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THE WORLD OF STRANGE PHENOMENA

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NOSFERATU: THE VAMPIRE AND THE OCCULTIST

THE SECRET HISTORY
BEHIND THE MAKING
OF A HORROR CLASSIC

FANGTASTIC VOYAGE

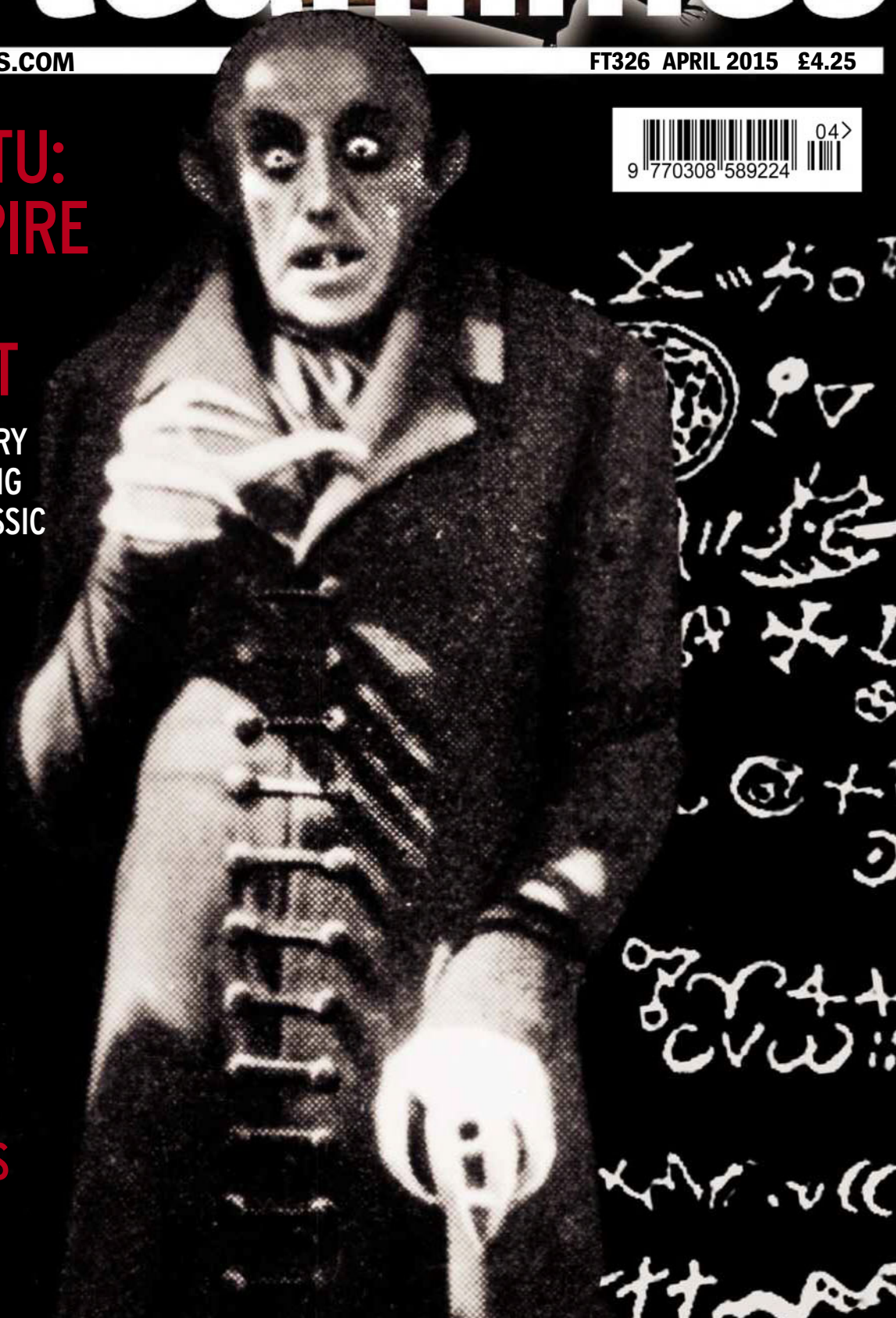
TRAVELLERS' TALES
FROM TRANSYLVANIA

HANGING AROUND

THE WEIRD WORLD OF
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RUN BY ALIENS?



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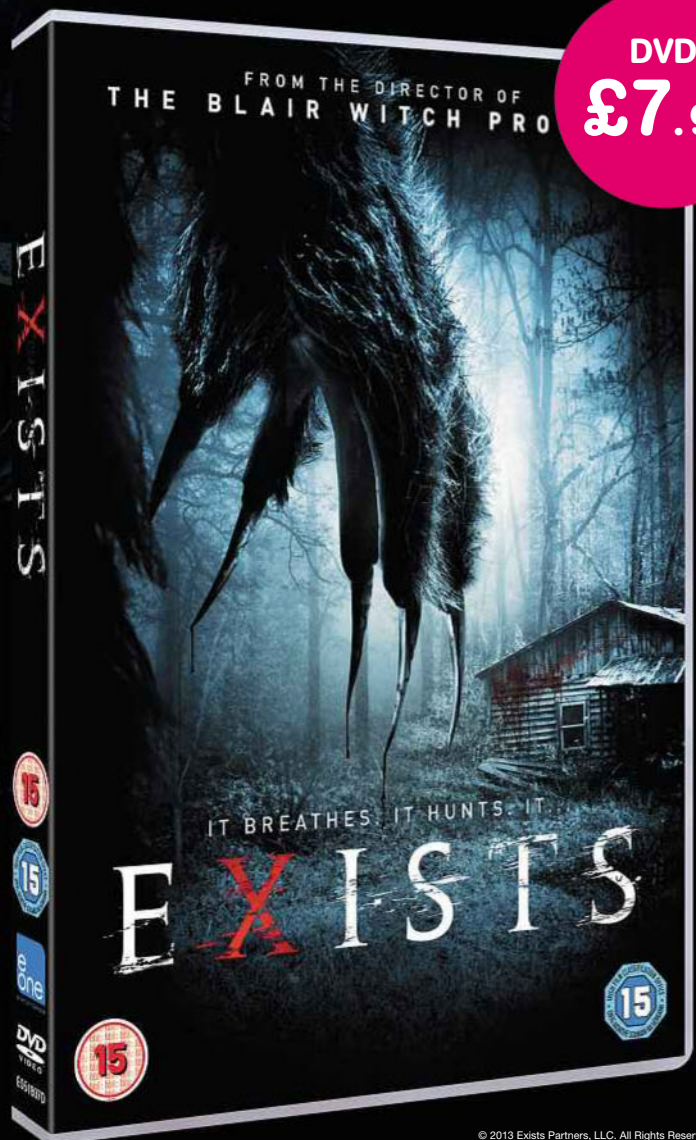


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strange days

Buried 'UFO' found in Siberia, kamikaze canines, mystery egg peltings, miraculous disembodied voice, testicle thefts and other organ oddities, unknown deity dug up, new Roswell photos, Hampton Court ghosts – plus much more.

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PETER MACDARMID / GETTY IMAGES

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ADRIAN DENNIS / AP / GETTY IMAGES

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editorial

The Mystery of the Missing Issue

SUBSCRIPTION SNAFU

Subscribers are the lifeblood of *Fortean Times*, and all of us who work to bring you the magazine - that goes for the editorial team and the hardworking subs team at Dennis Publishing - care very much about that. It's no exaggeration to say that we wouldn't be here without all of you and your vital, long-term support for the mag over the years.

But, every now and then, things go wrong - and with our February issue (*FT324*) things went very wrong indeed. Due to a mix-up at the mailing house, an old subscription list was used, meaning that a good many current subscribers didn't receive their copies of issue 324, while a number of lucky lapsed subscribers had an unexpected windfall when the errant issue plopped through their letterboxes unannounced.

We only became aware of the situation when readers took to email, Facebook and Twitter wondering what had happened to the February edition. Dennis Publishing tried to let people know what had happened and source spare copies of the issue; meanwhile, we had a full-scale panic on our hands as loyal subscribers feared a never-to-be-filled gap in their prized *FT* collections. Thanks to the wonders of social media, it wasn't long before readers in the US were asking where their copies of *FT324* had got to - forgetting that shipping issues to the States means they *always* get them a month after UK readers and with a *cover date of a month later*. (We'd like to thank the reader from Texas who was so concerned that he sent us virtually daily updates on his 'missing' issue until it finally arrived!)

In the end, the only solution was to reprint copies of *FT324* and send them out to all who didn't receive their subscription copies, which Dennis Publishing did as soon as the scale of the problem became clear. As we go to press, we hope that all subscribers have now received the missing issue, that they have enjoyed reading it and that it now nestles happily with the rest of their *FT*s.

This really does appear to have been a one-off - we've never, in all our years, experienced a major glitch of this sort (and we hope never to again). Yes, human error and quirks of the postal system can mean that your subs copies can go astray from time to time, and

if this should ever happen, then please let the subscription people know about it as soon as possible by emailing forteanimes@servicehelpline.co.uk or phoning 01795 592909.

Thanks to one and all for their patience during this difficult and frustrating time - and if there's anyone out there who is *still* missing a copy of February's issue, then please use the email/phone number above to report it. And if you're one of those people who unsubscribed in a fit of righteous (and understandable) indignation, then do think about coming back

to the fold. Once again, we really wouldn't be here without you and we're grateful for your continued support.

VAMPIRES AND VOTES

Back to the issue you (hopefully) hold in your hands, and a typically varied feast of *fortean*a, from scientific reconstructions of the crucifixion (it's Easter, after all) to the history of iconoclasm in the ancient Middle East; plus testicle thefts, creepy dolls, miraculous rescues and a Devil Man scare in old New Orleans.

Also in this issue - as the cover suggests - we tackle the themes of

vampirism and British politics. Some would say that they are closely linked; after all, it isn't just one-time Tory leader Michael Howard who has 'something of the night about him' or only Peter Mandelson who is a 'Master of the Dark Arts'. As election fever mounts, read on to find out what Britain's maddest MPs have got planned for us in the first of a new series about the world's strangest statesmen and most peculiar politicians. Plus: discover the secret history of horror classic *Nosferatu*, and get some holiday tips from our resident Reverend as he travels to Transylvania.



"OH, COME ON! IT'S AN ANTELOPE"

MARTIN ROSS

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DAVID R SUTTON

Bob Rickard
BOB RICKARD

Paul Sieveking
PAUL SIEVEKING

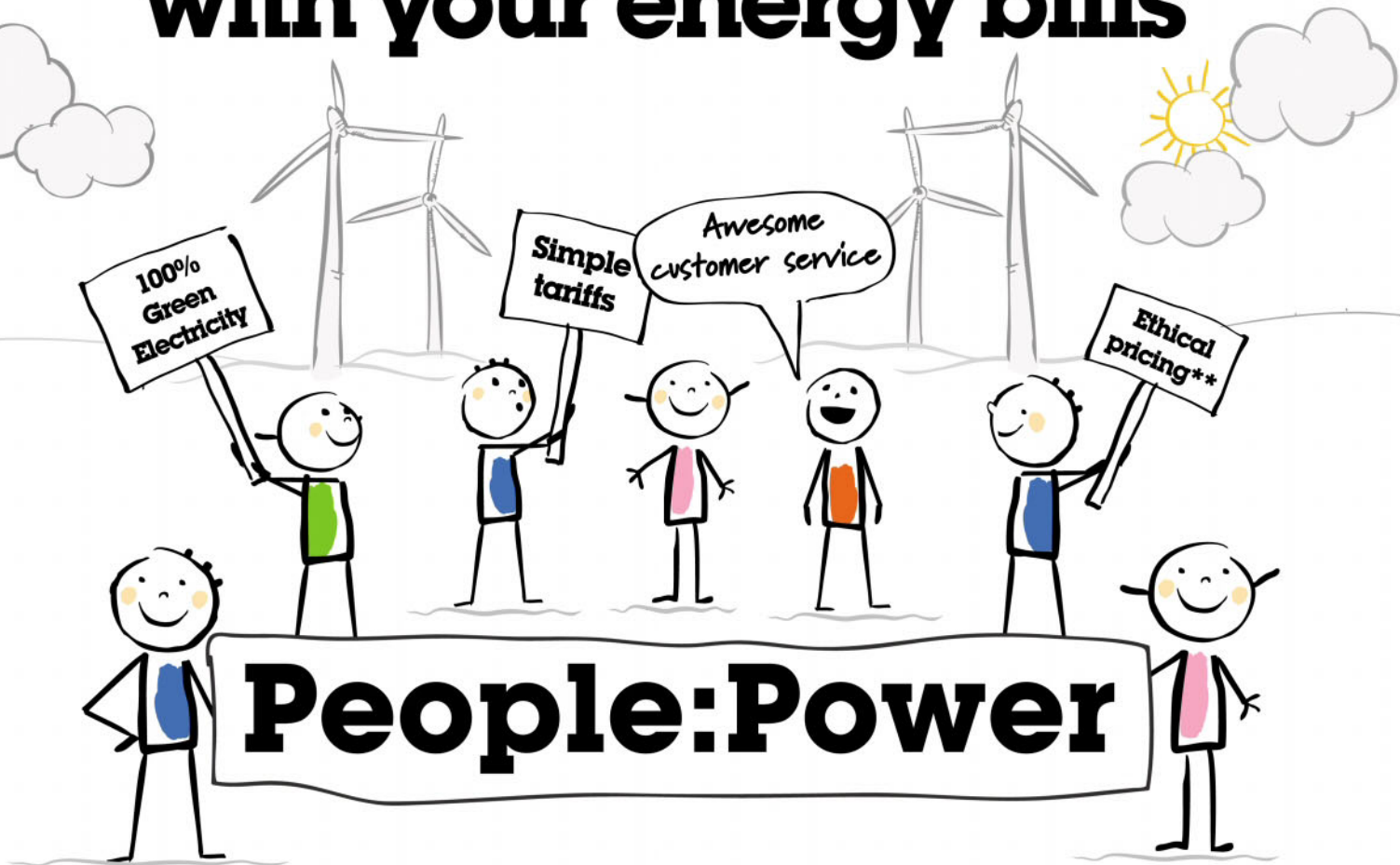


Why fortean?

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

SEE PAGE 78

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strangedays

Buried Siberian 'UFO'

Strange find in the Kuznetsk Basin and Putin's alien advisors revealed

This bizarre flying saucer-shaped object was dug up by a coal mining company in the Kuznetsk Basin, Siberia. Archaeologists are mystified, while unspecified "sky watchers" think it fell from space. It is almost perfectly circular, with a diameter of around 4ft (1.2m) and weighing roughly 440lb (200kg). "I have to say it wasn't hard to see as it was really distinctive and large," said Boris Glazkov, 40, who found the object. "I've never seen anything like it. It's obviously man-made." His colleague, Arthur Presnyakov, 38, said: "There were actually two similar objects, but the first one broke as it was being pulled out of the ground by the excavator bucket. We thought we saw something sure, because it broke into pieces, but then when the second one appeared we stopped work and carefully removed it from the bucket."

The Kuzbassrazrezugol mining company, which owns the object, said it had been pulled out of the ground at a depth of around 130ft (40m). Given that it was embedded so deep underground, it could be older than mammoth bones, which have been discovered in the area at a depth of 82ft (25m). Sceptics say it's probably a mundane geological phenomenon called a concretion – sedimentary layers that have become cemented together – though it's remarkably symmetrical and very heavy for its size. *mirror.co.uk*, 6 Feb 2015.

- The Gang of Fort is reminded of a strange find in an open cast coal mine at Leigh Creek, South Australia, back in 1977: three large perfectly circular discs, 4ft 7in (1.4m) in diameter, 18in (46cm) high at the centre. One of them was broken. The reports



ABOVE: The flying saucer-shaped object dug up by miners in the Kuznetsk Basin. BELOW: President Putin, presumably receiving alien advice through his headset.

failed to give their weight. At first they were thought to be fossil seashells, but marine expert Michael Lawrie said: "I've never seen anything like these objects. They appear to be rusty on the outer casing and are believed to be millions of years old. One thing is certain – they are not fossilised shells." According to Shirley Kemp of the Australian UFO Research Society, aboriginal folklore related that a great craft that came from the heavens many years ago and landed in the area. Then the men on board lit a huge fire to signal their arrival [FT26:4-5]. Do any antipodean FT readers know any more about this intriguing story?

- Since the 1980s, hundreds of enigmatic metal spheres have been found in mines in western Transvaal. South Africa, extracted from Precambrian strata dating back 2.8 million years. Looking like modern cricket balls complete with

'seams' (three parallel encircling grooves) they are exceedingly hard and do not seem to be natural formations. (*Bob Rickard & John Michell: The Rough Guide to Unexplained Phenomena, 2007, p.214*)

ALIENS BEHIND PUTIN?

Simon Parkes, 53, a councillor representing Stakesby ward on Whitby Town Council in North Yorkshire, recently gave a talk in Wallsend, North Tyneside, in which he declared President Putin of Russia was being advised by an alien race called the Nordics, and that hostilities in Ukraine have been exacerbated by extraterrestrial intervention. "Putin had been part of a group advised by reptiles," said the Labour councillor. "Nordics made a counter offer

to Putin. The technology the Nordics are giving to Putin is on a par with America. The Nordics have told Putin he no longer has to toe the American line, hence his resistance."

Councillor Parkes, who claims to have been visited by extraterrestrials ever since being inside his mother's womb, also told the 30-strong audience that, in the eyes of universal law, his legal father is a reptile. "It's very brave of Simon," said audience member Tony Richardson, 49, a self-employed artist from Durham, who was brought up in a haunted house. "He has opened himself up to a lot of ridicule. People should come out and give a platform to other people to make us realise what we are seeing. I think it will bring more people forward."

Councillor Parkes (who is also a driving instructor) sparked controversy in 2012 when he claimed that his "real mother" was a 9ft (2.7m) tall green alien, and that he had encountered "shadow beings" taking the form of cats, owls, circus clowns and policemen [FT288:4]. He has also claimed that he fathered an extraterrestrial lovechild called Zarka and that having sex with an alien has caused tension in his marriage. *Newcastle Chronicle*, 22 Feb; *express.co.uk*, 23 Feb 2015.



BULENT KILIC / AFP / GETTY IMAGES



MIRACULOUS ESCAPE

Rescuers save trapped baby after hearing mysterious voice

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HENRY'S HAUNTINGS

Grey Ladies and other famous ghosts of Hampton Court

PAGE 16



GONADS FOR GOD

The guru whose followers faced the unkindest cut of all

PAGE 22

The Conspirasphere

Do Solar eclipses correlate with stock market meltdowns? Is the World Bank run by aliens? Should **NOEL ROONEY** put his money under the mattress?

Of course, by the time you read this it may be too late – but it's nice to think that you might have read it here first; or possibly last. The near-total Solar eclipse on 20 March is the Big One. It falls on Nissan 1 in the Jewish calendar, and a Solar eclipse on Nissan 1 is a sign of judgement, according to Jewish tradition (according, that is, to the inestimable Michael Snyder and others). And this eclipse turns up in the middle of four 'blood moons': that is, four total lunar eclipses in a (sort of) row, as explained at some length by John Hagee in his book *Four Blood Moons: Something is About to Change*. The lunatic tetrad is quite the meme currently, with all sorts of people according for all they are worth to variously vague interpretations of Jewish tradition.

I haven't read Hagee's book, but plenty of people have, so it's curious to see that no one has yet come up with an explanation of why these moons are especially sanguine. Pastor Mark Biltz of El-Shaddai Ministries has

investigated the coincidence of eclipses and momentous events in Jewish history (coincidence is the key term here); blood moons feature heavily in his excitement, though again he doesn't quite get round to saying why. Which all goes to prove that sanguine is not the characteristic humour of the apocalyptic fringe.

Snyder reckons it's all to do with the Shemitah. I'd always assumed that Shemitah was merely the custom of letting fields lie fallow one year in every seven, but apparently it was also a time for debt amnesty – which explains, explains Snyder, why so many stock market crashes and economic downturns happen on, or near, or in the same article as, the first day of Shemitah. You have been warned.

And while you are withdrawing your cash from your local bank before depositing it under the bed with the usual protective talismans, it might comfort you to know that an august member of the world's banking fraternity has come out on the Other Side. Karen Hudes, former Senior Counsel at the World Bank, was given the elbow a few years ago for, by her own account, attempting to expose a web of corruption going right to the top. She has since gone public with her story, and some interesting variations of it have made their way into Cyberville.



KAREN HUDES
World Bank Whistleblower

Perhaps the most intriguing is the report on Above Top Secret that Ms Hudes claims the world's banking and religious institutions are in fact run by a separate species. I followed that link to its source and, indeed, she has said something extraordinary: apparently it's the Jesuits who are running the whole show, in cahoots with 'the hominids', a non-human race who are very good at sums. You can spot

them by their elongated skulls (not the Jesuits – you can't spot them at all), which probably makes them one of the "four alien species that have been visiting the planet for thousands of years," according to former Canadian defence Minister Paul Hellyer. The Enlightenment really has gone burlesque.

www.collective-evolution.com/2014/03/28/former-world-bank-senior-council-says-a-second-species-on-earth-controls-money-religion/

<http://earthsky.org/space/what-is-a-blood-moon-lunar-eclipses-2014-2015>

www.prisonplanet.com/sign-of-judgment-total-solar-eclipse-on-march-20th-falls-in-the-middle-of-the-four-blood-red-moons.html

EXTRA! EXTRA!

FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

ALASKA BEAR FALLS THROUGH SKYLIGHT INTO PARTY, EATS ALL THE CUPCAKES

CBC News, —July 2014.

Dog owner spared jail after death

Times, 4 July 2014.

Family asked if dead dad wanted his dinner

Irish Independent, 28 June 2014.

FARMER AND DRAGON IN SHOWDOWN

The Wicklow People, 25 June 2014.

Laws prevent police action

Adelaide Advertiser, 16 June 2014.

Tasers provide police with 'the missing link'

Jersey Eve. Post, 12 July 2014.

SIDELINES...

CLASSIC SHC

On 6 March 2014, villagers in the Ukrainian province of Zhitomyr saw smoke coming from the flat of 82-year-old Nadhezdha Solovei. They discovered her lower legs in stockings undamaged in the middle of the balcony, next to a heap of ashes and a smoking hole in the floor. The windowframe, door and ceiling were also undamaged and no source of ignition could be found. *zhizhn.ua*, 25 Mar 2014.

THAT'S VINTAGE!

The world's oldest wine, made in 1472 and kept in a cellar in Strasbourg, was recently transferred to a new oak cask when its 18th century barrel began to leak. It was tasted in 1576 and 1718 – and again in 1944, by General Philippe Leclerc, after he liberated the city from the Nazis. The latest transfer gave wine lovers the chance to taste it again, but they declined the offer, suspecting it would be too acidic. Leaks and evaporation have reduced the original 3,000 litres (5,280 pints) by 90 per cent. *Times*, 24 Jan 2015.

LUCKY COW

A cow plummeted 30ft (9m) down an old mineshaft near Axton, Holywell, North Wales, and survived – by landing on another cow that had already fallen in. Passers-by heard mooing and dropped grass to the cushioned animal until a cave rescue team winched it to safety. It had been trapped in chest-deep water for two days. The other cow had to be put to sleep because of its poor condition. *Sun*, 19 Jan; *D.Post*, 20 Jan 2015.

Any eggsplanation?

Police can't crack case of mystery ovoid peltings in Ohio



FRED TANNEAU / AP / GETTY IMAGES

Several times a week for a year, a house in Euclid – a suburb of Cleveland, Ohio – has been pelted with eggs, and police haven't been able to crack the case despite stakeouts, questioning neighbours, and installing a surveillance camera.

Albert Clemens Sr, 85, who shares the house with his adult son and daughter, suspects the eggs are launched a block or two away. He said whoever is responsible has “phenomenal” accuracy, launching five or six at a time – sometimes more than once a day – and often hitting the front door of the green, two-story house that he and his late wife bought nearly 60 years ago. The after-dark attacks, which began in March 2014 and last about 10 minutes, often sound like gunshots as eggs splatter on the aluminium siding, creating a residue that strips the paint. Clemens used to clean up each time but gave up because it happens so often. His insurer won't settle a claim until police

catch the perpetrators; but he refuses to move from the house, on the corner of Wilmore Avenue and East 210th Street, less than a mile from the police station. Other than a few rogue eggs that hit nearby homes, no other neighbours have been targeted.

The eggs have been traced to a local Amish farm, but analysing shattered shells proved useless because egg proteins destroy DNA. Door-to-door questioning yielded no tips, and a \$1,000 reward for information remains unclaimed. Police have spent hundreds of hours on the investigation, but their involvement doesn't seem to be a deterrent. Once, an officer was writing a report when a barrage of eggs was launched at the house, one of which hit him on the foot. The eggging has been rarer during cold weather, but Clemens and the officers anticipate the attacks will increase with the temperature. *Cleveland.com (NE Ohio)*, 5 Mar; *[AP]* 7 Mar 2015.

- *Fortean Times* has recorded ovoid fusillades for 40 years. In December 1974, Keep Hatch [!] School in Wokingham, Berkshire, was repeatedly bombarded with eggs. “Children would be sent scrambling for cover as eggs fell out of the sky to splat on the playground, and mothers, taking their kids to school, have seen eggs hitting cars, fencing, and even trickling from rooftops.” Then for five months in 1977, always on Tuesdays and Thursdays, houses in West St Helen Street, Abingdon, Oxfordshire, were pelted with eggs. An electrical shop was hit 36 times, and a woman standing outside the estate agents next door was hit on the head. The phantom egger even worked nights, smashing eggs on parked cars. Vigilante groups searched the neighbourhood in vain.

For a year up to December 1978, “a torrent of trajectorial treats” hit four old people's bungalows in Castleton, Derbyshire, including black puddings, eggs, bacon, bread and tomatoes – even legs of mutton. One night it was a dozen large eggs at once. The food hit doors, windows and walls and sometimes landed in the gardens. The attacks were irregular: every other night, then nothing for weeks on end. Despite almost nightly vigils by the local policeman, no one was ever caught. Bob Rickard's report was headlined “Dinner's on the house” [FT28:17].

From April to August 1986, the back windows of a house in Tipton, Staffordshire, were bombarded with eggs about once a fortnight. In March 1989, elderly people in Hayes, Middlesex, were harassed by eggs hitting their windows or aimed at them in the street [FT53:14]. In November 1990, there was “a new craze by youngsters – throwing eggs at doors and windows in Gainsborough, Lincolnshire.” [FT57:31].



MARTIN ROSS



Spanish Fork miracle

Baby Lily saved after rescuers hear mysterious voice



SPANISH FORK POLICE DEPARTMENT

ABOVE: The accident scene, with the Dodge sedan being pulled from the river, and (inset) lucky survivor Lily Groesbeck.

On the evening of Friday, 6 March, Lynn Jennifer Groesbeck, 25, was driving to her home in Springville, Utah, with her 18-month-old daughter Lily when she hit a cement barrier next to a bridge about 50 miles (80km) south of Salt Lake City, and her red Dodge sedan crashed into the Spanish Fork River. This happened around 10:30pm, according to a witness who told police he heard the crash. The car was not visible from the road and was not discovered until 14 hours later, when a fisherman spotted it at 12:24pm on Saturday and called police.

Police and firefighters responded and plunged into the freezing rapids to see if they could find any survivors. "We could see a person in the front seat and then we heard a voice saying, 'Help me, we're in here,'" said Tyler Beddoes of the Spanish Fork Police Department. "It was clear as day. We replied back 'hang in there, we're trying what we can'". Three police officers (Tyler Beddoes, Jared Warner and Bryan Dewitt) and two firefighters (Paul Tomadakis and Lee Mecham)

heard the voice. It motivated them to push harder because they believed there might be someone inside who was still alive. With their adrenaline pumping they pulled the heavy, water-filled car onto its side and discovered the driver was dead.

The rescuers had no explanation for the mysterious voice that appeared to come from inside the car. (Only the *New York Daily News* reported that it said: "Help me, we're in here"; all the other sources reported that it said merely "Help me".) Beddoes said he wouldn't have believed it really happened had not the others heard it as well. "I don't know what I thought I heard," he said. "I'm not a typically religious guy. It's hard to explain – it was definitely something." Though the voice was described as that of an adult woman, Spanish Fork Lt. Matt Johnson said the police don't believe it was Jennifer Groesbeck's. "Due to the trauma she sustained, we suspect she was deceased upon impact," he said. "I don't believe she survived the impact of the car crash. There was

massive trauma."

The little girl was hanging upside down, but her head was not touching the water. The responders didn't see her at first, but only when they got the car turned the right way up. "We could see her eyes fluttering so there was some life but as far as movements or consciousness there was nothing that we could see," said Beddoes. The four police officers and three firefighters formed an assembly line and passed Lily back to shore. They started performing CPR, and she later regained consciousness in a Salt Lake City hospital. At the time of the news reports, her condition was said to be "stable and improving". Her rescuers were treated for hypothermia. Lt. Johnson said they were "showing signs of delusion and being disoriented," but responded well to treatment. Police were still trying to determine what caused the accident. Lt. Johnson said there were no skid marks or evidence of evasive manoeuvres at the bridge. *nydailynews.com*, 9 Mar; *ABC News*, 11 Mar 2015.

SIDELINES...

MILKY RAIN

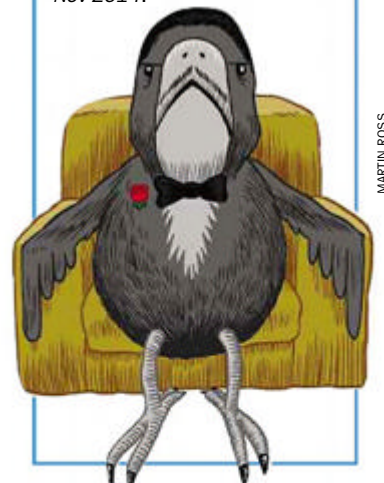
Strange "milky rain" fell across a wide swathe of Oregon and Washington State on 7 February, leaving a powdery residue on cars. Some meteorologists speculated that the rain had carried volcanic ash from an erupting volcano in Japan, while others blamed dust storms in Nevada. [R] 11 Feb 2015.

FIENDISH PLOT

Some of Paris's French-Algerian community believe the shootings of 17 people (including four Jewish men) on 7-9 January were a Jewish plot to make Muslims look bad. One man even put the blame on "magical shape-shifting Jews". So were Cherif and Said Kouachi, and Amedy Coulibaly, mere puppets – or Jews in disguise? This bizarre idea could have been inspired by Sacha Baron Cohen's spoof portrayal of Kazakh journalist Borat who, in a 2006 film, reported on "shape-shifting Jews" who had trapped him in their "nest". *timesofisrael.com*, 14 Jan 2015.

PARROT PUSHER

Last November, Italian police announced a list of animals recently confiscated from Mafia bosses. The haul included an African grey parrot that had been trained by its drug-dealing owner to say: "Adesso ti saro" ("Now I'm going to shoot you"). When customers rang the mobster's mobile to place an order, the bird would squawk down the line: "How much do you need?" *D.Telegraph*, 21 Nov 2014.



MARTIN ROSS



SIDELINES...

FORTUNATE STABBING

Margaret Parsons, 47, who stabbed her husband Gordon, 58, in a drunken argument in Launceston, Cornwall, accidentally saved his life after doctors treating him noticed he had liver disease. Mr Parsons begged a judge to spare his wife jail, but she was sentenced to 16 months. *D.Telegraph, 23 Oct 2014.*

EXTENDED SWIVING

Peter Komoll, 68, from Berlin, made an emergency call to police because foxes were having "abnormally long sex" in his garden. "I thought the animals had got stuck together and might injure themselves permanently," he said. Police told him to stop wasting their time. An expert explained: "Foxes have sex for at least 20 minutes because the male's semen is slow-moving." *Metro, 16 Jan 2015.*

WIN PREDICTED

Jackie Beresford, 57, a mother-of-five from Plymouth in Devon, lost her husband David to cancer on Valentine's Day 2014 and visited a medium in July. The medium told her she had spoken to David on the Other Side: he regretted not leaving his widow more cash, but he had a "plan". A fortnight later, Mrs Beresford was part of a syndicate of 15 Tesco workers who scooped £3.7million on the National Lottery – winning £245,996 each. *express.co.uk, 20 Jan 2015.*

Via Doll-rosa

CREEPY DOLLS TAKE OVER JAPANESE VILLAGE AND MEXICAN ISLAND AND TURN UP OUTSIDE CALIFORNIAN HOMES



ELIANE KURTENBACH / AP / PRESS ASSOCIATION IMAGES

ABOVE: Scarecrow passengers wait for a bus in Nagoro, Tokushima Prefecture.

VALLEY OF THE DOLLS

For years, eerily lifelike mannequins have been replacing actual residents in Nagoro, a Japanese town set deep in a rural valley in the Tokushima Prefecture on the southern island of Shikoku. Today, the fakes outnumber real people three to one. After leaving the town for just over a decade, artist Ayano Tsukimi returned from the sprawling metropolis of Osaka in 2002 to look after her 85-year-old father. She found that many of her friends, family and neighbours had died or moved away, and the population was down to 37. This has become a major problem in Japan: more than 10,000 towns and villages are depopulated. As the country grew increasingly affluent after World War II, younger people flooded into the cities, leaving their elders to tend small farms. Greater Tokyo, with more than 37 million people, and Osaka-Kobe, with 11.5 million, account for nearly 40 per cent of the country's 127 million people, with another 10 million scattered in a handful of provincial capitals.

While creating a scarecrow

Now the dolls outnumber real people three to one

for her garden, Tsukimi decided to model the figure after her father. Thus began a strange art project to create full-sized doll versions of all those who had vanished. Over the last 10 years, Tsukimi, now 65, has created over 350 dolls – 160 in Nagoro, the remainder in other depopulated villages in the vicinity. Many are visible to people passing through, seemingly engaged in everyday activities – gardening, walking, reading and fishing.

The classrooms of Nagoro school have been repopulated with students and teachers, forever waiting silently for class to begin (or end). "They bring back memories," Tsukimi said of the human simulacra crowded into corners of her farmhouse, perched on fences and trees, huddled side-by-side at a produce stall, the bus stop – anywhere

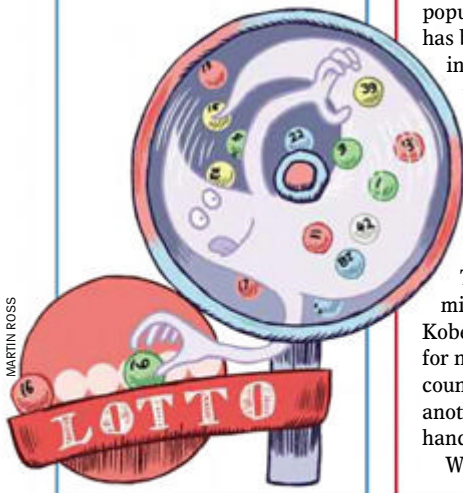
a living person might stop. A teenage boy in a baseball cap leans against a pile of chopped wood. "That old lady used to come and chat and drink tea. That old man used to love to drink sake and tell stories. It reminds me of the old times, when they were still alive and well." Like hand-carved Buddhist sculptures, each has its own whimsical expression. Some sleep, their eyelids permanently shut. Others cuddle toddler scarecrows, or man ploughs and hoes.

Tsukimi brings one along for company on her 90-minute drive to buy groceries in the nearest big town. But most remain behind, to be photographed and marvelled at by tourists. "If I hadn't made these scarecrows, people would just drive right by," she said. Although most of the dolls appear to have smiles, that doesn't stop them from looking creepy. Even Tsukimi acknowledges it would be easy to change their expressions. "The lips are difficult," she said. "A little tweak and they can look angry."

Fritz Schumann, who has made a documentary about the dolls, said: "Tsukimi discovered her craft almost by accident. When radish seeds that she planted failed to grow, she decided to build a scarecrow in the likeness of her father. It was only then that she fell upon the idea to recreate the village she once knew. The dolls are made with straw, fabric, and old clothes, much like a humble scarecrow, and Tsukimi is constantly making new figures to replace ones that have worn out." *businessinsider.com, 2 May, weburbanist.com, 6 May; [AP] dailymail.co.uk, 8 Dec 2014; Guardian, 8 Jan 2015.*

ISLAND OF THE DOLLS

On a dark and creepy island in the canals of Xochimilco near Mexico City sits what might be the world's strangest and scariest tourist attraction. The *Isla de las Munecas* (Island of the Dolls) – actually a *chinampa*, or artificial floating garden – is home to hundreds of dolls. Severed limbs



MARTIN ROSS



ESPERETA PALMA



ABOVE: Some of the hundreds of creepy dolls supposedly hung in the trees of Xochimilco by the island's crazed sole inhabitant.

and body-less heads with blank eyes hang side-by-side with whole, sun-bleached dolls on trees, fences and nearly every available surface. Mold covers some, while others are missing nearly all of their artificial hair. Spiders and insects have taken up residence in the hollow parts of most of the dolls. They appear menacing even at midday, but at night they are particularly haunting.

The story goes that the island's only inhabitant, Don Julian Santana, found the body of a drowned child in the canal some 50 years ago. He was haunted by her death, so when he saw a doll floating by in the canal soon after, he hung it in a tree to please the girl. He hoped to both appease her tortured soul and protect the island from further evil. One doll in a tree, however, was not enough to ease Santana's troubled mind. He continued to fish dolls and doll parts out of the canal whenever he saw them, hanging each one carefully on the island. Then he began scavenging more from trash heaps on his rare trips away from home. Later in life, he began trading his home-grown fruits and vegetables for yet more dolls.

