop, and in its own fascinating chapter, Murat asks why so many identified with Napoleon so easily – and here she wryly regrets that there were so few women among them. That Boney was a hero, the ‘superman’ of that time, as evidenced in ubiquitous art and statuary, seems obvious; but Murat points out that, beneath that public adoration was, quite literally, a self-made man. The Little Corporal had climbed to the top of both army and state by himself. Given the famous scene, in 1804, in the cathedral of Notre Dame, in which he snatched the crown from the hands of Pope Pius VII and crowned himself emperor, perhaps we shouldn’t be surprised so many wanted to be him or be like him. It was every monomaniac’s wet dream.

Murat’s study is a celebration of what Michelet called the “galvanic dance of archives”, something which Foucault recognised in dusty stacks, awarding them the status of a true branch of literature and drama.

This book is, to paraphrase Derrida, not so much a history of psychiatry but an archæology of madness ... and I urge every serious fortean to read it. It is hugely entertaining and may enlarge your perspective on anomalies generally.

Bob Rickard

Fortean Times Verdict

AN ARCHÆOLOGY OF MADNESS THAT ALL FORTEANS SHOULD READ

10

William Stanley as Shakespeare

Evidence of Authorship by the Sixth Earl of Derby

John Rollett

McFarland & Co Inc 2014

Pb, 277pp, bib, ind, \$45.00, ISBN 9780786496600

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £35.95



The English really do treasure their eccentrics, for how else to explain the extraordinary popular delusion that the greatest canon in our literature was authored by a man who left no writings or books, and could barely even sign his own name?

After an opening chapter in which strange inconsistencies in the depiction of Shakespeare’s doublet in the Drouseout engraving from the First Folio are deduced to mean that the Strafford man was wearing a jester’s outfit, thus signifying he was a stand-in for the real author, this book starts to find its feet in terms of specific evidence for the 6th Earl of Derby (1561–1642). The peculiarities Rollett uncovers from word games, allusions, acrostics and ciphers build the identity of “gentle” William Stanley, whose surname is acrostically written from the letters of actor’s names in the First Folio, for example. Another uncovered identity is the name of the Sonnets’ dedicatee “Mr W.H.” within the dedication, and while ‘hidden codes’ are generally suspect, you can never be sure with the Elizabethans, as other known examples show, making one consider at what point does intention meet coincidence? This is where scholars ordinarily balk, but they shouldn’t. This area is rich in research possibility.

Thousands of improvements made to the Second Folio of 1632 indicate the author was still alive then, and the better quality publication suggests he was wealthy, as was Stanley on both counts. Stanley’s writing style is juxtaposed with Shakespeare’s, finding many parallels in idiosyncrasies of spellings. Moreover, Stanley’s travels put him in the right places at the right times too, in both France and Italy.

There is much more, well-illustrated, and presented

concisely and with the dispassion that befits Rollett's scientific background.

Those who proselytise for the Earl of Oxford as Shakespeare, their loud and tortuous contortions doing so much to damage the reputation of the perfectly legitimate Authorship Question, should take note of how to make a strong case, sticking to what is verifiable and not seizing on all shades of ambiguity to press their candidate, a tendency that Rollett resists to his theory's credit.

Jerry Glover

Fortean Times Verdict

HIGHLY READABLE ARGUMENT FOR A SIDELINED CANDIDATE **8**

Return of the Golden Age

Ancient History and the Key to Our Collective Future

Edward F Malkowski

Inner Traditions 2014

Pb, 303pp, notes, bib, index, \$19.95. ISBN 9781620551974

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £16.99



There has been a trend for books mashing together the myths and spiritual teachings of older cultures to claim insights into the ills of modern civilisation. Malkowski believes that ancient mankind was traumatised by the destruction of its Golden Age, that we are yearning to re-invest it but can't until we can understand its symbols and spiritual technology. He goes further back than the earliest recorded human histories (apx. 5000 years ago); to a cataclysm 12,000 years ago that destroyed the human Golden Age, which he calls 'Civilization X'. The greater part of the book is a historical survey of psychological and spiritual events – from mystical visions (including the drug 'assisted') to the reports of the allegedly spiritually gifted 'Indigo children'. Malkowski writes clearly and without verbal hysteria, delivering a positive message for these chaotic times.

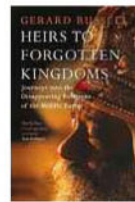
Otto Minyak

Fortean Times Verdict

HOW TO HEAL A 5000-YEAR-OLD TRAUMA AND CIVILISATION **7**

Written in the margin

The Middle East's liminal and threatened religions deserve to be recognised in this Arabist diplomat's superb study



Heirs to Forgotten Kingdoms

Journeys into the Disappearing Religions of the Middle East

Gerard Russell

Simon and Schuster 2014

Hb, 367pp, bib, ind, £16.10, ISBN 9781471114694

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £16.00

I've been waiting for a book like this. The Middle East is a treasure trove of small, obscure and strange religions and religious sects, but little in the way of information about them is published in the West, if anywhere. Gerard Russell, a career diplomat with long experience of the region, and fluent in Arabic and Farsi, has produced what I believe is a first: an attempt at a comprehensive – and sympathetic – description of the many marginal religions that populate the birthplace of the three major religious traditions of the West.

Russell's well-written and researched book has chapters devoted to the Mandaean, the Yazidis, the Zoroastrians, the Druze, the Samaritans, the Copts and the Kalasha. Prior to reading the book, I had heard of most of these groups (though not all; the Kalasha were a complete and rather wonderful surprise), but knew little or nothing of their beliefs and practices. *Heirs to Forgotten Kingdoms* has gone some way towards remedying that ignorance, and I am grateful for it.

Some of the traditions covered here will be familiar to readers of alternative history and religion books: the Madaeans are mentioned in various popular books about the early history of Christianity, and their reverence

for John the Baptist is a key piece of evidence for some writers claiming that the true origins of Christianity have been suppressed by the established churches. Zoroastrianism is relatively well known in the West too; but I doubt that many people could tell you much about their beliefs.

This book is not an exhaustive treatise on the theology of the groups it investigates, and the reason becomes clear as one reads it. Faced with persecution in many cases, and various forms of discrimination in almost all, the adherents of these religions have become secretive and reclusive. They rarely let outsiders into their holy places, or talk about their beliefs, so the fact that Russell has managed to glean some knowledge of all these groups, even if it's not the full story, is something of an achievement.

There are all sorts of little gems in here. One of my favourites is Dinanukht, a demon of Mandaean mythology: he is half-man, half-book, and he 'sits by the waters between the worlds, reading himself'. And there's the Skanduleh, a Mandaean apotropaic, a disc on which a lion, a snake, a scorpion and a wasp are portrayed; this iconography struck me as redolent of much earlier beliefs, and Russell confirms this by suggesting that many of the beliefs and objects on display here hark back to ancient practices, perhaps as far as ancient Sumer.

Not all of the religions Russell describes are right on the brink of oblivion; a surprising number

of sects and groups manage to survive and even thrive in the wider Muslim world of the Middle East; and there are instances throughout of Muslims from surrounding communities coming to religious festivals, and apparently feeling quite at ease with their unorthodox neighbours.

But the sad fact is that many, if not most, of these peoples are under threat of extinction, if not immediately, then in the not too distant future. Their young people are emigrating, sometimes founding branches of the ancestral religion where they end up, but very often forgetting their religious roots. Many members of minority religions find it easier to survive if they convert to Islam. Ultimately, suggests Russell, the Middle East will become a much more homogeneous place, in religious terms, and that will be a loss to us all.

One can only hope that, faced with the disappearance of their traditions, some members of the threatened sects will see the value in recording their beliefs and practices so that we will at least have a record of the extraordinary range of religions that have inhabited this most contested of regions. And that, if such a thing happens, someone like Gerard Russell will be on hand to give witness to the exotic and endangered religious species that he has chronicled here.

Noel Rooney

Fortean Times Verdict

THE MIDDLE EAST'S OBSCURE (AND DISAPPEARING?) RELIGIONS **9**

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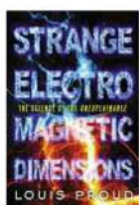
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The body electric...

An investigation of our relationship with electricity navigates some weird territory with unparticles, sliders and pseudopolts



Strange Electromagnetic Dimensions

Louis Proud

New Page Books 2015

Pb, 285pp, notes, bib, ind, \$16.99, ISBN 9781601633279

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £14.99

Electricity is all around us and we take it for granted; few of us give second thoughts to quite what a weird phenomenon it is. It has been harnessed, channelled and put to work. Our world would be unrecognisable without it. Now, more than ever, with wifi, mobile phones, broadcasting and as the by-products of other uses, electromagnetic fields pervade our entire environment and our bodies are constantly bathed in their presence.

Conventional research tells us that this happens at an energy level far below that which can harm or even influence our cells, but nonetheless, its relationship with our biology is curious, especially when the human body encounters electricity in its less domesticated forms, such as being struck by lightning. Louis Proud explores the strange fringes of our relationship with electricity and turns up suggestions that, for some people, something very peculiar is going on.

In animals such as turtles and pigeons, an electromagnetic sense based on tiny magnetic crystals has been discovered, allowing them to navigate using the Earth's magnetic field. There are indications that other animals, such as cattle and deer – and even possibly dogs – may also possess this sense. (Since this book went to press, a paper

has been published suggesting dogs align themselves with the magnetic field when defecating.) Proud puts forward evidence that we, too, have this sense, although we perhaps do not use it in the same way as dogs. Epidemics and mass social unrest can be tied to fluctuations in solar magnetism, he suggests, and suicides peak during geomagnetic storms. He ties this in with the controversial issue of people who claim to have electromagnetic hypersensitivity (EMH) and cannot live where there are electromagnetic fields or even electric appliances. His interpretation of the evidence is skewed in favour of the condition's reality, despite considerable research suggesting it's a psychogenic condition. Rather stronger is his chapter on lightning strikes and the odd effects they have been known to have on people (see FT330:30 for an edited version), which gathers some truly extraordinary stories, including that of the splendidly lexilinked Betty Galvano. If you want to know what the lightning desperation position is, he'll tell you...

As the book progresses, it heads into steadily weirder territory with his chapter on electric people and poltergeist agents. I had not come across Wimshurst disorder, a side-effect of botulism that causes sufferers to become highly charged with static electricity. It affected 34 prisoners in the US during a single botulism outbreak in the 1920s, and presumably derives its name from the Wimshurst machine, which produces static using rotating wheels.

He goes on to explore cases of High Voltage Syndrome (HVS), which he positions as the opposite of EMH. Experiencers find themselves abnormally charged with electricity all the time, and have continual detrimental influences on electrical appliances around them

(e.g. SLiders who create street lamp interference). Proud comes up with some striking incidences that have strong resemblances to polts, and compares classics like the Rosenheim Poltergeist to an electromagnetically induced pseudo-polts, drawing some illuminating parallels.

Rather than leave the book as a catalogue of weird phenomena at the human/electricity interface though, Proud attempts to draw the various strands together and link these electromagnetic anomalies with *psi* and *orgone*, and to have a stab at explaining them as the result of a currently unknown 'fifth force' proposed by Harvard physicist Howard Georgi in 2007, involving something known as an Unparticle, which could theoretically produce a version of magnetism that does not weaken with distance. Unparticles remain purely theoretical entities, however, and rather fringe ones in the world of physics at that, with no research therefore to confirm how they behave, or even their existence, so Proud is making a massive speculative leap in invoking them to explain these electromagnetic anomalies. Still, it is a commendable attempt to make some sort of rational sense out of all the strangeness; too few books of this kind make a proper stab at that, too often failing to suggest any mechanism, or copping out and invoking lame New Age waffle instead.

In *Strange Electromagnetic Dimensions*, Proud has written a solid and engaging book that makes a positive contribution to the field, and is a worthy successor to the work of people like Albert Budden.

One for the Hierophant's Apprentice's Fortean Library?
Ian Simmons

Fortean Times Verdict

PROBABLY EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT ELECTRIC PEOPLE

8

Memento Mori

The Dead Among Us

Paul Koudounaris

Thames & Hudson 2015

Hb, 206pp, illus, ind, £36.00, ISBN 9780500517789

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £32.40



Paul Koudounaris, whose photos and writing may be familiar to *FT* readers, has a doctorate in art history, an eye

for a fine image and a taste for *grand guignol*. His *Heavenly Bodies* brought to life jewelled skeletons from Roman catacombs, and *The Empire of Death* was an equally stunning history of charnel houses and ossuaries.

Where *Memento Mori* differs from Koudounaris's previous books is in its breadth and the image/text balance being firmly in favour of photos. Rather than confining himself to European death rituals, he also covers Asia and Latin America.

The chapter on Asian burial caves shows the wooden *tau tau* effigies found in the Torajan culture of Indonesia; they were a reminder that the spirits still lived. The examples of *Sokushinbutse*, the Buddhist method of preservation which started – with 1,000 days of dieting and a further 1,000 days of drinking poisoned tea – while the future icon was still alive, are fabulously gilded... and look as if they have just dozed off.

Bolivia goes for more mundane treatment of skulls for its *ñanitas* ("little pug-nosed ones"), which are decorated with baseball caps, sunglasses, beanies and cigarettes. Their spirits reveal themselves to their owner in dreams, and as it's impossible to lie in their presence, detectives use them to help solve cases. Bangkok's gilded skulls with gold lamé in the eye sockets fulfil an equally useful purpose: they ensure that no harm befalls the recently dead. And the fierce-looking *kapala* of Nepal and Tibet transfer the dead's knowledge, and make a useful drinking vessel.

In the midst of life, you need a good book about death. This is it.

William Darragh

Fortean Times Verdict

EXQUISITELY BEAUTIFUL BOOK FOR AFICIONADOS OF THE GHOULISH

9

Sci-fi and fantasy round-up

David V Barrett on post-apocalyptic Africa, a musical dictatorship, a cyberpunk murder investigation, elven warfare, a Jazz Age pastiche and an Elizabethan romp

The Book of Phoenix

Nnedi Okorafor

Hodder & Stoughton 2015

Hb, 272pp, £18.99, ISBN 9781473617940

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £14.99

The Chimes

Anna Smail

Sceptre 2015

Hb, 294pp, £14.99, ISBN 9781444794526

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £12.99

Crashing Heaven

Al Robertson

Gollancz 2015

Hb, 368pp, £20, ISBN 9781473203396; Pb, 368pp, £14.99, ISBN 9781473203402

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £12.99

Beowulf

JRR Tolkien

HarperCollins 2015

Pb, 425pp, £10.99, ISBN 9780008116583

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £9.89

The Fall of Arthur

JRR Tolkien

HarperCollins 2015

Pb, 233pp, £8.99, ISBN 9780007557301

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £8.54

Hy Brazil

Gerald Killingworth

Matador 2014

Pb, 262pp, £9.99, ISBN 9781784620066

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £9.49

The Elder Ice

David Hambling

(amazon) 2014

Pb, 117pp, £7.50, ISBN 9781291969863

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The Magonia Stone

Markus Wolfson

theEXAGGERATEDpress 2015

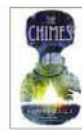
Pb, 261pp, £7.99, ISBN 9781326310967

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Is *The Book of Phoenix* science fiction or fantasy? Both; neither; it doesn't matter. It's the remarkable telling of the birth of a myth, of the 'real' story behind the writing of *The Great Book*, the scripture of a post-apocalyptic society in

West Africa. Phoenix is a young woman, though only two years old, genetically engineered by a corrupt research company in New York. She breaks free with two others, grows wings, and gradually discovers she has remarkable powers, which become stronger and more morally ambiguous as the story progresses. A beautiful and powerful prequel to Nnedi Okorafor's World Fantasy Award-winning *Who Fears Death*, this is both a very dark and a very spiritual novel, exploring both the worst and the best of humanity.



In *The Chimes*, music has become the primary form of communication and of passing on knowledge – a hummed

tune can tell someone a route to follow and what to look out for. But everyone's memory is almost completely lost each day, wiped out by a ruling elite of musicians in the Citadel in Oxford. A youth, Simon, comes to London and joins a small group on the fringes of society – and gradually finds himself central to a plot to infiltrate the Citadel and destroy the Carillon, the vast musical instrument that controls their lives. Anna Smail's debut novel plays with language in a way reminiscent of but different from Russell Hoban's *Riddley Walker*, using musical terms as everyday adjectives: "I wake subito... We pass tacet under the huge shadows of the cranes... Lucien's voice is piano..." The unexpected language and the daily loss of Simon's and the other characters' memory mean that the reader has to work hard in the opening chapters, but it's worth the effort.



Al Robertson's *Crashing Heaven* shows just how far cyberpunk has developed. Jack Forster has returned from an off-planet war to Station, an industrialised asteroid where it

seems humanity has moved from a despoiled Earth. Implanted in him is Hugo Fist, a stropky combat AI who, for some contractual reason, is going to take over Jack's body in a few weeks' time, effectively killing him. Much of the fun of the novel is watching the two constantly sniping at each other in internal conversations. Weaveware allows people to overlay a virtual environment – what they can see, hear, smell and taste – onto the fairly grubby reality of Station, and to project avatars of themselves; Hugo can manifest to anyone who is on the weave as an Archie Andrews-type puppet, separate from Jack. On one level this is a crime novel; Jack is determined to finish a murder investigation he was involved in before being sent off to war, including both physical and cyber realities, with Hugo's initially reluctant assistance. Add to this the involvement of a bunch of all-powerful squabbling AI gods who make the Greek and Norse pantheons look cuddly...



Two treats for Tolkien fans. For the first time his early translation of *Beowulf* is available, with extensive commentaries edited from his lectures by his son Christopher; the volume also includes 'Sellic Spell', an "attempt to reconstruct the Anglo-Saxon tale that lies behind the folk-tale element in *Beowulf*", with a translation into Old English. And Tolkien's only foray into the Arthurian mythos, first published two years ago, is now in paperback: *The Fall of Arthur*. The story only takes up 41 pages in the book; the remainder, again, is notes, commentaries and essays on the *Poem in Arthurian Tradition* and the story's links to *The Silmarillion*. All fascinating stuff – but one does wonder how many more books Christopher Tolkien can compile out of the scraps found down the back of his

father's filing cabinets.



In *Hy Brazil*, the first of a trilogy by Gerald Killingworth, the young Edward Harry sets off to Ireland as secretary to the poet Edmund Spenser in 1591 – and quickly becomes trapped in the elven realm where he is embroiled in a vicious war between opposing sides. Although it has some typical first-novel problems (the story is far too episodic, and simply stops abruptly instead of coming to a satisfactory conclusion), and Edward is an arrogant and somewhat unlikeable lead character, very difficult to sympathise with, this is an unusual and generally well written exploration of the dark side of faery.



A couple of excellent small press books with fortean connections to finish with. First, the novella *The Elder Ice* by FT writer David Hambling is a beautifully written 1920s pastiche: a mystery drawing on the Lovecraftian mythos, involving an ex-boxer working for a lawyer trying to track down the priceless treasure which the explorer Ernest Shackleton may (or may not) have found buried beneath the Antarctic, and discovering more than he bargained for.



My friend Mark McCann held the launch party for his first novel, *The Magonia Stone* as by Markus Wolfson, in a hospice a few days before he died. It's a delightful Elizabethan romp, with magic, witches and assorted gods, star-crossed lovers, plots and purple-prosed pamphlets, an investigator called Shylock Blooms and, for those who remember the very fortean *Magonia* magazine, a character called John Rimmer...

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The Wolfpack

Dir Crystal Moselle, US 2015
On UK release from 21 August

It was purely by chance that filmmaker Crystal Moselle came across the six Angulo brothers who feature in *The Wolfpack*. She saw them running through the streets of New York, followed them and asked who they were. Their story turned out to be a startling one, to say the least, and the intriguing film she's made about them rewarded her with a Sundance Grand Jury Prize for Best Documentary in 2015.

The story of the boys' lives is told by way of interviews filmed over five years, with them, their mother Susanne and father Oscar. The shocking fact the boys gradually revealed to her was that their father had kept the family indoors for years on a housing estate in New York, supposedly for their own safety, only letting them out on a very occasional basis – sometimes nine times a year, sometimes once, according to the third-youngest, Mukunda. Home-schooled by their mother Susanne, whose own movements were restricted, the boys and their sister (who wasn't interviewed as she's mentally ill) developed a highly creative world of their own to get them by in these confines. Drawings from their childhood line the walls of their too-small apartment, and props for their brilliant film re-enactments cover the whole place. Homemade cardboard guns and outfits cobbled together from discarded items and clothing brought home by dad help them stage living room versions of *Reservoir Dogs* and *Batman*. Hallowe'en provides the inspiration for all sorts

of creative costume-making.