A popular tale was that Santana had gone mad and believed the dolls to be real children who he

pulled from the canal and tried to revive; however, his family, who now run the island as a tourist attraction, insist that he simply believed the island was haunted by the spirit of the little girl. When Santana drowned in 2001, many people muttered darkly that the dolls, possessed by tortured spirits, conspired to murder the old man. Others believe that his death was an accident and that the dolls have taken over his role as the island's caretaker. International television crews have filmed there several times, including one that claimed to find proof the island is haunted. Soulless eyes follow visitors as they move around the small island, and many swear that they can hear the

dolls whispering to them. <http://weburbanist.com>, 6 Oct 2010.

CREEPY CLONES

Shortly after mysterious dead-eyed porcelain dolls were left outside eight homes in San Clemente, California, last July, each crafted to resemble a young girl living there [FT322:11], Orange County Sheriff's Department located the woman responsible, who said she had left the dolls "as a kind gesture"; she hadn't intended to freak anyone out. No further action was taken. The unnamed woman was a member of the community who attended church with many of the families concerned. *Int. Business Times*, 25 July 2014.



ABOVE: Two of the porcelain dolls left outside houses in San Clemente, California.

SIDELINES...

IMAGINARY TRAP

Brian Smith, 68, and his wife Mollianna (or Molljeanne), 65, feared they were stuck overnight in their keyless Mazda car in Alexandra, New Zealand, as they didn't have the transponder key to unlock the doors. They tried to smash a window with a car jack, and sounded the horn, but all in vain. They were freed after 13 hours when a neighbour simply opened a door – which they could have done from the inside. "The emergency services told us we'd have died if we'd been there for another half hour," said Mr Smith. *Otago Daily Times*, 18 Dec 2014; *Sun*, 25 Jan 2015.

EAU DE PUSSY

Residents of New Castle, western Pennsylvania, began noticing a pervasive smell resembling that of cat urine on 1 November. It was still lingering near a sewage treatment plant in the city's Mahoningtown neighbourhood over three weeks later. Environmental officials could not establish its provenance. On-site monitoring did not detect any hazardous substances in the air. [AP] 26 Nov; *irishexaminer.com*, 29 Nov 2014.

UNDERWATER COMEDY

Seinfeld fan Matt Davidson has turned an old TV into a fish tank that is a miniature replica of the show's set, with five fish characters. Davidson explained on Reddit that a fish called Jerry is accompanied by a "feisty and beautiful" Elaine, a "fat and ugly" George, a "Spaz" for Kramer and a lazy bottom-feeder for Newman. Someone suggested NBC run footage of the fish tank instead of re-runs of the show. *MX News (Sydney)*, 8 Dec 2014.

BURGLARS ALARMED

Burglars fled a house in Derby when a 17-stone (108kg) pot-bellied pig called Ludwig made his presence felt. "The noise he makes is like a low rumble that sound like the biggest Rotweiler you can imagine," said owner Mike Maughan. *Metro*, 16 Jan 2015.

ORANGE COUNTY SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT



SIDELINES...

SOUTHERN INVADERS

Britain is facing an “invasional meltdown” as 23 freshwater creatures – including killer, demon and bloody red shrimps from southern Europe – are appearing in the nation’s rivers and waterways, according to a study in the *Journal of Applied Ecology*. Then there’s quagga mussels, found recently in the Wreaysbury River near Heathrow airport, which smother native mussels and prevent them from breeding. *D.Telegraph*, 13 Oct 2014.

BLEATING LIBERTY

An Italian woman is suing the British makers of *Peppa Pig*, the popular children’s cartoon, claiming she was damaged by an episode featuring a baby goat character with her name. (“*Buon giorno, sono Gabriella Capra. Baaaaa.*”) Gabriella Capra (Italian for ‘goat’), 40, was demanding £80,000 in compensation, claiming that work colleagues were bleating at her. *D.Telegraph*, 17 Nov 2014.

PETROLHEAD

A petrol-drinking addict has been confined by his family for the past 15 years. Virenda Singh Kushwaha, 23, from the central Indian province of Madhya Pradesh, first siphoned his parents’ and neighbours’ cars aged five. By the time he was eight, his family were so concerned about the effects on his health that they chained him up. “We are too poor to afford medical treatment,” said his father Ram Sigh, 47. *Metro*, 23 Dec 2014.

LENIN HARANGUED

Oleg Basov and Yevgeny Avilov, from the Russian art group called Blue Rider, were arrested on 19 January after throwing holy water and shouting “Rise up and leave!” at the mausoleum in Moscow’s Red Square containing Lenin’s embalmed body. Irina Dumitskaya of Blue Rider said the aim of the performance was “to demolish the myth that Lenin lives forever by attempting to resurrect him on the Epiphany holiday just as Lazarus was raised from the dead”. *BBC News*, 20 Jan 2015.



ACUPUNCTURE FOR OWLS

Acupuncture has plenty of human adherents, but it is now being used increasingly on injured birds and animals. This male little owl (*Athene noctua*) received acupuncture treatment at Brinzal, an owl-rescue charity based in the west

of Madrid. The 10-in (25cm) bird hurt its back when he flew into a stovepipe at a factory in the east of the Spanish capital and was unable even to stand when first rescued. After treatment by the centre’s acupuncturist Edurne Cornejo, which included needles being

inserted all over its body, the owl was able to fly again and has since been released back into the wild. About 1,200 birds are brought to the centre each year, of which about 70 per cent recover and can be returned to the wild, says Brinzal’s co-ordinator, Patricia Orejas. *D.Telegraph*, 7 Feb 2015.

GERARD JULIEN / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

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ARCHAEOLOGY

PAUL SIEVEKING presents our round-up of archaeological news, including an unidentified deity unearthed in Turkey, a potential goddess dug up in north-eastern England and the Solar alignment of a Roman fort

UNKNOWN GOD

A first century BC sculpture of an unidentified deity has been unearthed in a temple in south-eastern Turkey, near the Syrian border. The ancient relief was discovered on a 3,900ft (1,200m) mountain near the modern town of Gaziantep, above the ancient city of Doliche, or Dülük. "It's clearly a god, but at the moment it's difficult to say who exactly it is," said Michael Blömer, an archaeologist at the University of Münster, who is excavating the site under the direction of Prof Engelbert Winter. "There are some elements reminiscent of ancient Near Eastern gods, as well, so it might be some very old god from before the Romans."

The area is one of the oldest continuously settled regions on Earth, and for millennia it was at the crossroads of several different cultures, from the Persians to the Hittites to the Aramæans. During the Bronze Age, Doliche was on the road between Mesopotamia and the ancient Mediterranean. In 2001, when Prof Winter's team first began excavating, almost nothing was visible. The team eventually discovered the ruins of an ancient Bronze Age structure as well as a Roman era temple dedicated to Jupiter Dolichenus, a Romanised version of the ancient Aramæan sky or storm god, who headed the Near Eastern pantheon.

During the second and early third centuries AD, the cult of Jupiter Dolichenus spread across the Empire, probably because many Roman soldiers were recruited from the area where he was worshipped, and those soldiers took their god with them. The cult died out after the fall of Doliche to the Sassanids in about AD 253. Our unknown deity may have been a *baal* (subdeity) of Jupiter Dolichenus. After the temple was destroyed, the Mar Solomon monastery was built on its foundations, and after the Crusades, the site became the burial place of a famous Islamic saint.

The archaeologists were excavating one of the old buttress walls of the monastery when they discovered the relief on a basalt stele, which had been plastered over. The relief depicts a bearded man rising up out of a palm-like plant while holding the stalk of another, suggesting a connection to agriculture and fertility. (The figure is reminiscent of the birth myths of some gods, such as Mithras, who was born from a rock, or Aphrodite, who was born out of sea foam.) The composition of the beard and the posture of the arms are reminiscent of Iron Age depictions from the early first millennium BC. At the base of the relief are images of a crescent moon, a rosette and a star. The rosette may be associated with the Mesopotamian god Ishtar, while the crescent moon is a symbol of the Moon god Sîn. The top of the relief was broken off, but when complete it would have stood about the height of a man.



UNIVERSITY OF FRANKFURT



The hybridisation of gods wasn't unusual for the time. "When the dominant style in the area is Greek and Roman, they give their gods a face-lift," said Gregory Woolf, a classicist at the University of St Andrews. For instance, the ancient Egyptian gods end up wearing the clothes of Roman legionaries, while ancient Mesopotamian gods, typically depicted as *betels* (stones or meteorites), get human faces. The best chances of

ABOVE: The ancient relief uncovered in Turkey. **LEFT:** The stele appears to show an unknown deity. **RIGHT:** The possible head of Brigantia discovered by WallQuest at Arbeia Roman Fort.

identifying this enigmatic deity is to find a similar representation somewhere with a related inscription. *Science Daily*, 10 Nov; *Livescience.com*, 25 Nov 2014.

SOLAR ALIGNMENT

Research by Amelia Carolina Sparavigna, a physics professor at the Polytechnic University of Turin, has shown that a ruined Roman fort near Hardknott Pass in Cumbria was aligned with the Summer and Winter Solstices. The fort, built during the reign of Emperor Hadrian (ruled AD 117-138), had four gateways facing one another. During the Summer Solstice, the Sun would rise in alignment with the north-eastern and south-western gates, and set in alignment with its north-western and south-eastern gates. During the Winter Solstice, the Sun would rise in line with the south-eastern and north-western gates, and set in line with the fort's south-western and north-eastern gates. "Moreover, the four towers of the garrison seem aligned to cardinal directions," wrote Sparavigna in her study, published in the journal *Philica* on 17 December 2014. The solar orientation could be symbolic homage to the god Sol – or to Mithra, a god of light whose cult was popular in the Roman army. Solar alignment of Roman temples and other public buildings was not unusual; the Pantheon in Rome is a classic example [FT280:9]. Timgad, an ancient Roman garrison town in modern-day Algeria, is aligned with the direction of the sunrise on the birthday of the Emperor Trajan (ruled AD 98-117). *Live Science*, 8 Jan 2015.

CLASSICAL CORNER



FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

HEAD OF BRIGANTIA

A 4in (10cm) stone head, said to represent Brigantia, goddess of the Brigantes, has been unearthed at the Roman fort of Arbeia in South Shields, near the mouth of the River Tyne in north-eastern England. In 1895 an altar dedicated to Brigantia was found a mere 100m (330ft) away. The goddess's facial features are delicately carved and there are traces of pink paint on the cheek and red on the lips. She wears a mural crown, carved in the form of a town wall with battlements, characterising her as a protecting goddess. A statue of Brigantia found near Dumfries in southern Scotland in 1731 wears a similar crown. Brigantia was the goddess of war, healing, water, fertility and prosperity. The Romans identified her with Minerva and Athena. The Brigantes, territorially the largest tribe in Britain, occupied what are the now the six northernmost counties of England, centred on modern Yorkshire.

The head was found in an aqueduct channel filled in during AD 208 to make way for the enlargement of the fort, when it became a supply base for Hadrian's Wall by order of the emperor Septimius Severus (ruled 193-211). The shrine evidently got in the way of the extension to the fort and had to be demolished, which is probably when the statue was broken up. This spring, following conservation work, the head will go on display in the Arbeia Fort Museum, where the altar dedicated to the goddess can also be seen. dailymail.co.uk, 8 Oct 2014.



186: WANKY PANKY

(Handy bilingual collection of texts in FK Forberg's *Manual of Classical Erotology* (1884; repr. Grove Press, NY, 1966), subtitled "As privately printed for Viscount Julian Smithson and Friends").

Onan is the traditional patron saint of wankers, thanks to (Genesis 38.9) "spilling his seed on the ground". Makes his name ideal for budgerigars. But, context makes clear this was actually coitus interruptus, to avoid impregnating his brother's wife – unsporting of Jehovah to strike him dead.

Onan's Greek rival is Pan, said (Dio Chrysostom, *Oration* 6 para20) to have learned self-abuse from his dad Hermes (striking example of father-son bonding), in turn teaching it to shepherds, to deflect them from the bestiality mentioned in pastoral poems of Theocritus and Virgil.

Sumerians described the god Enki masturbating to fill the river Tigris with water – Shock/Cock and Awe, indeed. Murals depict Egyptians manually caressing erections in celebration of solar deity Atun, thus creating the first human couple – beats hacking Eve out of Adam's rib.

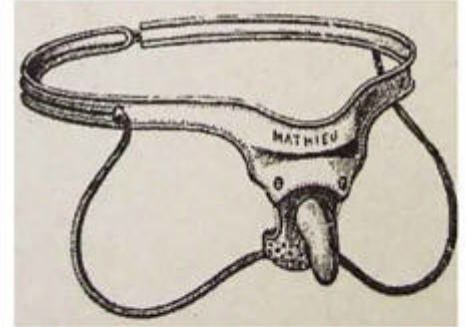
Aristophanes (*Frogs*, v545) has Dionysus "scratching my chick-pea", i.e. gratifying himself while reading Euripides's erotically charged play *Andromeda*. He presided over the Athenian theatre, with which Pan was also associated.

The Sumerian-Egyptian wank-fests lived on in the 'The Most Ancient & Most Puissant Order of the Beggar's Benison & Merryland', founded (1732) in the Scottish town of Anstruther. Its culminating ritual was collective masturbation into a pewter platter now (*Spectator*, 25 Feb 2012, p43) kept locked up at St Andrews University. Sample entry from Club Minutes: 1737. St Andrew's Day. 24 met. 3 tested and enrolled. All frigged – makes Freemasons look tame.

Diogenes the Cynic frequently masturbated in public, saying this was common in other cultures, thus demonstrating the relativity of moral standards.

Suetonius (*Tiberius*, ch43 para2) says that the emperor's bedroom was decorated with illustrations from the sex manual of Elefantis, thus anticipating the use of 'horn books' as stimulants.

Romans don't seem to have abused each other as 'You Wanker', an insult absent from the often gross graffiti on the walls of Pompeii (cf. my Classical Swearing article, *Verbatim* 25, 2000, p20-4 – also on the 'Shattercolors' website). Their noun and verb *masturbari* and *masturbator* occur almost exclusively in Martial. It's not always easy to separate fact



from fancy in his poems, but they may fairly be taken as mirroring everyday Roman life. In them, tossing-off is a subject for humorous episodes. One describes slaves beating their meat while watching their master and mistress copulate from behind the door. This and others have led some to conclude that masturbation was viewed as a servile speciality. But, slaves were allowed to marry and have children, hence were no more sexually frustrated than any other class.

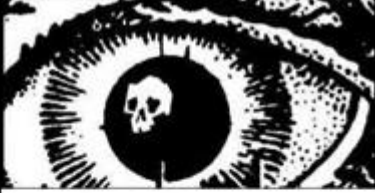
Masturbation links the 18th and 19th centuries. From English quack Bekker's *Onania* (1710) through medicals Tissot (1764) and Vogel (1786), phobic volumes warned and prescribed against this supposedly lethal sin. Victorian JL Milton's bestselling *Spermatorrhea* ordered spiked cages for nocturnal use, plus apparatus causing kitchen bells to ring if a filial erection arose; cf. Wikipedia's entry for sundry other such devices.

Victorian schoolmasters naturally thundered against the terrible perils of self-abuse (choice examples in John Chandos's *Boys Together* (1984). We were spared this at my school, our sex education not getting much beyond the housemaster nervously beginning along the lines of "You may have noticed between your legs..."

A more relaxed approach was taken by Mark Twain in his 'Science and Onanism' lecture to the Stomach Club of Paris, concluding "Don't play a lone hand," thus paving the way for the classic Seinfeld episode 'Master of my Domain'.

Victorian frettings may persist in the East, though, if this 1948 item from Simon Winchester's *The Man Who Loved China* (2008, p192 n39) is any guide: "A 38-year-old virgin wrote to Joseph Needham about the 'sexual radiation' that caused his eyelids to oscillate whenever he masturbated, which was five times daily."

"There's one thing to be said about masturbation. You certainly don't have to look your best." – 'The Boys in the Band' (1970)



GHOSTWATCH

ALAN MURDIE looks at the long history of Hampton Court's numerous ghostly inhabitants



GETTY IMAGES

THE GHOSTS OF HAMPTON COURT

Pity poor Miss Sybil Penn. In life, in October 1538, she was nominated as the chief nurse to the infant King Edward VI at Hampton Court, a year after the death of his mother Jane Seymour. Already somewhat advanced in years, her chief recreation in life was a spinning wheel, the sound of which would lull the royal baby to sleep. Edward VI died in 1553 leaving Sybil "bereaved as though she were his mother". Because of her devotion to the boy she was given apartments in the grand palace where she lived out her days until dying of smallpox in 1562. She was given a splendid tomb and monument in Hampton Church, which survived intact until 1829 when it was rifled in the process of rebuilding. Decades later the sound of the spinning wheel was reputedly heard in her former rooms, and accounts circulated of her fleeting ghost wandering the palace, becoming known as 'the Grey Lady'.

Alas, now in February 2015 poor Sybil has suffered a garish 21st century-style afterlife. Both her good name and her purported image are emblazoned across websites run by tabloid newspapers such as the *Daily Mail*, *Daily Mirror* and *Daily Star*. She is celebrated, amid "news" of the antics of a host of modern all-too-earthly celebrities, few of whom one would entrust with care of a royal child or expect to do anything as practically useful as spinning wool.

Poor Sybil has her once honoured name cast in amongst such company, all on account of a digital picture taken on a smartphone by 12-year-old Holly Hampshire, who was touring the palace with a girl friend in February 2015.

THE SOUND OF THE SPINNING WHEEL WAS REPUTEDLY HEARD IN SYBIL'S FORMER ROOMS



As ever, nothing the least the mysterious was seen at the moment the photograph was obtained. It's certainly a striking image, though its publication seems to have attracted considerable scepticism on-line, save amongst the tabloid press.

As one critic Leisa Miller Schnur of the USA-based *Haunted Librarian* website put it: "First, the image is too colorful. The "ghost" appears in the center of the image. Noticeably, the spirit looks elongated. Further, the figure is either hovering or incredibly tall. Finally, there is simply too much hair. Never has a piece of evidence been so clear. Nor has there been any evidence of this type found at Hampton Court. This is just too good to be true."

Perhaps with relief, the 'Haunted Librarian'

ABOVE: Hampton Court Palace.

BELOW: The notorious 'Skeletor' caught on CCTV.

site carries a useful postscript and link to the views of one photographer Mick West of the website 'MetaBunk' who identifies the image as a panorama (rather than paranormal) glitch with the iPhone. The 'MetaBunk', website is mostly concerned with chemtrails and conspiracy theories but takes time out to bash soft targets like alleged ghost photos produced by schoolgirls. According to West, "...it's just the result of taking a panoramic photo in low light on the iPhone. Panoramic photos are done by holding the camera up, and panning from left to right. The camera takes lots of photos and then stitches them together into a single image."

This seems a wholly plausible explanation, though I was struck by a partial resemblance to one classic "true ghost picture" taken by the Marquess of Ely at a house in Bryanston Square, London, in 1936 and showing what appears to be a Tudor dress by a fireplace and mantelpiece. It appears in *Ghosts and Hauntings* (1965) by Dennis Bardens.

Sources: *D. Mail*, 24+25 Feb; *D. Star*, *D. Mirror*, etc, 25 Feb 2015; <http://thehauntedlibrarian.com/tag/hampton-court-palace/>; Metabunk website.

Smartphone failures exemplify the problems with many digital images of alleged apparitions. Indeed, I share the strong reservations of many experienced ghost hunters such as Troy Taylor in the USA concerning digitally obtained images – orbs being the most notorious example. As long ago as 1998 Troy Taylor, author of *The Ghost Hunter's Guidebook*, declared "Digital

photos: or ghost hunting at its worst!” and “no matter what some people claim, digital cameras CANNOT be used to capture irrefutable evidence of the paranormal.” I can only agree with Taylor that digital cameras should only be used as a secondary back-up to other photographic techniques, even presuming that ghosts are capable of being photographed by any camera at all.

Soon after the Hampton Court case, the *Daily Star* was reporting on another recent picture taken at the Ritz Hotel by a visitor in which “the figure of a young girl wearing a Victorian-style dress appears to be distinctly present.” Disappointingly, nothing showed up on the CCTV footage running simultaneously with the photo. (“Ghost at the Ritz? Eerie figure pictured lurking on stairs at top London Hotel” by Tom Rawle, *D.Star*, 28 Feb 2015.)

Those with memories stretching back to 2003 may also recall the furore over an alleged ‘ghost’ film occasioned by someone in an anorak opening and closing doors at the Clock Tower of Hampton Court, picked up on CCTV footage [FT181:9]. A promotional video, ‘The ghosts of Hampton Court Palace’ on the Historic Royal Palaces website, hints the figure “may have been a member of the public”. Nonetheless this has not prevented the same site dubbing the figure “Skeletor” in an attempt at catch-penny populism, although earlier repeated openings of the same doors remain something of a mystery. In the 19th century, the Clock was known as ‘the Clock of Death’, supposedly stopping whenever anyone who has been long resident in the palace is about to die. Perhaps the cowed figure was the Grim Reaper who had temporarily lost his way.

With regard to this latest Hampton Court image, the reliability of any purported identification as Mistress Sybil Penn (variously spelt Sibell and ‘Penne’ in earlier

accounts) is suspect, given the number of shades reputed to haunt the building and its environs. As Alasdair Alpin MacGregor wrote, “the ghosts of Hampton Court are a chapter, if not indeed a book in themselves”.

Hampton Court has had a long and often sad history, being originally built by Cardinal Wolsey as his home, but which he conferred upon Henry VIII in attempt to buy back favour. It did Wolsey no good for on 30 October 1529 his lands were declared forfeit to the Crown and he was arrested on a charge of High Treason. Henry duly set about enlarging the building as a royal palace in which he entertained all of his six wives. His spouses are well represented amongst the ghosts. Catherine Howard was long said to re-enact her panic-stricken flight down the Haunted Gallery to the Chapel to plead with Henry for her life [FT136:10], whilst Jane Seymour is said to appear on the anniversary of the birth of Edward VI (12 October), and there are even claimed appearances by the ubiquitous Anne Boleyn in ‘rich blue apparel’. Some claim up to 30 other ghosts haunt the building and even some 40 years ago there was substantial disagreement amongst witnesses as to Sybil’s appearance. For example, Peter Underwood in his book *Hauntings* (1977) gave descriptions of her ranging from a “tall gaunt woman” on page 20 to another source as claiming her as “a little woman dressed in grey who politely says ‘good morning’”, quoted on page 30. Another supposed witness was the actor ‘Leslie Finch’ who saw the Grey Lady in 1964, according to Andrew



ABOVE: An old postcard showing Hampton Court's Grey Lady.

Green in *Phantom Ladies* (1976), but I have not been able to find further details of Finch or this sighting in Green’s archive.

Stories of hauntings at Hampton Court Palace have been in circulation for over 150 years. The earliest account of a ghost at the palace appears to be a crisis apparition seen by a resident, recorded by Charles Dickens in *All The Year Round* for 22 June 1862. Nothing further had emerged by the time that John Ingram published *The Haunted Homes and Family Traditions of Great Britain* (1884), but later sources mention sporadic reports from the 1860s, with tales of hauntings really seeming to take off from the mid-1890s when residents of the grace and favour apartments in the building announced they were troubled by strange noises. In 1894 *Cassell's Family Magazine* carried claims of loud screams being heard in the dead of night, and a further wave of ghost reports coincided with the renovation and opening up in 1905 of what became the ‘Haunted Gallery’, a section of the building formerly used as a lumber room.

By 1907 the usually sceptical writer Charles Harper seemed to be treating the ghosts with a degree of seriousness, stating: “Hampton Court Palace is the richest of all the Old Royal Palaces in ghost stories, and the continuity of people who have ‘seen a somethink’ must strike even the most sceptical as singularities worth investigating”. The same year saw a sensational report by a patrolling police constable of a procession of ghosts outside the palace one night. Other ghost sightings in the early 20th century included two males, strange lights and a phantom coffin, and a ghostly boy in black velvet seen in 1929 at the Old Court House, Hampton Court. Eight years later, in February 1937 the sound of footsteps – attributed to the ghost of Sir Christopher Wren – was heard in the same building. (See *Haunted Houses*, 1907, by Charles Harper and *The Ghost Book*, 1955, by Alasdair Alpin MacGregor; *Chambers Dictionary of the Unexplained*, 2006.)

Since the 1990s many more accounts of mostly low-level haunting incidents have emerged, resulting in a log of incidents being kept from 1998. Indeed, so great was

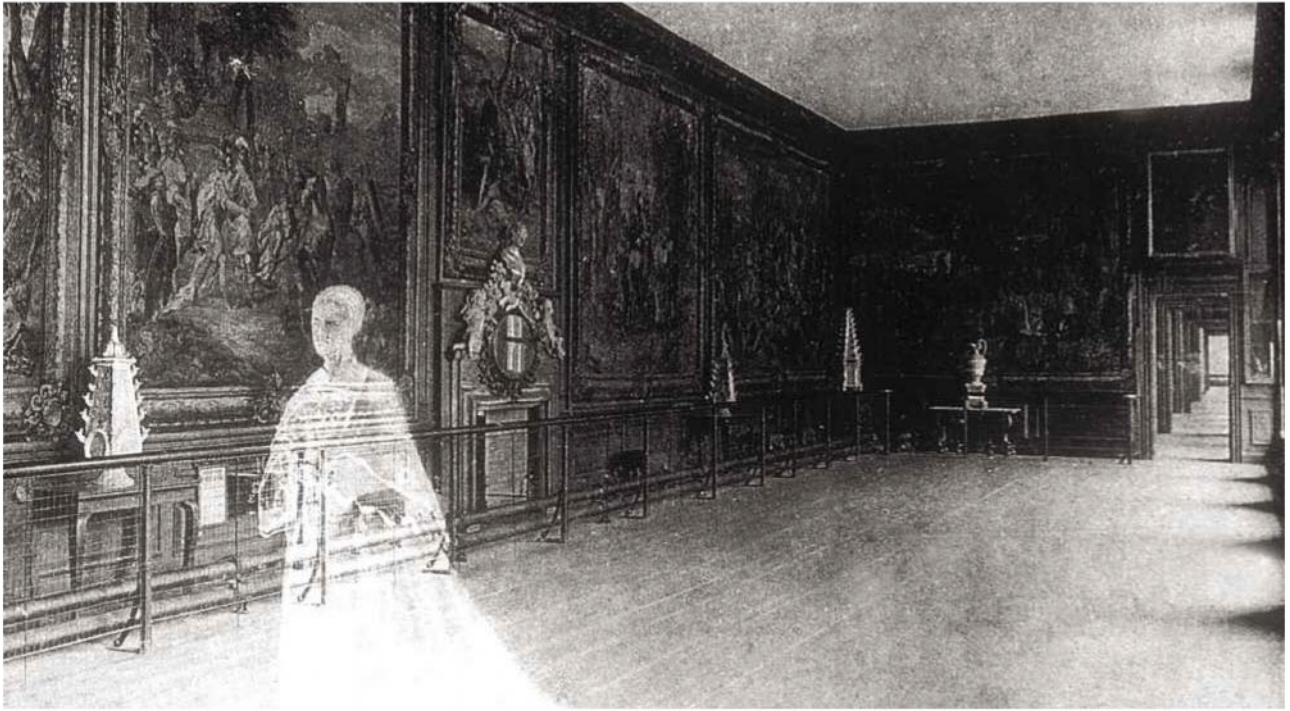


NEWS SYNDICATION / THE SUN

ABOVE: The photograph taken by Holly Hampshire and said by newspapers to show the ‘Grey Lady’.



GHOSTWATCH



APIC / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: An illustration showing the ghost of Catherine Howard gliding down Hampton Court's Haunted Gallery. **BELOW:** Cardinal Wolsey may have been the builder of the original palace but has only put in one appearance as a recognisably human apparition; he is said to prefer to scuttle about in the form of a large spider.

the interest in these reports that Richard Wiseman and fellow psi researchers Caroline Watt and Ciaran O'Keeffe carried out an investigation into (amongst other things) the intensity and attribution of unusual experiences within the building. They considered that through suggestion it had been possible to manipulate such experiences. In a later paper they fingered sensitivity to magnetic fields at certain spots as the reason why people thought they had encountered ghosts. (See 'An investigation into the alleged haunting of Hampton Court Palace: psychological variables and magnetic fields' by Wiseman, Watt, Greening, Stevens, and O'Keeffe, 2002, in the *Journal of Parapsychology*, 66(4), 387-408.)

However, a simpler and more parsimonious explanation was offered – most surprisingly – by celebrated ghost hunter Elliot O'Donnell (1873-1965) in a chapter devoted to Hampton Court in his book *Haunted Britain* (1948). I say surprisingly, since Elliot was a ghost hunter who had a tendency to trip over a ghost almost every time he set a foot outdoors, judging by his outlandish claims in the numerous classic books he penned from 1908 until his death (with more revealed in posthumous collections of his tales edited by Harry Ludlam). But of Hampton Court Elliot stated: "Regarding the royal phantoms said to perambulate periodically... there is seemingly little authentic

evidence," explaining: "The archaeological features of the Palace, its historical associations and a sense of awe and mystery arising from them tend to suggest to minds at all imaginative and impressionable the probability of ghostly presences". No need for magnetic fields, then.

Nonetheless, the record accumulated since 1998 by Palace Warden Ian Franklin is certainly suggestive of something, as well as being unique in public annals, in comprising a semi-official record of strange experiences. (Source: Ian Franklin, Ghost Club meeting, 14 Nov 2001).

What is it that makes ghost photographs so compelling for believers and sceptics alike? Undoubtedly, part of the attraction lies in the lure of physical evidence, and the seeming provision of solid proof of an otherwise intangible, spectral reality. For believers, the ghost photograph appears to offer objective corroboration of a

spirit world. Equally for committed sceptics it cannot possibly

be accepted as such, lest the picture becomes a Davidian slingshot bringing down the Goliath of materialist science. Yet the zealous and often repetitive arguments which can endure over decades about the reality or otherwise of certain photographs (e.g. disputes over certain classic spirit and UFO

photographs, the Cottingley Fairies and pictures of 'Nessie') are the products of passions burning far more intensely than any rational and conscious dispute over mere photographic evidence surely deserves. After all, an alleged photograph is only one strand in the totality of evidence that needs to be considered in any assessment of any paranormal or extraordinary claim. Those (including myself) who accept the reality of apparitional experiences but propose that apparitions cannot be photographed often find ourselves left in a cultural and intellectual limbo, watching 'bald men fighting over a comb'.

All in all, it seems the hope expressed by Ernest Law, who in 1905 claimed he had been looking for the Grey Lady at Hampton Court for some 35 years, that "I wish a snapshotist would bring his kodak down here and get a photo of her – it is much needed by historians", is still yet to be realised (cited in *Haunted Houses*, 1907, by Charles Harper).

Finally, what of the ghost of Cardinal Wolsey, the original builder of Hampton Court? Curiously, apart from one alleged sighting in 1966 (see *Phantom Britain*, 1975, by Mark Alexander), it seems there are no other reliable reports of his Eminence appearing in recognisable human form. However, tradition avers that he does in fact return, scuttling about in the form of a large cardinal spider at the palace that "in olden days was firmly believed to be the ghost of Cardinal Wolsey". Compared to disputes over anomalous photographs, conclusively proving or refuting that curious claim really would pose a challenge for believers and sceptics alike!



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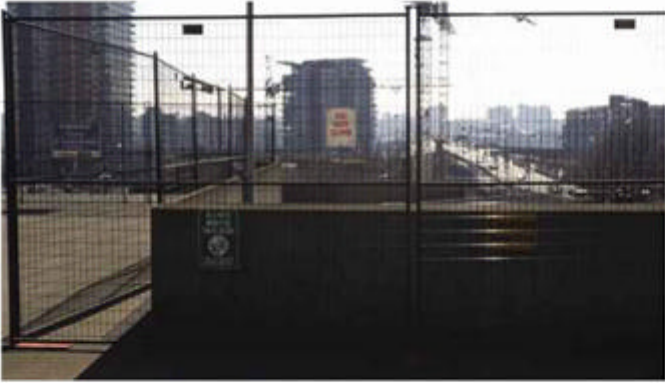
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KAMIKAZE CANINES

Dogs leap to their doom from a Vancouver ledge, while lucky labradoodles and collies survive some epic falls

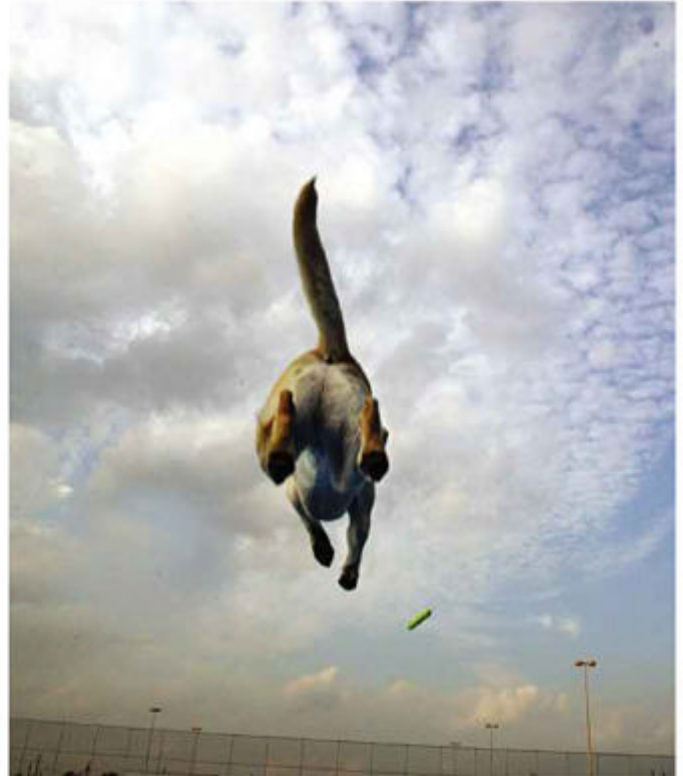


IAN GILLILAN



IAN GILLILAN

TOP AND ABOVE LEFT: The walkway at BC Place Stadium in Vancouver proved irresistible and deadly to the city's dogs; as can be seen, it has now been fenced off.



MARIO TAMIA / GETTY IMAGES

• A decade ago, over a six-month period, five dogs inexplicably jumped to their deaths from a bridge over a stream at Overtoun House in Dumbarton, near Glasgow, Scotland [FT196:4]. Now comes news of a similar phenomenon in Canada: there's a waist-high ledge framing an outdoor walkway at B.C. Place Stadium in Vancouver that seems irresistible to dogs. It is located near Gate B and Terry Fox Plaza, and conceals an 8m or 11m (26ft or 36ft – reports differ) drop to the concrete of Expo Boulevard below. In each case, young, large, healthy and active off-leash dogs had walked or run toward the ledge, then climbed or jumped over. On 13 November 2014 a six-year-old German Shepherd died after jumping over the ledge, at least the third canine fatality there in the previous year.

A fourth dog survived the fall: a one-and-a-half-year-old Siberian husky called Jake on a sunny day in April 2013. Jake's

owner Devin Drewitz noticed a sign that read "Caution Steep Drop", but it didn't register with him till after his dog had fallen. Jake was rushed to the Yaletown Pet Hospital, where he was successfully treated for a damaged bladder, lungs and liver, and a badly broken front leg. Vet Jessica Robertson said she knew of one other dog that fell over the ledge in 2008 and admitted there could have been many more. The other two recent fatalities were a German short-haired pointer in October 2013, and a dog (breed unspecified) on 21 March 2014. *Times Colonist (Victoria, BC, Canada), 10 May + 16 Nov 2014.*

• On the other hand, ironically, some dogs survive much longer drops. On 6 October 2014, for example, a Labradoodle named Gracie survived a 200ft (70m) fall in Oregon. Owner Michelle Simmons said Gracie and another dog were playing on a trail in the Columbia River Gorge

The 10-year-old rescue dog was marooned for 18 hours

when Gracie went over a cliff. Ms Simmons and her friends heard the dog rolling, hitting the ground, and yelping – then nothing. They thought she was dead and started an impromptu memorial service. Then another hiker came rushing up, saying the dog was alive. A rescue team fitted her with a harness and lifted her to safety. She was unhurt, apart from a few scratches and bruises. *Wilkes-Barre (PA) Times Leader, 9 Oct 2014.*

• While chasing seagulls in November 2013, a collie called Iggy plunged over a 300ft (90m)

cliff at Beachy Head in East Sussex. Claire Morris and her husband Mark Russell expected the worst. "We got on our bellies and began peering over the cliff edge," said Mrs Morris, 50, from Haslemere, Surrey. "We spotted this teeny tiny little spot walking around. It was high tide. I have no idea how he survived. He must have landed in the water in just the right place and at the right angle." Iggy, who escaped unscathed apart from a slight limp, was rescued by lifeboat. *D.Mail, 23 Dec 2013.*

• A nine-year-old springer spaniel called Sprig survived falling down a cliff at Foreland Point in north Devon by clinging to a rocky ledge for eight days. He stayed alive by licking moisture from moss and rocks while stranded on the small outcrop. It was thought he was chasing birds before disappearing on a walk in August 2014. Mark and Susie Sanderson organised search

parties and put up posters, but their pet was eventually found unharmed by a passing lifeboat crew, who approached the cliff after seeing a trapped sheep. “[Sprig] was about 30ft [9m] above the water and we couldn’t work out how he had got in that position,” said helmsman Andrew Escott. “He did seem rather pleased to see us.” A delighted Mrs Sanderson, 50, said: “No one knows how he got there. He’s a bit leaner, maybe, but has no marks on him.” *Metro Herald (Dublin)*, 2 Sept 2014.