The film isn't as depressing as you might think. There are hints that abuse has taken place (definitely in Susanne's case) in addition to the obvious psychological harm done by locking a growing family indoors for years, but the father appears to be losing his stranglehold over them. The first brother to leave the apartment (Mukunda again) does so in a Michael Myers mask and gets himself into trouble with the police; but this starts the process of the boys' entry into the world. Even their mother is taking steps to get back her life by the end of the film.

As well as encouraging their independence through the act of filming them, Moselle has also helped the boys find jobs that enable them to make use of their creative talents and love of film. In fact, I wouldn't be at all surprised if these movie buffs turn out to be responsible for at least one great film themselves over the coming years. Watch this space...

Julie McNamee

Fortean Times Verdict

FASCINATING DOCUMENTARY ABOUT ONE STRANGE FAMILY **8**

Fantastic Four

Dir Josh Trank, US 2015
On UK release from 6 August

The first 100 or so issues of *The Fantastic Four* by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby remain one of the greatest achievements – possibly the greatest – in all of comics history, a magnificent run that changed the medium forever. They had everything: cracking high-concept, SF-

inflected adventures, likeable core characters, an ever-growing sense of discovery and cosmic wonder experienced through the life of an all-too-human family and an unequalled rogues' gallery of baddies from Dr Doom to Galactus. It was all wrapped up in Kirby's astonishing, visionary artwork and kept grounded by Lee's dynamic scripts.

Perhaps it just doesn't translate to the very different medium of film – after all, Fox have had three previous stabs (the unreleased 1994 Corman cheapie and the pair of poorly received Tim Story films from 2005 and 2007) without notable success. Nevertheless, Josh Trank's latest "contemporary re-imagining" plumbs new and ridiculous depths of ineptitude, arguably beating off all other contenders for the title of Worst Comic Book Movie Ever.

It starts promisingly, with a school age Ben Grimm (Jamie Bell) befriending nerdy classmate Reed Richards (Miles Teller) and helping him out with the interdimensional teleporter he's building in his stepdad's garage. These early scenes are lifted wholesale from a pre-existent "re-imagining" – the *Ultimate Fantastic Four* series created by Mark Millar and Brian Bendis a decade ago – and once they are out of the way, the film falls apart. The story – the kids get their powers in an accident when exploring another dimension and are co-opted by the military – is shapeless and poorly structured, the characters lack development, the dialogue is witless and risibly exposition-heavy, special effects look as though they've time-travelled from the late 1990s, and the leads have zero

chemistry. It's as dull visually as it is dramatically, taking place in a dark research facility that effectively shuts out any sense of a wider world and relies on a palette of greys and browns. After a long, laborious central section in which nothing happens very slowly, the film suddenly speeds up for a rushed, off-world pay-off that doesn't deliver; it's topped by an excruciating (and probably hastily reshot) final scene shamelessly pinched from *Age of Ultron*. And what of Dr Doom? I hear you ask: suffice to say that this greatest of all comic villains appears to be made of cheap plastic and has been compared on Twitter to the infamous Monkey Jesus.

The performances are flat and charmless – Kate Mara lives up to her Invisible Woman moniker, while Reg E. Cathy's Dr Franklin Storm, with his single facial expression and gravelly monotone, sucks any residual life out of every scene he shows up in. Meanwhile, you may want to reassess your uncharitable memories of Michael Chiklis in an orange rubber suit once you've seen Toby Bell's Thing, who looks like a fiendishly painful bowel movement with googly eyes stuck on it.

Like its 1994 predecessor, this *FF* was likely motivated by Fox's desire to hang onto the film rights; sadly, though, this cynical effort has probably poisoned the well for any future adaptations of the original, and wonderful, source material.

David Sutton

Fortean Times Verdict

DULL AND JOYLESS. WHAT A REVOLVIN' DEVELOPMENT! **3**

Hemlock Grove Season 2

Prod Eli Roth, US 2015
Kaleidoscope Home Entertainment, £19.99 (DVD)

The second season of *Hemlock Grove* starts straight in with no hint of "Previously on..." Peter Rumancek (Landon Liboiron), the young gypsy werewolf, heads back to the small Pennsylvania town of Hemlock Grove, which he left at the end of season one, to try to help his mother who has been arrested. He gets a frosty response from his former friend Roman Godfrey (Bill Skarsgård), the young, arrogant vampire who has inherited his mother's company, the Godfrey Institute for Biomedical Technologies. Roman seems to hate every-

one – certainly his cold, emotionless mum Olivia (Famke Janssen) and Dr Johann Pryce (Joel de la Fuente), the secretive and ruthless oriental head of research at the company. Yes, clichés abound in *Hemlock Grove*.

There's a new central character, Miranda (Madeline Brewer), a young woman clearly on the run from something, who knocks on Roman's door after her car is deliberately smashed into – and then coincidentally meets Peter who has taken a job as a tow-truck driver. Within a couple of episodes she's slept with both of them. Then there's Peter's cousin Destiny (Tiio Horn), a gypsy con-artist but a genuine psychic who sees all sorts of nastiness ahead; and Dr Norman Godfrey (Dougray Scott), the psychiatrist brother of Olivia's late husband, and her lover, who is suing the Institute for the death of his daughter in season one.

There's lots of gore and lots of unpleasantness. Roman sometimes takes his snacks directly from someone's throat, but he also pays a man to cover his chest and back with leeches, which he peels off and swallows when they're engorged. Destiny swallows some of Peter's spit to analyse his troubling dreams, hallucinates snakes climbing up her body, then vomits up copious amounts of a black, tar-like liquid. *Hemlock Grove* majors in disgust.

It takes a while for season two to get going, but from around halfway, the story becomes coherent and powerful, and all the characters move to centre stage. Miranda forges an unlikely link with Roman's hidden-away baby daughter. Roman, disgusted with his lust for blood, determines to become human, while his centuries-old mother Olivia, recovering from an injury in the first season, now becomes terminally ill – though no less power-driven. Roman's disfigured sister Shelley returns to her family and a major change in her life. Peter's wolf nature comes through more strongly and dangerously, for him as well as for others.

It's worth persevering through the scrappy first few episodes for the more solid story of the remainder – and for the amazing and completely unexpected last few seconds, which guarantee that anyone who has made it this far will watch the final season.

David V Barrett

Fortean Times Verdict

CLICHÉD HORROR GOREFEEST IMPROVES ON SEASON ONE

7

Housebound

Dir Gerard Johnstone, New Zealand 2014
Metrodome, £8.99 DVD

Housebound is a genuine rarity: a properly funny, properly scary horror comedy. The film follows disaffected twenty-something Kylie (Morgana O'Reilly), who is sentenced to eight months house arrest after an ATM heist goes hilariously wrong. That means spending all her time in her ramshackle childhood home out in the boondocks of New Zealand with her irritating mother Miriam (Rima Te Wiata) and taciturn stepfather Graeme (Ross Harper). An electronic tag ensures she can't leave the house and regular sessions with her psychologist are intended to straighten her out.

Into this set-up comes a possible haunting. Miriam believes the property has at least one ghost, a notion that sceptical Kylie merely snorts at, saying if she ever meets a ghost she'll punch it in the face. When things take a turn for the genuinely spooky, she gets her chance. Luckily Amos (Glen-Paul Waru), the security officer who monitors her tag, is something of a ghost hunter on the side and can help the family out when things turn spooky.

As Kylie and Amos team up to explore the history of the house (it may not have been the old B&B that her mother told her it was), the film shifts up a gear. The humour is still central, but the scares are taken seriously. In fact, the characters in *Housebound* all react to what they interpret as supernatural activity as any 'real' person probably would. As the film develops, it echoes a couple of Wes Craven's better films, like *The People Under the Stairs* and the original *A Nightmare on Elm Street*.

Writer-director Gerard Johnstone has delivered a confident debut, making brilliant use of (primarily) one location and a limited cast. The performances are great, especially Rima Te Wiata, who makes the mother more endearing than irritating, and Glen-Paul Waru as the go-to-ghostbuster. The mystery is nicely built and satisfyingly paid off, while the film maintains a consistent tone while being both laugh-out-loud funny and jump-out-of-your-seat scary.

Brian J Robb

Fortean Times Verdict

SEE IT BEFORE THE PROBABLE SOULLESS AMERICAN REMAKE

8

SHORTS

THE STRANGE CASE OF DR JEKYL AND MISS OSBOURNE

Second Sight, £9.99 (DVD)



One person's soft porn is another's art film, and you'll have to be the judge of where this one lies because it revels in a bit of both. Udo Kier bathes in chemicals that turn him into a psychopathic sadist with a terrifying sexual appetite – cue uncomfortable scenes that in any other basic B-movie would be decried as brutal exploitation. Yet acclaimed Polish director Walerian Borowczyk throws in plenty of deep discussion on transcendentalism too. In some ways, this is a natural progression of Stevenson's original story: showing the two consequences of complete moral liberation – ecstasy for the Doctor and agony for his victims. In short: thoughtfully repellent! **Rev PL 6/10**

OUT OF THE DARK

Metrodome, £7.99 (DVD)



Sarah (Julia Stiles) moves her young family to Colombia to take up a senior position in her father's (a wasted Stephen Rea) paper mill, not suspecting their plantation-style mansion might be haunted. There's an interesting subtext here about colonialism and environmental issues that echoes the 1972 *Doomwatch* movie, but it's lost among the overwhelmingly familiar and boringly generic ghost stuff. Influenced by Spanish works like *The Devil's Backbone* and *The Orphanage*, *Out of the Dark* fails to offer anything new or engaging. It's all by-the-numbers, with every jump moment utterly predictable. With a little more imagination, something could have been made of that subtext, instead of focusing on the seen-it-all-before spook stuff. **BJR 4/10**

MAGIC IN THE MOONLIGHT

Warner Home Video, £9.99 (DVD), £12.99 (Blu-ray)



Slammed by the critics because it wasn't *Blue Jasmine*, *Magic in the Moonlight* sees Woody Allen returning to his obsession with magic and illusion, pitting Colin Firth's Houdini-like, debunking stage conjuror against Emma Stone's spirit medium. Containing elements of classic romantic and screwball comedy played out against lovely 1920s Riviera settings, this may be pretty undemanding fare but it's full of warmth, good humour and fortaean themes; call me old-fashioned, but I found this to be a thoroughly enjoyable bit of Allen. **DS 8/10**

DEAD SHADOWS

Bulldog Film Distribution, £7.99 (DVD)



It's the end of the world *à la française*, as a comet passes over Earth and the inhabitants of Paris start behaving very oddly indeed. You can guess the rest. This ambitious French horror marks the feature debut of director David Cholewa, who brings an impressive visual sense to this otherwise muddled and derivative take on the gory 1980s B-movie that throws everything from Romero (zombies), Cronenberg (sexual horror) and Carpenter (tentacles) at the wall (not to mention *Night of the Comet*, of course) in the hope that something will stick. **DS 5/10**

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Life after death

TO KNOW WHERE YOU'RE GOING IS TO KNOW WHERE YOU'VE BEEN

Based on the erosion process 'solid rock to boulders to pebbles to sand' our great scholars collectively agreed that to form all the sand in the world would take a thousand million years, an aeon, and confirmed "This Planet Must Be Old"

Dictionary – Sand – Created over the past half billion years.

From this point onwards everything known to the history of Mankind was constructed. Deep-time was born; sedimentation rates, dinosaurs, fossil record, evolution, plate tectonics, are all dated from this old planet perspective. Combined facts that give radioactivity there atomic readings.

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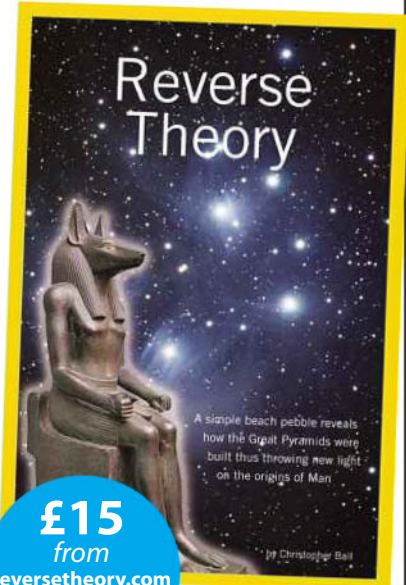
wishes to see them. A sea-basin is just like a dirty washbasin and the mechanics are fully explained in this powerful and detailed book.

Consequently the foundation for an old planet and therefore radiometric dating is wrong. Sand has come from our missing landscapes, from places like the Grand Canyon and the Great Butts of Arizona, removed when the forming limestone was still soft and mud-like.

The steep sides of these canyons and gorges tell us how the pyramids were built and knowing how the pyramids were built tells yet another story, a story quite opposed to evolution. It seems circumstances prevailed that took mankind on a course down to animal rather than the other way around.

But is RT right? Only a closer inspection of the humble beach pebble will call for a geological recount.

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by

SOONITA ROCKETT

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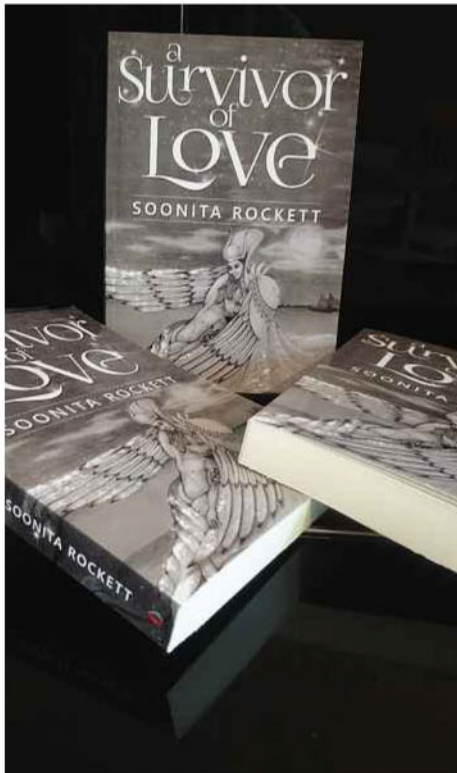
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Dear FT...

letters



Ancient treachery

The repellent and cruel child rearing practices of the Classical civilisations [Classical Corner 181: Savile Row, FT320:17] explains a lot about their history. This is because abused children often become abusive adults: cold, callous, highly sexualised, impulsive, violent, mistrustful and untrustworthy. In short, exactly like the Classical elite.

Reading histories of the times, the most striking feature is how the Roman generals, consuls, etc. would swear loyalty to the Republic or the Emperor, then betray their oath at the first opportunity. This also applies to many post Roman, mediæval and early modern societies – the elites seemed incapable of pledging their word and keeping it.

Ray Vickers

Birkby, West Yorkshire

On the other hand...

The ETH (Extraterrestrial Hypothesis) came in for a hammering in the last issue, both in The UFO Files [FT329:26-27] and David V Barrett's review of David Clarke's latest UFO book [FT329:57]. As usual, people like myself, who are open to the possibility that some UFOs could be alien spacecraft, were characterised as credulous, wedded to discredited ideas and conspiracy theorists of the worst type. The charge was also made that inconvenient evidence is either ignored or used selectively by the ETH lobby. But this surely cuts both ways. In Dr Clarke's writings, I note that he usually accepts the Government's word on UFO-related issues, for instance that the recent release of the MOD UFO files has been comprehensive and that Rudloe Manor has never been involved in top secret UFO work. But then elsewhere, he has revealed that the Government has in fact been dishonest about UFO matters, such as the formation in the 1950s of a UFO working party, which was officially denied at the time. Surely, this is an example of accepting the word of people with



Simulacra corner

One gloomy morning on his local beach at East Cowes, Isle of Wight, James Nye was cheered up by finding this smiling stone.

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@forteanimes.com – and please tell us your postal address.

a dodgy track record when it helps your case to do so.

Mr Barrett, for the purposes of balance, might have made mention of the tactic, often used by sceptics, when all else fails, of discrediting witnesses. Jesse Marcel (the Roswell intelligence officer) was subjected to this and described as a fantasist on the basis of nothing more than CV embellishment. Then, there are the sneering tones adopted by Roberts and Clarke when referring to those, like Nick Pope or Stanton Friedman, with whom they don't happen to agree. Am I the only reader who finds this rather silly?

I appreciate that Dr Clarke wants to wrap up the UFO enigma as nothing more than a social or cultural phenomenon but that would involve ignoring a great deal of "inconvenient evidence", such as UFO reports emanating from the former Soviet Union, South America, China and elsewhere. The global dimension to UFO sightings must ultimately

undermine any attempt to explain them away in purely societal and cultural terms.

And finally, many of the UFO reports that have been meticulously gathered by investigators over the past 70 years have been submitted by pilots, both military and civilian. I appreciate that Dr Clarke does not have a great deal of confidence in their reliability as witnesses but, if their faculties are really as substandard as he seems to think then I, for one, shall never set foot on an aeroplane again.

Geoff Clifton
Solihull, West Midlands

Puffball?

Regarding David Burn's photograph of a white light behind a tree [FT329:67], I think he has captured

the moment of release of spores from a species of fungus located on the far side of the tree from his viewpoint. Both the forest setting and the time of year seem indicative. As to the species, there are several candidates but the common puffball *Lycoperdon perlatum* would be a strong contender.

Andy Pearson

By email

Another Cock-Up

Re "Up on Tickle Creek" [FT329:11]: I used to teach in a school on the edge of Beddington Park, south London. One morning, the police attended after two boys reported a man exposing himself to them in the park. The names of the two witnesses: Christopher Dick and Miles Willey.

Rob Scales

London

Bronze Age Stars

I'm puzzled why the obvious links between Ötzi the Iceman [FT60:14, 62:12, 66:18, etc] and the Amesbury Archer have become "damned data" – for one thing, they came from the same small Alpine region, within five miles or so of each other. Orthodox archaeologists never link them – a case of never the twain shall meet. Is it because they would have to admit that their theories about travel patterns, sociology, culture, etc in ancient Europe were mistaken?

Bobby Zodiac

Shipston-on-Stour, Warwickshire



"I don't think that's how you play 'Pooh Sticks'."

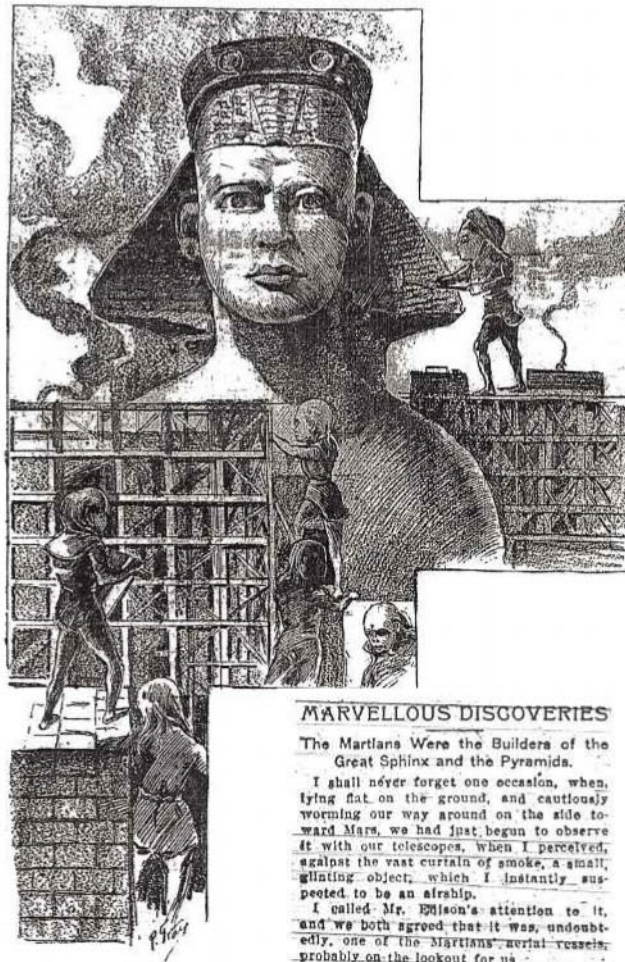
PAUL TAYLOR

The Martian Sphinx

I read with great interest the fascinating letter by Clive Davenhall [FT328:71] concerning examples of pyramids associated with Mars before the 1975 Dr Who story *The Pyramids of Mars*. He lists a fascinating example published in the *New York Herald* on 30 November 1906, which he found in a book, but which can also be found online in a readable format. ¹

Dennis Lien [FT320:69] mentioned an even earlier example connecting Mars, the Martians and ancient Egyptian culture, found in an instalment of the pro-science fiction novel *Edison's Conquest of Mars*, by Garrett P Serviss (shown at right). The series was published in instalments in the *New York Evening Journal* from 12 January to 10 February 1898, and they are currently found online. ² Its instalment of 3 February was accompanied by an illustration with the caption 'The Martians Built The Sphinx'. We read that 'The Martians were the builders of the Great Sphinx and the Pyramids'. Why? After a merciless invasion thousands of years ago, the Martians "had been astonished at the sight of the great mountains which surrounded our valley, for on Mars there are no mountains, and after they came into the Land of Sand they built there with huge blocks of stone mountains in imitation of what they had seen, and used them for purposes that our people did not

THE MARTIANS BUILT THE SPHINX.



understand. Then, too, it is said they left there at the foot of these mountains that they had made a gigantic image of the great chief who led them in their conquest of

our world."