- On 9 March 2014, cocker Spaniel Marley tumbled over a 350ft (100m) cliff at White Nothe near Weymouth, Dorset. The four-month-old puppy escaped with minor bruising because the drop was broken up by steep inclines. He slid down one slope, plunged 80ft (24m) and then rolled down another incline. Owners Jacky and David Pipe looked over the precipice to find Marley stranded on a grassy ledge about 200ft (60m) down. Coastguards abseiled down and rescued him. *D.Mail*, 11 Mar 2014.

- On 17 January 2015, Georgie, a border collie cross, survived a 300ft (90m) fall off a Swansea Valley mountain. The 10-year-old rescue dog also had to contend with spending more than 18 hours marooned in snowy conditions on Fan Hir, near Dan-yr-Ogof. Owner Simon Pierce said: “It is steep on one side and not so steep on the other side. Georgie went to the edge to have a closer look. There was a cornice – a ledge of frozen snow – and she went through it. She dropped 30 feet [9m] in the air and probably rolled another 270 feet [82m] down the hill.”

For four hours, Mr Pierce scoured the mountainside with another man, but they gave up as darkness fell. He returned with friends at first light and finally spotted his pet. “We took her to the vet,” said Mr Pierce. “She has got a complicated leg break and some bruises and scrapes. The vet was a bit surprised how she survived. She is a tough old boot.” *southwales-eveningpost.co.uk*, 18 Jan 2015.



A VERY SILLYMANDER

There are only three known species of giant salamander alive today – one confined to the eastern USA, one to China, and one to Japan. Not surprisingly, therefore, recent news of a possibly unknown, fourth species turning up in Vietnam attracted considerable online interest, especially on Facebook. For this was where the story began, when in early March a 25-year-old Vietnamese man named Phan Thanh Tung had claimed on his Facebook page that he had pulled the mysterious metre-long creature out of a pond near his home in northern Vietnam’s Vinh Phuc region. He had also posted some top-quality colour photos of it on his page. These revealed that although the creature superficially resembled the larger giant salamander of neighbouring China, it exhibited various differences too, thereby perplexing local environment officials who had examined the photos, and spurring various other viewers into suggesting that it may represent an entirely new, hitherto undescribed species.

The officials, however, were not merely perplexed but also very alarmed, because Phan Thanh Tung announced that he had sold the animal (but would not reveal its new owner’s identity or whereabouts) and his photos showed it alive but placed upon a large dining tray with a chopping board in close proximity! As a result, the officials were so determined to track the animal down and save it that they called in the police to assist them – assuming, of course, that the poor creature had not already been killed and eaten, as a number of commentators feared. This proved not to be the case, as the whole episode was soon exposed as a hoax.

When summoned by police to an interview shortly after his story had made headlines worldwide, Phan Thanh Tung shamefacedly confessed that he’d made the whole thing up. As for the photos, he’d found them online and they had originally depicted a normal Chinese salamander, but after downloading them he’d edited them in order to create a creature that looked different from all known species, and had then uploaded them together with his fake story onto his FB page in order to attract some attention to himself – too much, as it turned out. Not so much a salamander, then, as a sillymander, and a very silly one at that.

www.bbc.co.uk/news/blogs-news-from-elsewhere-31748742 5 Mar; www.thanhniennews.com/education-youth/facebook-user-made-up-story-about-rare-animal-in-northern-vietnam-police-39498.html, 7 Mar 2015.

THE BEAR FACTS LAID BARE

Previously in Alien Zoo [**FT320:21, 324:21**], I revealed how DNA tests conducted last year by a scientific team led by Oxford University geneticist Prof Bryan Sykes on two alleged Himalayan yeti hairs, one obtained in Bhutan, the other in Ladakh, had apparently shown that both were from a supposedly long-extinct, ancient form of polar bear, but that a subsequent, independent retesting of those hairs by a different team had discovered that the first tests were in error, and that the hairs were actually from the current, modern-day polar bear.

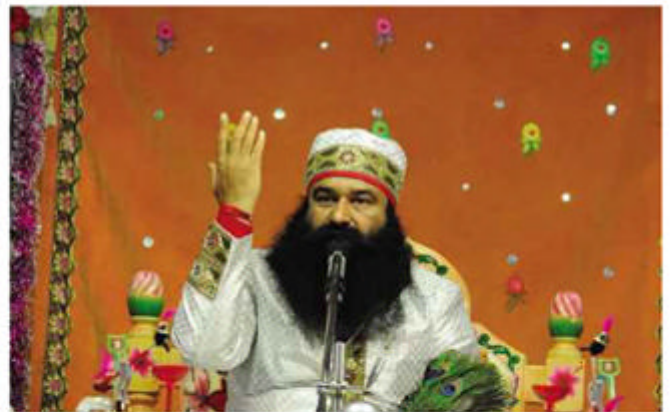
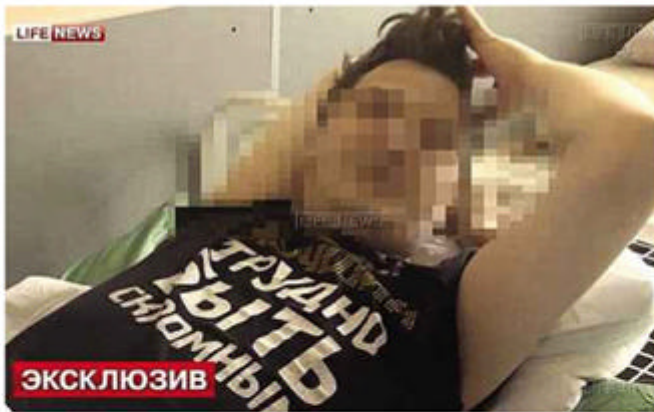
I then asked how modern-day polar bear hairs could have come from two widely separated Himalayan locations. Did this mean that both hairs had originally been mislabelled with regard to their respective provenance and therefore had not come from the Himalayas at all? Or, even more remarkably, could modern-day polar bears actually be living undiscovered by science within this famous landlocked mountain range in central Asia, far removed indeed from this species’ normal Arctic habitat? In response to my queries, Copenhagen University geneticist Dr Ross Barnett from the scientific team that had retested the hairs kindly emailed me the following illuminating explanation, quoted here with his permission:

“We don’t think the hairs were mislabelled because Sykes et al. say they were golden brown or reddish brown in colour and therefore not likely to be from a Polar. We also don’t think that they are evidence of surviving polar bears in the Himalayas either as the one thing we know about DNA is that it degrades quickly and predictably if not stored in certain ways. The “polar bear” DNA has one base pair difference from brown bears, which we think is most likely due to degradation. So our conclusion is that the hairs are brown bear in origin, but due to their age/handling history, some DNA damage occurred that made them look like polar bear.”

So there we have it – no polar bears, ancient or modern, in the Himalayas after all. The bear facts laid bare at last.

ORGAN ODDITIES

TESTICLE THEFT IN A RUSSIAN SAUNA, GURU MAKES HIS FOLLOWERS GIVE UP THEIR GONADS FOR GOD, PLUS TRANSPLANTS LEAD TO CHANGES OF HEART



ABOVE LEFT: Did Dmitry Nikolaev really lose his testicles after a trip to a sauna with a mysterious blonde? ABOVE RIGHT: Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh: give your gonads for God.

GONE GONADS

Russian soap actor Dmitry Nikolaev, 30, had a drink with a young blonde woman who approached him at a bar after he finished a performance at a small Moscow theatre. She then invited him to a sauna, and though he was married, he agreed to go with her. "They kissed and had some more beer and after that the actor remembers nothing," said a police source. He woke up next day at a bus stop, feeling acute pain, and with blood on his trousers. Rushed to hospital, he was told that his testicles had been removed cleanly and professionally "by someone with a medical education" – a doctor, or perhaps a vet. Police believe his beer was spiked by a gang seeking to sell human organs on the black market. Carol Cooper, billed as the "Sun Doctor", suggests the testicles "could be sold for use in a bogus aphrodisiac or fertility treatment". The actor, we are told, is now working as a children's animator. *dailymail.co.uk*, 26 Feb; *Sun*, 27 Feb 2015.

The urban legend website Snopes suspects this story – which lacks date or specific location – is a variation on well-known organ-theft scarelore. It comments: "It's highly unlikely a crime such as the one described truly constitutes a profit center for gangs in any country, as testicles are neither a commonly purchased medical

commodity nor a commonly transplanted organ, and organs of any description are delicate and difficult to transport. [And] the manner in which the [Russian website] partially obscured the purported victim's identity was atypical and suspicious. While the man's face was pixelated, his full name, age, and general location were utilized by the Russian news outlet from which the *Daily Mail* sourced the story. The translated article from which the claims arose concluded with a claim that the man's wife remained ignorant of his experience, which is rather implausible given that his full name and other identifying details were released by the media: "Interestingly, the wife of the injured man is still convinced that her husband was in the hospital because of surgery on the genitals caused by a serious illness." For a feature on stolen organ scarelore, see "Kidney devils" [FT138:34-39].

CASTRATED FOR GOD

According to *India Today*, Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh, an Indian pop star and telepreacher with a reported wealth of more than £30 million, is being investigated after he allegedly manipulated around 400 men into removing their testicles to be 'closer to God'. Hans Raj Chauhan, 35 – one of his former followers who underwent castration seven years ago – is one

He woke up the next day at a bus stop in acute pain

of the few to break the silence to speak out against him and his Dera Sacha Sauda organisation. Chauhan filed a petition against the guru in 2012 and the Central Bureau of Investigation has started looking into claims dating back as far back as 2000 in preparation of charges of grievous bodily harm.

At a press conference in January for his new film, Singh said: "Such allegations disturb me, when I am doing good for humanity. Therefore my legal advisor and I are going to challenge them in court." The alleged castrations were said to be mainly carried out at a hospital run by the DSS in Singh's ancestral village Gurusar Modia, in the Hanumangarh district of Rajasthan. The DSS also owns factories, markets, farms, restaurants and hotels, and runs schools and orphanages. *Independent*, 3 Mar 2015.

CALIPHATE ORGAN TRADE

The UN Security Council has been told that Daesh (ISIS/ISIL) is funding its insurgency by

harvesting organs. Shallow graves full of corpses with missing kidneys and other body parts have been discovered, according to Mohamed Alhakim, Iraq's ambassador to the UN. "We have bodies, come and examine them," he said. "Surgical incisions have been found in bodies and it is clear they are missing certain parts." He also claimed a dozen doctors had been "executed" in the city of Mosul in northern Iraq – seized by Daesh in June 2014 – for refusing to harvest organs.

Such organ-theft stories in a war context have circulated before – for instance, Albanians dissecting Serbs, Israelis dissecting Palestinians [FT258:9] – and Alhakim may be spreading mendacious propaganda; but blackening the reputation of Daesh jihadists hardly seems necessary after the sectarian massacres, gruesome executions and imposition of sexual slavery. Now 'Caliph' Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's goons, ostensibly fighting 'idolatry', are busy smashing statuary in Mosul, bulldozing Nimrud (the Assyrian capital), Hatra (the Parthian capital) and Islamic holy sites (while hypocritically flogging off portable antiquities). Proud of their sickening barbarism, they have released videos of the destruction on the Internet. See pp54-55 for more. *Metro*, 19 Feb; *D.Telegraph*, 7 Mar 2015.

187: TRAPPIST MONKS



HUNTEMERSON

The myth

Trappist monks take a vow of silence.

The “truth”

The one thing everyone knows about the Trappists is that they take a vow of total silence, and would rather die than break it even in an emergency. If you grew up in the 1970s you know this from watching Dave Allen sketches on TV, but in any case, you surely know it. And, of course, it's not true. It is true that members of the Order of Cistercians of the Strict Observance (called Trappists after their founding abbey) are a pretty quiet lot, but they do not take, and never have taken, an actual vow of silence. They certainly aim for a general atmosphere of profound quiet, to avoid distraction from their duty of continual prayer, but they stress that silence is considered a tool, not an end in itself. Everyday monastery business will often involve speech: a monk isn't obliged to use mime to tell another monk that the roof's leaking. Community discussions are also verbal, as are sessions concerning “spiritual progress” with confessors or mentors. Perhaps more surprisingly, according to an official FAQ, “Sometimes, too, Trappists will enjoy friendly conversations with each other in a conversation room or in nature.” A Trappist conversation room – now there's a concept to boggle the brain.

Sources

www.trappists.org/visitor-questions/do-trappist-monks-and-nuns-take-vow-silence; <http://thetrendythings.com/read/23425>; www.osb.org/cist/intro.html; www.ocso.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=53&Itemid=63&lang=en

Disclaimer

If we've got this wrong, we'd love to hear from you – so do give us a shout.

Mythchaser

Pain has an obvious purpose, as do hunger and thirst, but itching is the “silly signal,” because it prompts you to do something that is against your interests: to scratch the itch, which is likely to result in infection. Or so a reader remembers being told at school. Is that true, he wants to know, or is it a myth: is itching, in evolutionary terms, completely pointless?



TAKING HEART

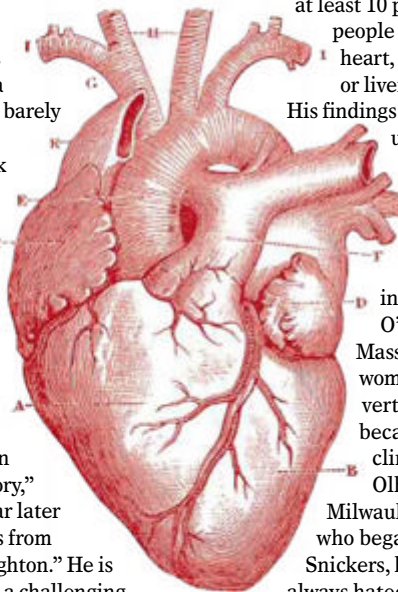
Kevin Mashford, 38, was born with a congenital heart condition and has had a number of major operations. He had three pacemakers fitted and suffered a stroke that almost killed him – but went on to recover and set up his own design and project management business. However, his condition deteriorated and he was given only weeks to live. In May 2014 the married father of two was given a heart transplant at the Freeman Hospital in Newcastle.

Doctors told him his new heart came from a man named John, an avid cyclist killed in a collision with a car while out riding. Seven days after his 13-hour operation, Mr Mashford asked for an exercise bike and cycled seven minutes every day for a week. Despite barely having cycled before, he took to the saddle as soon as he left hospital and is regularly clocking up the miles. “I completed a 30-mile charity cycle in [John's] memory,” he said. “A year later I rode 54 miles from London to Brighton.” He is gearing up for a challenging 342-mile (550km) ride from his home in Backwell, North Somerset, to Newcastle.

“I feel that I have got a big sense of responsibility to my donor and his family in a way,” he said. “Doing a ride like that in his memory is the least I can do. I do think about him because without him I wouldn't be cycling. Part of him is with me.” Despite various newspaper reports, he insists it has nothing at all to do with the new heart beating inside him. “I don't think I have inherited a part of his personality or anything like that,” he says. “That is something other people may have experienced.”

It is an intriguing theory, one that has been explored in literature, in music and on screen. From the Gothic horror of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Maurice Renard's *The Hands of Orlac* to Homer Simpson turning into a murderous psychopath after undergoing a hair transplant the idea that a medical procedure can somehow graft one person's characteristics or traits onto another holds powerful resonance. US academics have dubbed it cellular memory phenomenon (or universal living memory syndrome). Gary Schwartz, a professor of medicine at the University of Arizona, has documented 70 cases and argues

Fig. 37.



that cellular memory affects at least 10 per cent of all people who have a heart, lung, kidney or liver transplant. His findings are backed up by Dr Paul Pearsall, author of *The Heart's Code*. Examples include Dottie O'Connor, a Massachusetts woman with vertigo who became a climber; Paul Olham, a Milwaukee lawyer who began eating Snickers, having always hated chocolate; a seven-year-old girl who had nightmares about being killed after being given the heart of a murdered child; and a 29-year-old lesbian fast-food junkie who became a heterosexual vegetarian after being given the heart of a teenage girl. [For numerous other examples, see **FT100:12, 159:24, 236:18-19**]. Mainstream medicine remains sceptical. Monitoring shared personalities is hardly an exact science; and due to the anonymity of organ donors, it is usually impossible to track behavioural patterns between them and recipients. *D.Mail*, 5 Feb; *D.Telegraph*, 6 Feb 2015.

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NECROLOG

We wave off a countercultural pioneer who photographed London's beatnik scene and started Europe's first underground magazine – and the founder of the Black Hebrew cult

JOHN 'HOPPY' HOPKINS

John Hopkins was a key figure in the London 'underground' during the Sixties – some even called him the "King of the Underground". The son of a naval engineer, he attended Felsted School in Essex, where he ran the jazz society. He read physics and maths at Emmanuel College, Cambridge (MA 1958), after which he worked as a nuclear technician for the Atomic Energy Authority at Harwell near Oxford, where he became part of the beatnik milieu. When the *Daily Mirror* revealed he had been deported from the USSR after travelling with nine others on a peace mission to Moscow in a yellow hearse painted with the CND logo, the British security services tried to recruit him, so to escape their clutches he hastily resigned from the AEA.

On 1 January 1960 he moved to London where he worked as a photographer, his pictures appearing in *Time & Tide*, *Melody Maker*, *Sanity*, *Peace News*, the *Observer*, *Sunday Times*, and *Jazz Journal*. His subjects included Allen Ginsberg and Malcolm X in London, and Martin Luther King in Oxford – as well as John Lee Hooker, Dizzy Gillespie, Duke Ellington, Thelonious Monk, the Beatles and the Rolling Stones. He also recorded peace marches and happenings, and the seedier side of London: hookers, transsexuals, fetishists, rockers, tattoo parlours, and derelict architecture. A selection of his photographs was published in the book *From the Hip* (2008).

A trip to the US in 1963-64, where he encountered the Free University of New York, showed Hoppy the potential of the "alternative society". He joined his friend Barry Miles, the poet Michael Horowitz and others in organising a poetry reading that took place at the Albert Hall in London on 11 June 1965. That night, 17 poets, including Ginsberg, Ferlinghetti, Corso, Alex Trocchi, Ernst Jandl, Harry Fainlight, Christopher Logue, and Adrian Mitchell, proclaimed their work – and the standing-room-only audience of 7,000 recognised itself for the first time as a



counterculture. It was probably the largest ever audience for a poetry event in the UK. (Some of the readings were recorded by Peter Whitehead in his film *Wholly Communion*).

On 8 March 1966, Hoppy and others – including Michael de Freitas (aka Michael X) – launched the London Free School, intended to be a centre where anyone with knowledge to disseminate could give free lessons. It was in the basement of 26 Powis Terrace, Notting Hill Gate, used for jam sessions by the Third Ear Band's Dave Tomlin (who later established the Cambodian Embassy squat in St John's Wood). The Free School's landlord was the "natural philosopher" John Michell, who was soon to publish his first book, *The Flying Saucer Vision*. At the same time, Hoppy collaborated with Rhaune Laslett in organising the first of the annual street processions that would become famous as the Notting Hill Carnival.

To fund the Free School, Hoppy and Barry Miles transformed the local Notting Hill paper *The Gate* into *International Times (IT)*, Europe's first underground paper, launched on 15 October 1966 at the semi-derelict Roundhouse in Chalk Farm – the first time the building had been used for

anything other than a locomotive turning shed or beer warehouse. Fundraising concerts were staged at All Saints' Hall in Notting Hill, providing Pink Floyd and Soft Machine with a platform for their first live appearances. The Free School was something of a scam, but it attracted a disparate band of free thinkers, while its "students" included the actress Anjelica Huston, then a pupil at Holland Park Comprehensive.



given a nine-month jail sentence, but before that – on 27 April – he mounted the 14 Hour Technicolor Dream, a fundraising concert (really the UK's first "acid test") at Alexandra Palace, in response to a police raid in March on the *IT* offices. The event was filmed by Peter Whitehead as *Tonite Let's All Make Love in London*.

Hoppy's jail sentence sparked a "Free Hoppy" campaign, which led to the famous advertisement in the *Times*, asserting that the existing cannabis law was "immoral in principle and unworkable in practice". This was organised by Steve Abrams, paid for by Paul McCartney, and signed by a host of the great and the good (including Francis Crick, Jonathan Miller, George Melly and John Mortimer).

In the event, Hoppy served six months in Wormwood Scrubs, and so missed out on much of the "Summer of Love". After his release he and Barry Miles converted *IT* into a workers' cooperative

(in the spirit of Paris May '68), and he set up BIT (after the computer data unit), a free information exchange decades before the advent of the Internet. In the early 1970s, Nicholas Albery developed BIT into London's first not-for-profit social centre.

After a brief marriage to "Susie Creamcheese" (the California heiress Susan Zeigler, associate of Frank Zappa) in 1968, Hoppy began a partnership with Sue Hall, with whom he established the Fantasy Factory, a film and photographic co-op in north London that revolutionised lowtech video editing, bringing it within reach of community activists and independent directors. UNESCO funded Fantasy Factory's educational package and distributed it widely in the developing world. Hoppy dreamed that we could be "free of a corrupt government and a society run by greedy hooligans". In the 1970s, he became a vehement champion



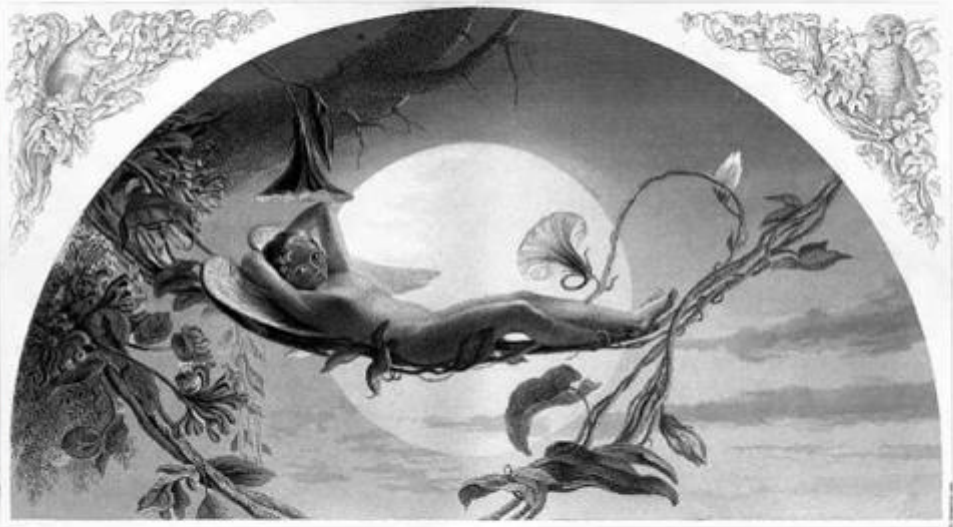
of squatters' rights, and later his footage of occupied areas such as "Tolmers Village" near Euston proved valuable to social historians.
Hoppy (John Hopkins), photographer and counterculture pioneer, born Slough, Berkshire, 15 Aug 1937; died 30 Jan 2015, aged 77.
 Paul Sieveking

BEN AMMI BEN-ISRAEL

After dropping out of high school, Ben Carter (as he then was) served three years in the US Army before working as a metallurgist at Chicago's Howard Foundry. In 1961, a co-worker introduced him to the idea that African Americans are descendants of the biblical Israelites, and Rabbi Reuben of the Congregation of Ethiopian Hebrews gave Carter a Hebrew name, Ben Ammi Ben-Israel. In 1966, the angel Gabriel appeared to him and told him to lead African-Americans to Israel and establish the long-awaited Kingdom of God; but first there was an abortive attempt to found a settlement in Liberia. In 1970, 48 families immigrated to Israel, claiming their right to stay there under Israel's Law of Return. Ben-Israel and more of his followers arrived in the ensuing months, settling in the Negev city of Dimona. The community was eventually given permanent residency in 1990, and then a path to citizenship in 2003.

Ben-Israel, also known as Abba Gadol (Great Father), was revered as a messianic figure in the community, his picture adorning at least one wall in every apartment. He wrote a number of books; he believed that Moses and Abraham were black, and that the Black Hebrews – stemming from the tribe of Judah – were the only "true" inheritors of Israel. The singer Whitney Houston claimed Ben-Israel as her spiritual father. The Black Hebrews, 3,000 of whom live in Israel, maintain a vegan diet, practise polygamy (though only men can have multiple spouses) and alternative medical techniques, including iridology, in which patients are diagnosed according to the state of their irises. Ben-Israel is survived by his four wives, 25 children, 45 grandchildren and 15 great grandchildren.

Ben Carter (aka Ben Ammi Ben-Israel), cult founder, born Chicago, Illinois, 12 Oct 1939; died Be'er Sheva, Israel 27 Dec 2014, aged 75.



FAIRIES, FOLKLORE AND FORTEANA

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

BOGGARTLORE

The boggart was, originally, a bogie of the northern and Midland shires. However, the boggart tribe had a difficult 18th and 19th century. In that time, a monster that had once sent children to bed with their little hearts racing was driven out of its old strongholds in the Ridings and the Marches (blame Methodism and steam whistles) and found itself restricted to what might be called a greater Lancashire: the County Palatine, northern Cheshire, northern Derbyshire and the South Pennines.

What is worse, the very word 'boggart' was employed in an unforgivably lazy fashion and, by the end of the 19th century, it was used routinely to mean 'ghost'. Most 19th-century boggart-lore – we have tens of thousands of words – is, in fact, ghost-lore. And while interesting, as ghosts always are, this is not much help in understanding the boggart, who traditionally dwelt out in the countryside.

However, there are sentences in half-forgotten sources that allow us to get closer to the boggart that once haunted the wilds of the North and Midlands; sources that allow us, in a manner of speaking, to strip the death shroud from off the boggart's back. So we know something of its habitat. The placename

Boggart Hole, of which the north-west has about a dozen, is our main clue here. These are (save two damp caves) associated with narrow wooded dells – what in Lancashire are called 'cloughs'. Boggarts were also often said to live under bridges: there are several

Boggart Brigs in the north: boggarts evidently liked to be near water. We also know something of their diet. 'Boggart muck' meant, of all things, owl pellets. Apparently the little bones inside were the fairies that the boggart had devoured. But they were omnivorous, not carnivorous. 'Boggart-meat' was a country name for ferns: which suggests boggart supper was Tinkerbell and bracken salad.

We also have eyewitness descriptions. The following is extreme but not unprecedented: "I saw [the boggart had] eight great flaming yellow eyes, and two

great big red ones as large as t' bell i' t' church tower." As the amorphous 10-eyed monster here perhaps hints, they could shape-change; common forms included calves, horses, dogs (of course) and even rabbits.

Given all this, what was the boggart? The best bet is that he was the great-great-great-grandchild of the trolls that the Vikings brought kicking and screaming with them from Scandinavia.

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

APPARENTLY THE
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the UFO files

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FLYING SAUCERY

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

SLIDING TOWARDS ROSWELL

The Roswell incident is ufology's Holy Grail, and the industry that has grown up around it never sleeps. On 5 May, the world may, or may not, be rocked to its foundations when the showmen behind the latest chapter in the Roswell saga unveil two colour slides that supposedly show "an unusual body in a glass case". The creature has a small thin body with a large head, so – hey presto – it *must* be an extraterrestrial. And as experts have concluded the Kodachrome film was definitely exposed in 1947 it may – or may not – show one of the aliens whose flying saucer crashed in New Mexico and was recovered by the US government. Up till now, only tantalising glimpses of the images have been revealed, via a YouTube teaser, to fuel the bandwagon as it rolls towards Mexico City, where they will be revealed in the presence of UFO pundit Jaimie Maussan. Internet flame wars are raging between those promoting them as the fabled 'smoking gun' and sceptics who have poked gaping holes in the story.

In his commentary, Adam Dew, who appears to be the custodian of these images, says they were found inside a box containing 400 old slides that turned up in Sedona, Arizona, in 1998. The cache belonged to geologist Bernard Ray and his wife Hilda Blair Ray, who was an attorney and amateur pilot. The couple travelled widely and their photographs include snaps of celebrities such as Bing Crosby, Clark Gable and General Eisenhower at various public events. But there is absolutely no evidence that the Rays had any political or intelligence connections that would have allowed them access to Top Secret material.

The one flimsy connection with Roswell is that Bernard was President of the West Texas Archaeological Society and may have visited New Mexico in 1947. Dew says that he is "not making any claims" but then goes on to state the creature has "some unusual features". Sceptics have pointed out these do not prove the creature is an extraterrestrial. It could equally show the body of a child with hydrocephalus or indeed the remains of an ancient mummy of the type stored in assorted museums across North America and Europe. But why let such awkward problems get in the way of such a good story? Dew says that logic tells him "it's probably nothing but I just can't shake the thought that maybe... just maybe... it's something." No one seems to have noticed that 5 May 2015, the day that some claim will change the world forever, is exactly



JIM TROTTER

LEFT: Will the new photos be as convincing as this reconstruction of the 'alien autopsy' at the Roswell Museum?

20 years since the footage of the infamous 'alien autopsy' was first shown to a hushed gathering of ufologists, journalists and others at the Museum of London (**FT81:41-43; 82:34-36; 84:29-31; 132:47; 210:30-31; 232:28**). In ufology, history just goes on repeating itself. But the warning we gave to those fooled by Ray Santilli's footage applies here: *caveat emptor*. Adam Dew's teaser on YouTube: www.youtube.com/watch?v=jLOMvHpieaE; *Metro*, 10 Feb 2015; Tim Printy, 'An invitation to witness history', *SUNlite* 7:2: www.astronomyufo.com/UFO/SUNlite7_2.pdf

WHICH CAME FIRST?

Many ufologists come to the subject via a love of the sci-fi literature they read in their youth. UFOs, flying saucers and aliens were the staple of pulp magazines dating back to the 1920s. The degree to which sightings of UFOs and experiences of alien contact have influenced fiction and vice versa continues to be hotly disputed by believers and sceptics, with each side making cogent points but with no absolute conclusion being possible. Into this melange of speculation steps Gregory L Reece, with a perceptive article on the popular culture Internet site Popmatters, in which he tries to untangle the process whereby the DC Comics character Green Lantern was forged in the white hot crucible of the 1950s American UFO craze. DC Comics supremo Julius Schwartz wanted to resurrect and re-tool an older version of the superhero that was more suited to the zeitgeist of the flying

saucer era. Schwartz had a head start in that he was already a close friend of Ray Palmer, founder of *Fate* magazine, who introduced the world to the Shaver mystery and collaborated on Kenneth Arnold's book *The Coming of the Saucers*. In the 1950s, the Roswell UFO Crash had already happened but was not yet the stuff of saucer folklore. The crash of a saucer near Aztec, New Mexico (see **FT181:30-36**), was, however, well known and although it had been exposed as a hoax its echoes were reverberating through popular culture. Schwartz used it as the genesis of the revived Green Lantern character, with the hero finding a downed alien craft and its dying alien pilot in "a desolate spot in the southwest USA".

Other aspects of the story mirror elements of the Aztec case including captured alien technology, military intervention and the spiriting away of the crashed saucer. Even the equally dubious George Adamski saga seems to have been incorporated into the Green Lantern story that thrilled a generation of space-and-saucer-hungry children. Reece concludes, as have ufologists of the psychosocial persuasion, that the sci-fi pulps were the breeding ground, the petrie dish, for flying saucer culture. This created an endless feedback loop where "science fiction influenced real world claims and folklore and real world claims and folklore influenced science fiction". Quite.

www.popmatters.com/feature/190606-crashed-saucers-and-contactees-ufos-and-these-secret-origin-of-the-gree/

FLAPPY VALLEY, PART TWO

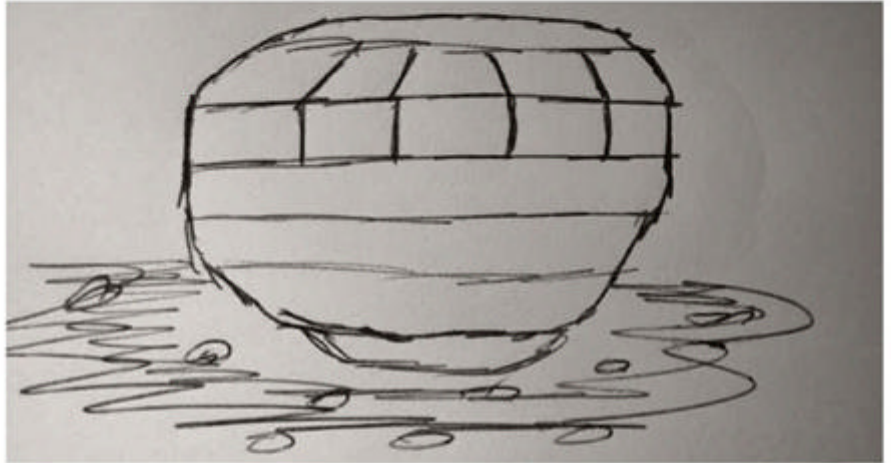
Last issue (**FT325:27**), we saw how a new witness in a classic British UFO case had an odd experience in the early hours of 29 November 1980 on Burnley Road, Todmorden, West Yorkshire. It coincided with a famous encounter in which local policeman Alan Godfrey drove his patrol car towards a rotating object above this same highway. Under hypnosis he later described a medical probe and classic 'alien abduction'. So what happened that night?

By adding to PC Godfrey's testimony the account of Bob – a bus driver on Burnley Road – we are presented with new possibilities. But, if the UFO *was* a bus, as has been suggested (see **FT269:44-47**; **270:46-49**), then Bob was seemingly 'flying' it; the twist being that, while this theory is enhanced by the bus's presence, the driver also witnessed something unusual from where PC Godfrey was abducted. He described a localised 'whirlwind' buffeting debris and leaving a swirled road surface beneath – something Godfrey had reported in 1980, understandably assuming these effects were caused by the UFO he saw.

So did PC Godfrey and Bob both encounter that same anomaly? Did Alan really just see Bob's bus parked inside this spinning vortex amidst a swirl of twigs and debris, making its metal body appear as a fuzzy spinning-top UFO? Or did the policeman see something else above the road, which Bob missed and that caused these ground effects? With much help from both witnesses I have analysed their accounts, hoping to clarify the facts.

Alan was making one last trip around the town centre before going off shift, then realised another constable was already inspecting the shops. He decided instead to drive off and look for some missing cows that were on the loose. He left the police station in Todmorden centre at about 5.05am, drove down Burnley Road, saw something ahead of him that he at first guessed was a 'staff bus' (one of the few vehicles likely to be about at that hour). As he got within 50ft (15m) of it, he realised it was no bus but a rotating diamond with five windows. These timings put him near Mons Mill at about 5.10am. He next recalls inexplicably 'relocating' 300ft (90m) further down the road, where he looked back to find the object had gone. He drove back to the spot and found the road surface swirled dry in a circular patch with a faint whirlpool pattern inside. Then he returned to the police station, picked up another police officer, returned to the site of the encounter and logged his story officially.

Bob the bus driver told me that he was driving from the Todmorden depot at Millwood onto Burnley Road, reaching Mons Mill around 4.55am. He stopped inside the whirlwind for a minute or so without getting out as he had a tight timetable. He saw the swirled dry circle below him. At no point did he meet Alan's panda car. He left the vortex still rotating above the road to go and pick up another driver then get him back to Millwood in time for him to operate the 5.10am bus to Halifax. Given the total distance



ABOVE: PC Alan Gofrey's sketch of what he saw that night on Burnley Road.

Did PC Godfrey and Bob both encounter the same anomaly?

travelled (about six miles/10km), it would take 15 minutes for this journey in a bus. So 4.55 is the latest viable estimated time for his sighting, as he reached Millwood on time.

Problems arise trying to make these claims match the theory that PC Godfrey's UFO was Bob's bus. Bob cannot have passed the police station heading onto Burnley Road later than 4.50, so Alan would have had to immediately follow that bus in order to catch it up at Mons Mill during the minute or so it was stopped in the vortex. Yet Alan told me: "I was not even outside the police station before 5am as I left with another PC who only signed off shift at that time." So it seems almost impossible that he saw Bob's bus at Mons Mill given that by the time Alan arrived there Bob would have been back at the depot. More importantly, Alan also saw a bus pass by when he was talking to the other PC in the town centre, *before* driving off in search of the cows. Significantly, he is not just claiming this now. I documented him doing so 32 years ago in *Pennine UFO Mystery* (p124). To have voluntarily revealed a potential explanation to me shows the innate honesty of Alan Godfrey.

That passing bus was either Bob heading back into the depot about 5.05 or, more likely, the first service bus going out from the depot up Burnley Road around 5.10. Either way, both Alan and Bob's timings have fixed marker points built in that seem to prevent placing these two vehicles at the same spot at the same time: and without that conjunction Alan *cannot* have misperceived Bob's bus. Bob knows his encounter was on his outward run, otherwise he would have had the second driver as witness. Thus his sighting occurred *before* Alan's. Another significant clue is that Alan told me in 1981 that his encounter was around 5.10am, after leaving town at 5.05. If Alan's encounter had been even five minutes earlier,

then he would have passed Bob at some stage going in the opposite direction on the Burnley Road – but neither says that this happened.

However, Bob reports seeing the vortex and swirl pattern at 4.55, but saw neither on his return at around 5.05-5.10. This complicates matters. Did Bob just miss these effects on the reverse run or did the curious vortex appear in the same location twice over a short period in order for Alan to see it at about 5.10?

For a UFO to hover and create such effects twice might just be feasible. Would a natural phenomenon also recur in the same location over a 15-minute period?

There are clues supporting the bus theory. Bob put his hand outside the window and felt upward suction reaching 4ft (1.2m) off the road, while Alan says the UFO hovered 5ft (1.5m) above the road. Might this suggest that the bottom few feet of the bus were obscured by rotating windborne debris, creating a persuasive illusion of a disembodied floating top deck? Additionally, some West Yorkshire Daimler Fleetlines had a rounded upper roof and five upper deck windows, a bit like Alan's UFO drawing. I am still trying to find the exact bus that Bob was driving.

Might Alan instead have met that first service bus after it passed him? Perhaps; but you must decide if it is easier to think that Alan and Bob witnessed forces created by a hovering UFO; or that a second bus besides Bob's also stopped in the recurring vortex at the same point without coming forward or noticing a police car up its rear end. Undeniably, some of the data matches the 'Bob's bus in a whirlwind' theory, but the apparent impossibility of both men coming together on Burnley Road seems crucial.

The idea that Alan's UFO *was* a bus is tempting, since it requires no added unknowns. Buses *were* there in the precise location around the same time. Witnesses saw the same whirlwind effects and ground traces. Alan saw the UFO and no bus. Therefore, arguing that the UFO *was* a bus seems logical. But is logic enough to defeat the timings that seem to eliminate Bob's vehicle?

Next time, we'll return to the witnesses themselves, their views on these theories and what *they* believe they saw, plus some further evidence that might help us reach a conclusion.

BLASTS FROM THE PAST

FORTEAN TIMES BRINGS YOU THE NEWS THAT TIME FORGOT

56 THE DEVIL MAN OF NEW ORLEANS

THEO PAIJMANS unearths reports of a bizarre terror in Louisiana and strange scare stories from 1938

In October 1938, large parts of the American populace were reeling from the shock of Orson Welles's 'War of the Worlds' radio broadcast on Hallowe'en (see FT199:42-47). Many listeners were led to believe Martians were invading the Earth in their towering, invincible death-dealing machines. In New Orleans, though, things were heating up in a very different way. The black populace of the city was in fear of a demonic creature, dressed in red, with a pair of horns, and able to vanish into thin air.

It had all begun the month before, when, in Algiers, on the other side of the Mississippi from New Orleans, a mysterious stranger appeared. He was described as having long black horns, bright pink ears shaped like sunflowers and eyes like a chicken. As the story went, he could disappear at will or turn himself into a baboon. At least he had the courtesy to announce his name: he said he was the 'Devil Man'.¹

One night, a husband and wife were driving home from a dance when a man stopped them to ask for a lift. The woman had misgivings, so they refused his request. Ten miles further on, they encountered the same man once again – and again after another 10 miles. This time, when they stopped the car, the man changed himself into a devil, whereupon the woman fainted. The man kept driving, and a few miles down the road the Devil Man appeared again, this time seated on a horse. The couple told neighbours what happened, who in turn alerted the police. Subsequent stories had it that the police tracked down the Devil Man, emptied their guns into the creature, only to have the bullets returned to them "by way of hairy hands".²

The newspapers denounced the incident as mass hysteria, mentioning that: "it was the



CAROLINE DESLOUIS

"He was described as having long black horns, bright pink ears shaped like sunflowers and eyes like a chicken. He could disappear or turn into a baboon"

same story in north and south Louisiana as in New Orleans – horns, disappearances, bullet tossing and all. Hundreds prepared to insist devoutly they'd seen him. Thousands believed he was in the offing, whether they saw him or not."³

The New Orleans police,

while remaining highly sceptical, decided to draw a line under the whole thing by arresting a man for vagrancy. The judge sentenced him to 30 days in the house of detention. The reasoning was that when the news broke that the Devil Man was safely behind bars, it

would put an end to the scare. The unfortunate individual arrested was a 30-year-old black man who said his name – or one of them – was 'Lord Harold'. Sergeant Harris had arrested the man after complaints from several people from Algiers that a devil with horns was appearing in bar rooms, ordering drinks and vanishing without payment.⁴ The plan backfired though. Those who were afraid of the Devil Man reasoned that it would be impossible to keep him locked up. He could go anywhere he wanted, and the stories of him

being seen continued to spread. He was spotted at a dance, where a man briefly turned a fiery scarlet for a few minutes and frightened the dancers. Somebody else had heard how a man “was in a saloon somewhere making glasses walk up and down the bar,” disappearing when it was time to pay for the drinks.⁵

On another occasion, the Devil Man leapt from a second storey balcony, sauntered over to an automobile parked near a saloon and stood there calmly until police gave chase. “The chase moved down Lawrence street toward the lake, the running crimson figure in front, the black police car right behind. At the end of two blocks, the speeding car was running all by itself. The Devil Man had disappeared. Such at least is the story of several, who maintain they saw him.”⁶

But was there really a Devil Man? Police remained noncommittal, but they admitted “the existence of somebody posing as a ‘demon’. But they know, they say, that the creature is no devil but some human dressed in a red costume. They declare too that he apparently does nothing more than frighten people, that he has not attempted to harm anyone.”

Yet the stories kept coming. One morning, two police officers hurried to the campus of the Second Ward School. They did not find the Devil Man, but a group of badly frightened boys who said they had seen him “dressed all in red with a horn in the top of his head and only half a face” and that they saw him “spit out a ball of fire as big as a basketball.”⁷ Shades of Spring-heeled Jack!

And so the scare rolled on. One girl claimed that she suddenly noticed that a man with whom she was dancing had a horn. She screamed and the man disappeared, she told the police. Several men were arrested for firing their guns in the air, trying to drive away the

Devil Man. The climax of the scare came when a Mrs Morane claimed to have received death threats from the Devil Man. Two policemen went to her house and lay in ambush, but the Devil Man never showed up. Then a stampede of school children occurred, when a pupil of the Joseph A Craig Negro elementary school shouted that he had seen the Devil Man.⁸

After these two incidents, the scare seemed to abate. Calls came into police headquarters for a week or two afterwards, then the panic was over. Towards the end, though, a new variant made a brief appearance: there was now mention of a ‘Devil Baby’, and the police even went so far as to go to the address where the baby was said to reside. “They returned, with considerable irritation, to report that if the baby they went to see was a sure-enough Devil baby, he was satanic enough to pull in his horns and make his tail disappear when they inspected him.”⁹

But what about the man who called himself Lord Harold and who was arrested on vagrancy charges? According to one newspaper, Lord Harold, whose actual name was Carlton Clark, was a 30-year-old African American from Arkansas, where he was born in the town of Fordyce. The reports stated that he had made “overtime use of a Mardi Gras costume on both sides of the river with disastrous effects”.¹⁰ Clark, though, denied he was the Devil Man. He allegedly said: “It is difficult to explain my ideas without my astronomical charts. I have been spiritually instructed. In Fordyce, in the month of February 1936, I was visited by a king. He was the King of Mars. He was a representative under the Queen of the South. This great king told me to attain Virgo I must first be a Mardi Gras. So I wore a red coat and carried a red handkerchief as an indicative sign that we should have water in season and out. But as for being a Devil Man –

ah, no. The Spirit of the people will not see me as a destroyer or as a devourer. I would not do that.”¹¹

In the end, the newspapers admitted that nobody actually knew what had started the hysteria. Police speculated it might have something to do with voodoo. “What or who will the Devil Man turn out to be? Or will he ever be discovered? A lot of people would like to know”, the newspapers concluded. And what happened to Carlton Clark? Mayor Robert Maestri summoned Clark after his sentence was completed, asking for his plans. Hearing that the man would like to stick around, but fearing that Clark would further upset people, he persuaded Clark to leave town, giving him three dollars and a new suit.¹²

New Orleans has an interesting past with regard to various scares, and a book, consisting of tales compiled on behalf of the Louisiana Writers Project and published in 1945, lists a number of these. There was the all too real – but never caught – mysterious Axeman, an early serial killer who held the whole city in a grip of fear before disappearing forever. There was also the 1920s Needle Man scare. And then there was Hugging Molly, “a half-wit who wound himself in a sheet and accosted women on the street, frightening them by hugging them. He was never punished, but was greatly feared by the Negroes, as his costume was similar to that of the Ku Klux Klan.”¹³

As with these earlier scares, the Devil Man panic was one that was predominantly experienced by the black communities of New Orleans and its wider environs. Moreover, it was one of four major scares I’ve so far identified from 1938 that infected black communities in several American states. The three other scares mainly took place in January-February. In Alabama, the Monster

of Marmotte Street roamed around. In the end, an otter was shot and the scare abated. In Panama City, Florida, a creature dubbed Harold the Horrible briefly created unease in the African-American section of town. It was a newspaper concoction that got out of hand before being quelled quickly. The editor who made it up did so in response to another fear that held sway in Pensacola, Florida, where a terrible, six-legged monster called the Goon of Guillemard Street held the black population in fear. With Europe and the Far East marching towards World War II, 1938 was a jittery year: Neville Chamberlain’s “peace in our time” was not to be. Perhaps this generally felt climate of unease explains the panic created by Welles’s radio play or the cluster scares among black Americans that year. But where white Americans were afraid of Martians and extraterrestrials, black Americans were worried about monsters and devils. It’s an interesting distinction, fuelled by differences and demarcations in social status, culture and tradition.

One of those traditions was remembered when Clark had left town and the dust around the Devil Man scare had settled down a bit. It was time for the older inhabitants to recall a scare, no less strange, that had held Lafourche in its grip some four decades earlier: that of the Rooster Man. Those who saw the Rooster Man all agreed it had to be a mentally-ill individual who had got his hands on a Mardi Gras costume that he wore during his forays to the bayou farms. It consisted of a red suit and a cock’s head mask. “The characteristic prints of a giant rooster’s feet that he left behind were dreaded evidence of his presence in a neighbourhood during the several months he was at large.” In the end, the scare stopped because the man’s family placed him in an insane asylum, where he died some years later.¹⁴

Notes

1. Lyle Saxon, *Gumbo Ya-Ya: A Collection of Louisiana Folk Tales*, Houghton Mifflin, 1945, p89.
2. Ibid, pp89-90.
3. As well as the reporting in the New Orleans newspapers, a full account of the Devil Man scare was

published nationwide in several American newspapers, such as the *Independent Republic*, Phoenix, Arizona, the *Salt Lake Tribune*, Salt Lake City, Utah, *The San Bernardino County Sun*, San Bernardino, California, *Seattle Daily Times*, Seattle, Washington, all on 18

Dec 1938.

4. ‘Police Allay Devil Man Rumors; Reveal Loiterer’s Arrest, Sentence’, *Times-Picayune*, New Orleans, Louisiana, 23 Sept 1938.
5. For sources, see note 3.
6. ‘Elusive Devil Man Outruns Police Car’,

Lake Charles American-Press, Lake Charles, Louisiana, 23 Apr 1967, reprints the story from its 7 Jul 1938 edition (which would make the appearance of the Devil Man even earlier than September.)

7. Ibid.
8. ‘Negroes Fear Devil Man’, *Lexington Herald*, Lexington, Kentucky, 25

Dec 1938.

9. Ibid; also ‘Now Son Of ‘Devil Man’ That Negroes Fear’, *The Delta Democrat-Times*, Greenville, Mississippi, 25 Dec 1938 and sources in note 3.
10. Ibid, and sources of note 3.
11. For sources, see note 3.

11. ‘Devil Man Leaves Town’, *Times Advocate*, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 15 Nov 1938.

13. *Gumbo Ya-Ya*, pp75-78; 568.

14. ‘Tales of South Louisiana’s Devil Man Recall Days of Lafourche Rooster Man’, *Times-Picayune*, New Orleans, Louisiana, 9 Oct 1938.

THE VAMPIRE &

Hidden in the frames of the silent horror classic *Nosferatu* are encoded occult messages from one of Weimar Germany's most well-connected practitioners, Albin Grau.

BRIAN J ROBB traces the secret history behind the making of the film.

Perhaps the origins of vampire cinema – as popular today as it ever was in the heyday of Universal and Hammer horror films – begin with German expressionist director FW Murnau's masterful silent 1922 film *Nosferatu: A Symphony of Horror* (*Nosferatu – Eine Symphonie des Grauens*). An unauthorised adaptation of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (which had been published just 25 years before, in 1897), the film is something of an occult text, the very frames of which have been imbued with hidden meanings. This was down to the film's producer and production designer, Albin Grau, a practising occultist who used Murnau's movie to spread his esoteric gospel to the masses.

Grau and Murnau saw the cinematic potential in Stoker's novel, but the rights to formally adapt it were never properly obtained. Instead, screenwriter Henrik Galeen simply changed the settings and time period and the names of the main characters. Despite this, the ghost of Stoker's *Dracula* was readily identifiable in the finished film. This act would cost Grau dearly when Stoker's widow, Florence, became aware of the unauthorised movie.

A SYMPHONY OF HORRORS

Born in 1884 near Leipzig, Albin Grau was a baker's apprentice before studying at the Leipzig Academy of Art, where his natural aptitude for drawing and painting suggested a possible future career. The First World War derailed Grau's artistic ambitions for a time. He served on the Russian Front, but survived the experience. Afterwards, while it may not have matched up to his artistic ambitions, he secured a job as a commercial artist, producing work for shipping lines, including the North German Lloyd Company, and the German railway, among others. Grau's interest in occult subjects, fuelled by his wartime experiences, continued to grow alongside his skills as a draughtsman.

His talents eventually led him to a job at UFA (Universum Film AG), Germany's principal film studio between the wars. His earliest production credits are sketchy, but he started by providing what today would be thought of as storyboards and concept art for various films, said to include *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* (1919). His first major credit,



GRAU HAD MET SOMEONE WHO CLAIMED TO HAVE ENCOUNTERED A REAL VAMPIRE

however, would be on *Nosferatu*, the only film produced by his own company, Prana-Film.

Grau established Prana-Film with the express intention of producing movies not only on occult subjects but which contained some traces of occult practices and lore. The name 'prana' came from the Sanskrit word for the Buddhist concept of 'sacred breath' or 'life force', which had also been used as the title of proto-Nazi Hugo Vollerath's Theosophical journal. There was an occult revival in the period of the Weimar Republic as Germany reeled not just from its traumatic wartime defeat, but also from economic collapse and the continuing after-effects of the 1918 Spanish Flu epidemic. According to Lotte Eisner in her classic study *The Haunted Screen*: "Mysticism and magic, the dark forces to which Germans

LEFT: A Prana-Film poster for *Nosferatu*. FACING PAGE: Max Schreck as the film's vampiric Count

have always been more than willing to commit, had flourished in the face of death on the battlefields... the ghosts which had haunted the German Romantics revived. A new stimulus was thus given to the eternal attraction towards all that was obscure and undetermined".

Albin Grau was certainly in the forefront of that 'eternal attraction' towards the occult. He launched his film company with the help of businessman Enrico Dieckmann, who had arranged capitalisation of 20,000 marks by January 1921. The would-be occult film mogul developed a range of potential projects, including such suggestive titles as *Hollenträume* ('Dreams of Hell') and *Der Sumpfteufel* ('The Devil of the Swamp'). Although he had grand plans, circumstances would mean that Murnau's *Nosferatu* would be the one and only movie completed by Prana-Film. At this point, neither Grau nor Dieckmann had any great experience of producing movies: film was a new art form, open to pioneers and charlatans alike. Grau did have a firm idea, though: a movie based on Bram Stoker's *Dracula* sparked all kinds of possibilities in his fertile imagination and would be the perfect vehicle for presenting his occult world view, disguised within a captivating popular fiction.

Grau had another reason for turning to Stoker's unusual tale for his first film: he'd personally met someone who had encountered a vampire – or so he claimed. Grau related his experience in a 1922 issue of *Bühne Und Film* ('Stage and Film'). Towards the end of WWI, he had been living with a family of Serbian peasants. His host told the story of his father's return from the dead. The dead man was a 'nosferatu' – an undead spirit, intent upon stalking those in the local village who remained alive. Eventually, so Grau was told, the man's undead father was captured by a mob (not unlike those seen during the climax of many Universal movies of the 1930s, pitchforks and flaming torches at the ready) and reburied – this time with a stake piercing his heart. This folk tale drew upon the same myths and legends that inspired Stoker, but Grau heard the tale from someone who firmly believed in their reality. The word 'nosferatu', used

THE OCCULTIST



to describe a vampire-like creature, had appeared in ED Gerard's *The Land Beyond the Forest*, an 1888 book on Transylvanian folklore. Its origins are understood to have been from the Greek word 'nosophoros' or 'nosoforos', meaning 'plague carrier'.

SCARY MOVIE

Dracula chronicler David J Skal describes a "general air of impracticality" around the making of *Nosferatu*. The film's director, the then 32-year-old FW Murnau, had form with unauthorised film versions of popular literary text: his *The Head of Janus* (Der Janus-Kopf, 1920, now lost) was a direct take-off of Robert Louis Stevenson's 1886 novel *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. Hans Janowitz, writer of the Expressionist classic *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* (1919), had simply changed all the character names for this film version. As producer of an equally unauthorised version of Stoker's *Dracula* ("freely adapted", as the film's publicity claimed), Grau settled on Murnau as director.

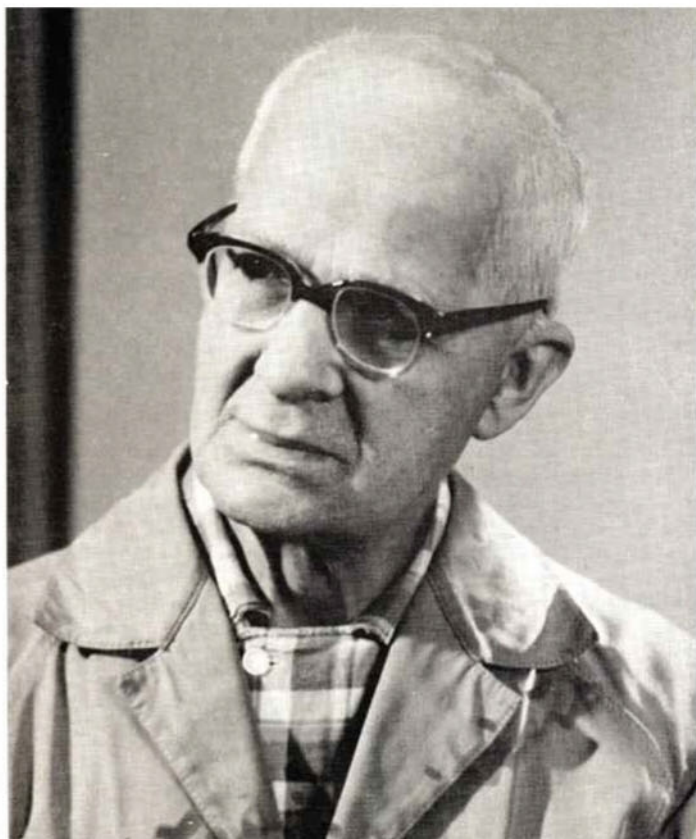
Screenwriter Henrik Galeen stripped the narrative down to its core. He'd previously scripted and directed *The Golem* (1920), exhibiting a penchant for the macabre and mysterious. All the names were changed, with Count Dracula becoming Count Orlok, Harker turning into Hutter, Mina becoming Ellen, and the Van Helsing figure going by the name of Professor Bulwer. The outline of the plot, however, was essentially the same as that of Stoker's novel. The film sees Hutter travel to Transylvania to complete a property purchase for Count Orlok, followed by the Count's voyage by sea in pursuit of Hutter;



the malevolent creature's uncanny influence over Hutter's wife, Ellen; and his final fate at the hands of scientific investigator, Professor Bulwer. The script was poetic in its use of language (Murnau's copy is retained by the Cinémathèque Française), but Murnau used it as little more than a template from which his visual imagination could freely deviate.

The story of how Stoker's widow Florence launched a ferocious legal attack upon *Nosferatu* and its makers, almost wiping the film completely from movie history, is well known. It seems likely that the first Florence Stoker knew of the film was upon hearing about the gala premiere at Berlin's Zoological Gardens on 4 March 1922. According to Donald Skal, Florence had "neither given permission nor received payment for *Nosferatu*". It was quite clear that Grau, Galeen, and Murnau had wilfully pirated her late husband's most famous book, despite their half-hearted attempts to disguise the story's origins.

Florence hit Prana-Film just at the moment they were going out of business anyway. The company had been struggling with cash flow and was unable to pay its bills. By June 1922, it was bankrupt: its collapse ruined Grau's plans for a filmmaking empire founded on new mystical principles. Although it was money she'd initially sought, having fallen on hard times since the death of her husband, Prana-Film's bankruptcy meant that Florence Stoker was to be disappointed. There was another remedy, however. Her German lawyer, contracted through the Society of Authors – which she had joined solely to pursue the filmmakers – suggested that Florence might be able to claim ownership of the film itself.



TOP: One of Grau's poster designs for *Nosferatu*. ABOVE LEFT: The film's director, FW Murnau. ABOVE RIGHT: A rare photograph of the mysterious Albin Grau.



ABOVE LEFT: Berlin's Zoological Gardens, scene of the film's 1922 premiere. BELOW: The young Florence Stoker.

While the legal wrangling went on, the film continued to be screened across Europe.

The case against Prana-Film and others who sought to benefit from the exploitation of *Nosferatu* went on for over three years, constantly driven by a relentless Florence Stoker. By 1925, evidently finally reassured that there was no money to be recovered, Florence switched her focus to requiring the physical destruction of all existing copies of a film she had apparently never taken the time to watch. By July, there was a legal ruling that all prints were to be destroyed. Like a celluloid-hating Van Helsing, Florence Stoker made it her mission in life to wipe out all evidence of the vampiric *Nosferatu* that was leeching away her life force of legally due royalties. A print held in London by Ivor Montagu's Film Society, long pursued by Florence Stoker, was finally destroyed around April 1929. But this wasn't quite the end...

Like all the best cinematic bloodsuckers, *Nosferatu* refused to go quietly into the night. After all, it needs only a single member of a nest of vampires to survive for the contagion to spread once more. And a single film print of the offending movie escaped Florence Stoker's efforts and turned up in the United States, where, under local copyright law, the novel of *Dracula* was in the public domain, making it fair game for filmmakers like Grau and Murnau. It is from this single survivor of Florence's celluloid purge that every copy we have today of *Nosferatu* is said to have originated.

The appearance of the film in America almost scuppered Florence's attempts to sell the film rights to Universal (off the back of a successful official touring stage adaptation that featured a young Hungarian actor named Bela Lugosi). The summer of 1929 saw the resurrection of *Nosferatu* (retitled *Nosferatu the Vampire*) on America's screens, advertised as "inspired by *Dracula*". Universal's 'spy' at an early New York screening, Louis Cline, declared the film to be "boring", as did a report in the *New York Times*. Shortly thereafter, the American print of *Nosferatu* was finally obtained by Universal, whose



FLORENCE STOKER MADE IT HER MISSION IN LIFE TO WIPE OUT ALL EVIDENCE OF THE VAMPIRIC FILM

creative personnel studied it as they began adapting the stage play of *Dracula* for the screen afresh.

OCCULT MESSENGERS

The existence of *Nosferatu* did more than simply haunt Universal's attempts to make an official film of Stoker's novel. It appears that encoded within the film itself were occult messages that only the suitably enlightened could discern. Albin Grau's occult interests were far-reaching, but his main affiliation was to Fraternitas Saturni, the 'Brotherhood of Saturn', a German mystical order founded in the late-1920s. Prior to that, Grau had many titles and many roles – if there was a occult group active in the early 20th century,

then he was probably a member. Under the alias 'Frater Pacitus', he was a Master of the Pansophical Lodge, where he first met fellow occultist Eugene Grosche. Grau was also briefly an initiate of the Ordo Templi Orientis, or OTO, primarily associated with the 'great beast' himself, Aleister Crowley. Grau worshipped Baphomet, the pagan goat deity linked with the Knights Templar and later associated with the Church of Satan. There were complicated relationships between many of these groupings, but it is enough to say Albin was a busy man.

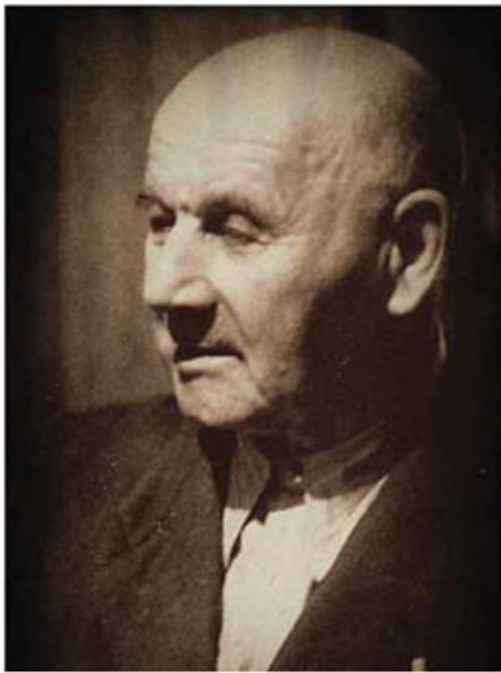
In the early 1920s, in the lead up to the production of *Nosferatu*, Grau's connections and contacts with Berlin's occult demi-monde were numerous. He was a friend of Heinrich Tränker, a bookseller who no doubt kept Grau supplied with the esoteric texts he needed to indulge his interests in "mystery rituals", those reputed sources of 'ancient knowledge'. Tränker was a founding member of several pansophic groups in Weimar-era Germany. Pansophia, translated as "universal wisdom" or "all knowing", was popular in 17th century Europe and underwent a revival in the period between the wars. Pansophism was a Frankenstein-like belief system that cherry-picked the best bits from the likes of better-known outfits such as Theosophy, Rosicrucianism, and Freemasonry, among others. Grau and Tränker were heavily involved in the study of such arcane traditions, as well as astrology, Templarism, and even alchemy; the older the supposed hidden knowledge, the better.

As Grau embarked upon the making of *Nosferatu*, deliberately conceived as a vehicle for his occult ideas, Tränker was combining his various occult groups into one: the Grand Pansophical Lodge of the Orient. Tränker was Grand Master, while Grau served as Master of the Chair – essentially Tränker's second-in-command. The group boasted around a membership of about 100 at this time, the largest in Germany, and was considered to be quite successful among the numerous small occult groups of the period.

Members of the Pansophical Lodge spent many evenings dressed up in long robes covered in occult symbols – of the type that Grau would eventually smuggle into *Nosferatu* – discussing the esoteric and the strange. They had titles and held invented offices, but this was more of a gathering of occult fanboys rather than a practising magical group. Many of Grau's occult contacts were part of the Lodge, including Grosche, who served as the group's secretary, and Karl Germer, who was Tränker's private secretary and publisher of the Lodge's journal.

Another of Grau's occult connections was with the Austrian author and Expressionist painter of macabre subjects, Alfred Kubin, whose pamphlet about lighting techniques for movies affected the look of *Nosferatu*. Study of the esoteric was very much the order of the day at the Grand Lodge, with members progressing through various 'degrees', much in the style of freemasonry or modern Scientology.

The casual 'club' nature of the Grand Lodge changed during 1921 when Tränker brought



ABOVE LEFT: Heinrich Tränker. ABOVE: Eugene Grosch, aka 'Frater Gregor A Gregorius'. ABOVE RIGHT: A robed brother of the Fraternitas Saturni. BELOW: The society's symbol.

his Pansophists into the orbit of the OTO, the Order of the Knights Templar of the East, the largest international occult organisation, which co-opted many of the leaders of smaller, local and national groupings under one tent, becoming that group's German outpost. While Grau was busy with *Nosferatu*, the notorious Crowley had inducted Tränker in May 1921, making him the OTO Grand Master for Germany, and so putting Grau next to the heart of occult power across Europe. By November 1921, Crowley had remade the OTO into an organisation built around his personal concepts of Thelema, a 'new' religion of which Crowley was to be the sole prophet. Crowley dated his 'revelation' to a 1904 encounter in the Egyptian desert with a mysterious entity, which had dictated *The Book of the Law* to him. The entire scheme seemed simply an excuse for Crowley to indulge his main rule for life under Thelema: "Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the law". Although he balked at the incursion of the OTO and Crowley (whom he reputedly despised) into the German occult sphere, Grau couldn't resist remaining active on the fringes.

After the collapse of Prana-Film and the legal moves by Stoker's widow, Grau worked on a mere handful of movies, prime among them being the weird *Warning Shadows* (1923). As art director, Grau brought this 'nocturnal hallucination' to cinematic life, virtually without inter-titles. While it lacks the obvious occult influences at play in *Nosferatu*, *Warning Shadows* continued Grau's approach to generating a unique filmic atmosphere. His deep involvement with the Grand Lodge and the occult had continued throughout his filmmaking years.

By 1925, Tränker thought a formal alliance with Crowley's crowd made sense, and with his film career now in ruins, Grau had little objection. Karl Germer, who would succeed Crowley as head of the OTO in 1947, recalled: "Grau was a good man, but was too deeply entangled with Grosche and Tränker... He

CROWLEY EXPECTED OBEDIENCE FROM HIS GERMAN OUTPOST, WHILE ALBIN GRAU OBJECTED STRONGLY



could not extricate himself and never saw the light".

According to Grosche's later account of the meeting between the leading lights of Germany's Grand Pansophical Lodge and Crowley's entourage, dubbed the Weida Conference, the event was rocky from the beginning. Crowley expected complete obedience from his German outpost, while Tränker and Grau objected strongly. Despite his personal animosity, it is believed that Grau recorded Crowley's visit to Germany on film, although this is long lost (there have been rumours that the film resided at Joseph Metzger's 'Abbey of Thelema' in the Swiss village of Stein, but there is no

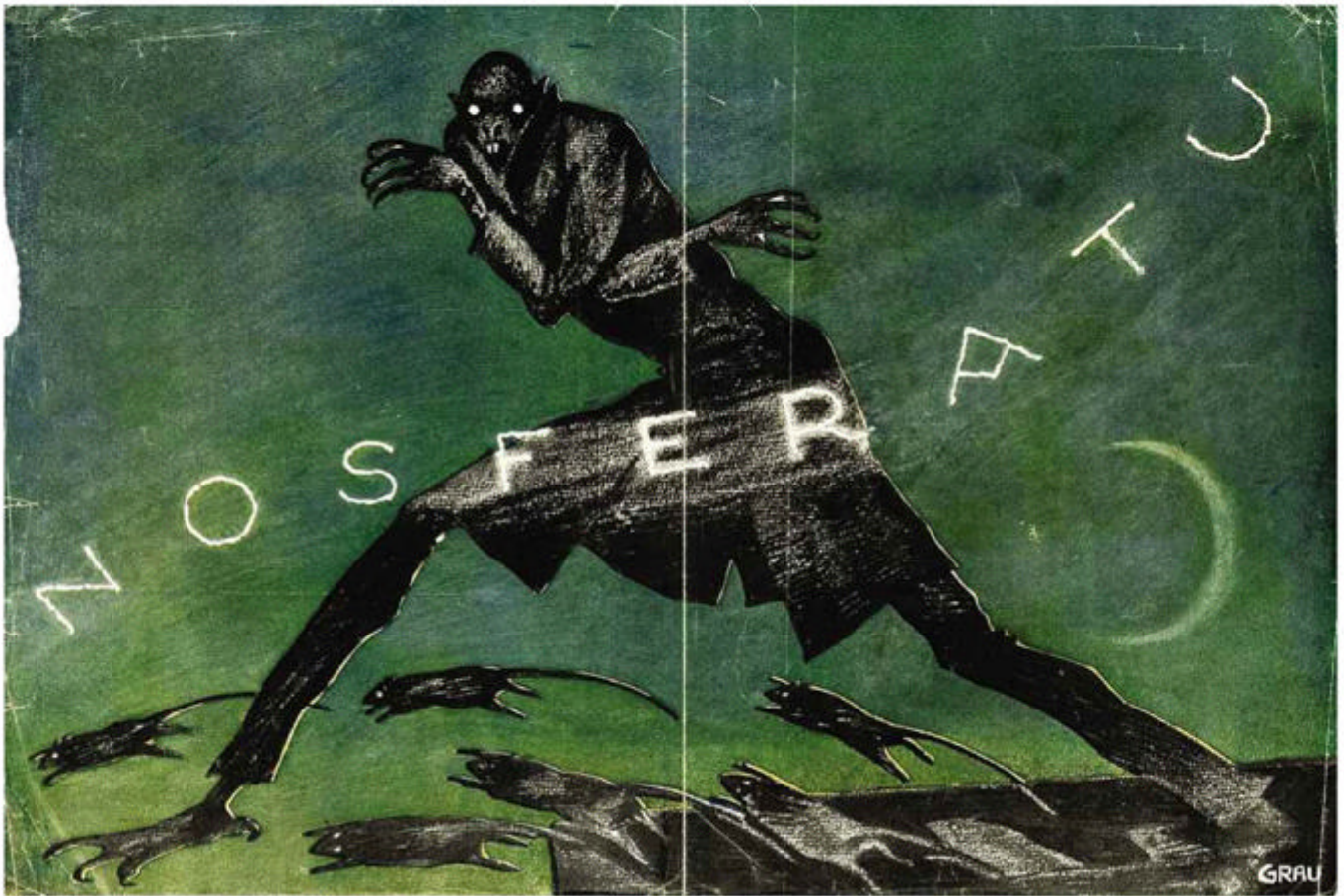
evidence for this). Grau eventually came to see Crowley's demands as such a breach of occult etiquette that he pushed for the resignation of Tränker as head of the Lodge, on the grounds that it had been Tränker who had brought about Crowley's involvement in German occult affairs. This may have been a self-interested power grab by Grau, as the result was the dissolution of the Lodge. While Tränker and others clung to the OTO for their salvation, Grau and about two-thirds of the former Lodge membership re-formed in a new organisation: the Fraternitas Saturni. Although expected to take the leadership of the new group, which was essentially Crowley's OTO without Crowley, Grau declined, suddenly backing away from direct membership of any occult group (although he did contribute to the organisation's journal).

Nonetheless, Grau remained hungry for occult knowledge, and felt passionate about communicating his ideas on the subject to a wider audience. *Nosferatu* was to be his most successful vehicle for doing so.

HIDDEN KNOWLEDGE

Although only officially credited with production design and costumes on *Nosferatu*, Grau was far more closely involved in reality. The fact that the film was produced through his company, Prana-Film, meant that Grau was not only responsible for the film financially, but also artistically, at least as much as was its director, FW Murnau. The film was made in a country that had been defeated in war and continued to suffer, seemingly disproportionately, from the conflict's fall-out. Soviet-inspired uprisings in Berlin and Munich would partly inspire a counter-reaction that gave birth to the forces of Nazism, while the cities were populated by many crippled and impoverished in the war. Against this backdrop, Grau and Murnau dreamt up an all-consuming cinematic vampire.

Within the images of *Nosferatu* are encoded



ABOVE: Albin Grau's artwork defined the rat-like, emaciated look that actor Max Schreck brought to life in his portrayal of the film's vampire, Count Orlok.

a network of occult communications, linking the various characters. Varying between attraction and repulsion, the central vampire villain is first connected to Hutter and then Ellen, causing each in turn to become dependent upon him. The literal meaning of the word 'occult' is simply the unknown or hidden, and the figure of Graf Orlok embodies the unknown 'other', a feared foreign influence of middle-European origin. Orlok influences and ultimately corrupts all that he comes into contact with, from the crew of the ship that delivers him to Hutter's home town, through the town's officers, and ultimately to Hutter, Ellen, and Bulwer.

Before Murnau shot a single scene of *Nosferatu*, Grau had developed a range of storyboards and conceptual artwork, much of which would later find its way onto posters and other marketing materials used to promote the movie. He produced many fully illustrated, very atmospheric versions of key scenes from the film's script that acted as a guide for Murnau, perhaps not in the specifics of how to shoot the film, but certainly in defining the dark style Grau was hoping to achieve in its visual scheme. It was Grau's artwork that defined the rat-like, emaciated look of actor Max Schreck as Orlok, the vampire at the heart of *Nosferatu*. (E Elias Merhige's 2000 film *Shadow of the Vampire* amusingly postulates that Schreck himself was a real-life vampire; Udo Kier plays Grau in the movie).

Grau's focus, as a film producer in financial difficulty even before production even began, seemed often to be on what, to

outsiders, were trivial or irrelevant details. However, these things were obviously deeply meaningful to Grau himself and to those few adepts who would recognise his use of occult imagery. Grau lavished a huge amount of attention upon the contract drawn up between the vampire Orlok and Hutter, out of all proportion to its screen time. Only briefly seen, the document is littered with recognisable occult symbols, many relating to planets of the Solar System and astrology. These symbols would strike most viewers in passing as simply interesting graphics or decoration, but knowing thaumaturgists would have been wise to Grau's occult games.