Then it dawns upon the professor (there's almost always a professor in these old science fiction stories) and he exclaims:



"Gentlemen, gentlemen, he cried, is it that you do not understand? This Land of Sand and of a wonderful fertilizing river – what can it be? Gentlemen, it is Egypt! These mountains of rock that the Martians have erected, what are they? Gentlemen, they are the great mystery of the land of the Nile, the Pyramids. The gigantic statue of their leader that they at the foot of their artificial mountains have set up – gentlemen, what is that? It is the Sphinx!"

Edison's Conquest Of Mars was written as a sequel to the unauthorised serial publication of HG Wells story *War Of The Worlds*. Serviss's novel features an extinct race of giants on the Moon, a sole human descendant from a group of humans abducted by Martians some 9,000 years ago, and famous inventor Edison who not only invents an antigravity spaceship, but also a disintegration ray to destroy the last Martians who are planning yet another attack.

Garrett Putnam Serviss (1851-1929) was an American

Hidden poetry

There's a lovely short poem hidden in the last issue [FT329:11]:

Of all the stars in the whole sky
Visible to the naked eye
Only one is green
And nobody knows why.

Janet Wilson

By email

Spacecraft rumour

A follow-up to my letter on The Doors [FT325:70] with a fortean anecdote derived from some more random rock-related reading. The autobiography of 1970s über-producer Tony Visconti, *Bowie, Bolan*

and *the Brooklyn Boy* (Harper Collins 2007) contains the following passage in relation to the recording of David Bowie's seminal *Low* album in France in 1976:

"The album was made in a relaxed atmosphere and the company made for interesting and stimulating conversation over meals, especially long dinners. Dennis Davis [Bowie's house drummer from 1975-1980] amazed us with a story about when he was in the US Air Force. He accidentally walked through a restricted hangar and saw a crashed-up alien spacecraft. He was ordered to leave immediately and not to say a word about it. He

hadn't told anybody but us, and who would believe a bunch of musos? (p237)"

I looked online to see if I could find any corroboration for this yarn, and found a slightly different recounting in an interview about *Low* that Visconti did with *Uncut* magazine in 1999:

"*UNCUT*: There's a story about Dennis Davis recounting a tale (during *Low* sessions) of being thrown out of the army after seeing a UFO crash. What do you remember of this, if at all?"

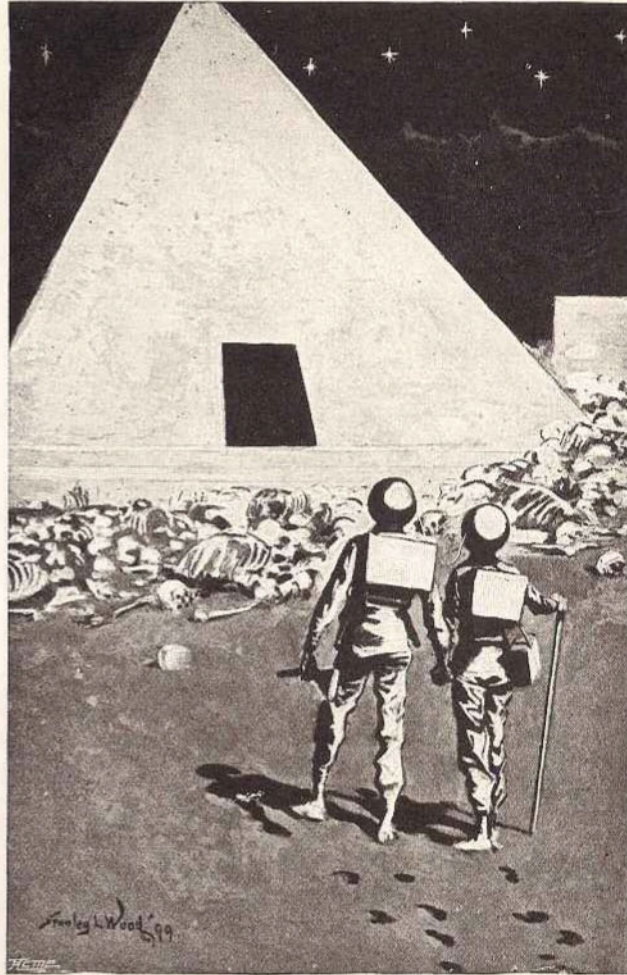
TV: Dennis was the life of the party. He could do a mime act on the closed-circuit-TV camera and have us in stitches. He claimed

he took a short cut through a highly classified hangar and saw a crashed UFO from the catwalk he was on. He stared at it for ages until a guard told him to leave because he wasn't classified to be there. He was warned not to ever mention what he saw. I don't know if this is true, but it was highly entertaining. French TV sucks, Dennis is the best we had." (archived at <http://www.bowiegoldenyears.com/low.html>)

Given Bowie's contemporary performance as *The Man Who Fell To Earth*, Davis's revelation was aptly timed. It's also a noteworthy addition to the ufological canon of 'soldiers who see crashed

astronomer and early science fiction writer. His fame spread across the ocean; a German book that speculates on the future has an entry by his hand concerning the end of the world.³ Serviss published more science fiction, such as *A Columbus Of Space*, a tale of travel by atomic-powered spaceship to Venus that is inhabited by people and monsters. Serialised in *All-Story Magazine* in 1909, it was published as a book two years later.

But there's also a pyramid on the Moon, as found in George Griffith's 'Stories of Other Worlds', serialised in *Pearson's Magazine* from January to June 1900. In the first instalment, 'A Visit To The Moon', the interplanetary explorers find a pyramid in the City of Tycho: "From the centre of this square rose a huge pyramid nearly a thousand feet in height, the sole building in the great, silent city which appeared to have been raised as a monument, or, possibly, a temple by the hands of its vanished inhabitants..."⁴ Around the towering object are strewn the bones of a race of giants who built the pyramid, having become extinct when the Moon lost its atmosphere. Our heroes wonder: "Inside the great Pyramid of the City of Tycho they might, perhaps, have found something – some stone or tablet which bore the mark of the artist's hand; elsewhere, perhaps, they might have found cities reared by older races, which might have rivalled



This fringe was composed of millions of white-bleached bones and skulls.

the creations of Egypt and Babylon, but they had neither time nor inclination to look for these..."⁵ Returning to Mars, famous

comic artist Jack Kirby drew a fascinating, sphinx-like face on Mars in his 1958 comic *The Face On Mars*, years before 'the face

on Mars' discussion.⁶ In Kirby's short story, the face is a remnant of a once highly civilised giant race that became extinct following an interplanetary war.

There are more examples to be found, of Moon pyramids and also a sphinx on Mars in the 1979 Russian science fiction story by Mikhail Puhov, 'Okno v futurozoi' (Window to the futurozoi), which was published in the magazine *Tehnika Molodezhi*, 1979, #11. The story featured a description of a Sphinx on Mars. Inside the Sphinx was a chamber with a 'window', where one could see the future. Futurozoi – a word invented by the author – means something like 'era of the future'.⁷

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- 1 *New York Herald*, 30 Nov 1909, <http://fultonhistory.com>.
- 2 <http://durendal.org/ecom/index.html>
- 3 *Die Welt In Hundert Jahren*, 1910, <https://archive.org/details/dieweltinhundert00lbbe>
- 4 George Locke ed., *Worlds Apart, An Anthology of Interplanetary Fiction*, Cornmarket reprints, 1972, p116.
- 5 *Ibid.* p122.
- 6 Kirby's comic http://podcast.sjrdesign.net/files/060_Jack-Kirby-Face-on-Mars-1958.pdf
- 7 Correspondence with Mikhail Gershtein, 17 June 2015.

Theo Paijmans

The Hague, Netherlands

UFOs in hangars' stories – or, as more sceptical ufologists such as Jacques Vallee, Peter Brookesmith and the authors of *Mirage Men* might suggest, 'soldiers who are allowed to see fake crashed UFOs in hangars as part of Cold War military intelligence psy ops'.

Dean Ballinger

Hamilton, New Zealand

Cloyed with lobster

Re: Mythchaser [FT324:43] regarding prisoners and indentured servants objecting to being fed too much lobster: although this does not involve the objections of prisoners or servants, one of the

earliest writings from colonial America regarding the low esteem of lobster due to its overabundance is the report of renegade New England colonist Thomas Morton (1579?–1647?).

In the 1620s, Morton founded at what is now Quincy, Massachusetts, a colony of rebelled indentured servants whose activities, including trading firearms to the Massachusetts, fell afoul of the Plymouth Pilgrims. Myles Standish of Plymouth Colony arrested Morton once, and John Endecott of Massachusetts Bay Colony arrested him twice; on all these occasions he was exiled from the Puritan-dominated Massachusetts

Bay region, the first two occasions back to England, the final time to Maine. In 1837, Nathaniel Hawthorne famously published a short story, "The May-Pole of Merry Mount", fictionalising the 1627 May Day revels to which Morton invited nearby Native Americans, and of which William Bradford wrote with such bitter invective in *Of Plymouth Plantation*.