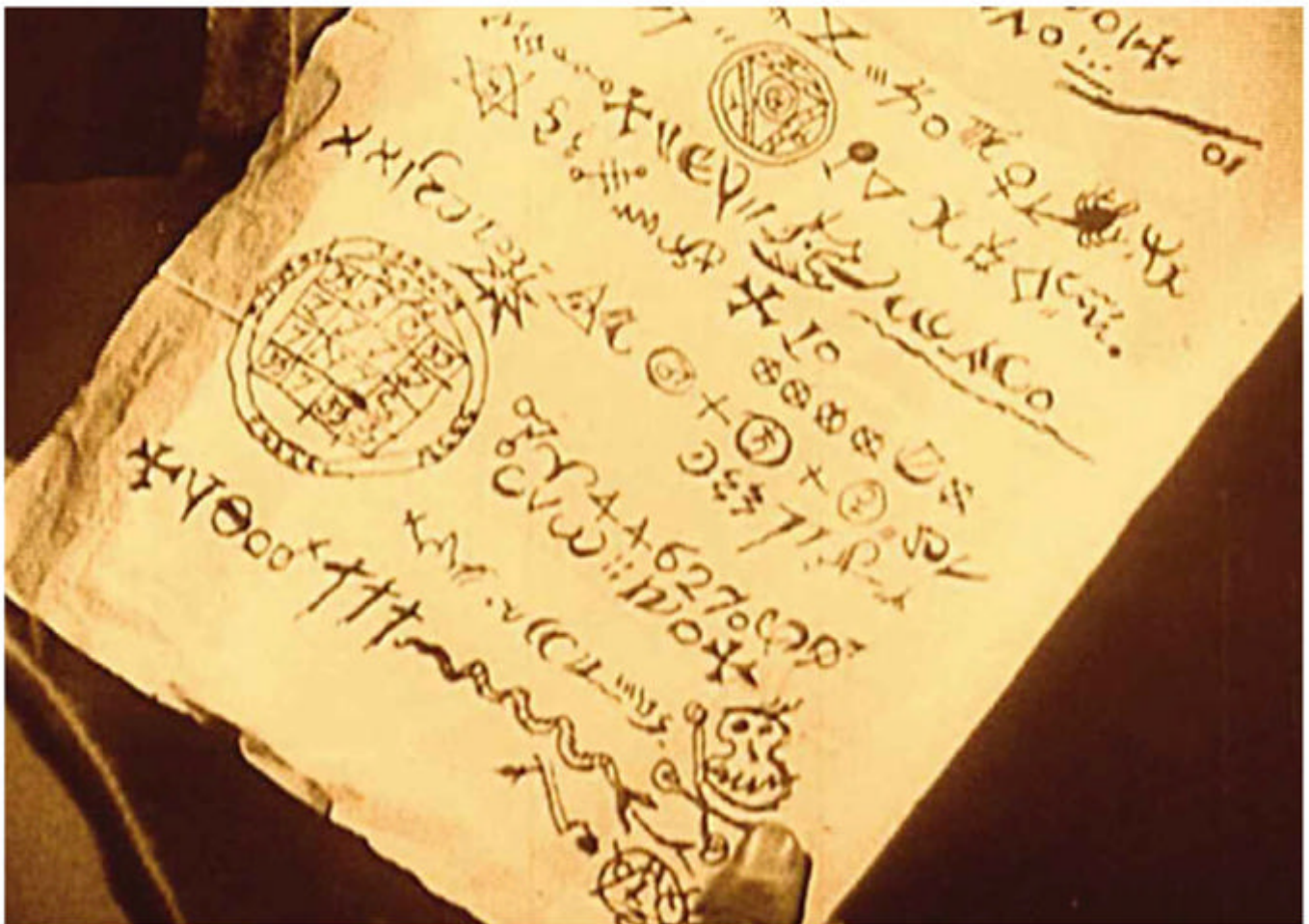
Hutter's letter, or contract, is seen from both the front and the back, and each page is closely covered in angular symbols. Their meaning was first broken down in an article in the French film journal *Positif* in 1980, accompanied by a series of frame blow-ups from the film. Writer Sylvain Exertier uncovered what David J Skal described as "a complex synthesis of cabbalistic and astrological symbols that [Orlok] would take as favourable auguries for his purchase of the house".

For many, this use of occult symbolism in the film might be seen as a simple in-joke, a throwaway reference for those in the know; except for the fact that Grau was so deeply immersed in the occult world. This went beyond the practice of adopting hermetic symbols as a kind of signature, recognisable to others of a similar bent. Given his deep involvement in Weimar Germany's occult circles, it seems reasonable to suppose that

Grau's inclusion of such symbols had genuine meaning for him and others.

Described by some often self-appointed experts as mere 'cabbalistic gibberish', the text is supposedly – as translated by an inter-title – a plain account of a contract to purchase property, devoid of any occult content whatsoever. The enigmatic symbols presented on the paper are stripped of their meaning for the sake of clarity and simplicity in the storytelling. Exertier's piece in *Positif*, however, tells a different story. He found in the seemingly abstract scribbles a deeper meaning, in line with much occult practice and esoteric traditions of the time. He sees each cryptogram as having a distinct meaning, relating to Count Orlok's journey and his ultimate aim (the seduction of Hutter's wife, Ellen, whom he glimpses in a photograph during the same scene).

Exertier marvels at Grau's achievement in including in the film a piece of symbolism, glimpsed only for seconds and therefore resistant to instant deciphering, which displays great fidelity to occult practice. It was only through enlarging the individual film frames back in 1980 that he was able to ultimately interpret the text; today, the freeze frame button on any DVD player allows a contemporary viewer the same instant access. Exertier sees this act of hiding material within the visual text of the movie as a "wink to the occultists" with whom Grau was involved. He notes that what is surprising about the text "is its relative readability. Esoteric texts are generally written in the form of tomes, unreadable



ABOVE LEFT: A frame from *Nosferatu* reveals the occult symbols on the contract drawn up between Count Orlok and Hutter. It is seen only briefly on screen, but Grau seems to have taken some pains to give them a hidden meaning.

without using a grid that only the magus and his correspondent have. Here, each sign is significant. [The character of] *Nosferatu* is not afraid [to have the letter] read by others because he is sure it does not reveal important secrets”.

The symbols Grau used are largely astrological in nature, evoking the Moon (Luna), Mars, and Saturn, as well as Satan himself. The intention was to suggest the contract with Count Orlok is actually a pact with the Devil, suggested through the use of personal sigils.

This kind of thing had been seen before in some of the early work of the illustrators of Stoker’s original *Dracula* manuscript, although none seems to have approached the representation of magical symbolism with the same rigour as Grau. It’s a combination of images and markings that Grau no doubt believed would look impressive for the brief time they’re seen on screen, but that also might suggest possible meanings that relate directly to the scene in which the document appears. Some magical practitioners have noted that although the signs and symbols appear authentic enough and could convey the intended meaning, their actual arrangement on the parchment is rather strange and would, if translated strictly according to tradition, produce something akin to gobbledegook.

What the images and symbols used on this prop do prove beyond any shadow of a doubt is that Grau knew his stuff.

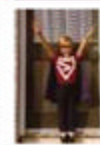
THE LIGHT OF DAY

What finally prompted long-term occultist Albin Grau to suddenly give up all esoteric pursuits? After spending the better part of two decades trying to get his ideas across – through films like *Nosferatu* and *Warning Shadows*, and groups like the Grand Pansophical Lodge, the OTO, and Fraternitas Saturni, all seemingly to no avail – perhaps he’d simply had enough. Nazism was on the rise in Germany as the 1930s began, and many of those involved in pre-war German occultism would end up in detention camps. Grau was to be one of them, finding himself imprisoned in Buchenwald. For many years, it had been assumed that the driving force behind Murnau’s *Nosferatu* had died in the camp in 1942, a victim of Nazism. However, later researches revealed he’d survived his experience, escaped with his disabled daughter to Switzerland, and then lived quietly in Bavaria until his death in 1971.

Film critic David Cairns has noted on his Shadowplay blog that he had what he dubbed a “half-arsed” theory that in making *Nosferatu* Albin Grau had “wanted to coalesce an evil force into filmic form – and then exorcise it,” which might be a great idea for a novel if nothing else. “The spell crafted by Grau,” he writes, was intended to draw “evil into the film’s substance, embodying it in a character personified as shadow, and destroy[ed] with light, a plan to purge evil from the world and to cleanse the medium of cinema of its darkest impulses.” Given the state of the

modern world (and film) and all that has transpired since *Nosferatu*’s release in 1922, Grau’s magic spell has obviously failed. However, it cannot be denied that encoded within the occult images of this silent cinema masterpiece, in the darkness that falls between each flickering frame, mysterious messages remain. Their troubling nature is embodied in the disturbing effect of the film, with each viewer receiving Albin Grau’s occult messages subliminally, sitting in the dark waiting to be spooked... **FT**

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



BRIAN J ROBB is a regular contributor to FT and the author of books on silent film, Steampunk, Philip K Dick, Wes Craven and Laurel and Hardy. He is co-editor of the Sci-Fi Bulletin website and lives in Edinburgh.

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THE STRANGE WORLD OF CRUCIFIXION SCIENCE

Can the medical facts concerning Jesus's final moments ever be established?

MAX HARTSHORN considers the strange world of crucifixion research, in which bodies both living and dead have been nailed to the cross in the name of science...

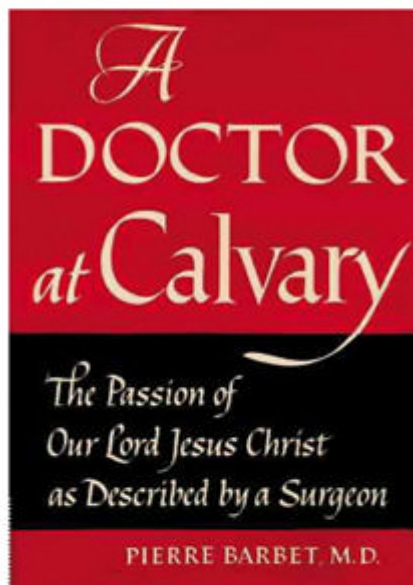
Most amputated limbs wind up in the hospital incinerator, but Dr Pierre Barbet had other ideas. Having recently lopped off the arm of a "vigorous man," the Parisian surgeon squared a large nail in the center of its palm and mounted it as one might the prized head of a slain beast.¹

Barbet then tied a 100lb (45kg) weight to the elbow, causing the palm's flesh to buckle and tear under its pull. After about 10 minutes, the initial wound had stretched into a gaping hole, and Barbet felt it was time to give the whole thing a good shake. What was left of the cadaverous palm burst open and fell to the floor, raising the question: was Jesus Christ really crucified with nails driven through the palms of his hand?

THE MAN OF THE SHROUD

To the uninitiated, the research of Pierre Barbet (1884-1961) might seem morbid, but he is far from the only scientist to become captivated by Jesus Christ's death. Jesus's final moments have always been shrouded in mystery, but in the past two centuries his Passion has increasingly become the subject of dispassionate investigation. By exposing the dead and the living to all the torments of Christ, researchers believe they can reveal the medical facts behind the scriptures. Sides have been speared. Scalps have been pierced with thorns. Countless bodies, both living and dead, have been crucified in the pursuit of knowledge.

Crucifixion science tries to unravel the mystery of Christ's death. The scriptures say Jesus died on the cross, but that's only half the story. Crucifixion victims regularly hold out for days.² Yet the Gospels agree that Jesus died in a matter of hours.³ Why did this healthy, fit, and relatively young man die so soon?



RESEARCHERS BELIEVE THEY CAN REVEAL THE MEDICAL FACTS BEHIND THE SCRIPTURES

In the late 1940s, with the scientific atrocities of the war still fresh in people's minds, German radiologist Hermann Mödler somehow managed to get away with crucifying medical students. Stretching their arms out to mimic the pose of Christ, the Cologne-based doctor hung students by their wrists and monitored their vital signs.

FACING PAGE: Dr Frederick Zugibe examining one of his crucified volunteers.

After six minutes of hanging, the students' blood pressure dropped, breathing became difficult, and their skin turned sickly damp. According to Mödler: "What will set in after the end of the sixth minute can be foreseen by the physician: unconsciousness, intense pallor, sweating. In short: collapse due to insufficient blood supply to the heart and brain."⁴

Evidence shows that the Nazis carried out the same type of pseudo-crucifixion as a deadly form of torture. While imprisoned at Dachau, Father G Delorey was forced to watch as his doomed fellow inmates "were suspended from a horizontal bar by means of leather straps around their wrists... After their hanging for one hour the victims could no longer exhale the air that filled their chest." The only way victims could breathe normally was if they pulled their whole body up, as if performing a chin-up at the gym. This agony could go on for up to six hours. According to Delaney, "only at the end of the torture, when the victim's strength failed, did asphyxiation take place, generally within two to four minutes."⁵

Could Jesus have suffocated on the cross? If so, then he too would have raised his body in order to breathe like the Nazi torture victims. This is indeed what Pierre Barbet found when he examined the Shroud of Turin, the alleged burial shroud of Jesus.

The Shroud has been mired in controversy ever since its 'discovery' in the 14th century. It depicts a faint bloodstained image of a dead man who appears to have been beaten and crucified in the same manner as Christ. Radiocarbon tests date the Shroud to around the 14th century, suggesting that it's a forgery.⁶ Yet no one has been able to demonstrate conclusively how the image



was formed. This has led to speculation that the Shroud could be anything from an ancient X-ray triggered by a radioactive earthquake,⁷ to a secret photograph by Leonardo Da Vinci.⁸ Despite its controversial status, the Shroud is often cited as evidence in crucifixion research.

Barbet noticed that the blood emanating from The Man of the Shroud's hand wound seemed to flow in two separate directions. He wondered if the two distinct bleeding patterns were evidence of two distinct postures.⁹ If Jesus raised himself in order to breathe, we would expect his arms to pivot slightly – thus blood would drip from the hand wounds at a different angle than when his body was lowered. What Barbet needed to prove was that Christ's body sagged on the cross. He believed that Christ, like the Nazi torture victims, would have found breathing difficult in such a strained position.

The doctor scoured the hospital grounds for a suitable test subject, settling on a half-starved, wraithlike cadaver he apologetically describes as the “least ugly” he could find. Operating swiftly, so as to approximate the brusque, brutish manner of a Roman executioner, the surgeon nailed his corpse to a homebuilt cross and raised it. The results, photographed in Barbet's 1950 book *La*

Passion de N.-S. Jésus-Christ selon le chirurgien, were compelling, if a little unnerving to look at. Not only did the dead body slump as predicted, but it fell at exactly the same angle as indicated by the Shroud. Jesus's body must have sagged on the cross. The bloodstains on the Shroud suggest that he raised himself periodically to gasp for air. But when his strength gave out, he would have suffocated.

By the mid-20th century, suffocation had become the dominant explanation for Jesus's death. But debate over his death would not die so easily.

CRUCIFY THE LIVING

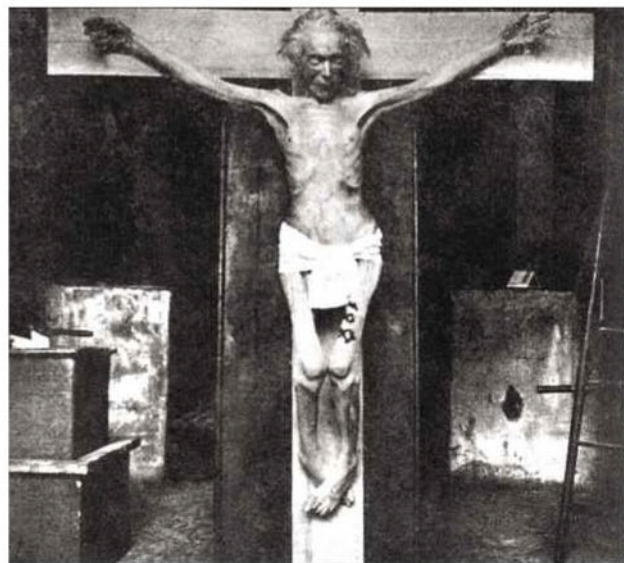
It might seem strange, but medical examiner Frederick Zugibe (1928-2013) has crucified

DOCTOR BARBET SCOURED THE HOSPITAL GROUNDS, SETTLING ON A HALF- STARVED CADAVER

more people in his suburban home of Rockland County, New York, than perhaps anyone since Roman times. Armed with a steady stream of volunteers from his local church and enough medical monitoring equipment to outfit a small hospital, Zugibe has given hundreds the opportunity to feel what it's like to be Jesus.¹⁰ Granted, Jesus didn't have a team of attending physicians monitoring his every heartbeat.

Like Mödder, Zugibe used straps instead of nails to bind his subjects' hands. Unlike Mödder, who let his subjects dangle, Zugibe also bound their feet. This seems to have made all the difference. While the bodies did sag, as Barbet predicted, not one subject in Zugibe's experiments found it difficult to breathe.¹¹ What's more, contrary to Barbet's notion that Christ lifted his body on the cross periodically, Zugibe found that it was literally impossible to pull your torso up while you are crucified in that position. He asked his volunteers to push and pull their body upwards as if their life depended on it, but no one could. So even if Jesus did find breathing difficult, he would have been unable to raise himself in order to breathe easier, as did the Nazi torture victims at Dachau.

Zugibe's volunteer Christs could stay on the cross as long as they wanted, and some



ABOVE AND TOP RIGHT: Two views of a cadaver crucified by Dr. Pierre Barbet to determine the true position of Jesus on the cross (taken from his book *La Passion de N.-S. Jésus-Christ selon le chirurgien*). BOTTOM RIGHT: Barbet's theory that the bloodstains on the hand seen in the Turin Shroud are indicative of Jesus's two positions on the cross.



GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: Restoration work on a 19th-century plaster cast. The figure was cast in 1801 from the corpse of convicted murderer James Legg as part of an experiment to settle an artistic debate. Three Royal Academicians wanted to prove their theory that most depictions of the Crucifixion were anatomically incorrect. Eminent surgeon Joseph Constantine Carpue nailed the still warm body of Legg to a cross immediately after execution. A cast was made of the cadaver when it cooled and afterwards hung in the Royal Academy.

held out for close to an hour. Their biggest complaint? Arm pain. But sore arms didn't kill Jesus, so what did?

One theory that has seen a surprising resurgence in recent years is the idea that Jesus never died on the cross. According to Dr Habib-ur Rehman, "Jesus in fact fainted on the cross, was believed dead, and recovered after a period of coma." After 'resurrecting' himself, the newly beatified Christ made the rounds in Israel before absconding east to seek out lost Hebrew tribes in India.¹²

But Rehman doesn't take into account the immense trauma Jesus suffered, especially leading up to the Crucifixion. The night before, as Jesus awaited arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane, his agony was so extreme that according to Luke: "His sweat became like drops of blood".¹³ Christ was then marched for miles without sleep, after which he was

scourged to within an inch of his life. As Zugibe notes, the scourging whips of Roman times were often tipped with metal weights powerful enough to break bones and cause significant internal and external bleeding. Piercing lacerations from the crown of thorns would only worsen this blood loss.¹⁴

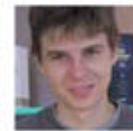
By the time Christ arrived at Calvary bearing his cross, he was already in very bad shape. Add to that the trauma of being nailed through the hands and feet and you have a recipe for what Zugibe calls hypovolemic shock, a condition caused by severe loss of blood and bodily fluids. Simply put, Jesus lost so much blood that his heart could no longer supply his organs with the oxygen they needed, and he died.

So there you have it; or, well, you don't. We're only scratching the surface. Hematidrosis, trigeminal neuralgia, fatal

acidosis¹⁵ – Jesus has been posthumously diagnosed with enough scary sounding medical conditions to fill a Robin Cook novel. Zugibe may be the most thorough crucifixion researcher of the bunch, but there is still widespread disagreement as to whether his hypovolemic shock theory, or any theory for that matter, is correct.

And seeing that there is no irrefutable forensic evidence from Christ's Passion, it looks as if many more will be pinned to the cross before crucifixion scientists are satisfied. **FT**

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WESTMINSTER or, Bizarreness at the

As election fever sweeps the country, **SD TUCKER**, in the first of a new series exploring the world's strangest statesmen, meets some of Britain's maddest MPs and most peculiar politicians, in a quest to find the most 'off-message' of them all.

It is sometimes said that having an incredibly boring political landscape is one of the greatest achievements of post-war British democracy; and, certainly, if you look at the way elections tend to play out in places like Egypt or Thailand, you will soon begin to appreciate the cruel wisdom of that old Chinese curse, "May you live in interesting times." However, when John Hayes, the Transport Minister, can stand up in the House of Commons, look down at his own pre-prepared speech, sigh wearily, and declare it to be "mind-numbingly turgid" before deciding to recite some lines from Ezra Pound to the nation instead, then you know that perhaps things have finally gone too far.¹

It was not always so. Nobody fell asleep on the back-benches or played *Candy Crush Saga* on their iPads when Gladstone or Disraeli, Churchill or Bevan, Benn or Powell were speaking their minds; but then, they all had something to say, whether you agreed with it or not, rather than being mindless drones churned straight off the conveyor-belt at Central Office and pre-programmed to endlessly parrot the agreed Party line no matter what. The days when the Tory 'Mad Monk' Sir Keith Joseph could give bizarre interviews to newspapers in which he banged tables, declared that Britain was "doomed", and claimed that the only cure was to build "more lavatories; I'm in favour of lavatories, very much in favour of them" without being immediately sacked now seem distant indeed – and yet this was only 1974, not the Victorian Era.² Back then, Britain had some genuinely strange MPs, like the amazing Colonel Charles Sibthorp, Tory MP for Lincoln, who would arrive in the Commons dressed for battle in white top-hat, nankeen trousers, gold-rimmed monocle, stiff Regency frock-coat and over-sized Wellingtons, making speeches condemning libraries, railways, Catholics, foreigners, the entire continent of Europe and something called 'opera dancers' as being obvious works of the Devil. Interestingly, Sibthorp was Sir Keith Joseph's direct political



ABOVE: Colonel Sibthorp, Tory MP for Lincoln; it's doubtful we'll see his like in the Commons again.

HE WAS SIR KEITH JOSEPH'S NEMESIS UPON THE ISSUE OF LAVATORIES; HE THOUGHT THEM ABOMINATIONS

nemesis upon the issue of lavatories; he thought them abominations, on the reputed grounds that, if anyone should happen to look into one after you had just used it, they

would be able to tell what you had eaten for dinner. Dickens, once a Parliamentary sketch-writer, thought this early campaigner for personal privacy to be "slightly damaged" in the head, and no doubt he was right.³

Where, though, are his likes today? Do any parliamentarians of Sibthorp's obvious calibre still exist, hidden away in dark, cobwebbed cupboards somewhere by an embarrassed Black Rod? Well, there are still a few lone wolves doing their best to keep the flag of eccentricity flying proud over the Palace of Westminster, and here – scrupulously arranged on a Party-by-Party basis, so as to avoid undue censure from OFCOM – are a few of the weirdest.

TER WEIRDOS The British Ballot-Box

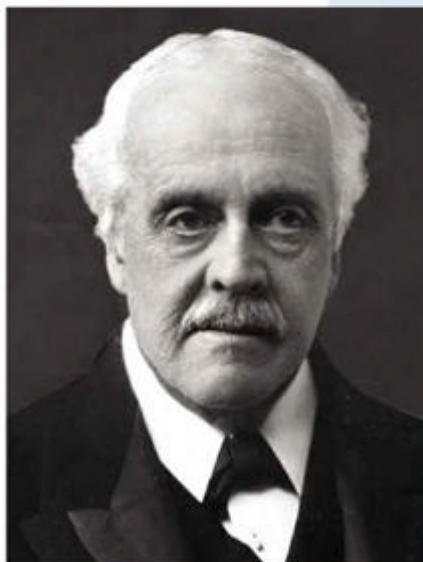
THE UNNATURAL PARTY OF GOVERNMENT



In 2012, Tory PM David Cameron made one of the silliest moves of his entire political career, dafter even than 'hugging a hoodie' – he callously failed to intervene publicly in the sad case of a man named Rupert Matthews, who was reported to be in danger of de-selection as a prospective Conservative MEP for daring to be interested in ghosts and aliens. As well as writing such fortean-sounding tomes as *Monster Mysteries* and *Alien Encounters*, Mr Matthews was outed as running an online course in the paranormal for something called the 'International Metaphysical University', leading to some in the Party machine voicing doubts about the wisdom of appointing him to the role. You might have thought Cameron would have been glad to have a man with some 200 books to his name wearing Tory blue – but apparently not. Clearly, the author of such sinister-sounding titles as *Cats & Kittens*, *Let's Look at Castles!* and *The Majesty of the Horse* had to be stopped. While Matthews – once cruelly described as “a sceptic over the EU, but on precious little else” – was not actually burnt at the stake, and remains a

Party member, I don't recall the PM coming out and publicly speaking in his favour, as he surely should have done.⁴

As the alleged standard-bearer of a Party which is supposed to stand for Free Speech, this is nothing less than a disgrace. Clearly, Cameron's critics on the Right, like Lord Tebbit, are correct – this man isn't a 'true Tory' at all. If he was, then surely he would



have been aware that there was a long and glorious tradition of prominent Conservatives dabbling with the occult in some way. Doesn't he know, for instance, that the sainted Mrs Thatcher herself, the woman who saved/ruined this country (delete as applicable) twice consulted an Indian guru named Sri Chandraswamy with questions about her political future after becoming Leader of the Opposition in 1975?⁶ And did his course in PPE at Oxford honestly neglect to inform him that the celebrated Arthur Balfour, Tory PM from 1902-1905, was made President of the Society for Psychical Research in 1893, his brother Gerald supposedly later being enlisted by ghosts to impregnate a famous medium with the spirit of a New Messiah?⁶

Perhaps Cameron is wary of such matters simply on account of a disturbing black-magic assault perpetrated upon one of his Ministers by members of the teaching profession back in 2013. Outraged by the plain-speaking of the then-Education Secretary Michael Gove, many educators had it in for the poor man; something which a woman called Katrina Stiff took advantage of to start flogging a range of pink woollen Michael Gove voodoo dolls from her Brighton-based website. Stiff's disturbingly cute Gove-dolls had a real Lovecraftian vibe, seeing as they came



TOP: Arthur Balfour, PM and President of the SPR. ABOVE LEFT: Rupert Matthews, MP and author of *Monster Mysteries*. ABOVE RIGHT: Sri Chandraswamy – Mrs T's guru

HUTTON ARCHIVE / GETTY IMAGES

TEKEE TANWAR / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

equipped with tentacles attached to Gove's head rather than any actual body, thereby confirming to his critics in schools up and down the land that he really *was* Cthulhu in human form, as they had suspected all along. To help combat the evil influences of the octopus-like Old One, Stiff assured her customers that her dolls had been "mentally infused with mean thoughts" by her, thereby ensuring that the act of stabbing them with pins would be effective. ⁷ 'Spookily', of course, Octo-Gove was actually removed from his job and cast back down into the sunken city of R'yleh (re: made Chief Whip) in July 2014 – although this probably had more to do with the fact that Cameron has a spine made of jelly than with the dolls themselves, in truth.

If Cameron really wants to know what the future holds for his Party, however, then perhaps instead of dismissing those who commune with the Other World, he should consult them – beginning with the Tory MP for Bosworth, David Tredinnick. Mr Tredinnick claims to have spent two decades studying astrology, once having shared a stage with top tabloid astrologer Jonathan Cainer at Glastonbury, and to be convinced that the influence of the stars should be taken into account when treating patients on the NHS. On 25 July 2014, he even stood up in the Commons and made a statement about the matter, deploring that more was not being done to make doctors and nurses aware of the healthcare benefits which would inevitably accrue from study of the invisible influence of the macrocosm upon the microcosm. A fan of alternative Chinese medicine, Tredinnick has accused scientists who dismiss such things as being "racially prejudiced", and claims to have cast the horoscopes of some of his fellow MPs. Somewhat incredibly, Mr Tredinnick – who is on record as speaking of "the awesome power of the Moon", claiming to the House in 2009 that blood does not clot when that heavenly body is full – sits on both

the Commons Health Select Committee and the Science and Technology Committee. You don't need to be Nostradamus to predict what the likely response would be if his ideas ever got any actual public funding behind them; presumably the same reaction as that which occurred in 2010 when it transpired that Tredinnick had claimed (and since repaid) £755.33 in expenses in order to purchase some astrology software for his PC – i.e. outrage. No wonder Tredinnick's political colleagues now call him 'The Hon. Member for Holland & Barrett'. ⁸

THE RED DEVILS



In August 2014, allegations arose in the High Court that, during a local election campaign in the Muslim-populated area of Tower Hamlets, certain literature had been published accusing

Labour Party politicians of being *shaytaan* (Islamic devils) in disguise. ⁹ If this is true, then perhaps the persons allegedly responsible got their inspiration for the idea from a notorious 1996 advertising campaign upon behalf of the Conservative Party in which it appeared to be strongly implied that former Labour leader Tony Blair was possessed by the Devil. Of course, subsequent events have since made this hypothesis seem more than plausible, but at the time the idea caused massive controversy. Part of the Tories' 'New Labour, New Danger' range, the ads in question were apparently inspired by an interview Labour MP Clare Short gave to the *New Statesman*, in which she criticised Blair's backroom advisors. Spotting this, the Conservatives' ad-agency, M&C Saatchi, put out attack-ads in which Blair's real eyes had been replaced by inverted red demonic ones, together with the caption "One of Labour's leaders, Clare Short, says dark forces behind Tony Blair

manipulate Party policy in a sinister way." Nobody *actually* expected voters to believe that Blair was possessed; but, by spinning it in this way, Labour's PR-team managed to turn the situation around. By seizing on comments from various religious leaders, who condemned the ads as being both sacrilegious and puerile, Labour HQ were able to turn the focus around from Short's damaging comments and onto the Tories' apparent immorality in claiming Blair was Satan's stooge. In spite of it winning an 'Ad of the Year' award, the 'demon-eyes' campaign was generally judged to have been massively counter-productive for the Conservatives, generating numerous complaints. ¹⁰

At the time, however, M&C Saatchi doggedly maintained that Blair's demonic red eyes were meant to be viewed by the public not as belonging to Satan – but to somebody far more sulphuric. Every Mephistopheles needs his conjuror, after all, and in Blair's case this role was filled not by Dr Faustus, but by Peter Mandelson, one-time MP for Hartlepool, former EU Trade Commissioner, and all-time spin-doctor supreme. In 2010, showing a commendable appetite for self-parody, Mandelson appeared in some highly camp TV ads for his new autobiography *The Third Man* in which, like Christopher Lee reading MR James tales on the BBC at Christmas in years gone by, he opened up his grimoire and told viewers by the light of a flickering fireside flame that he was going to tell them the chilling fairy-tale of an evil 'Prince of Darkness' – namely, Mandelson himself, this being a title bestowed upon him for his utter mastery of the so-called 'Dark Arts' of spin and media manipulation on behalf of the Blair Government. ¹¹

So adept was Mandy at getting the Press and his fellow MPs to swallow everything he said that, in 1997, he even managed to convince a Select Committee that he had helped give birth to a new sport. 'Surfball',



ABOVE LEFT: The Octo-Gove voodoo doll. ABOVE CENTRE: David Tredinnick speaking at Glastonbury. ABOVE RIGHT: The infamous 'New Labour, New Danger' poster.



ABOVE: A scary Peter Mandelson in M R James mode. BELOW: Auberon Waugh and his 'campaign manager'.

the so-called “sport of the 21st century”, Mandelson proclaimed to MPs on 2 December, was “a 15-minute roller-coaster ride” destined to take place inside Tony Blair’s Millennium Dome, an amazing virtual-reality experience in which head-set wearers were somehow transported into moving VR-balls that then did... something or other; he was never 100 per cent clear about it, really. Whatever the precise mechanics involved, though, it certainly sounded exciting; or, in the words of Durham’s Labour MP Gerry Steinberg, “quite exciting. Really exciting. Very exciting, in fact. I don’t deny that it’s very exciting.” But it also wasn’t true – eventually, Grimsby MP Austin Mitchell got Mandy to admit that desperate consultants had made it all up during a Dome pitch-meeting prior to his Select Committee appearance.¹² To get people to believe that load of obvious surf-balls seemed incredible; how on earth did he do it? Mandelson couldn’t *really* have magic powers ... could he?

Sadly not. But that didn’t stop a silly *rumour* about such things springing up. Look, for instance, at an apparently inexplicable event which occurred during the filming of a 1999 Channel 4 documentary about Mandelson, when his former PA, Susan Hunter, was about to make some hitherto-secret revelation; lo and behold, just at the precise moment she opened her mouth to speak, a vase full of red roses suddenly shot themselves off a table and smashed down to the floor. “*Poltergeist!*” Hunter squealed – or was it? Another interview with a critic of Mandelson’s, former Labour leadership candidate Bryan Gould, was soon also spiked at the last minute due to a sudden tractor accident Gould had suffered in his native New Zealand. Coincidence – or the Curse of Mandelson? In a 2008 book, long-time *FT* stalwart Paul Screepton cited a contemporary TV critic’s comments about what might *really* have caused these uncanny events: “It was quite possible to imagine Mandy the Merciless, robed and cowed, scattering his eyes of newt into some bubbling cauldron while chanting his dreadful spells.”¹³

One person who may well have preferred not to imagine this particular image, however,

JOSÉ LIMA DA SILVA CLAIMED MANDELSON HAD ATTENDED ONE OF HIS VOODOO-LIKE CEREMONIES

was Charlie Whelan, one-time spin-doctor to the then ‘Iron Chancellor’, Gordon Brown, and Mandelson’s arch-enemy. This was because, in 2001, José Lima da Silva, a Brazilian witch-doctor from that country’s famous *candomblé* spirit-cult, made outlandish claims in the Press that Mandelson had attended one of his voodoo-like ceremonies and held down a live chicken whilst da Silva sacrificed it to his native gods by chopping the bird’s head off. Some time later, said da Silva, Mandelson’s Brazilian boyfriend Reinaldo had then contacted him again, sending him



a photograph of Charlie Whelan in the post, together with a letter asking him to make “this bad person” stop doing “bad things” to harm the career of “my friend Peter”. Reinaldo didn’t want Whelan dead, he explained, merely forced to “disappear from politics”, perhaps into exile abroad. Da Silva said he took Whelan’s photograph, covered it with white corn and roses as an offering to his spirit-masters, lit some candles and waited to see what would happen. And what did happen? In 1999, Whelan was forced to resign from his role over a leaks scandal, and was indeed banished abroad to a dark and distant land – he now lives in Scotland.¹⁴

YELLOW PERILS



At least Mandelson was a colourful character, unlike the current Labour Front-Bench and their Dear Leader, who seem utterly incapable of having a single forteen thought between them. It’s a similar case with today’s Lib Dems; now that UFO-loving Lembit Öpik has moved on from the Commons to a career in semi-professional wrestling,¹⁵ probably the last man standing in the Party of any interest to FT readers is Lewes MP Norman Baker, a conspiracy-theorist who has gone so far as to write an entire book conjecturing that Dr David Kelly was murdered by Dark Forces over the so-called ‘Dodgy Dossier’ on Iraq back in 2003.¹⁶

Somewhat less dull than the Lib Dems themselves, however, was an obscure splinter-party which grew out of their predecessor organisation, the Liberals, in 1979, namely the satirical journalist Auberon Waugh’s marvellous ‘Dog-Lovers’ Party of Great Britain’, a one-man band aimed at exposing the fact that, under Liberal rule, “dogs have had a very poor deal”. How so? Those who read the obituaries of Jeremy Thorpe, the former Liberal leader, last December, will probably know: Waugh had helped expose a byzantine conspiracy in which a hit-man, having allegedly been hired to kill Thorpe’s former gay lover and thus avoid a public scandal, bungled the assignment at the last minute, shooting a Great Dane named Rinka in the head instead of his intended human victim somewhere on Exmoor. Amused, Waugh stood against Thorpe in his North Devon constituency in 1979, garnering only 79 votes but helping keep the allegations in the public eye. Waugh’s campaign literature was predictably facetious: “Rinka is NOT forgotten. Rinka lives. Woof, woof! Vote WAUGH to give all dogs the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness!” one flyer read. Eventually, Thorpe lost his seat to the Conservatives, leaving him free to prepare to face trial at the Old Bailey (where he was found not guilty), and Waugh to retire from front-line politics altogether – other than to issue a final official Party edict in 1987 to the effect that eating dog-shit straight from the pavement ought to be encouraged as a “free and non-fattening” source of nutrition for the children of the urban poor.¹⁷



ABOVE: UKIP's 2015 party conference in Margate, Kent, is hijacked by Nazi dancing girls from *The Producers*.

FISHY KIPPERS



Dullness is certainly not an accusation you can level at Britain's newest political sensations UKIP, however – a Party stuffed full of “fruitcakes and loonies”, if you believe David Cameron's now-infamous slight. Certainly, UKIP is the go-to Party to join if you believe gay marriage causes flooding¹⁸ – but why exactly does it attract so many nuts? Some claim that it is because its policies themselves are inherently mad; but I am not so sure. Yes, UKIP's 2010 manifesto (which leader Nigel Farage later admitted he hadn't even read!) included such comical ‘policies’ as forcing all taxi-drivers to wear uniforms and ensuring that London Underground's Circle Line was actually genuinely circular,¹⁹ but their main two proposals of withdrawing from the EU and limiting mass immigration are surely simply *controversial*, rather than actively *insane*, as such. UKIP are not like, say, the old Natural Law Party, who in 1994 memorably tried to woo the floating voter by implying that some of their members could levitate.²⁰ Why so many cranks and gadflies, then?

In *The Times*, the former Tory strategist Daniel Finkelstein recently suggested a plausible answer. Finkelstein was once involved with the now-defunct Social Democratic Party, whose membership was small and amateurish. He well remembers his encounters with such Party luminaries as the activist who got so frustrated by her inability to elucidate the difference between the SDP and SLD to voters that she felt compelled to hurl a brick *through her own window*, and the member of his campaign team who was obsessed by the idea that the Government was secretly spreading

AIDS through infected yeast, an allegation he thought might be a real vote-winner on the doorstep. How did such loons manage to gain their positions of official responsibility, though? According to Finkelstein, it was because of the SDP's small size; in its dog-days, he wrote, just as in the still-recent early days of UKIP, more-or-less anyone could join and progress to being put on the Party's leadership team “within weeks”. Larger, more established parties have reliable procedures in place to filter out the nutters; UKIP are simply not that professional yet.²¹ Take, for example, some recent allegations about the state of UKIP's HQ, a place where, according to one anonymous former employee quoted in the media last year, “there are animals in the office [and] people taking their clothes off”, not to mention a big board with a list on it headed ‘people we want to shag’, and a woman who reportedly sits around the place wearing a device described as an “Orgasmatron” on her head.²² If this is really true, then is it any wonder that, in July 2014, a scare-story broke alleging that UKIP was now being infiltrated not just by fruitcakes, but by sinister occultists?

The row centred around one Jake Baynes, the prospective UKIP candidate for Wells, who resigned after his branch-chairman Graham Livings claimed that “devotees of the occult” were trying to undermine his close ally. According to Livings, a couple named Glen and Colleen Tucker (no relation), who run something called the ‘Angelic Guidance and Healing Centre’ in nearby Glastonbury, had also simultaneously been running an underhand campaign against Baynes's candidacy.

Glen was a failed UKIP

county-council candidate, whilst Colleen was UKIP's treasurer for the Somerset area – but, somewhat less mundanely, they also claimed to be in contact with “Angelic Realms” and “Galactic Beings”. According to Livings, the Tuckers put on “weekend retreats where they guarantee the angels will be present” and “say that they take angelic guidance and defer in all things to St Michael the Archangel” which, if true, is somewhat ironic, given that St Michael is actually the patron saint of Brussels! The Tuckers denied doing anything untoward, but Livings's assessment of the situation chimed well with Daniel Finkelstein's; UKIP has procedures in place to prevent former British National Party or English Defence League members joining up in order to avoid looking racist, Livings explained, but “when they sat down and wrote out the prescribed list [of potential members] they wouldn't have thought to put occultists down.”²³ Ah, well. At least no Kippers are going around saying that there's AIDS in the bread... yet.

GREEN UNPLEASANT PLANS



There's certainly no AIDS in any Free Trade, ethically-sourced, yeast and gluten-free wheat-bread products, of course – and, if such items constitute a regular part of your own diet, you'll naturally be intending to vote Green. But, if you do vote to save the whales and the trees, what else will you be getting too? In a series of inadvertently funny January interviews, Green Party leader Natalie Bennett proudly explained her idiotic policies to the electorate. For one thing, said Bennett, the Queen would be evicted from Buckingham Palace and allocated a council-house; for another, economic recession would be welcomed in the hope of curing people's worship of that horrible 1980s Thatcherite substance, money. Nonetheless, for those who continue to foster an inexplicable desire for Mammon, a weekly ‘Citizen's Wage’ of £72 would also be distributed to every person in the land at an estimated cost to the Treasury of a trivial £280 billion. Never mind, however, because ‘sin taxes’ on meat and environmentally-irresponsible goods and services would help pay for this bribe – the idea that consuming such things is a ‘sin’ suggesting that extreme environmentalism really is just a sublimated manifestation of the religious impulse after all. Even better, prisons would basically be abolished and membership of such exciting Islamist terror organisations as ISIS legalised – presumably because Bennett and her friends would be busy destroying Western society themselves, leaving the cause of global *jihād* somewhat redundant. As Green literature honestly states: “The contribution of particular activities (such as air travel and nuclear power) to the general risk to society of massive [terrorist] attack should be adequately factored into public choice about their funding and future.” Or, in other words, if we don't *have* any aeroplanes or atomic power-stations, then the terrorists will be unable to destroy them – brilliant!²⁴

One particular area of Britain currently

RIGHT: Meanwhile, UKIP leader Nigel Farage evokes the spirit of *Dad's Army*.



being destroyed by a process of legal terror, meanwhile, is Brighton & Hove, the only Green-led council in the UK at present (and hopefully ever, some might add). Appropriately enough for an organisation led by a man who glories in the name of Jason Kitcat, the Green Party in Brighton has split itself in two, straight down the middle; rival gangs calling themselves the ‘watermelons’ and the ‘mangoes’ are currently trying to apportion responsibility for the municipality’s woes, like tie-dye town-hall versions of the Bloods and the Crips. Who, for instance, was to blame for the mad proposal to release sheep onto local roads in an attempt to slow down traffic? Whose fault is it that bin-men went on strike over pay after being alienated by having their bacon-butties banned on ‘Meat-Free Mondays’ – another measure with distinct religious undertones to it – embarrassingly leading to Britain’s single truly ‘eco-friendly’ council actually having one of the worst recycling-rates in the entire country? Watermelon or mango, they’re still coloured Green.²⁵ Even Tom and Barbara Good would think twice about supporting this lot.

INDEPENDENT THINKERS



Of course, if none of the above big parties take their fancy, fortunate voters in certain constituencies can always choose to vote for Independent candidates instead – people such as Bez from 1990s ‘Madchester’ sensations The Happy Mondays, who is standing in Salford on an ambitious platform of “tackling cancer” and “ending all war.” Good luck, Bez – and good luck also in convincing voters of your theory about Adolf Hitler having been a secret British double-agent who was actually working for



ABOVE: The eccentric Captain Beany, leader of the New Millennium Party, out on the campaign trail in Port Talbot.

the Freemasons and the Illuminati during WWII.²⁶ Also worthy of support is a regular Independent candidate for the Welsh seat of Aberavon called Captain Beany, a noted eccentric, charity fund-raiser and self-styled superhero who wears a cape, dyes his skin orange, claims to come from ‘The Planet Baked Bean’, and runs the world’s only Baked Bean Museum of Excellence in nearby Port Talbot. This year, Beany is running for his self-created New Millennium Bean Party against Labour ‘Red Princeling’ Stephen Kinnock, son of the Party’s former leader Neil, and I for one sincerely hope that Beany wins.²⁷

And that, in the year of the 800th anniversary of the birth of English democracy

itself at Runnymede, is the standard of our contemporary politicians; either mind-numbing PC-robots or else outright Monster Raving Loonies, with nary a happy medium in-between. Today’s candidates tend to spoil the ballot-papers themselves – merely by being on them. **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 with the provisional titles *Great British Eccentrics* and *Forgotten Science*,

he is an FT regular and will be writing more about the world’s strangest statesmen.

NOTES

- 1 ‘Diary’ item, *Times*, 24 Jan 2015.
- 2 Dominic Sandbrook, *Seasons in the Sun: The Battle for Britain, 1974-1979*, Penguin, 2013, p235.
- 3 John Michell, *Eccentric Lives and Peculiar Notions*, Adventures Unlimited, 1999, pp57-61; David Long, *English Country House Eccentrics*, The History Press, 2012, pp70-72.
- 4 See **FT287:28**; www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-16594668. Seriously, though, the witch-hunt against Matthews was genuinely ridiculous; he has published books about innumerable topics, not just UFOs and spooks, and has to make his living somehow.
- 5 See **FT273:23**.
- 6 For the full story of this, see Archie E Roy, *The Eager Dead*, Book Guild Publishing, 2008. The Tories’ true New Messiah, of course, was actually born in 1925 in Grantham.
- 7 Diary item, *Times*, 11 Oct 2013.
- 8 *Times*, 26 July 2014; www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-28464009; www.telegraph.co.uk/news/health/news/10991455/Tory-MP-says-astrology-is-good-for-the-health.html; www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstoppers/mps-expenses/6982318/MPs-expenses-David-Tredinnick-repays-750-in-secret-deal.html.
- 9 *Times*, 20 Aug 2014.
- 10 Philip Gould, *The Unfinished Revolution: How New Labour Changed British Politics Forever*, Hachette, 2011; www.nytimes.com/1996/08/29/world/tories-learn-limits-of-personal-attacks-on-demons-eg-laborites.html; http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Labour,_New_Danger. In 2001, incidentally, Labour hit back with posters showing then-Tory leader William Hague and Shadow Chancellor Michael Portillo as wandering B-movie zombies, under the strap-line ‘The Return of... the Repossessed’, in an attempt to scare people into thinking that voting Tory would cost them their homes.
- 11 www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1293551/Peter-Mandelson-stars-TV-advert-autobiography.html; see www.youtube.com/watch?v=_y77T0Yb9sc for the ad in question.
- 12 Peter Osborne, *The Rise of Political Lying*, The Free Press/Simon & Schuster, 2005, pp3-5.
- 13 Paul Screeton, *Mars Bar & Mushy Peas: Urban Legend and the Cult of Celebrity*, Heart of Albion Press, 2008, p48; the documentary itself was *Now We Are Two: The Real Peter Mandelson*, broadcast on C4, 25 April

1999. See also **FT145:9**, for MPs’ jocular speculation that a “gigantic thunderbolt” – actually an unexplained loud bang – over Hartlepool marked the resignation of Mandelson as Northern Ireland Secretary in January 2001.

14 www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/4260680/That-old-black-magic.html; www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1328025/Wizard-curse-ive-had-spell-of-good-luck-says-Whelan.html.

15 You can see footage of Lembit discussing UFOs – and sensationally confessing that “my step-mother is an alien” (i.e. of Lithuanian origin) – in company with the BBC’s Andrew Neill and FT’s resident ufologist Dr David Clarke online at www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-23004563.

16 Norman Baker, *The Strange Death of David Kelly*, Methuen, 2007.

17 Sandbrook, 2013, pp441-458; Waugh column in the *Spectator* for 29 Aug 1987, reprinted in William Cook (Ed.) *Kiss Me, Chudleigh: The World According to Auberon Waugh*, Coronet, 2010, pp147-148; you can find Waugh’s full Dog-Lovers’ text, together with the deliberately ridiculous cover of his election-pamphlet, at http://ukjarry.blogspot.co.uk/2008/12/202-jeremy-thorpe-19.html

18 More on this in a future column.

19 *Times*, 20 Jan 2015.

20 For footage of Natural Law Party members engaging in acts of so-called ‘Yogic Flying’ from their infamous 1994 Party Political Broadcast, see www.youtube.com/watch?v=438UKM1Av1g.

21 *Times*, 17 Dec 2014; the SLD were the Social and Liberal Democrats – the future Lib Dems.

22 *Times*, 10 Mar 2014; fairness obliges me to admit that a UKIP spokesman later denied these allegations.

23 *Times*, 31 July 2014; *D. Mail*, 31 July 2014.

24 *Times*, 24+26 Jan 2015; *D. Mail*, 26 Jan 2015; BBC *Sunday Politics* show, 25 Jan 2015.

25 *Times*, 23 Jan 2015; www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2020041/Binmen-rebel-meat-free-Monday-green-council-ditch-bacon-butties.html; www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2613905/Lunacy-town-turned-green-A-ban-bacon-butties-Traffic-calming-sheep-Transgender-toilets-Sounds-like-send-In-fact-real-story-Britains-loopi-est-party-took-Brighton.html

26 *Times*, 15 Mar 2014; *Sunday Times*, 4 May 2014.

27 Diary item, *Times*, 25 Mar 2014.

The Fortean Times

Random Dictionary of the Damned

compiled by the Hierophant's Apprentice



No 60: REFLECTIONS ON FORTEANISM PART TWO

Charles Fort's middle name was, we all know, Hoy. A hoy is (or was: they flourished in the 17th and 18th centuries) a ship: a small sailing vessel, usually sloop-rigged, usually displacing no more than 60 tons, that plied the south and south-east coasts of England, while two-masted versions hugged the coasts of Holland. They weren't riverine and they weren't ocean-going; in these tricky seas, their sailors made as much use of the tides as they did of the winds. In the Thames estuary, hoyes would also ferry cargo and people between the London docks and vessels that were too large to navigate the river. They carried passengers and freight in waters that were betwixt and between, yet also on the outer fringe of the ordered life of men safe on dry land.

'Hoy' is a nice case, then, of a subtle nominative determinism, as the middle name of a man whose literary life was spent exploring and exploiting the liminal spaces where strange things appear, heaving in and out of sight like so many elusive beasts of the deep. At the edges of the known world, as old maps had it, 'Here be monsters' and 'Here be dragons': liminality arises as much at the periphery of the 'normal' as it does in the spaces between one familiar thing and another. After all, any given normality, apparently populated by discrete entities, has to have an edge – so that we may discern the differences between one and another – apple and orange, dog and cat, night and day, real and unreal – and so what is an outer border separating one thing from another is also an undefined middle place, seemingly



LEFT: A model of an English 'Hoy' of the kind that once plied waters that were betwixt and between.

empty but not.

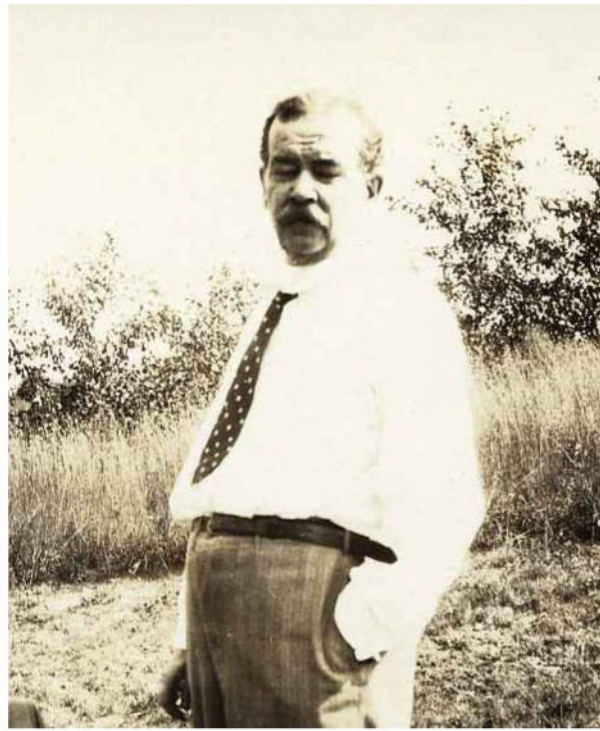
The idea is ancient, and flourishes still. In folklorist Francis Child's Ballad No 39 (www.sacred-texts.com/neu/eng/child/ch039.htm), fair Janet (or Margaret) snatches her knightly paramour Tam Lin from captivity and probable sacrifice in the land of Faery at midnight on Hallowe'en (one of the 'great hinges' of the year, in Willa Muir's phrase) at a cross-roads or, in some versions, on a bridge, and in others by a well – as the faery troop rides by on their way to pay their septennial tithe to

Hell. Both the occasion (time) and the places (space) are liminal and by tradition spiritually dangerous or magical, while Janet's antagonists are not quite human – and notoriously ambivalent, ambiguous, and untrustworthy. In one version, the Queen of Faery speaks "out of a shoot of corn": an unnerving displacement of time, Springtime thrusting incongruously into Autumn. When Janet clasps Tam Lin in her arms, he turns into a snake, a bear, a lion, a toad, among other things – and finally red-hot iron; she steadfastly hangs on, and his true form is restored. The long-lost anonymous author(s) of Tam Lin most likely thought of this perilous drama as quotidian, or at least didn't think of such events in terms of their being 'paranormal' or 'supernatural' or 'magical'

– as strange, unexplained phenomena – in quite the way we do today. Disjunctions – which are also intermediate links – of time, space and identity still body forth beings and events that are indefinable, in some sense magical and, often, dangerous. But today we tend to see them as being quite divorced from the everyday world. It is worth asking why this dissociation has occurred, and what are its implications.

The classic analysis is sociologist Max Weber's notion that the rise of Protestantism – along with a dose of Aristotelean logic – led to a 'rationalisation' of the world that nurtured the rise, in turn, of scientific (reductionist, materialist) thinking, which became the dominant post-Reformation mode of thought in the West. In the process, the world became 'disenchanted': its magic faded away, at least from the outlook of the cultural élites who set the tone of public discourse and, of course, controlled education. So in *The Secret Agent* (1907) Joseph Conrad can have a character plausibly pronounce that: "The sacrosanct fetish of today is science"; more waggishly, Nicholas Stevenson has remarked (*Salisbury Review*, Autumn 2010) that: "Scientists are the shamans of our age to people who can't do maths." From such sidelong comments we may gather that while Weber may have been accurate in his historico-cultural account, 'disenchantment' and 'rationalisation' haven't yet sterilised all the corners of everyone's mind. The imaginal life thrives: the arts (high and low) and fascination with 'the unexplained' continue to flourish. Indeed science recognises this visceral need for something more than reductionism, and promotes its own enchantment in speaking of the emotional, unrationalised joy of discovery and the 'wonders of science'. This does not immunise anyone from the cultural impact of disenchantment and the consequent niggling suspicion that *in principle* the world is orderly, self-consistent and ultimately knowable, had we but sufficient information with which to know it. If we did, no one seems inclined to admit, that would also make the world predictable – that is, deterministic. The irony (and the relief) is that the most esoteric branches of physics rather powerfully suggest otherwise.

So does human nature, which is not only fond of the apprehension and exercise of its own free will but celebrates the unknown by making it sacred. Religious rituals, you may have noticed, are usually rites of passage (at birth, puberty, marriage, death, or at the opening of a new season) into the future, which is the fundamental unknowable that we each face minute by minute. The paradox of this sense of the sacred is that it imbues the world with meaning – with a sense of *télos* – by celebrating the irremediably inscrutable and impenetrable: in effect, something comes of nothing. Whereas rationalisation and disenchantment deprive the world, and those within it, of any such sense of the numinous – and hence arises the *scientistic* perception that science is 'against' religion. It becomes so only if one accepts its most ambitious, and probably most unrealistic, premise. But the



BELOW: Max Weber charted the disenchantment of the post-Reformation world. LEFT: Charles Fort marshalled, and celebrated, that world's excluded data.

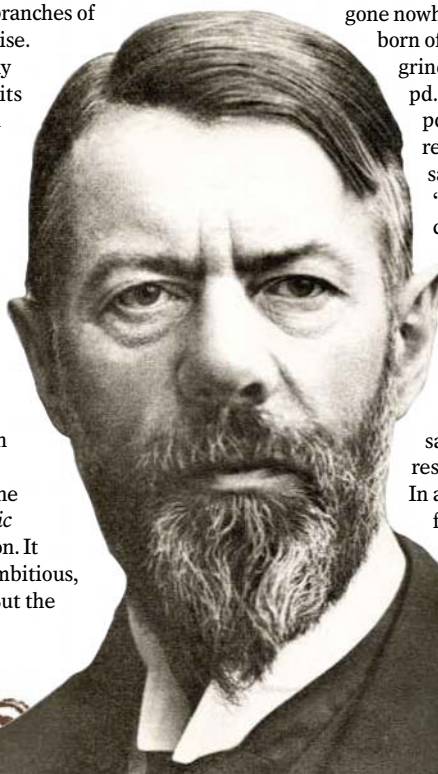
tendency to empty the world of all but the mechanical is widespread. As philosopher Roger Scruton (*Spectator*, 31 May 2014) puts it: "Atheists... tell us that the 'self' is an illusion, and that the human person is 'nothing but' the human animal, just as law is 'nothing but' relations of social power, sexual love 'nothing but' the procreative urge and the Mona Lisa 'nothing but' a spread of pigments on a canvas." This goes against the human grain. It is, says Scruton, "just as absurd to say that the world is nothing but the order of nature, as physics describes it, as to say that the Mona Lisa is nothing but a smear of pigments. Drawing that conclusion is the first step towards understanding why and how we live in a world of sacred things." And of course it is

not necessary to be in any sense conventionally religious to live in that world.

The power and influence – and perniciousness – of the School of Nothing-But is yet more visible in popular culture over the last couple of decades. First came the soulless Greys, quintessentially bureaucratic in their pointless, repetitive, painful and outdated procedures; all designed, it seemed, to show who was really in charge – and it wasn't us. Then the vampires appeared on our TVs: they *were* us: reduced to parasitic, predatory bloodsuckers at the mercy of their own appetites – spiritually, chavs, made all the more alarming for sporting the curves of cheerleaders. Now zombies roam our screens, neither dead nor alive (uncompleted, in short), but nonetheless deathless and ravenous, and with a disconcerting urge to have us become as they are (taking one radical step further than the Greys' 'hybrid breeding programme'). As allegories of our own psychic emptiness these themes could hardly be improved. As Robert Cheatham says, this is "not the human emptying into God but a simple emptying out, to be refilled with a more tangible apparatus of control – or just refilled with nothing, except the idea of 'going/coming back', a memorialisation centering on having

gone nowhere and having done nothing... the zombie seems born of a catastrophic event, blown back into time's grind and in a continual rage because of it." (www.pd.org/Perforations/perf32/perf32_zombie_call_3.pdf) The rage, it seems, is the thing: an inverted, reflexive, nihilistic howl of both yearning for the sacred and anguish at its loss. And of course the 'undead' zombie is as liminal as anything gets. It could be fortuneism's ghastly portrait-in-the-attic.

Vampires and zombies, having no self to speak of, are not renowned for their self-determinism. They are the pawns of unmanageable urges and influences. As are we, if you believe what Marx (historical forces), Freud (sexual instincts), and neo-Darwinists (selfish genes) and their acolytes have been saying for generations. We are not, in other words, responsible for ourselves, in the modernist reading. In addition, we have been persistently reminded for more than a century by cosmologists that the Earth is but a speck in a rather mediocre galaxy and less than that in the Universe as a whole. By implication, individual





GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: Zombies, like Modernist Man, are the pawns of influences and urges beyond their awareness and control. Is that why we like to dress up as them?
 OPPOSITE PAGE: The Trickster – exemplified in this case by Reynard the Fox – is a shapeshifting figure marked by hoaxing, comedy and self-mockery.

humans are negligible creatures, void of significance, whose subjective experience and individual consciousness – as in, for example, the ability to make trustworthy value judgements or moral decisions – are dismissed as trivial. The *post-modernist* project, wilfully obfuscatory as it is, can be seen as a recoil against this denial, promoting subjectivity to the status of a central guiding principle. But its extremism merely creates another kind of vacancy, emptying the *objective* world of rocks and stones and trees of any significance, indeed any *facts*, in its turn. Anyone unfortunate enough to be knocked over by the Clapham omnibus can tell you why that's nonsense. The over-riding point, however, is that both these modes of thought are expressions of rationalism and disenchantment, and both have infected public discourse to the extent that (although, *prima facie*, they are mutually contradictory) they have become subsumed into the cultural mythology – the unconscious assumptions – of our time.

Nature, especially human nature, abhors a vacuum – and here we have two of the buggers struggling to convince us of their valency. There is no real paradox here: we can only know the world, or apprehend reality, as individuals – we have but one mind each. If we are somehow convinced that our comprehension is not our own but determined by forces outside our control or conscious knowledge (the modernist position), then our faith in the objective nature of the world we perceive is compromised; for then we cannot rely on our senses, experience, education or ratiocinative faculties, or anything else in our heads, to perceive or report reality accurately. Similarly, if our perceptions and conclusions are utterly subjective and 'relative' (the post-modernist position), then we are equally crippled, since we cannot presume that our knowledge – and more to the point, our personal comprehension – of the world is held in common with anyone else – and that includes the 'truth' of post-modernism itself: and the self is isolate. Both positions end in ignorance and irony. Most ironic, neither position has room for any kind of human culture, which stems from and depends on shared values and collective understandings – even scientism demands those. And – let's labour the point – without these commonalities not even disenchantment could have occurred. We would not have had language. Neither modernism nor post-modernism could have been thought of, let alone articulated.

But we are where we are. Our current underlying cultural mythology says that our selves are empty on the one hand, and isolated on the other. What we are offered is a strangely, perhaps unprecedentedly, soul-less existence. While the myth accords

with neither lived historic experience nor the unassailable fact of human culture, it has power. The isolated self craves company, and for that must gain attention. So we observe arising the narcissistic worlds of Facebook and Twitter, sexting, blogs, revenge porn (indeed the acceptance of hard porn as 'normal'), selfies (robbed or disrobed), online dating, and all the rest of the paraphernalia of vulgar self-advertisement that makes up the *ersatz* electronic – certainly not fleshly – 'community' of the cybersphere. It's noticeable that these phenomena are obsessed with externals, as befits identities that are felt to be no more than shells; and hence presumably the mechanistic view of sexuality and the decay over the past couple of decades of modesty, decorum, and reticence – among other indicators of shame.

There is a concomitant desperation to belong, to no matter how narrowly defined a group: Facebook, we hear (can this be true?), offers members a choice of no less than 32 'genders' from which to identify themselves. Twitterdom is notorious for its storms of confected outrage on behalf of some allegedly maligned minority or other. More worrisome is that the objects of these campaigns (for instance: poor Benedict Cumberbatch, who so naughtily spoke of 'coloured people' instead of 'people of colour' – no, don't ask) feel compelled to apologise for their unwitting transgressions. Even if one sees political correctness as a cult, and that to be offensive is actually *not* the worst crime in the world, one can still see that the pressure to conform in our culture is enormous: for those demanding and granting obedience, compliance assuages loneliness, while furnishing the vacuum of the soul with form and purpose, no matter how fatuous. Thus conformity feeds narcissism, and narcissism feeds conformity. Yeats comes to mind: "The best lack all conviction, while the worst / Are full of passionate intensity."

Such thrashings and writhings (and we could name many others) are, we would venture, symptomatic of desperate attempts to find or create some sense, some meaning, in the void of personal identity, or to inject or project significance into the social abyss. And this will continue as long as the prevailing myth denies what Viktor Frankl identified as the human 'will to meaning', the engine of which is what we have traditionally called the soul.

There are, as noted, pockets of resistance as well as places that the myth has never reached. The whole amorphous, inchoate New Age 'movement' is in large part a reaction against the reductionist project. A standard explanation for the appeal of the supernatural, the paranormal, anomalies-in-general and all of *fortean* is that

their putative reality restores a sense of wonder to life and the world: they resacralise an otherwise disenchanting existence. Up to a point, we would concur. Much of forteana has an intrinsic religious tinge, although it's not always as obvious as in, say, the camouflaged sermons of the flying-saucer contactees or the antics of the Victorian séance room. Fort's holistic apprehension of the cosmos indicates a distinctly spiritual dimension to his outlook; and his own interests, as detectable from his published books, evince a predilection for the miraculous, i.e. the routinely inexplicable. About the only thing Fort had to say about God in any remotely conventional sense was: "The theologians have recognized that the ideal is the imitation of God. If we be a part of such an organic thing, this thing is God to us, as I am God to the cells that compose me." One may take that as a kind of pantheism if one wishes, but as ever ("If we be...") Fort hedges his bet. On the other hand, Tiffany Thayer maintained that Fort had wanted to call his first book *God and the Fishmonger* – a reference to the massive fall of periwinkles at Worcester in 1881, which he details, and reverts to often, in *The Book of the Damned*. The inference one can fairly reliably take from Fort's writings is that, the cosmos being organic ("we... are only different expressions of an all-inclusive cheese"), all the phenomena in the quaint and curious reports he gathered had some kind of ultimate cause

and some kind of ultimate meaning. And, the cosmos *being* organic, that means it too has – or embodies, or manifests – meaning and purpose. And not ones that are fundamentally loopy – it wasn't Fort but his biographer Damon Knight who posed the question "If there is a Universal Mind, must it be sane?" Not everyone intrigued by anomalies is a fortean, of course, but we have the sense that behind the wonder and delight that forteana provide there lurks a sense of relief that life consists of a bit more than agglomerations of meaningless atoms and astronomical accidents.

Does that mean one can say what it all means? Be warned. Put the foot on the notion of 'meaning', and the Great Existential Banana Skin will have you sliding all over the place. Meaning is inherently booby-trapped: KEEP OUT OF REACH OF CHILDREN, your matchbox wisely advises. More mysteriously, the London Underground insists that DOGS MUST BE CARRIED ON THE ESCALATOR, but fails to provide the mandatory woofers, free of charge or otherwise. Does Goya's title *The sleep of reason breeds monsters* mean that reason is a kind of monster-breeding sleep, or that if reason sleeps, there will be monsters? Giving us greatest pause is the Bissell carpet cleaner whose side bears the legend EMPTY WHEN FULL. Something (even) more profound than the concept of the Cosmic Joker is at work when one ventures forearmed with such slogans into the realm of forteana: the whole field is rampant with ambiguity.

What is the 'meaning' of a cryptid? Is it a real but phenomenally (*sic*) elusive animal? Or the protagonist of a collection of stories, in turn based on prior expectations, misperceptions, and hoaxes? Is a grey alien 'really' a fairy, or vice-versa, or neither, or both? You can ask the same kinds of question of ghosts, or falls of fish, or any other fortean phenomenon, and come up against the same problem of definition. Like the proverbial glass of beer, each is both half full and half empty of certainty. At the centre of Tam Lin's crossroads, which road are you standing on? Is the twilight half light, or half

dark? Is the faery queen human, in any sense? What is so variously definable, we realise, is in essence indefinable. Yet we know what we mean when we talk about psi, or levitation, or synchronicity.

There are those who have shown that such bottomless pits are inherent, and ubiquitous, in human discourse. Kurt Gödel proved that behind every mathematical proof lies an *unprovable* assumption. Michael Polanyi demonstrated something similar in language and science with his theory of 'tacit knowledge', summed up as: "We can know more than we can tell". Harold Garfinkel came up with an experiment in ethnomethodology to show that even simple dialogue is rife with implicit meaning. George Hansen (*The Trickster and the Paranormal*, pp280-281) recounts how students recorded and transcribed a five- or 10-sentence conversation, then explained it: "and, in doing so, they often came to realize that the conversation was nearly unintelligible to outsiders. Their explanations were typically much longer than the original conversation. The next step was to have them explain the explanation. The students would soon recognize that this could become an infinite process, demonstrating the impossibility of specifying all aspects required for complete understanding."

While there would always be a "fringe of incompleteness" in their statements, it should be remembered that the original dialogue was perfectly

comprehensible to the interlocutors themselves.

The act of listening, rather than being merely passive, contributed to understanding. But to an outsider, the conversation would have been a liminal, twilight entity. Possibly someone might take it as intended to bemuse or even mock an outsider.

The greatest of all mockers and bemusers to inhabit the twilight zone is, of course, the trickster. Not all tricksters in all cultures are the same, but we can safely say that, taken as a whole, the trickster figure personifies a constellation of disruptions and transgressions: tricksters break typological and moral boundaries and taboos, are deceitful, polymorphously perverse, and possess magic or supernatural powers.

They are outsiders, inhabiting the interstices of the world; and

are prone to have their pranks backfire on them. The paradoxes involved suggest that trickster stories often acknowledge, but often do not resolve, conflicting impulses in humans – most obviously those that generate disorder *versus* those that favour stability. Such contradictions may never be wholly reconcilable: we just have to live them. "However," says Hansen (p33), "the trickster is not to be limited to the psychology of individuals. Trickster characteristics can manifest with small groups and even entire cultures."

In our disenchanting and deracinated culture, forteana and those fascinated by them are more than a small group, and less than an entire culture, but something like a sub-culture. The phenomena are, as Fort recognised, disruptive to a rationalised existence – enchanted and enchanting in a dusty world, giving it back its soul. Innately multifaceted and immune to consensus definition, they offer the sense that the cosmos contains meaning beyond its grating mechanisms. They tell us one thing and they do another; they shapeshift; they contain deceptions and hoaxes, comedy and moments of self-mockery, and no lack of rumpy-pumpy. Forteanism and forteana are the tricksters of our age and station, and they won't go away. Tricksters never do. **FI**



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The manna machine

TED HARRISON revisits an 'ancient astronaut' classic of the 1970s and asks whether it was really just an April Fool story or something more...



TED HARRISON is a former BBC religious affairs correspondent, regular *FT* contributor and author of a number of books. His latest, *Apocalypse When?*, is out now from Darton, Longman and Todd.

George Sassoon, the only child of the war poet Siegfried Sassoon, was both a maverick scientist and an extraordinary linguist. It is said he mastered Serbo-Croat in only two months and was fluent in Klingon.

It was his knowledge of Hebrew and Aramaic combined with his expertise in engineering and physics that led him to his most startling and original theory. Through the 1970s, he worked on research that led him to conclude that the manna that sustained the Israelites through their 40-year sojourn in the wilderness was a food produced by a highly sophisticated machine powered by nuclear energy.

The book he published with co-author Rodney Dale, *The Manna Machine*, became a bestseller and was one of several 'ancient astronaut' books of the time proposing that extraterrestrials had visited the Earth in Old Testament times and that the Bible contains many descriptions of their advanced technology.

The key to their understanding of the Old Testament text, Dale and Sassoon asserted, was the Zohar – the body of Jewish oral tradition, the Kabbalah, that had been written down for the first time at the end of the 13th century.

In the Zohar, they said, there was a description of a being called the Ancient of Days responsible for feeding the Children of Israel as they wandered in the desert with Moses. The Ancient of Days is described in arcane and obscure language, which scholars have traditionally understood as mystical symbolism. Sassoon and Dale, however, took a very different view. They saw in the text "a straightforward mechanical description of a physical object. Some of the parts are given unlikely-sounding names, but the whole description fits together perfectly" – a machine for

making a basic foodstuff.

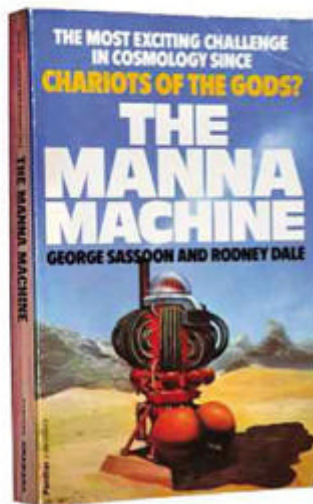
Manna, they concluded, was made from the algæ Chlorella, and the manna machine consisted of an arrangement of tanks containing culture solution in which chlorella would grow. At the top of the machine was a curved surface cooled by a flow of air that distilled the scarce moisture in the desert air. In this water the algæ were grown under artificial light. The resulting chlorella sludge was transferred to another vessel for processing into food wafers to be stored until required.

Chlorella, although unpalatable, contains all the elements of a balanced diet, Sassoon and Dale maintained: "protein, carbohydrate, fat and some vitamins". With no technical language to draw on, the authors of the Zohar used words for parts of the body to describe the machine, giving the impression that the whole was some kind of living being. Tanks became skulls, the pipework through which the algæ sludge circulated was called the beard, the control dials were seen as "shining eyes" and when parts had to be joined together, the process was described in sexual terms.

The 'being' that was regarded with awe and wonder by a primitive nomadic tribe wandering in the Sinai Desert was interpreted in the light of 20th century science in a very different way, especially when Sassoon's new translation of the Zohar treated the document more as an operational manual than a mystical text.

The machine provided all the food the Israelites needed, but to keep it in good working order it had to be stripped down and thoroughly cleaned every seven days, which is why on the Sabbath it did no work.

The Ancient of Days and the Ark



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1 2 Samuel 6: 6-7

2 George Sassoon was a regular *FT* correspondent, writing about Hitler's diet, rains of footballs, woolly pigs and stone spheres in the Arctic. See his obituary, **FT214:26**.

of the Covenant, Sassoon and Dale maintained, were one and the same thing. And by whatever name it was known, it needed an energy source to work. The Ark was said to give off a blinding light, yet no description is given in the ancient texts of it being fed fuel to burn. Sassoon and Dale deduced it was nuclear powered. (For more on theories about the Ark of the Covenant as advanced technology, see 'Re-engineering the Ark', **FT207:48-55**)

This explained the strict rules imposed to limit access to the Ark and its tendency to zap the unwary and disobedient. "Uzzah put forth his hand to the Ark of God,... And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah; and God smote him there for his error; and there he died by the Ark of God."¹

Such sophisticated technology was literally out of this world, the authors concluded: it must have been brought to Earth by an advanced extraterrestrial civilisation. And this civilisation might still have things to teach the modern world. "Ancient writings, shorn of their mysticism, may contain answers to at least some of the problems of science."

George Sassoon died in 2006 at the age of 69, having, in the words of his *Daily Telegraph* obituary "attained distinction as a scientist, electronic engineer, linguist, translator of scientific papers, player of the piano accordion and investigator into extraterrestrial phenomena".² His collaborator Rodney Dale is now in his 80s and lives in Cambridgeshire. "It's some years since I worked on this topic," he wrote recently, "but I stand by our findings, strange as they are. When we started our work, there was the English text, and we built up a block diagram of what it said was a physical 'thing' piece by piece, becoming more and more excited all the time. That was the foundation for much subsequent work."

Dale and Sassoon's theory first appeared in the *New Scientist* in 1976, but it wasn't until I checked the exact date of their article that its significance struck me: the issue came out on 1 April that year. Had the whole thing simply been an April Fool, one which its perpetrators nevertheless stuck to for the rest of their lives?

I wrote to Rodney Dale, who told me – in all seriousness – that he stands by the theory. Perhaps, then, the *New Scientist* perhaps chose the 1 April date to protect its own reputation. **FT**

Iraq's Twilight of the Idols

In the wake of Islamic State's shocking assaults on historic monuments and culture in Iraq, **JERRY GLOVER** looks at the origins of iconoclasm in the region's deeper history and beyond.