During a prolonged exile back to England, Morton wrote *New English Canaan* (1637). In this work, he wrote of the natural bounty of his part of New England, of the customs of the Natives he dealt with, and of the folly of the Puritans.

In Book II, Chapter VII: 'Of the Fishes, and What Commodity They Prove', Morton writes:

"Lobsters are there infinite in store in all the parts of the land, and very excellent. The most use that I made of them in 5 years after I came there was but to bait my hook for to catch Bass, I have been so cloyed with them the first day I went ashore. This being known, they shall pass for a commodity to the inhabitants; for the Salvages [sic] will meet 500 or 1000 at a place where Lobsters come in with the tide, to eat and save dried for store, abiding in that place feasting and sporting a month or 6 weeks together."

New light on Greyfriars Bobby

I recently had occasion to purchase a cabinet card photograph depicting, according to a pencil inscription on the back, "Greyfriars Bobby above his master's grave". There is reason to believe that this card is genuine, and thus a previously unpublished portrait of Edinburgh's most famous dog [see **FT297:44-51, 298:42-48**]. Some table-stones can be seen in the background, behind the elderly, gloomy looking terrier mongrel. The card is published by Walter Greenock Patterson, Bobby's official photographer, who was responsible for several other cabinet cards featuring the celebrated cemetery dog, either alone or with members of the Trail family, keepers of the restaurant where Bobby was regularly fed. The back of one card gives Patterson's address as 4 North College Street, where the photographer resided until 1867, suggesting that he photographed the dog in that year.

It is not possible that the long-bodied, shaggy old dog in the Patterson cabinet cards is the same animal as the dapper-looking Skye terrier on the Greyfriars Bobby monument in Candlemaker Row. Two paintings of Bobby, by Robert Sanderson and John MacLeod, agree well with the dog statue, however, and since Sanderson's



work is dated 1867, it appears likely that a substitution of dogs was carried out in that year, quite possibly after the death of Bobby I. Bobby II the Skye terrier lived on until 1872, impersonating the original cemetery dog with complete success. As any visitor to Edinburgh will be aware, the cult of Saint Bobby has flourished into the present day: for every visitor to Greyfriars and its historic churchyard, there are 10 who have come merely to see Bobby's grave and to worship in front of the iconic dog monument, ignorant that it does not really portray the original canine saint from 1867, but a false prophet usurping his fame.

Dr Jan Bondeson,
Newport, Wales

Additionally, in Chapter V: Of the Beasts of the Forest, Morton notes that "[t]he Bear is a tyrant at a Lobster, and at low water will down to the rocks and grope after them with great diligence."

EJ Barnes
Massachusetts

Wrong Compound

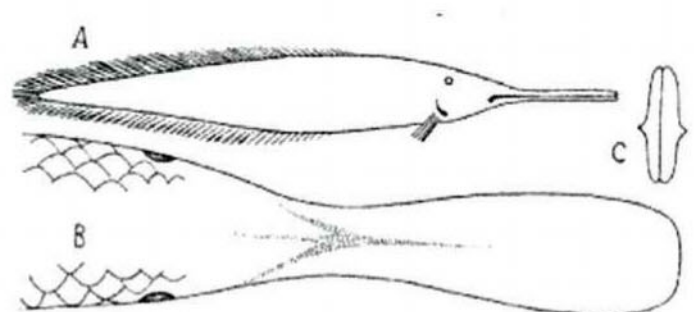
The reference to poisoning by ergot fungi [**FT329:18**] makes a common error. Ergot poisoning is due to the alkaloid ergotamine (with lower concentrations of other ergot alkaloids), not lysergic acid, which is rarely found in nature, and not particularly toxic; Hoffman did not synthesise lysergic acid – he got that by hydrolysis of ergotamine – the compound

the author means is lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD). This may seem trivial, but the error is widely reported in the tabloid press, where it is often stated that ergot poisoning from mouldy bread was due to LSD.

Andrew Munro
Co Cork

He Swallowed It

While reading Eric Chalé's *History's Greatest Deceptions and the People Who Planned Them* we learn of a cryptozoological wonder discovered in the Burnett River of northern Queensland in 1872 that had the body of a lungfish (Neoceratodus) and the duck-shaped bill of a platypus. The type specimen was cooked and served



to Carl Staiger, former director of the British Museum, for dinner. Before Staiger ate it, he drew the fish (shown above) and sent the drawing to the Linnæan Society in Sydney who gave it the name *Ompax spatuloides*. Three decades later naturalists re-examined Staiger's drawing and realised the

type specimen had been assembled from parts of other animals – the head of a lungfish, the body of a mullet, the tail of an eel and the bill of a platypus. Staiger had not only been taken in by the hoax but swallowed it!

Greg May
Orlando, Florida

First-hand accounts from *Fortean Times* readers and posters at forum.forteanimes.com

Rune-casting magpie

On Midsummer's Eve I felt like getting down with the faery folk and made my bed at the bottom of the garden. I had been reading *Mythologies* by Levi-Strauss and Frazier's *The Golden Bough*, which had inebriated me a little. I hung a magpie feather and a leaf, which fell on my chest the day before, from a branch above my sleeping bag. Some silver half-crowns were left for the pixies and I laid out some runes on a brick (right).

The night passed uneventfully; I awoke at dawn with around 25 slugs for company. My shock came when I inspected the runes. They had been recast! The wind hadn't moved them – there was only a light breeze. A fox? No, not dextrous enough. Then I remembered the cackling noise just before waking... a magpie. The reading he left me was remarkably accurate.

Do any readers have tales of bird divination, tarot-reading tortoises or rune-casting rodents?

Paul Tierney

Marsh, West Yorkshire

Kitchen crow

When I was digging the garden I noticed a crow watching me. I threw him a worm and he caught it and immediately dropped it, pulled himself up to his full height and flapped his wings and crowed, then picked up the worm again and ate it. This same procedure happened every time I threw him a worm. I later walked to our local shops and noticed the crow following me along the rooftops of the houses. He followed me to the shops and back again. Every day the crow was there sitting on my doorstep and every time I gave him something to eat he dropped it, did the flapping routine then picked it up and ate it.

He then began coming in through the kitchen door and sitting on the back of a chair. He would sleep in the kitchen every night and then follow me wherever I went. One day he brought me a bottle top, then another and another until I had a whole collection. He continued to sleep in our kitchen until one day when I was working in the garden I heard a shriek – a cat had grabbed him. I was so upset. He managed to fly away but he never came back. So for about three months I had a pet crow, but I think he must have felt betrayed because I didn't protect him.

Sandra Johnson

Mouldsworth, Chester

Extra flapjack

Regarding covid gifts [FT329:22-23]: I took a day off work on 29 June to do some serious gardening and took a break at 11am for a flapjack and a cup of coffee. During this time I noticed an unusually large crow sitting on top of the tall fir tree half way down the garden. I began a calling conversation with the crow for about five minutes, he/she replied, and I thought nothing of it.

I went out at lunchtime, and when I returned sitting in the middle of the patio was a perfectly intact



chunk of flapjack and a bone (shown below). I had swept the patio so it was completely clear of debris. Both neighbours were out and I soon realised that if the flapjack had been thrown any distance it would have shattered. I have not been feeding the crows, but often try and engage them in conversation. I have no idea how the flapjack or bone arrived on the patio other than being brought in by air. It is curious that I had eaten the same type of cake earlier that morning.

Andrew Spencer

Erdington, Birmingham

Deep freeze mystery

I went from London as a 12-year-old to live in Cornwall. The winters had some very cold spells. One very cold morning, in the winter of either 1953, 1954 or 1955, I walked to a pool to inspect the ice, which was about a quarter to half an inch [6-12mm] thick. To my great surprise, I saw dozens of coots and moorhens frozen into the ice, in the random positions you would have expected on open water. They seemed to have been instantly frozen in the postures they assumed going about their normal business. I have mentioned this to several people whom I thought could give me an explanation, but no one could. I don't think many of them believed me, and I don't blame them. The sight of those birds frozen into the ice is as clear in my mind today as it was all

those years ago. The magazine *Birds* could find no record of such a phenomenon, although it did know of rare reports of single swans frozen into ice.

Malcolm Christophers

East Yorkshire

A taste for rubber

Back in 1980 or 1981 I had a girlfriend who lived in a cottage in the woods outside Oslo. This cottage was infested with ants, but she was reluctant to do anything to get rid of them. One morning after spending the night together, we found ants swarming around my discarded rubbers on the floor. The ants were behaving in a bizarre fashion, standing absolutely still and waving their heads about in a random way. On closer inspection, we found that they had chewed the condoms to tatters. There was obviously some kind of intoxicating agent in the lubricant or the material itself. We researched the matter further, catching sober ants and putting them in jars together with condoms. The ants would invariably make a beeline for the rubbers, and chew on them until they fell into a head-waving stupor. The high would last for some time (I forget how long), until the effect wore off and they resumed normal behaviour. As far as I remember, they never had more than one go at it. Probably they got a hangover and swore off rubbers for the rest of their lives.

Nils Erik Grande

Oslo, Norway



FORTEAN TRAVELLER



a local battle in the 19th century.

The region's volcanic origins create an eerie landscape. The beautiful valley of the *calanchi* (eroded clay cliffs) is really worth a visit for its spectacular formations, but just beside Bagnoregio, although separated from it by a large, surrounding chasm, is the village of Civita. Local legends blame the chasm on a major earthquake during the early Middle Ages, but historians have documented a more gradual process between the 14th and 15th centuries when an increasing frequency of landslides, floods and collapses gradually eroded the village. Civita is almost inaccessible to modern means of transportation; you have to cross, slowly, along a steep and narrow bridge 900ft (274m) long, which seems endless. On some misty mornings, the little group of surviving houses atop Civita seems to float, surreally, in the fog. One has the impression that it is truly a gateway into a supernatural world. At night, the silence is palpable.

Bagnoregio is the birthplace of several saints – prominently the Franciscan St Bonaventure (1221-1274) – and houses two museums. One, named after a famous Italian driver of the 1930s, Piero Taruffi, is devoted to antique cars and ‘microcars’ since WWII. A visit here could be useful to ground yourself in the feel of the times, and as a prelude to the main fortean attraction: Giancarlo D’Alessandro’s own ‘UFO Museum’ (visits, by appointment only; email at ascaris@tin.it).