JERRY GLOVER is a freelance writer with a special interest in esoteric, symbolic, and ancient enigmata. He has contributed to *Fortean Times* since 2001, and plans to continue doing so.

The adage that the history of art is also the history of iconoclasm is being confirmed by Islamic State (Daesh/ISIL/ISIS) militants in their widening offensive on ancient and religious sites they deem idolatrous. Since seizing control of the northern Iraqi city of Mosul in June 2014, the militants have blown up and bulldozed scores of district churches, mosques, shrines and tombs in an iconoclastic rampage on a scale not seen since the *Beeldenstorm* riots against Catholic art across 16th century Europe.

Gone is the tomb of the mediæval scholar Ali ibn al-Athir (1160-1233), who wrote an important history of the Crusades, along with the traditional tombs of saints such as St George and the prophets Daniel and Seth. Gone, too, in Mosul is a shrine of the Biblical Jonah¹ – ISIL succeeding at what Austin Henry Layard had wanted to do in order to excavate the palace beneath it. The prophet, who in the eponymous book spent three days inside the “big fish”, predicted the fall of Nineveh, a city whose 3,000-year history ended with its sack and razing by Assyria's former vassals in 612 BC. Attempting to finish the job, ISIL bombed the Nineveh Wall in January, and burned Mosul's library, before turning their hammers – and video cameras – on Assyrian stone sculptures at the Mosul Museum at the end of February. *Lamassu*, protective winged deities from Nineveh and Nimrud, were toppled and smashed, a mixture of modern replicas and original reliefs and statues.² Days later, ISIL took their bulldozers south east of Mosul to flatten Nimrud, the Assyrian capital from the reign of Ashurnasirpal II (883-859 BC).³

The safekeeping of Assyrian sculptures in museums in Europe and the United States means a potentially more catastrophic legacy of ISIL's iconoclasm has been sustained by the

melting-pot culture of Hatra. This two-millennia-old Parthian frontier city fused Greek, Mesopotamian and Near Eastern traditions in its art and architecture, resisting Roman assaults before falling to the Sassanian Empire in 241. The sledgehammering of at least four statues of the kings of Hatra (one was the finest example known) in the most notorious sequence of the ISIL museum video represents the loss of 15 per cent of all such statues from Hatra – especially bad since the art of this culture is hardly studied and all of its works have remained in Iraq.⁴ The razing of Hatra itself was reported on 7 March, and on 9 March the pre-Nineveh capital of the Assyrians, Dur-Sharrukin – the ‘Fortress of Sargon’ (modern Khorsabad) – was reported to be receiving the same treatment. After the desecration of Mosul Museum, caught on video like some demented reality TV show, now gone viral, the razing of the culminating monuments of the 2,000-year Assyrian Empire seemed almost

BELOW: A statue of a Parthian princess in Hatra (Al-Hadr), Iraq, photographed in 1977. Along with the rest of the ruined city, it has probably fallen victim to ISIL's bulldozers.



like a grotesque afterthought.

Images and texts were commonly destroyed in the earliest phases of Mesopotamian history. One such event is prominent in the earliest well-documented historical episode, the Lagash-Umma conflict over a bordering tract of fertile land c. 2500 BC. The border was demarcated by inscribed stelæ, which the ruler of Umma smashed before marching on Lagash. The decapitation and cutting-down of statues thereafter became ‘normal’ Mesopotamian practice. Of the few surviving divine statues from Mesopotamia, every one has suffered intentional damage. The *Lamentation over the Destruction of Sumer and Ur* describes the demolition of the statue of the goddess Nin-e'iga, pruned of her divine horns then “seated in the dust”.⁵ Along with the destruction of images and names came curses to protect against such assaults, which by the time of Sargon of Akkad (c. 2334-2279 BC) threatened the destroyer and their children (“whoever tears out this inscription, may Shamash uproot his foundations and pluck out his progeny!”).⁶ Protective curses became progressively more elaborate into the Old Babylonian period. The history of war is also the history of iconoclasm and curse magic.

The history of iconoclasm itself is much deeper than recorded history, extending back more than 9,000 years to the inception of agriculture and organised cultic practice on a large scale. Evidence for what is possibly the first major iconoclastic event in human history comes from a major cultural complex in southeastern Turkey, what I tentatively term the Sanliurfa-Çayönü culture. Its major hub was the extraordinary megalithic site of Göbekli Tepe (FT220:46-51, 289:23, 310:18-19), where hunters and artisans erected totems and pillars from around 9500 BC. Over the span of about two millennia, Göbekli Tepe and its satellite sanctuaries (including another major site at Nevalı Çori in the foothills of the Taurus mountains) developed a culture in which wild and dangerous animals, especially vultures and snakes, were carved into the pillars. Vultures were already a long-established feature of shamanism in the region. However, the overriding iconography of the incipient Sanliurfa culture that orbited around Göbekli Tepe strongly suggests that a shamanistic elite who closely identified themselves with snakes gained control of regional trade, most lucratively in obsidian. Building on traditional shamanism, this emergent



‘snake priesthood’ instigated megalithic sanctuaries where cultic rituals centred on hunting and shamanism, as well as trade and artisanship, flourished. This further contributed to the power of the elite, who developed their control of the region’s trade and built up a cultural ideology that soon overrode the trust and esteem previously invested in ‘great bird’ shamanism.

Even though Göbekli Tepe underwent a slow decline almost from the outset, its megalithic enclosures shrinking over centuries, the culture survived for around 2,000 years. It was around 7400 BC when the site, and those of its satellite communities (where similar carved pillars stood), started to be backfilled, deliberately wiped from the face of the Earth in highly organised, large-scale iconoclasm. My research makes me wonder if the massive effort going into building these sites, the terrible hardships being suffered by those attempting to get a foothold in agriculture at exactly the same time, and the human sacrifices happening at the related site of Çayönü (where revolts and conflagration occurred around 7200 BC), are some of the factors contributing to an uprising that rejected the prevailing ideology: the result was a total (though not immediate) cultural collapse. Just how significant is it that the only example of ‘unsanctioned’ folk art found at Göbekli Tepe so far is the graffiti of a woman giving birth, incised at the base of a pillar? ⁷ Added to the rest of the evidence, this minor act of vandalism may be one of the most important pieces of the puzzle of what actually happened in Göbekli’s final decades.

Similar circumstances leading to major iconoclasm happened again in Malta, only much later. By the third millennium BC, a theocracy with an ideology possibly traceable back to the complex proto-civilisation of the

Images were commonly destroyed in Mesopotamia’s early history

Danube heartlands developed a fertility culture with megalithic monumental imagery and an emphasis on community and extravagant feasting. After 2450 BC, someone was so displeased with this state of affairs that the temple culture collapsed violently. At Xaghra’s Brochtorff Circle, on Gozo, and Tarxien temple, structures were dismantled and abandoned and statuettes of prestigious figures smashed and thrown about. The large ‘fat lady’ statue at Tarxien, with her top half missing, shows a determined attempt at obliteration. Whether slow or rapid, the demise was total, and the archaeology suggests a populous and over-exploited environment, leading to poor diet, in which the system “ceased to be seductive or believable”. ⁸

Other iconoclasm are doubly perplexing: the fate of the Copper Age menhirs of Lunigiana in northern Italy, decapitated in the Early Iron Age in a mysterious social upheaval; ⁹ the menhirs of Champagne-sur-Oise in northern France, toppled and slashed in the Late Neolithic; ¹⁰ or the thousands of broken figurines deposited on the Ægean island of Keros between 2800-2300 BC; they were mostly broken up somewhere else, the missing pieces not traced to

ABOVE: In a recent video, ISIL ‘fighters’ wreak havoc in Mosul Museum, taking their sledgehammers to ancient Assyrian statues.

any Cycladic island. ¹¹ Seen through the lens of archaeology, the ‘baddies’ of Indo-European mythology and folklore – the monsters and giants – seem like the targets of a concerted effort of defamation and disfiguration: the once beautiful are made hideous, the most violent warrior-chiefs are deified, and the wise women and giants made into cannibals and child-snatchers. This is iconoclasm hidden in plain sight.

So concerned are they with publicising their efforts, the contemporary iconoclasts of Mosul are inadvertently perpetuating their targets in memory. What kind of iconoclasm is it when, by making a world spectacle of their destruction, many more people are now aware of the ‘idolotrous’ images of Hatra and Assyria than ever before? By ISIL’s own stated motives, this makes no sense. If you are going to do it properly, learn from the despoilers of Göbekli Tepe who erased the culture so diligently that it took 10 millennia for anyone to notice that the iconoclasm *had even taken place*.

But this fresh wave of iconoclasm has hidden objectives: reports suggest that ISIL has been selling antiquities on the black market to fund its terrorist activities. ¹² The plundering and the posturing suggest this is not real iconoclasm, rather a charade, despite the incalculable and tragic material losses. **FT**

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Aporia doesn't fear the law

Modernity has not drawn the sting from witchcraft; instead it has created more and different instances of it, revealing a fear of the unusual – and societal upheavals



The Empty Seashell

Witchcraft and Doubt on an Indonesian Island

Nils Bubandt

Cornell University Press 2014

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Instead of putting witch-hunting down to the badness and madness of our ancestors, historians today try to understand its reality, as it was perceived in its own time. It turns out that people were unsure whether witches existed, and that credulity has always rubbed shoulders with scepticism. Because of this, it is sometimes hard to see how anyone believed in witchcraft at all, but the difficulty for historians is that their subjects, being dead, have nothing more to say.

Here anthropologists like Nils Bubandt have the edge. Over a period of 17 years, he spent many months on the Indonesian island of Buli, where locals told him about the witches in their midst. The only problem was that the more Bubandt learned, the fuzzier it all became. This wasn't because he was some hard-of-understanding Westerner: it's exactly how the idea appears in islanders' own minds.

Witchcraft in Indonesia, Bubandt explains, is a "precarious, embarrassing, and potentially libellous issue" – much as it was in 17th-century Europe. As with pre-modern

demonology, the rudiments can be described easily enough. *Gua* are neighbours, friends and family who, to satisfy their anti-social greed, make pacts with evil spirits which empower them to fly about at night, transform into animals and harm their enemies. It's all rather familiar, then, except that *gua* also swoop from the rafters to eat the livers of their sleeping victims (fava beans and nice Chianti optional). What may sound daft to us, on Buli is utterly terrifying.

These fears burn brightly not because possession and bewitchment are commonplace in Indonesia but despite the fact that they are not.

Bubandt likens the witch-menace to nuclear war or terrorism: "a threat that is both real and yet often absents itself from daily experience". Witchcraft is, therefore, a paradox: it's everywhere and nowhere, real and impossible, hauntingly vivid yet intangible and invisible. Buli's Christians are afraid to voice their scepticism of witchcraft in case – you've guessed it – they are overheard by witches. "The corporeal and experiential reality of witchcraft," writes Bubandt, rather wonderfully, "is intimidated more truthfully by an account of its absence and the necessary doubts about it than by an account of beliefs about its presence." Like the little man upon the stair, witchcraft isn't there and, however hard everyone wishes, won't go away.

As you might expect, there's some dense academic exegesis. This can be hard to penetrate, however subtly it elaborates and qualifies the main thesis. But there are some extraordinary

"On Buli, witchcraft explains nothing – indeed, as an aporia, it confounds explanation"

stories, too. Sami Batawi and her husband Herman both believed that their fathers had been killed by *gua*. After that, the witches came for her. Apparently possessed, Sami was wild-eyed, flailed her arms, and screamed denunciations of Lolos, her own uncle. Spirit healers diagnosed witchcraft, but also blamed Herman for having killed a pig (and making his wife sit next to it in a boat) when he should have respected an obvious taboo: the pig was Sami's spirit guardian. Blame therefore lost its focus, the result: 'aporia'.

Aporia is the concept around which Bubandt organises his data – a persistent state of doubt caused by the assembly of various plausible ideas to make something insubstantial, inconsistent and improbable. One finds it in Plato's dialogues, and it resurfaces throughout the history of Western philosophy, notably in the post-structuralism of Jacques Derrida.

Witchcraft, Bubandt has found, "is not an objective belief but an experiential aporia" – no one ever sees witches, but this just makes them more unnerving. Old-fashioned anthropological 'functionalism' suggests that witch-beliefs explain everything to those who hold them. On Buli, witchcraft explains nothing – indeed, as an aporia, it confounds

explanation – but this offers a tantalising glimpse of the unease people feel about themselves and their environment.

Historians and anthropologists alike are starting to understand witchcraft not as a relic of a time before change, but as an anxiety and an ideology excited by change. Witch-panics may be seen not as symbols of antiquity, but of modernity and its painful transitions. After all, what are often called 'mediæval' witch-hunts were mostly not mediæval at all, but early modern – that is, they belong to an in-between period of profound upheaval in all areas of European life. On Buli, modernity promised to neutralise the perils of the greedy *gua*, but so far has succeeded only in producing more witches and new aporias. Capitalism, we know, doesn't satiate greed: it creates it. The case against Sami's tormentors was inflamed by expectations that the law – an agency of modernity – would bring relief and justice. The same thing happened in early modern England.

The fact that this book is about witches gives it obvious fortean interest. We learn that the intellectual framework by which anything is known about witchcraft on Buli (its ontology and epistemology) is ambiguous and self-contradictory, much as it was 400 years ago. And yet the more profound significance of its central idea transcends time and space and culture.

Bubandt describes a characteristic of the human mind that is universal yet not always obvious to those proud of their post-Enlightenment heritage.

Continued on p58

The Thing is 50

A Warminster agnostic and a believer combine to write a history of the hotspot



History of a Mystery

Fifty Years of the Warminster Thing

Steve Dewey & Kevin Goodman

Swallowtail Books 2015

Pb, 144pp, illus, ind, £4.99, ISBN 9780955119033

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £4.99

This is an anniversary year for the Warminster area of Wiltshire, because 50 years ago – in 1965 – it acquired a reputation for being an anomaly hotspot.

Unusual sounds were heard in late 1964. Within a few months, UFO sightings predominated, or at least received the most attention. The ‘Thing’ was the nickname originally given to the source of the sounds. This appellation was extended to the UFOs.

Strange phenomena seemingly continued into the second half of the 1970s. The reports drew visitors. Expectancy, suggestion, imagination, and sleep-deprivation may have induced many observers to misperceive ordinary aerial objects as UFOs. But people going about their normal business also had odd experiences.

Steve Dewey and Kevin Goodman provide a synoptic history of the Warminster ‘Thing’. They make an interesting pair: they’re both experts on the Warminster case, but come to it from different perspectives. Dewey was brought up in Warminster, but is sceptical about the notion that anything genuinely paranormal was behind the reports from the area, which were far fewer by the second half of the 1970s. Instead, he

subscribes to the view that social and psychological factors (suggestion, imagination etc.), along with misreporting and hoaxing, can explain the refrained. Goodman, on the other hand, isn’t a Warminster native, but personally witnessed some hard-to-explain UFO phenomena in the area in the 1970s.

It testifies to the authors’ maturity that they’ve been able to work together despite this. They claim not to comment on what did or didn’t happen. It’s true that it’s an historical account, and that they’ve largely refrained from examining theories about what was or wasn’t going on. But it’s not quite correct to say that they’ve passed no comment. Indeed, I imagine that it would be impossible not to include some such commentary in a work of this sort.

Helpfully, the book has an index. The text contains a sprinkling of unusual words that might better have been avoided (e.g. “adumbrate”, “divagation”, “gallimaufry” and “holloway”); but, on the whole, it’s quite readable. There are some typos (e.g. missing full stops), but they don’t obscure the intended meaning.

As a short book, *History of a Mystery* would be useful for someone who wanted a quick and authoritative overview of the Warminster story. Even seasoned students of the subject might find some nuggets of interest. For example, in discussing the Gordon Faulkner UFO photograph of 1965, which some have dismissed as a fake, the authors quote a fairly detailed statement from Faulkner himself, who contends that people have made some very inaccurate assertions about the matter.

Peter A McCue

Fortean Times Verdict

SNAPPY AND EVEN-HANDED REVIEW OF WHATEVER IT WAS

8

Continued from page 57

Our brains are simultaneously full of knowing and not knowing, believing and doubting, fearing and rationally dismissing fears. We know these to be incompatible opposites, but can’t help having them both in play at any one time. And so we comfort ourselves with the illusion of singularity, and of secular triumph.

One thing we know for sure is that we have to appear to know things, when really we may know nothing at all.

Malcolm Gaskill

Fortean Times Verdict

FASCINATING INSIGHT INTO APORIA AND WITCHCRAFT

9

Living with the Stars

How the Human Body is Connected to the Life Cycles of the Earth, the Planets, and the Stars

Karel Schrijver and Iris Schrijver

Oxford University Press 2015

Hb, 202pp, ind, £18.99, ISBN 9780198727439

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £17.09



Most of us feel – more or less – permanent. But it’s an illusion. “We are a pattern”, *Living with the Stars* explains, “like a cloud, a traffic jam, or a city” that offers sufficient stability to engender our body and personality with a “sense of continuity”.

We shed, for example, 30,000 skin cells and make 300 million blood cells a minute, using raw material forged in the “burned-out embers of stars”. We recycle the water in our bodies every few days or weeks. Some nerves, heart and bones cells take decades to be replaced, but we’re constantly fuelling their activity and repairing damage. So, on average, an adult’s cells live for between seven and 10 years.

I am, as my wife reminds me, not the man I was a few years ago.

Living with the Stars eloquently explores the “the transient human body within the ecology of the Universe” as well as “the links between the atoms in our body and the lives of stars”. The authors’ almost journalistic

eye for telling detail and turn of phrase enlivens the book.

They note, for example, that the energy needed to power a person throughout life requires the Sun to convert just half a gram of hydrogen to helium. Our bodies store about 110,000 calories – the yield of just 0.75 milligrams of fused hydrogen.

There are, however, no illustrations, references or further reading. I particularly missed the references, although the authors suggest that “you should have no trouble at all looking up the original texts and background information”.

Nevertheless, *Living with the Stars* is lively, engaging and insightful.

Hawkwind were right: we’re all children of the Sun.

Mark Greener

Fortean Times Verdict

ENGAGING LOOK AT OUR PLACE IN THE UNIVERSE THAT FORMED US

7

The Paranormal Diaries

Clophill – The True Story of Clophill’s Black Magic Church

Kevin Gates

Off World Films and Bleeding Edge Films 2014

Pb, 205pp, illus, ind, £12.99, ISBN 9780993093807

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £12.99



In March 1963, two schoolboys on a cycling excursion stumbled upon the apparent remains of a black mass

in the ruins of Old St Mary’s church in the village of Clophill, Bedfordshire. They found a human skull impaled upon a spike, with bones arranged around it, and the remains of a cockerel, seemingly having been sacrificed and dismembered. Outside in the churchyard, tombs had been desecrated.

Soon, the national press was taking an interest, the case being an early instance of Hammer- and Wheatley-style ‘occult panic’ in the British media, which reached its apogee some years later with the Highgate Vampire affair.

Outbreaks of what was termed black magic activity continued throughout 1963, with an estimated 200 churches across

Britain reported as having been desecrated, by being defiled, robbed, or set alight; was this a genuine 'spike' in such activity, or merely the result of frenzied press attention?

Gates's book (which accompanies his film of the same name) places the episode in the context of other odd goings-on in the Bedfordshire area, such as the discovery of mutilated cows' and horses' heads in Bluebell Wood, Caddington, the very next month. Gates tracks down witnesses to some later, lesser-known (but no less mysterious) episodes – again, in Bluebell Wood, an apparition bearing a close resemblance to Mothman or Owlman. Other interviewees speak of having seen robed and hooded figures conducting ceremonies at Old St Mary's well into the 1970s. Gates's investigation also encompasses local ghost and UFO sightings, and a secretive military airbase (RAF Chicksands) not far from Clophill.

An absorbing and well researched book.

Christopher Josiffe

Fortean Times Verdict

DECENT RESEARCH INTO WEIRD GOINGS-ON IN BEDFORDSHIRE

9

DMT and the Soul of Prophecy

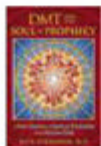
A New Science of Spiritual Revelation in the Hebrew Bible

Rick Strassman

Park Street Press 2014

Pb, 338pp, notes, bib, ind, \$19.95, ISBN 9781594773426

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £15.29



Strassman's groundbreaking book develops his observations on the phenomenological parallels between spontaneous visionary experiences and those induced by psychedelic substances such as ayahuasca, or rather its DMT constituent. He goes into great detail about the natural origins of DMT (found in a great many plants) and its effects on the blood and brain.

DMT can be made by the human body, and when taken orally is normally rendered inactive by enzymes; but

ayahuasca also contains beta-blockers that inhibit that process, allowing it to be fully and powerfully psychoactive.

Strassman – a professor of psychiatry at the University of Mexico Medical School – became fascinated by the consistency of reported encounters with luminous magical entities in DMT experiences, often non-human entities that taught or prophesied. He found that his clinical research and interest in mysticism could not answer the question of why a simple compound like DMT “instantaneously opens us to an active spiritual world”.

More significant for him was the “extraordinarily similar” phenomenology of the visionary experiences of DMT-users to those of the Hebrew prophets Adam, Daniel, Ezekiel and Moses.

For example, one of his subjects, a fellow psychologist, reported “Large crystalline prisms appeared, a wild display of lights shooting off into all directions... My body felt cool and light... My mind was full of some sort of sound, like the aftereffects of a large ringing bell... Out of the raging colossal waterfall of flaming color expanding into my visual field, the roaring silence, and an unspeakable joy, they stepped, or rather, emerged. Welcoming, curious, they almost sang... ‘Now do you see? Now do you see?’”

Using scriptural accounts and the metaphysical models of mediæval Jewish philosophers alongside similar accounts from his DMT subjects, Strassman develops the hypothesis of a ‘theoneurological’ state of consciousness in which the Divine communicates with a DMT-augmented human (the opposite of a ‘neurotheological’ state in which “altered brain function generates the impression of a Divine-human encounter”.

This fascinating notion seems to have been well received by rabbinical scholars, psychiatrists and anthropologists with an interest in altered states of consciousness.

Bob Rickard

Fortean Times Verdict

NATURAL & INDUCED EXPERIENCE OF NUMINOUS ENTITIES

9

Cryptids of Oz

The thylacine is supposedly extinct, but the critter just won't lie down and die



Tasmanian Tiger

Extinct or Extant

Ed: Rebecca Lang

Strange Nation Publishing 2015

Pb, 189pp, £16.00, ISBN 978 0 646 926346

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £16.00

The thylacine or Tasmanian wolf is the cryptid most likely to exist; but relatively few books have been written about it.

Col Bailey believes there are at least two thylacine populations. Ned Terry, who has searched as far as New Guinea, presents witness interviews. Nick Mooney, who investigates sightings for the Tasmanian government, believes that at least 100 could have outlived the last known specimen.

A chapter from Tony Healy and Paul Cropper's *Out of the Shadows: The Mystery Animals of Australia* looks at modern sightings in Australia, which today are more common than in Tasmania. Cryptozoologist Malcolm Smith cherry-picks his best reports in which witnesses insist what they saw was neither dog nor fox, and looks at thylacines in New Guinea. The late Peter Chapple, of the Australian Rare Fauna Research Association, focuses on mainland sightings, the photographs taken by an Aboriginal tracker and the more convincing 1971 film.

He discusses Professor Henry Nix's BIOCLIM programme, which matches species' preferred habitats and geographical information; there was a strong correlation between where it predicted thylacines would be and sightings. Wildlife consultant Gary Opit examines the incredulity that some witnesses have met. He saw a thylacine on the Gold Coast Highway in 1969 and presents accounts phoned into his radio programme. He observes that no one reports genuinely extinct animals but they *do* report Tasmanian wolves.

Mike Williams, co-author with Rebecca Lang of *Australian Big Cats: An Unnatural History of Panthers*, concentrates on the well preserved Nullarbor thylacine carcass discovered in a cave in 1966. Dr Robert Paddle, the author of *The Last Tasmanian Tiger*, examines Victorian scientists' predictions of Tasmanian wolf extinction based on the declining populations of the placental wolf in Europe and the supposition that the marsupial wolf would be treated in the same way. Dr Andrew Pask, of the University of Connecticut, examines the possibility of resurrecting the thylacine from DNA in preserved tissue.

Tasmania Tiger: Extinct or Extant? belongs on the shelf of anyone interested in the possible survival of the world's most magnificent marsupial.

Richard Freeman

Fortean Times Verdict

PROBABLY EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE THYLACINE

10

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Scissors beat paper

A splendid history of paper devotes an entire section to discussing the bedrock of this magazine: newspaper clippings



White Magic

The Age Of Paper

Lothar Müller

Polity Press 2014

Pb, 291pp, illus, appx, notes, bib, ind, £20.00, ISBN 9780745672533

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £20.00

At a certain point in *White Magic* I found I'd stopped reading the text and was staring at the gaps in between, the off-white, textured spaces left blank between the letters. This was not due to any deficiency in the writing – far from it. Instead, Müller's in-depth and comprehensive history of paper changed my focus from the words to the material on which they were printed.

Müller is not the first to inspire this change of perspective from the words to the medium. In the *Pfennig-Magazin's* "descriptions of the paper machine and the paper cutting machine, the magazine used the same reflexive movement that Balzac employed in his novel to demonstrate to its readers the material makings of the very journal they held in their hands."

Müller's working life is embedded in paper. He is editor of the features section of *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, and has a background in teaching general and comparative literature. In *White Magic*, he brings that knowledge and (dare I say, passion?), into play.

White Magic mainly focuses on the use of paper in Europe, though it does put the arrival of paper on the continent into a continuity of production in China, and the move to using rags as a source material in the

Arab world. He explains how this change moved from a reliance on products of nature to using products of civilisation. Now freed from the limitations of the paper mulberry or papyrus paper, raw materials could be found "wherever people lived, wore suitable clothing, and engaged in trade."

This early section of the book includes one of my favourite phrases, acoustic calligraphy, highlighting what a masterful translation Jessica Spengler has achieved. She has maintained the nuance of Müller's discussion, without losing the poetry or subtlety of the language.

Though Müller explores the technological changes, his skill is in finding interesting avenues to lead us down. These include the rise of playing cards as a mass produced product, the development of double-entry book-keeping, and the arrival of the media of modern bureaucracy in the Spain of Phillip II.

There are several of these avenues that bring home the constant modernity of life, no matter what century. For example, while discussing the use of placards during the French Revolution, Müller comments on how "day after day millions of blue, purple, green and red placards had turned walls of the city into public platforms where no one was prevented from inciting murder or looting." The parallel with contemporary online discourse, and the complexities surrounding it, is blatant. Müller shows us these debates are nothing new.

Of particular interest to *Fortean Times* readers will be a whole section on newspaper clipping. As any long-time reader will know, there is a small army of clippers who supply the magazine with interesting news articles. Starting with James Joyce's *Ulysses*, Müller explores how newspaper clipping offices emerged in the

19th century, arguing how this second-order medium lengthened the lifespan of time-limited daily newspapers – an argument that is sure to warm the heart of many a *fortean*.

At times Müller's writing has the feel of an Adam Curtis documentary in showing us the unintended consequences arising from changes that can only be seen in retrospect.

An excellent example of this is the New York Stock Exchange's "electronification of the back offices." Müller discusses how this led to over-confidence in the new technology (which still relied on paper in the form of cardboard punch cards). He then traces punch card technology back to the textile industry of the 19th century, and from there Charles Babbage and the rise of automated musical instruments. Müller finds these strands within the wider history of rag picking, wood pulp and DIN 476, teases them out and critically analyses the role they've played.

By using technological history, literature and a considerable amount of insight, Müller not only traces the changes in the use of paper but shows how those changes alter the world.

White Magic is also refreshing in looking at the history of paper from a German rather than Anglo-centric or American perspective.

Starting with Alan Macfarlane's *Glass, A World History*, there have been a number of single material histories of civilisation in its many forms.

With *White Magic*, Müller has written an authoritative, accessible and readable account that argues for paper's role in our social world to be recognised far beyond the printed page of the book.

Steve Toase

Fortean Times Verdict

HUGELY READABLE ACCOUNT OF OUR FAVOURITE MATERIAL

9

Once upon a Time

A short history of fairy tale

Marina Warner

Oxford University Press 2014

Hb, 225pp, bib, ind, £10.99, ISBN 9780198718659

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £9.99



It's become something of a truism to say Marina Warner wears her erudition lightly, and it certainly

applies to this little tome. Here she explores a multitude of tales on the page, the stage and the screen. Fairy tales are entangled with folklore and myth and arise from specific ideas about imagination and fantasy, nature and the supernatural, gender roles and cultural boundaries.

Major landmarks range from Perrault's *Tales of Olden Times* (1697) and the Grimm Brothers' *Household Tales* (1812) to Jorge Luis Borges's *The Book of Imaginary Beings* (1967). While scholars distinguish between genuine (anonymous) folk tales and literary fairy tales (Dickens, E Nesbit, Tolkien, Calvino, etc), in practice the two are hard to keep separate – consider the metamorphoses of a single story like 'The Sleeping Beauty' or 'Ali Baba'.

Angela Carter called the spirit of fairy tale 'heroic optimism'. Blind hope or the life principle in action carries the tales of terrible dark deeds to their unlikely happy conclusion. Fate will be changed; perpetrators overcome. Wishful thinking is rooted in sheer misery. While the tales typically dramatise mundane sufferings, needs and desires, wild talents and other *fortean* are standard fare: clairvoyance, abductions, spellbound sleep, doubles, curses, prophecies and charmed objects; animals speak and rocks and trees shape-shift. "Fairy tales are stories that try to find the truth and give us glimpses of greater things," says Marina Warner. "This is the principle that underlies their growing presence in writing, art, cinema, dance, song."

Edward Young

Fortean Times Verdict

A STIMULATING AND WIDE-RANGING SURVEY

9

ALSO RECEIVED

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

Return of the Golden Age

Edward F Malkowski

Inner Traditions 2014

Pb, 303pp, notes, bib, ind, \$19.95, ISBN 9781620551974

There has been a recent trend for books claiming brilliant insights into the ills of modern civilisation by mashing together the myths and teachings of older cultures. Malkowski believes that mankind was traumatised by the destruction of its Golden Age. We yearn to re-invest it, but can't until we understand its symbols and spiritual technology. He goes back to a cataclysm 12,000 years ago that destroyed the Golden Age, which he calls 'Civilization X'. The greater part of the book is a survey of psychological and spiritual events, from mystical visions (including the drug 'assisted') to the increased reports of the allegedly spiritually gifted 'Indigo children'. Malkowski writes without the usual verbal hysteria, delivering a positive message for chaotic times.

Sad Monsters

Frank Lesser

Souvenir press 2014

Pb, 180pp, £6.99, ISBN 9780285642324

Humorous essays from the *Colbert Report* writer about 40 monsters and cryptids encountering everyday problems: an experimenter jealous of Jonas Salk, who got medals for testing teleporting on himself when all he got was a fly's head and arm; a goatsucker fed up with anti-Hispanic prejudice; the 'reverse Medusa' who turns to stone when looked at; the Mummy's painful ankles; the hungover leprechaun; the werewolf whisperer; and a genie who can't get rid of his wishes. It may amuse younger readers.

Unidentified: The UFO Phenomenon

Robert Salas

New Page Books 2015

Pb, 238pp, illus, bib, ind, \$15.99, ISBN 9781601633422

Salas – a retired missile engineer and USAF officer – takes issue with the USAF's 1969 statement that "No UFO investigated and evaluated by the Air Force was ever an indication of threat to our national security" and has confronted 'official secrecy' at every opportunity. Here, he sets out a detailed case and, along the way, his own 1967 UFO experience leads into his reasons for believing that a 'UFO Cabal' exists at the

highest level of the Air Force. However, he also conflates what was personal and local into a conspiracy that includes the governments of other countries. It is a sober yet heartfelt narrative which dares you to dismiss it without due consideration.

The Exodus Reality

Scott Alan Roberts & John Richard Ward

New Page Books 2014

Pb, 286pp, illus, notes, bib, ind, \$19.99, ISBN 9781601632913

The publisher's blurb claims this is the "real" history of Moses. The authors argue two theories for the identity of Moses: Amenhotep (grand vizier, chief of works and the armies, and royal steward to Amenhotep III); and Senenmut (a royal prince and lover of Hatshepsut). The authors re-interpret ambiguous inscriptions and documents concerning Moses, the 'Pharaoh's daughter' who fished him from the river, the flight from Egypt and the sojourn of the Israelites in Sinai. A thought-provoking read on an important biblical and Hebrew mystery.

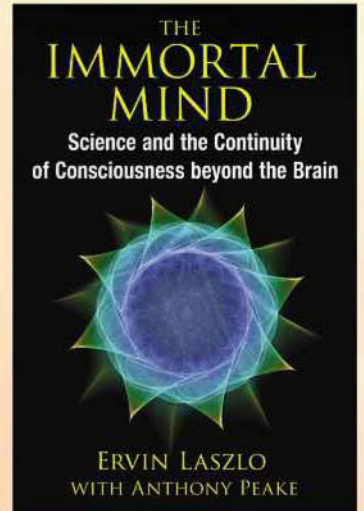
A Brief History of Death

WM Spellman

Reaktion Books, 2014

Hb, 253pp, bib, refs, index, £20.00, ISBN 9781780232652

After the spate of near-death and out-of-the-body experience books comes this refreshing cultural, historical, psychological and personal examination of the death experience. Spellman, a professor of history at the University of North Carolina, explores nearly every topic related to our demise: the mind-body problem, beliefs, burials, taboos, suicide, grief, infant mortality, and legal and philosophical definitions. Whether we have faith in a better existence in the Afterlife (be it the Elysian Fields, Valhalla, Cockaigne or Brahma-loka), go with Democritus: "Get used to believing that death is nothing to us, for all good and bad consists in sense experience and death is the privation of sense experience"; chill with Zhuang Zhou: "I received life because the time had come; I will lose it because the order of things passes on"; or take Buddha's advice to extend compassion to all things while freeing oneself from the cycle of reincarnation (after all, who wants to come back as tin of milk?) or attempt to become one with everything... The bottom line is that every day an estimated 155,000 people die on this Earth and one day it will be your turn. Recommended as an antidote to modern life.



THE IMMORTAL MIND

Science and the Continuity of Consciousness beyond the Brain

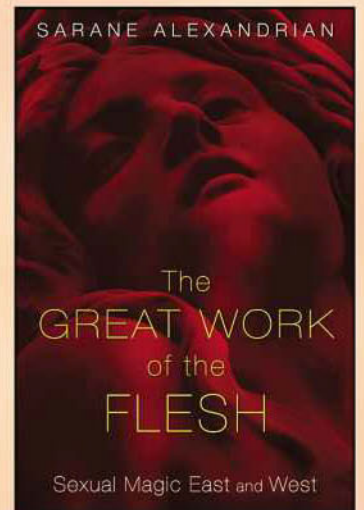
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Robot Overlords

Dir Jon Wright, UK 2015
On UK release from 27 March

Imagine, if you will, that famed British children's author Enid Blyton met the mighty HG Wells... and they got on so well they decided they'd write a novel together. The book they'd have written would've been *Robot Overlords* – a story that could only be more British if it involved the Queen, Winston Churchill and a bulldog in a Union Jack waistcoat sitting down to tea at the Ritz.

Three years ago the robots arrived, and following an 11-day war – which we puny humans lost – we were imprisoned in our own homes, carefully monitored by the robots via the glowing blue neck implants we all now bear. That's where we start: with four frustrated kids being looked after by the fortean goddess that is Gillian Anderson, unable to leave the house and slowly reaching breaking point as their Playstation needs repairing. It's while fixing the games console that one child inadvertently receives an electric shock that stops the neck implants from working, giving him and the other children access to the outside world for the first time in years.

With echoes of Terry Nation's *Survivors*, the children set out on 'Operation Haribo', finding the nearest sweet shop and gorging themselves on sugary treats.

However, our young, brooding hero (well played by Callan McAuliffe) has his eyes set on loftier goals. He must find his father, who disappeared during the final onslaught against the Robot Overlords. Together with his three friends – the love interest, the wisecracking sidekick and the young 'un – he sets out on an adventure that will ultimately save the planet and the human race.

It's certainly an appealing mix – *The Railway Children* takes on *Transformers* – which for its target audience (teenagers and youngsters) pays huge dividends, delivering all the action and life lessons you'd expect our young heroes to learn on their travels. It's a film that wears its Britishness on its sleeve: the spirit of the Blitz spirit keeps us going in our seaside towns through these dark days, the underworld is having one hell of a lock-in in the local pub, and due to its old-fashioned mechanical operation, the Spitfire is once again called upon to defend Blighty from the computer hacking robot's space-ships. Ben Kingsley plays the story's collaborator villain and delivers his lines with all the conviction of a man wondering when clocking off time is. There are lapses in logic, too, though none that will worry the film's target audience.

It's by no means a bad film – in fact, the production values and design would make many a Hollywood effort blush – and its heart

is in the right place, although adult viewers may be left feeling not altogether satisfied. Perhaps the dream-based concept seems unexplored in its entirety and certainly unresolved at the end – leaving open the possibility of a sequel. Should it get one? Why not? I'd certainly watch it.