D’Alessandro was, as he told me, inspired by the Nobel Prize-winning Turkish author Orhan Pamuk when he recreated the ‘Museum of Innocence’ from Pamuk’s novel of the same title. Where Pamuk displays a collection that evokes the everyday life and culture of Istanbul during the period in which the novel is set, D’Alessandro wanted to preserve the culture of ufology. Since the late 1970s, when he began to investigate UFOs, Giancarlo has collected anything UFO-related that he’s come across. You name it, he has it – enough to fill a museum.

The objects on show bear witness to the degree of penetration achieved by the alien meme in many different (and sometimes unexpected)

spheres. However, this ‘UFO Museum’ is completely different from others of its kind around the world. You won’t see all those faked photographs, models or dioramas customary elsewhere. Instead, hundreds of big and small items overflow the cabinets of the main hall; from china designs to inflatable

102. Tuscany’s UFO Museum

LUIS R GONZÁLEZ finds the Italian region of Tuscia is home to a many fortean attractions – most notably an impressive collection of UFO-related material.

To the northwest of Rome, about an hour’s drive along bumpy roads, is Tuscia, the Italian region that comprises the territories under Etruscan influence before the Roman conquest. Its most famous fortean feature is the *Parco dei Mostri* (Monster Park), located in a wood in a valley beneath the castle of Orsini, at Bomarzo, and a major tourist attraction since its restoration in the 1970s. Its many monstrous statues, larger-than-life, appear to be unconnected to any rational plan – as one inscription suggests: “*Sol per sfogare il Core*” (“Just to set the heart free”).

But the Monster Park is not the area’s only fortean attraction. My search for a ufological treasure had brought me to Bagnoregio, a little town surrounded by many archaeological sites, mostly Etruscan chamber tombs dug in the cliffs. Today, it is a lively centre for agriculture, commerce and light industry with a population of about 4,000. Its name is derived from the sulphurous and ferruginous hot springs created by the continual volcanic activity in the area.

My guide was Giancarlo D’Alessandro, a retired Air Force medical colonel, who first took me to the nearby town of Montefiascone. Famous as a Papal possession for centuries, the Pope’s old summer residence at the top of the hill provides a wonderful view of the surroundings, especially Lake Bolsena, Italy’s largest volcanic crater lake. According to a local contactee group, there is a ‘star gate’ located on Bisentina, one of the lake’s islands. Although the view during my visit was suggestive – a thunderous cloud mantle full of lightning hovered over the lake – I cannot vouch for the existence of this mysterious ‘artefact’.



He began to investigate UFOs in the late 1970s

At Bagnoregio, I was surprised to find a small black pyramid, about 35ft (11m) tall, in the middle of a square, surrounded by clipped gardens. No extraterrestrial connection this time, it was merely an ossuary erected to honour Garibaldi’s followers, decimated in

ABOVE: Parco dei Mostri, Bomarzo.

BELOW: A flying saucer money bank, US 1950s.





ABOVE LEFT: Books and objects on display in the museum. **ABOVE RIGHT:** The first time the term “dischi volanti” (flying saucers) figured on the cover of an Italian comic was in June 1950, when Onofrio Bramante created *Qual'è il mistero dei dischi volanti?* (What is the mystery of flying saucers?). The plot includes an alien corpse retrieved from a crashed UFO in Mexico and sent to the USA for autopsy (below). There is also the abduction of a pilot and a visit to a ‘mother-ship’. **BOTTOM:** An Italian Tombola game from the 1950s.

sex dolls, every imaginable gadget has its alien version. From the late 1990s onwards, alien merchandising has become universal, especially the iconic ‘Grey’ face. But the museum also showcases plenty of earlier material, some from the very beginning of the modern ‘flying saucer’ craze in 1947. In those days, another icon was Adamski’s saucer with its three hemispheres underneath. Foodstuffs, sweets, games, toys, radios and clocks, perfumes and cosmetics, designer objects and fashion accessories, even car deodorants: there is no commercial area that has not exploited the notion of the UFO.

A side room preserves printed and audio material. Here, you can find every Italian UFO book ever published (including translations), plus a substantial collection of magazines and comics. There are also many singles and LPs with UFO songs, which one day will be available for listening.

There is also a place for posters from ufo-themed movies, and in one corner is a small collection of Mexican UFO *ex-votos* and other examples of contactee art.

On the first floor, Giancarlo keeps the more authentic ufological material: his own archives of investigations, UFO bulletins, newspaper clippings and magazine articles, as well as a good collection of SF novels and comics. Due to lack of space, one of his main attractions is kept at his home: what is probably the world’s best collection of UFO-themed stamps, fully catalogued on his own web page (www.philcat.it). He is now working to translate it into English. Besides any stamp even only slightly related to UFOs, the collection also includes coins, postcards, phonecards, and so on. Never



satisfied, Giancarlo is presently cataloguing all kinds of UFO group logos and stationery.

Adjacent to the exhibit hall, is a fully-equipped apartment for visitors... but beware! On one of the nights I spent there, I awoke with a sudden, sharp pain in my left calf. No probe mark was visible but I walked awkwardly for a couple of days afterwards. I don’t recall anything, but continue to refuse any hypnosis, just in case.

Satisfied that my pilgrimage was complete, I thanked D’Alessandro and his wife for their kind hospitality. Then, a final revelation opened a new challenge. Giancarlo confessed that his was not the best collection of UFO-related cultural

material in private hands. To visit this, I should have to travel further north, to Torino... but that’s another story.

To close this fortean circle, I should mention that in 2000 D’Alessandro produced *Enthusiasmòs*, a 28-minute film directed by his wife Carla Vittoria Rossi and based on the idea that Dante’s ‘Inferno’, in his 14th century *Divine Comedy*, might be the map of a real place... the Bomarzo gardens I mentioned at the beginning of this piece.

Yes, they were allegedly created much later, during the 16th century... but who knows?



LUIS R GONZÁLEZ is a veteran Spanish ufologist who enjoys collecting stamps on fortean themes and cataloguing obscure comics pertinent to UFOmania.

POLICE THE ILLUSTRATED NEWS

LAW COURTS AND WEEKLY RECORD

JAN BONDESON presents more stories from the "worst newspaper in England" – the *Illustrated Police News*.

41. PAUL TETZEL, THE CHAMPION BUTCHER

The earliest butchery competition considered newsworthy by the national press was held at the Standard Theatre, Gateshead, in April 1898. The London champion butcher Edward Harper had been challenged by the Gateshead butcher Matthew Ramsey, known as the winner of a local beef-dressing competition the previous year. Each man had to skin and dress two large, fat bullocks, watched by a referee and a time-keeper. A special train had been run from London, full of cattle dealers, drovers and butchers keen to have a few pints of strong Northern bitter and a bet on London champion Harper.

The four bullocks were duly slaughtered, and the two butchers went to work, cheered on by a large and uproarious audience. Harper was a fine figure of a man, 25 years old and very strong and sturdy; Matthew Ramsey was smaller and also incapacitated by blood poisoning to one hand. The London butcher was by far the superior performer: he finished his two bullocks in 21 minutes and ten seconds, whereas the Gateshead man took 26 minutes and seven seconds. There was much cheering as the result was announced, and the jolly London butchers went for another extended pub crawl, before boarding another special train that was to return them to the Metropolis.

In June 1898, Harper was challenged by the champion butcher of America, Paul Tetzel, a native of Chicago. Another butchery competition was arranged at the Wood Green Athletic Grounds, for £200 a side. The stipulations were the same as those for the Gateshead match, and thousands of pounds were bet on the result. The attendance exceeded all precedents, and several men were doing a good trade selling silk handkerchief trophies of the event. The Old Butchers' Band of the Metropolitan Cattle Market were in attendance, playing marrow-bones and cleavers to great acclaim. When the four fat bullocks were slaughtered, there was a roar of anticipation as the two rival butchers went to work.

Edward Harper looked like a proper butcher, large and stout, and with a red, perspiring face.

In contrast, Paul Tetzel was a thin, dapper-looking cove, whose waist-belt would not have reached round half of his opponent's well-nourished bulk. But still, Tetzel had the head off his first bullock well before his opponent, and he proceeded to skin both beasts with extreme rapidity. In the end, Tetzel had his two carcasses ready for the market in 18 minutes and 32 seconds, whereas Harper took just over 20 minutes. Paul Tetzel was the new undisputed champion butcher of the world.

The working men's newspapers of the time reported on the Wood Green butchery competition with the utmost enthusiasm. 'International Beef-Dressing Competition for £200 a Side and the Championship!' exclaimed the *IPN*. At least 4,000 people had watched this bloodbath, which had "aroused a tremendous amount of excitement throughout the butchery trade in England." Trade newspapers like the *Butcher's Advocate* were also enthusiastic about the Wood Green encounter, and the prospect of future butchery competitions. But squeamish, middle-class people objected to

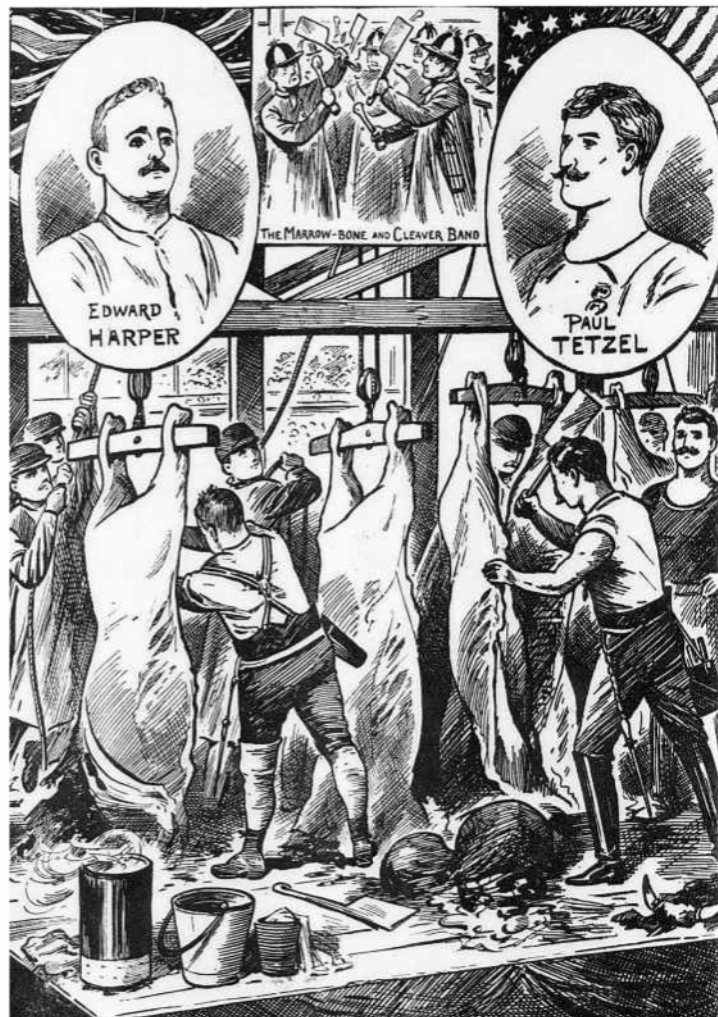
such a sanguinary display being enacted in front of a large, paying audience. When there was a question in Parliament as to whether it was really appropriate for butchery to be performed in a place of public amusement, the Home Secretary, Sir Matthew White Ridley, gave a rather vague answer. Although the Wood Green track had given an assurance that butchery contests would not be allowed there in the future, the butchery trade might well find alternate venues for their 'beef-dressing competitions'.

Paul Tetzel enjoyed his newfound fame among the London butchers. Showing no urgency to return to his native land, he settled down at a butcher's shop in Greenwich. The 1901 Census finds him and his family – his wife Amelia, son George and daughter Caroline – in a three-story Victorian terraced house at No 59 Endwell Road. He had been born in Germany in 1867, but his parents had brought him to New York in 1881. Tetzel called himself the Champion Butcher of the World, and was always ready to defend his title. In 1901, he

was challenged by J Marsh, the Champion Sheep-dresser of Manchester, to a contest at the Salford Football Club for a stake of £50 a side. The bet was that Tetzel could not dress a bullock in less time than his local rival would dress a sheep. Again, several thousand spectators were present, many of them butchers from Manchester or the Midlands. Councillor Hornby of Manchester acted as judge, and Mr Mills of Birkenhead as time-keeper. Once more, Tetzel was the winner, taking just three minutes and 16 seconds to get his bullock ready for market, whereas Marsh took more than half a minute longer to dress his sheep.

In 1903, Tetzel outclassed all local competitors at a butchery contest in Glasgow. A few years later, the Champion Butcher performed at Gilbert's Circus in Sherwood Street, Nottingham, to general acclaim. The 1910 US Census finds Paul Tetzel at 19 Manhattan Ward, New York, with his wife and three children.

According to an Internet source, Tetzel remained active much longer than that, showing off his skills at fairs and markets on both sides of the Atlantic. His year of death is not known, but since his son George was listed in the 1940 US Census, with four children alive, the Champion Butcher may well have living descendants today.



ABOVE: The Wood Green butchery competition, from the *IPN*, 25 June 1898.

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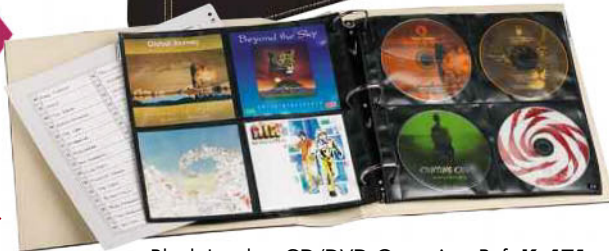
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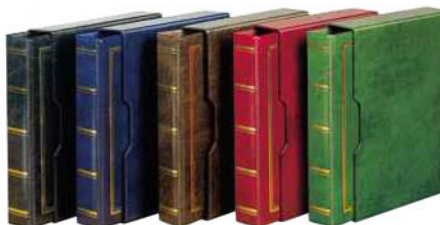
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Why Fortean?



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Besides being a journal of record, FT is also a forum for the discussion of observations and ideas, however absurd or unpopular, and maintains a position of benevolent scepticism towards both the orthodox and unorthodox.

FT toes no party line.

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PHOOEY

BUT HER MANY FOLLOWERS SWORE THAT THEY HAD SEEN HER WORK MIRACLES! SHE ONCE LEVITATED IN A DRAWING ROOM TO LIGHT HER CIGARETTE!

GASPATION!

MA FOIS! ET POUR UN CLOP...

INCROYABLE!

AT SÉANCES, SHE WOULD PRODUCE THE SOUND OF RAPPING...

YO YOU MUTHAS—LISTEN TO ME! TELL YOU 'BOUT A BITCH CALLED BLA-VATS-KEE!

OH, COME ON! ON TOP OF THE MARX GAG? IT'S A BIT TOO MUCH!!

AND, ON A TRIP TO INDIA, SHE MANIFESTED A SHOWER OF ROSES!

BUT THERE WAS NOTHING ETHEREAL ABOUT HPB! SHE SMOKED A POUND OF ROUGH SHAG TOBACCO EVERY DAY!

AND SHE LOVED EGGS FRIED IN BUTTER!

AS A RESULT, SHE GREW MASSIVELY OBESE...

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FORTEAN TIMES 332

ON SALE 17 SEPT 2015

STRANGE DEATHS

UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL



On 28-29 June, Daesh (aka ISIS) decapitated two women in eastern Syria, the first time the Wahhabi death cult has beheaded female civilians. One was murdered with her husband in the city of Deir Ezzor; the other, also with her husband, in al-Mayadin to the southeast. All four were accused of “sorcery”, or using “magic for medicine”. In their enthusiasm to emulate mediæval barbarity, we expect Daesh’s vile faux-pious bandits to start sticking their victims’ heads on spikes atop city walls – with photos online.

Daesh has previously released images of several executions in Syria and Iraq of street performers and others found guilty of performing “black magic”. Optical illusions and other basic magic tricks are considered a form of sorcery, an art condemned as questioning the existence of Allah. In May, Daesh’s Libyan franchise released images of a “sorcerer”, wearing a Guantanamo-style orange boiler suit, being beheaded in the province of Barqa. One of the images released as evidence of his guilt included a manuscript, covered in handwritten Arabic, alleged to be some sort of spell. Daesh also released photos of a magician being decapitated in the Iraqi province of Salahuddin. A close-up image of the man’s body shows a broken bag full of prayer beads beside him. Daesh claim the beads are trinkets and charms, a form of forbidden black magic. *Al Jazeera, dailymail.co.uk, 30 June; [R] 1 July 2015.*

Stephen Whinfrey, 50, was suffocated to death after getting stuck headfirst in a rabbit hole at a beauty spot on New Year’s Day. A walker discovered him at 4pm on 2 January with just his legs and torso sticking out of the ground at Squirrel Wood Scout Camp, near Burghwalis, Doncaster. One hand was also visible, wedged firmly between his thighs. He was at a 45-degree angle, curved around the deep hole. There were scratch marks on the ground. The unemployed father-of-two, a former miner, had been a ‘rabbiting’ enthusiast most of his life. He had taken off his Wellington boots and jacket, which were found next to the hole along with two bags, one containing ferrets, a spade, knives and a net. A dead rabbit and a fresh mound of soil was next to the hole while his dog was tied to a nearby tree. *D.Express, 3 June 2015.*

Following mysterious deaths in a family in Muzarabani, Zimbabwe, five kinsmen asked their priest, Zvidzai Muchengeti, for help to cleanse their home of evil spirits. Self-styled prophet Shamiso Kanyama was invited to conduct the cleansing ceremony. He told the family he had to be buried alive to summon more healing powers. He helped dig the pit and then prayed before jumping inside. While lying face down, he ordered the family members to cover him with soil. As they did so, Joseph Taderera asked them to stop, but Kanyama urged them to continue, saying that he would later come out alive. When he failed to do so, the soil was removed and he was

found to be dead. Five members of the family were arrested and charged with murder. *InformationNG, 15 June 2015.*

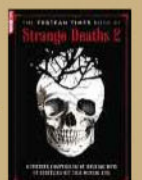
On 28 August 2014, Nathan Greenway, a 33-year-old gardener, was found by his wife collapsed on their living room floor in Aldershot, Hampshire. He was drenched in sweat, scratching the lacerations on his hands, and vomiting. He told her he felt “as weak as a kitten”. He was rushed to hospital but died of multiple organ failure on 7 September. He had been working in the grounds of Millcourt House near Alton, and it is thought that he brushed past a patch of *Aconitum napellus* – known variously as devil’s helmet, wolfsbane or monkshood – without wearing gloves. The plant’s toxicity is well known but its roots are its most poisonous part and can kill if ingested. Though the ornamental plant is quite common in gardens, doctors said Greenway’s death was “extremely rare” and they could not be completely certain what caused it. The coroner recorded an open verdict. *BBC News, 7 Nov 2014; D.Mail, 25 June 2015.*

Julie McCabe, 39, an estate agent from Cowling, North Yorkshire, died in October 2011 after suffering a severe allergic reaction caused by L’Oreal hair dye. She was rinsing it out when she “screamed loudly” and gasped at her husband: “I’m struggling to breathe, I think I’m going to die.” The anaphylactic reaction caused her to fall into a coma and she died 13 months later in hospital without regaining consciousness. The coroner at the inquest in Skipton, North Yorkshire, in February 2015 said he believed it was only the second death in the UK resulting from hair colourant. The cause of death was given as cardiorespiratory arrest as a result of severe brain damage. *D.Mail, 18 Feb 2015.*

Jayln (or Jaylon) Rippy, a five-year-old Florida girl riding in her family’s boat on 2 July, died after a sturgeon leaped from the Suwannee River near Fanning Springs and struck her. Her mother Tanya, 31, and nine-year-old brother Trevor suffered serious injuries and were taken to a Gainesville hospital. Low water levels in the river meant sturgeon were jumping more frequently than in recent years. Four people have been injured by jumping sturgeon in 2015, and this is the first fatality from a sturgeon strike on the Suwannee River. The fish are known for leaping more than 7ft (2m) above the water. They can grow up to 8ft (2.4m) long and weigh up to 200lb (90kg). *[AP] 4 July; independent.co.uk, 5 July; 10News (Tampa Bay, FL), 6 July 2015.*

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