Mark McConnell

Fortean Times Verdict

THE RAILWAY CHILDREN
TAKES ON TRANSFORMERS

8

The Town That Dreaded Sundown

Dir Alfonso Gomez-Rejon, US 2015
On UK release from 15 April

Is it a remake? Is it a sequel? Is it a reboot? The short answer is that it's a mix of all three. For the uninitiated, in 1947 in Texarkana, on the Texas-Arkansas border, a series of brutal murders was committed by a masked killer known only as 'the Phantom'. Despite the efforts of the local police and Texas Rangers, it went unsolved. The real-life incident was dramatised by Charles B Pierce in his terrific 1976 film *The Town That Dreaded Sundown*. Pierce's film has the reputation of being a grindhouse/drive-in classic, but more than anything it's a fine example, perhaps the best example, of American regional filmmaking as practised in the 1970s by the likes of SF Brownrigg, Earl

Owensby and Pierce himself. Made independently, out in the sticks, and free from executive interference, these films have a sense of place almost unrivalled in American cinema. It's not stretching the point to say that in his films Pierce paid homage to his beloved South in the same way that Woody Allen does to New York City. It's technically very proficient too: Pierce's widescreen compositions and vivid use of colour recall the best work of John Carpenter and Mario Bava respectively.

As in the original, this new film opens with a couple of Texarkana high school kids Jami (Addison Timlin) and Corey (Spencer Treat Clark) driving off to a secluded spot for a little tonsil hockey. There, they are terrorised by a masked man who brutally stabs Corey and tells Jami to "Remember Mary" before letting her go. The locals and police quickly realise that they are once again being preyed upon – by another Phantom. The killer appears to have a special interest in Jami, sending emails and phone messages seemingly in an attempt to provoke her into discovering the truth behind both the old and new murders. Teaming up with gawky librarian Nick (newcomer Travis Tope), Jami begins delving into the past in an effort to solve a modern-day mystery.

That's the context for this new film, then, and director Alfonso Gomez-Rejon (*Glee*, *American Horror Story*) clearly has his work cut out to emulate the quality and impact of the original. So how does he approach the challenge? He makes the interesting decision to use a metafictional narrative which references not only the original murders and the original film but also the original film-makers. There are sequences where we the audience are watching the 2014 film, in which a fictional audience is watching the actual 1976 film, which depicts a fictional version of actual murders. As if that isn't mind-bending enough, fictional 2014 murders then intrude upon the existing narrative. Furthermore, at one point the fictional 2014 characters pay a visit to the fictional son of (deceased but real) Charles B Pierce.

Really, it's this metafictional narrative which just about saves the film; take that away and all you have is another glossy slasher that

trades on the standard images of young people (particularly pretty young women) being butchered in a variety of gruesome ways (when they aren't kissing or shagging). It's no worse than most other modern films of the genre, but doesn't stack up very well against Pierce's original: it has some stunning rural photography, but no sense of place; it has some very nifty camera movements, but no coherent visual style; it has some good actors (Veronica Cartwright, Gary Cole, Ed Lauter), but gives them nothing to do; it has some spectacularly violent set pieces, but generates no fear or tension.

The problem, in short, is that it's a modern horror movie made for a modern audience by a major company, MGM, and as such has to deliver certain things. For instance, a film that has already killed off seven or eight people in 75 minutes feels it has to up the ante for a big finish and bumps off six more in the final 10. Similarly, whereas the original film concentrates on the detectives – and Ben Johnson was 58 when he played Captain Morales – this new one concentrates on the teenagers, who are far less interesting. Indeed, you could say that Pierce's film is a detective thriller that has been reimaged or rebooted as a horror movie. The self-conscious referencing of an earlier, better film is a bold tactic that works well for those who have seen the original, and I'd recommend this iteration of *The Town That Dreaded Sundown* for that. For those who haven't seen the original but like horror movies, then this one has just enough going for it to make it worth a look. But promise me you'll then watch Charles B Pierce's film and see a talented film-maker at the top of his game. Daniel King

Fortean Times Verdict

SO-SO SLASHER ENLIVENED BY A REALLY GOOD GIMMICK

6

Exists

Dir Eduardo Sánchez, US 2014
Entertainment One, £12.99 (DVD)

There's a surprising number of Bigfoot movies, encompassing everything from gory horror (*Night of the Demon*) to family comedy (*Harry and the Hendersons*). With the notable exception of *The Legend of Boggy Creek* (directed by

THE REVEREND'S REVIEW

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

RABID

Dir David Cronenberg, Canada 1977
Arrow Films, £14.99 (Dual Format)

When a young woman suffers horrendous injuries in a motorcycle crash, she's given experimental plastic surgery at a nearby clinic. She wakes up as beautiful as ever, the operation apparently a success, until the small pulsing wound in her armpit pushes out a metallic spike soaked with rabies. The more people she hugs, the faster an epidemic spreads across Canada.

It sounds ridiculous: I get that. In fact, much of Cronenberg's early work reads like pure schlock on paper. Imagine the pitch for his first feature, *Shivers*: 'Slug parasites turn victims into crazed rapists!' Or his next after *Rabid*, *Scanners*: 'Psychics run cross-country trying to explode people's heads!' Yet, you watch *Rabid* and you slowly become aware of the depth of its invention. Yes, you get explosions, fluid-rich gore and a dash of sex, but when you find yourself thinking about the film for days after, it's because Cronenberg's work is so thematically rich. Maybe I'm weird, but *Rabid* spoke to me about the desire for companionship, the dread of loneliness

and the shocking expendability of human life.

Another thing I love about Cronenberg is how cold and revolutionary he can be. The message of much sci-fi/horror tends to be: don't tamper with nature and don't play God, or THIS horrible thing will happen. You watch *Rabid*, however, with a sense of weird wonder at the mutation of the body, rather than just horrified shock. It's as if Cronenberg sees Rose not necessarily as a victim, but as someone liberated from everyday humanity. She is somehow better than the rest – who are little more than frothing-at-the-mouth zombies. She's the queen mutant whom everyone desires, but now it's her penetrating the males, treating them as meat, and not the other way around. Is Cronenberg celebrating her predicament or lamenting it? It's like the end of *Shivers*, when the sex zombies spill into the city and you can't tell if it's supposed to be a happy ending or not. I like that.

The late Marilyn Chambers plays Rose, in her only non-porn role, and she's brilliant. Fragile and lost, beautiful and threatening, she's the emotional heart of the movie. Yet if she's the heart, Cronenberg is the body and brain of it all, with his offbeat



sensibilities woven into every frame. Unlike in *Shivers*, where he was bound to a single location, the budget here lets the director paint a wider canvas. As a result, there's a more epic feeling, in the same way that *Dawn of the Dead* felt so much bigger than *Night*. (Watch the final shots of *Rabid* to see the Romero influence.)

Rabid is perhaps the perfect calling card for David Cronenberg. It fuses the high-concept exploitation of *Shivers* with the broader more accessible action of *Scanners*. It's not as thematically solid as *The Brood* or *Videodrome*, but it's gripping, thought-provoking and visually fascinating.

Fortean Times Verdict

EARLY CRONENBERG REMAINS THOUGHT-PROVOKING CLASSIC

9



Charles B Pierce, who also made the original *The Town That Dreaded Sundown* they've tended to be bad, often hilariously so. So, can Eduardo Sánchez – co-writer/director of *The Blair Witch Project* – do anything worthwhile with this very forteen but largely ungrateful subgenre? Well – yes and no.

The father of found-footage horror returns to the subgenre he helped create – and which has spawned an incalculable number of imitators over the past decade-and-a-half – and yet brings nothing new to the table to challenge its increasingly tired tropes. The story – such as it is – is pretty generic, as are the characters: five young idiots take off to stay in a remote cabin in the heavily wooded Big Thicket of East Texas, location of numerous Sasquatch sightings (but only camera-obsessed Brian knows that, and is secretly hoping to get some major YouTube footage). While driving along a dark track on the way there, their car hits something big and heavy, and they find blood and hairs on the front fender. Yes, they've hit a Bigfoot and – as in most horror films pitting careless humankind against innocent but deadly nature – they will pay the price. The rest of the film probably wrote itself, quite possibly on the back of a napkin.

But even though the film plays out strictly by the numbers, it does manage to be pretty enjoyable in a dumb kind of way and – most importantly – it's actually genuinely scary for much of its running time. Sánchez doesn't go down the *Blair Witch* route of ambiguity and indirect scares, or, for that matter, evoke the blurry images of an amorphous 'something' lurking in the undergrowth familiar from 'real' Bigfoot footage: this backwoods beast is very real, very pissed off and brought to convincing life by 6ft7in- (2m) tall Brian Steele (he has form, having played 'Harry' in the TV series of *Harry and the Hendersons*) and some impressive physical make-up and effects. A genuinely cool monster is always a big plus for an essentially cheesy horror movie, and despite its parade of cliché and contrivance it's hard not to enjoy *Exists* and its no-nonsense scares.

David Sutton

Fortean Times Verdict

BIGFOOT GETS THE BLAIR WITCH TREATMENT

6

Extraterrestrial

Dir Nacho Vigalondo, Spain 2011
Icon Home Entertainment, £12.99 (DVD)

To avoid confusion, this isn't the 2014 American film called *Extraterrestrial* about a small group of people in a cabin in the woods being terrorised by alien visitors. This is the 2014 DVD of the 2011 Spanish film called *Extraterrestrial* about a small group of people coping with an alien invasion that doesn't actually do anything.

A guy wakes up, somewhat bemused, in a beautiful woman's bed. As Julio and Julia are fumbling with the awkwardness of their first-morning-after they look out of the window and see a huge spaceship hovering over Madrid, which appears to be deserted. Then Angel, a socially inept and suspicious neighbour with the hots for Julia, turns up – as does Julia's partner or ex-partner (it's never quite clear) Carlos.

What follows is a sort-of comedy, as Julio and Julia, in trying to cover up their night together so Carlos won't find out, accuse Angel, who is about to spill the beans, of being an alien spy. Their lies multiply, and Carlos gets it in his head that a local TV News presenter (who completely unfunnily keeps forgetting he's on-air) is also working for the aliens, and holds a gun to his head to get a list of other aliens-amongst-us. And that's about it for plot.

It's supposed to be romantic comedy SF; there's definitely some romance, the comedy is sometimes weak and sometimes slapstick, but there's no SF beyond a spaceship hanging in the sky. It's as if half the film is missing: the answers to a host of posed but unresolved questions. Why do Julio and Julia have effectively the same name? How did they sleep (or have sex) through the spaceship arriving and the government evacuation of the city? Why do their phones and TV sometimes work and sometimes not? Why does Julia keep needing to go to sleep? Why do Angel and Carlos behave in the ways they do? Why are the alien spaceships there, and are they ever actually going to do anything? Is there any point to any of it?

David V Barrett

Fortean Times Verdict

MILDLY AMUSING BUT VERY SLIGHT SF ROM-COM

5

SHORTS

RAGNAROK

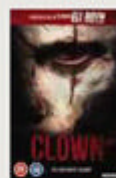
Studiocanal, £12.99 (DVD)



Ragnarok isn't rubbish, but it is wholly derivative, shamefully ripping off whacking great chunks of all three *Jurassic Park* films, *Jaws*, *Raiders of the Lost Ark* and all those recent movies about people stuck in caves. Our Indiana Jones in this case is Sigurd Sverre (Pal Sverre Hagen) an archæologist who drags his two children to a pristine wilderness on the Norway-Russia border in search of Viking artefacts. Love interest (he's a widower, naturally) is provided by Sofia Helin (*The Bridge*) as no-nonsense outward bound type Elisabeth. The action is capably handled by Mikkel Brænne Sandemose and the photography is excellent, but really there's nothing you won't have seen many times before. The pity is that Scandinavia, and Norway in particular, has an incredibly rich mythology but what little there is in this film is swamped by a routine derring-do, a generic enormous beastie (which isn't actually that impressive) and lots of stunt work. It's also remarkably bloodless – the kind of film for which the phrase 'mild fantasy peril' was invented. In the end, the only genuinely Norwegian things about it are the scenery, which is breathtaking, and the language; those aside, it's a Hollywood movie down to its toes. Norwegian cinema really ought to look closer to home for inspiration. **DK 6/10**

CLOWN

Studiocanal, £15.99 (DVD)



Jack's 10th birthday party is looking like a washout after the clown cancels. Fortunately, Kent (Andy Powers), the boy's estate agent father, finds an old clown costume in one of his properties (as you do) and saves the day with his impromptu turn. Less fortunately, he can't get the clown costume, or his red nose, off at the end of the party. The situation seems amusing at first, but turns into a nightmare as Kent finds himself transforming from an amiable family man into a flesh-eating monster with a taste for children. Andy Powers's excellent performance gets across Kent's increasing isolation and self-revulsion as he struggles to come to terms with his Kafkaesque metamorphosis, and the creepy make-up effects create a distinctive take on body horror. Unfortunately, the film drifts into less interesting territory (a demonic Scandinavian curse) as it unfolds, and its rather mechanical finale undermines much of its early promise. **DS 5/10**

HONEYMOON

Arrow Films, £12.99 (Blu-ray), £9.99 (DVD)



Bea and Paul (Rose Leslie and Harry Treadaway), a pair of young newlyweds, decide to get away from it all and spend their honeymoon shagging each other silly in a remote cabin by a lake. Their rural idyll takes a turn for the weird and disturbing when, in the middle of the night, Paul sees strange lights and finds Bea wandering in the woods in some kind of trance. Soon, as her behaviour becomes increasingly odd, he begins to wonder whether this is the same woman he married. Essentially a two-hander, Leigh Janiak's debut feature shows her fully in control of her material, getting the most from her actors and delivering a nicely paced, unpredictable and insidiously disturbing slice of arthouse horror that mines our anxieties about relationships to frightening effect. **DS 7/10**

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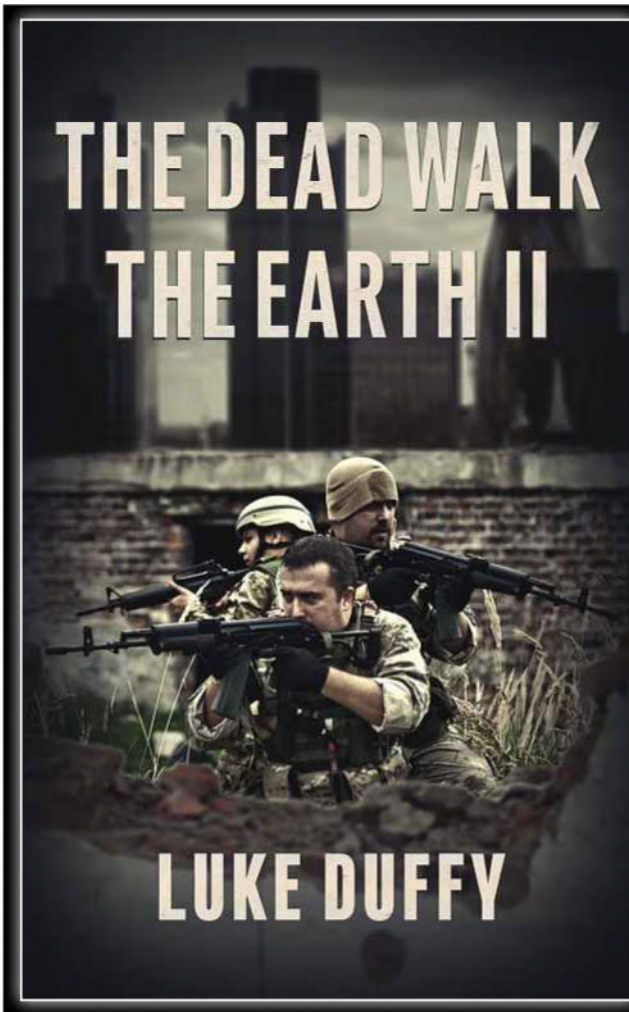
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letters



Fort's boxes

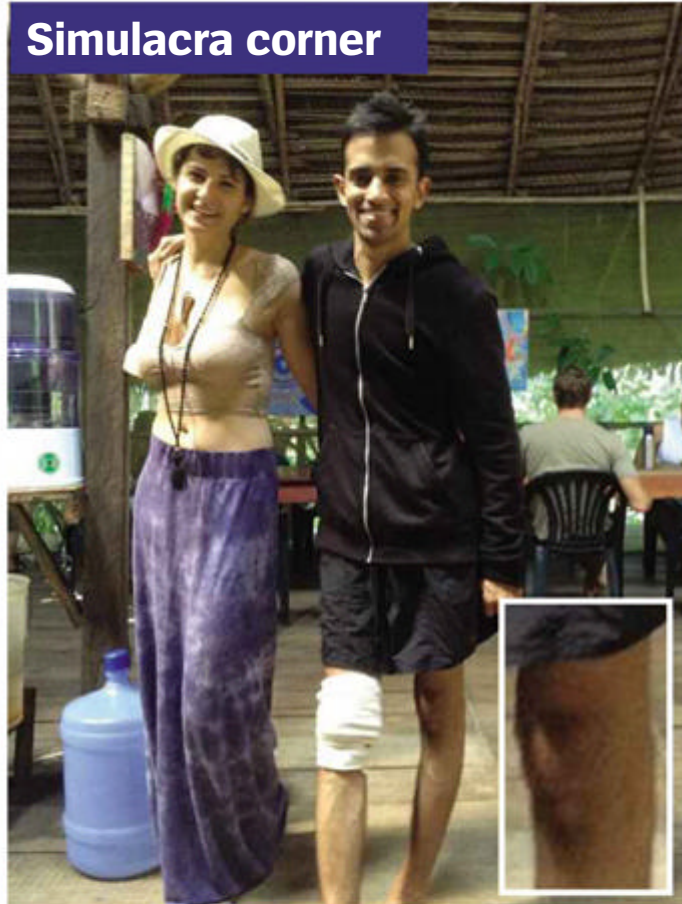
Following my account of Dr John Reed's rescue of the boxes containing Charles Fort's original notes [FT324:54-55], our illustrious and vigilant colleague, Ian Kidd, challenged me on the one thing I was having a lot of trouble determining – the precise number of boxes in which the notes were kept. I had already commented on the lack of any reliable count of Fort's notes, due, in part, to the confusion arising from different figures given at different times, and Fort's own admission that he had destroyed a collection and started again. The boxes in which he kept the notes are widely described as 'shoe-boxes', but from the only image we have of them – reprinted with my Forum piece – they look too long and narrow to have held shoes. I guess 'shoeboxes' was used, in this case, generically for a small storage box.

The figure I used – 32 boxes – came from the very first issue of Thayer's *Fortean Society Magazine* (Sept 1937) and his inaugural explanation of the state of the notes, in which he also commits to publish them in a chronological sequence. Thayer wrote: "There are thirty-two boxes of memoranda." At this point Thayer complains only that the notes were "wretchedly" written.

Time was limited so I could only track the notes through the first 10 issues, when, in the winter of 1944-45, it changed title to *Doubt*. Sometime in 1946, Thayer abandoned his unwieldy issue-dating system completely and so subsequent issues of *Doubt* are nigh impossible to date. In my collection, issue 18, undated, is the first to carry any significant 'prologue' to the instalments of the notes, and it is here that Thayer complains about the difficulty of reconstructing a chronological sequence, necessitating, as he says, alternating back and forth between two sequences of boxes, one marked numerically (for "non-human" phenomena) and the other alphabetically (for "records of persons").

In my haste to complete my

Simulacra corner



Vinash Dhokia from Leicester sent us this photo, with a covering note: "My friend went to an ayahuasca retreat in Peru a couple of years ago and had rather extreme experiences leaving even the shamans stumped. They said he most likely had several demons inside, resulting in poor health, including a long-term knee injury. This photo was taken after he was recovering from a session. You can see a human-like face on his left knee. Trick of the light or evil spirit?"

We are always glad to receive pictures of spontaneous forms and figures, or any curious images. Send them to the PO box above (with a stamped addressed envelope or international reply coupon) or to sieveking@forteantimes.com – and please tell us your postal address.

article, I misunderstood Thayer's original reference to "32 boxes of memoranda" as referring to a third (and hitherto undiscussed) sequence. Since then, I have re-visited my *Doubts*, and it seems clear: the boxes of notes totalled 32. There was not an additional 'memoranda' sequence. I apologise to all readers who might have been misled – or as excited as Ian was – by this.

Bob Rickard
London

Stretchy dog

I'm sure Gail-Nina Anderson is right when, after describing the scene in which Carmilla, in the guise of a huge cat, crawls up the heroine's bed, she says: "I suspect [J Sheridan] Le Fanu knew of this not-uncommon form of hypnagogic/hypnopompic experience" (i.e. of some sort of presence on one's bed) [FT323:75]. Le Fanu used the idea more than once.

In *Squire Toby's Will* (1868),

which predates *Carmilla* by four years, there's an almost identical scene, but this time featuring a ghostly bulldog: "...he heard what he knew to be the dog walking from the door round his bed slowly... he felt something place itself at the foot of his bed, and saw a pair of green eyes staring at him in the dark... And with a long, low growl, the thing began to creep up upon his feet; the growl continued, and he saw the reflection of the up-turned green eyes upon the bed-clothes, as it began slowly to stretch itself up his body towards his face. With a loud scream, he waked". The dog-spectre's ability to stretch itself up the bed is noteworthy, as hypnagogic dreams often feature figures that stretch out and distort in an abnormal and nightmarish fashion. Le Fanu's description rings so true to those of us who have had such 'hallucinations' ourselves that I feel certain he not only knew of such horrors but also had firsthand experience of them.

Rosemary Pardoe
Hoole, Chester

Redditch wallaby?

On 5 December 2014 my wife was driving us from Birmingham to Redditch for my mother's 90th birthday. As we drove along Claybrook Drive near Mappleborough Green, Warwickshire, she suddenly called out: "Did you see that?" There was a stretch of grass to our left, disappearing into a line of trees and hedges and she'd spotted what she first thought was a fox – except it was hopping on its hind legs. It vanished into the hedge before I saw anything (typical: the first time I'm anywhere near an anomalous animal, and I'm wool-gathering), but my wife was adamant. Her first thought was kangaroo, but judging from the size it sounds more like a wallaby.

Have any FT readers heard of – or seen – anything similar in the Redditch area?

Mike Chinn
Hall Green, Birmingham

Bread trick

On the day after Boxing Day I woke up to look at a cold morning in Newcastle-upon-Tyne. In a neighbour's garden I could see pigeons behaving strangely. One was waddling around with a piece of bread on its back. Another was holding a large piece of bread in its beak, throwing it in the air and attempting to position itself such that the bread fell on its back. I watched as other pigeons arrived to join in this practice. My best explanation is that the bread had become very cold overnight and so the birds were trying to use their own body warmth to make it a more palatable breakfast. This struck me as a notable piece of lateral thinking. Do readers know if it is typical for birds to behave like this – or was I watching some notably intelligent pigeons? It's easy to be envious of birds flying, but there are also times when arms are preferable to wings.

Andrew Brearley

By email

Henry Miller

The letter by the great Barry Baldwin [FT324:72] refers to Henry Miller as a fortaean. More so, he even tried to make new converts – as Anais Nin notes in her diaries (*Die Tagebücher der Anais Nin*, vol. 3, 1939–1944, Hamburg 1970, p. 109). In January 1941, Henry Miller asked Anais Nin to get hold of a copy of Fort's *Book of the Damned*, which was “a most curious book – as you will see.” He stressed that she should not just leaf through it, but “read it fully – it contains most amazing facts and even more astonishing ideas”. Regrettably,

Nin never noted down how reading Fort was to her.

Ulrich Magin

Henef, North Rhine-Westphalia

Asthma and Dreams

Alice Heppie asks in her letter [FT324:71] if there's a link between asthma attacks and vivid dreams. The answer is almost certainly yes, but the key factor is her observation that her lungs were “clogged with unexpelled carbon dioxide”. Inhaling a mixture of oxygen and CO² can cause a range of bodily symptoms as well as hallucinations. During the 1950s/60s the inhalation of this mixture was a treatment for certain neuroses. It was given to induce abreactions that were thought to help release pre-verbal feelings and break up “pathologic reverberating circuits in the nervous system”, whatever they are. As far as I know this treatment is no longer used.

Mike Harding

London

Re Alice Heppie's letter: Lois Bourne, in her book *Conversations With A Witch* (1989), records an experience related by her 12-year-old son: “During one attack he was treated with a drug which shall be nameless... ‘Oh, Mummy, I have been flying! I saw my body lying on the bed and just sailed through the window and over the housetops and landed on top of the war memorial in the town; I watched the traffic through my feet. I got scared and wished I was home and found myself on the pavement looking at my bedroom window. I just wished I was in bed again when you came in and woke me...” (p.61). This medication

may well have been Asthmador, which contains both belladonna and datura: Robert Anton Wilson cautioned psychonauts: “Good trips are extremely rare on this drug” (*Sex, Drugs And Magic*, 1973, p.255).

Richard George
St Albans, Hertfordshire

The Orléans Rumour

Following ‘The Cities of Lost Children’ by Theo Paijmans [FT323:32-33] I would like to tell you about an event that also fits in the category of ‘rumoured disappearances’. It happened in France and is known as ‘The Orléans Rumour’.

Between April and July 1969, the town of Orléans (population: 88,000 at the time), 70 miles (113km) south of Paris, became a focus of fear and fascination. According to rumour, three young girls had been found in the cellar of a women's wear shop in the city centre. They had fallen through a trapdoor in a changing room and been rendered unconscious with hypodermic injections. They were to be spirited away by night, loaded onto ships and sent to foreign countries to be used as sex slaves. Later details inflated the number of victims to six, then 26, then 60 by the end of May. They had been captured in eight different boutiques. Various media outlets picked up the rumour and journalists from Paris arrived. Crowds began to form outside the shops under suspicion. Public order was at risk and the authorities became involved.

Although police sources stated that no abduction or suspicious disappearance had been reported at the time, the rumour grew to an extent where the Renseignements généraux (national intelligence agency) began an investigation. The shops were discreetly searched and the rumour found to be entirely without foundation. As most of the shops under scrutiny were Jewish-owned, left-wing groups thought anti-Semitism was at play. Fingers were pointed at a far-right student group at the local university and/or at Palestinian students on the same campus.

Anti-Semitism seems to have given rise to a secondary rumour. Apparently, the fact that the Orléans media had remained relatively silent on the subject – although they had initially pronounced the rumour baseless – could be explained by the use of ‘Jewish gold’ to gag ‘those who knew’. An alternative scenario

even accused the stores' owners of having made up the story to gain publicity for their businesses. To emphasise the ridiculous nature of the rumour, a facetious member of the Jewish community came up with the additional ‘fact’ that the girls were taken away “on board submarines travelling up and down the Loire river”. This ‘fact’ was also picked up by the media, destroying whatever credibility the rumour might have held.

The ‘rumour d’Orléans’ faded over time. No one ever found out precisely who started it or why. Similar rumours have cropped up to this day, in the towns and cities of France and across the world. Back in 1969, however, the phenomenon puzzled the authorities to such an extent that France's scientific research centre (CNRS) dispatched sociologist Edgar Morin to Orléans to investigate. Morin gave his analysis of the case in a book, *La Rumeur d’Orléans*. He found a clue in a story on women trafficking in *Noir et Blanc*, a now-defunct tabloid magazine. The piece had appeared shortly before the rumour had begun, although the alleged facts were supposed to have happened in the Grenoble area, approximately 350 miles (563km) from Orléans.

Having looked at various theories, Morin's explanation of choice was that a sexual fantasy had been cooked up and spread by feverishly imaginative pupils in the classrooms of Orléans's schools for young ladies. The rumour may also have been inflated by local mothers trying to regain authority over teenage girls gone crazy for a new item of clothing called the ‘miniskirt’. In France, the *minijupe* was long suspected of leading its wearers into prostitution. The threat of abduction and slavery in a bordello would undoubtedly have added weight to the familiar injunction: “Tu ne vas pas sortir habillée comme ça!” (You're not going out dressed like that!)

Sources (in French): http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rumeur_d'Orléans; *L'Express Magazine* ‘Une si étrange rumeur’ by Richard de Venteuil, 21 June 2007 (online); Edgar Morin, *La rumeur d’Orléans* (Paris, Seuil, coll. « L'histoire immédiate », 1969.)

Valérie Dabbs

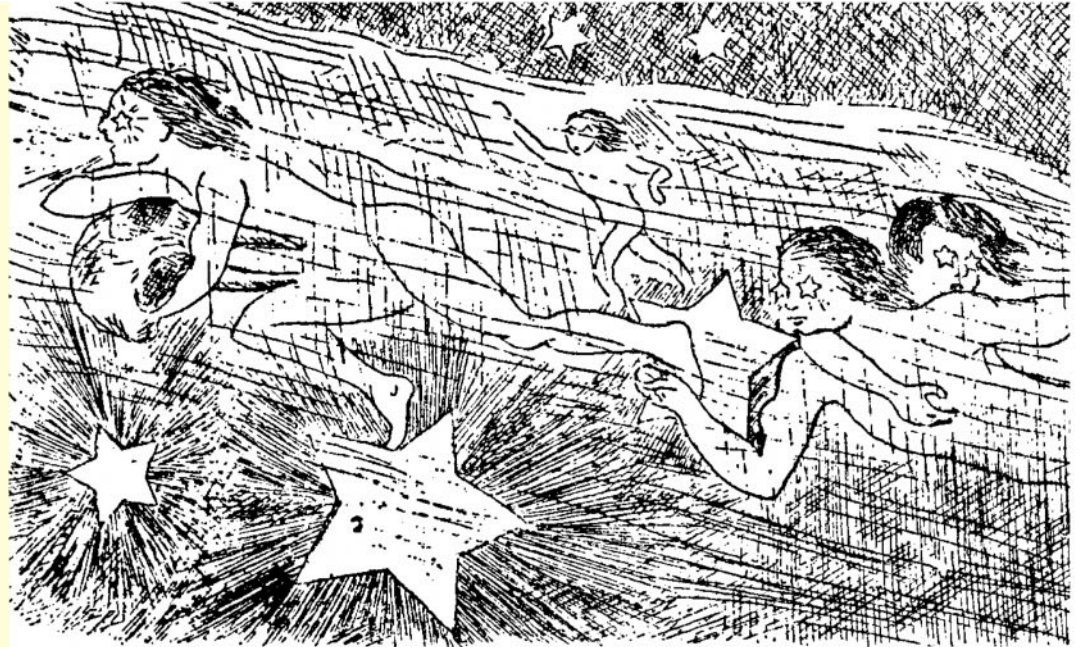
By email



Northern lights

A propos of "I sing the mind electric" by Marinus van der Sluijs [FT323:40-43], here's a picture of dead people playing ball with a walrus head in the Northern Lights, drawn by the Greenland artist Hans Lynge. It's from a wonderful book I picked up for a song at a jumble sale – *Fedrekult* (Ancestor Worship) by Emil Birkeli, published in 1943. According to Birkeli, all Arctic peoples (Eskimos, Indians, Lapps, Asians) consider the Northern Lights either as the abode of the dead, or the bridge they cross to get there.

Nils Erik Grande
Oslo, Norway



Yawning dynamics

The Mythconception about yawning [FT322:19] reminded me of a couple of other 'factoids' I've heard: firstly, that yawning is contagious within a group situation. I have noticed this happen on occasion; I wonder whether it is a primitive instinct, signifying to the members of a communal group that it's time for them all to settle down and rest, thereby conserving their collective energies, without disturbance by others staying awake.

The second factoid – that schizophrenics are unaffected by contagious yawning in a group situation – was related to me by a well-read friend, who also told me about the 'yak-o-sphere': a particular height above sea level that yaks inhabit, as they couldn't breathe properly and would die below a certain altitude. I discovered that this was a myth when I visited Bowland Wild Boar Park in Lancashire, where they keep a small herd of healthy yaks. So, is the factoid about schizophrenics also mistaken?

Adrian Lord
By email

Hutton's Paradox

One day when I was five or six years old (I remember the class-

room I was in and the row of desks at which I was sitting and have no doubt I was still in my first year at school) I was suddenly panic-stricken at the thought that I might not exist. If life were a dream, how could I be certain it was my dream, not somebody else's? And if I existed only in somebody else's dream...

But first something about the fascination dreams held for me in those days. As a child I often had *lucid* dreams – dreams, that is, in which I became aware that I was dreaming and realised that my body was asleep in bed. I still have the occasional such dream – sometimes I even find myself trapped in one, disconcertingly unable to wake – and I never fail to be struck by the verisimilitude of the experience: I can gaze upon a sun blazing in a bright blue sky and feel its warmth on my face; I can run a fingernail over a piece of wood and not only distinctly feel the grain but also hear the sound thus produced; I can talk to people and receive replies so unexpected and so thought-provoking that it seems they must have originated outside my own sphere of consciousness. Such a dream is indistinguishable from real life save for what one might term the physics of the dream world: the attenuated pull of gravity; the penetrability of solid objects; the recalcitrance of

electrical equipment; and so forth.

Sometimes I had *pre-lucid* dreams – dreams, that is, in which I suspected I was dreaming. I have never forgotten one in which my family were the proprietors of a timber yard in Fulmer, the Buckinghamshire village where I attended school. (In real life they owned a chain of fish-and-chip shops and several other businesses – none connected with timber – and had nothing to do with Fulmer.) As I wandered about the village and encountered friends and relatives, the suspicion grew on me that I was dreaming. Everything seemed real, yet something I could not put my finger on told me it was not. Could I remember waking up that morning? Did my family really own that timber yard (which had no counterpart in the waking world)? All this dragged on, it seemed, for about half an hour. Time and again I asked myself whether I was dreaming. Time and again I concluded I was not. Yet I could not altogether rid myself of the suspicion that I was.

Such dreams – this one in particular – disturbed me greatly. Whether it ever occurred to me to establish my true situation in one by attempting, say, to pass my hand through a wall, I cannot now recall. (And resorting to such a tactic nowadays usually leads me to conclude I am awake and must

have acquired some preternatural power!) I did, anyhow, come up with a magic formula – an open sesame, if you like – for use in them: "If I find myself asking 'Am I dreaming?' it proves I am, for the question would never occur to me in waking life." Yet, such is the nature of dreams, I could never recall it when I needed to.

That day at school, bored with classwork and disenchanted with the world in general, I was reflecting on my dreams and the nature of reality when, as I have said, I was suddenly panic-stricken at the thought that I might not exist. If life was a dream (as I had often conjectured it was), how could I be certain it was my dream, not somebody else's? And if I existed only in somebody else's dream, what would become of me when (s)he woke? (The parallel with Alice and the Red King's dream is obvious, though I do not believe I was familiar with *Through the Looking-Glass* in any shape or form till my 20s.) A moment's reflection reassured me: I could be certain I existed because I thought. Or, to put it another way, I think, therefore I am. But no sooner had this sublime example of deductive reasoning occurred to me than it slipped my mind and panic supervened once more. I struggled to recall it, succeeded, forgot it again almost immediately and had to rack my brains for it

A face in the bush

In the late 1930s and early 1940s, my grandfather used to go on really long walks, mostly in isolated spots in the middle of nowhere, and generally with a friend of his, who was a priest. On one of these, which I believe was in the Lake District, they had been walking for miles and had seen no one. They were nowhere near a village or town, and had not come across any other people. They stopped for a moment on a dirt track so my grandfather could take a picture of the priest. He took the picture you see here and they continued walking.

By the end of the day, they finished the walk, having seen no one the whole time. A few days later, my grandfather had the picture he'd taken of the priest developed and discovered that behind a small bush, on the opposite side of the dirt track, a little face was looking at them. The face was seemingly a girl's, and she had her hand up in front of it, like she was smiling or giggling behind it, as if saying, "I can see you, but you can't see me". She also had what looked like a headband tied around her hair. My grandfather and the priest (both very conservative men) couldn't believe what they were looking at. Judging by the width of the track, the bush she is hiding behind can't be more than about 2ft (60cm) tall. This picture was kept by my mother for years and was commonly known as 'The Fairy Photo'. What do you make of it?

Pete Moore

By email



afresh. Many years passed till I learnt to my chagrin that one René Descartes had beaten me to this most fundamental of epistemological propositions by some 330 years.

Now and again during my schooldays I became obsessed with the idea that I alone might exist, that everything else – my family and friends, my own body, the Universe itself – might be illusory. Over time I formulated a hypothesis: the life I was living was one of a long, perhaps infinite, series of confused and troubled dreams; if the series was not infinite, I would one day enter an ultimate reality, in which it would no longer be possible to doubt I was awake. I am now in my 50s, and the suspicion that I am trapped in a dream has never entirely left me.

When, some years ago, I wrote a piece about solipsism and my childhood interest in dreams ("Adversaria V", *Write Justified*, Spring 1989), I was struck by a contradiction in my earlier reasoning. True, asking oneself "Am I dreaming?" in a dream would seem to prove that one is. Yet that is precisely what I had often asked myself in waking life. Therein lay a paradox

– Hutton's Paradox as I christened it with characteristic modesty. What was I to conclude? That it does not prove one is dreaming? Or that life really is a dream?

Eric Bond Hutton

Gerrards Cross, Buckinghamshire

Conspiracy theory

I was surprised that Matthew Dentith's article "I'm not a conspiracy theorist, but..." [FT324:36-39] didn't mention the main distinction between types of conspiracy theorist: those who believe in a monolithic, global conspiracy that controls everything, and those who believe in smaller, more specific conspiracies. That conspiracies (plural) happen is not much in doubt: as Mr Dentith shows, there are many well-documented examples. Monolithic conspiracies are very much in doubt, however; apart from anything else, they contradict each other as to who the "real rulers of the world" are, so all except one of them (at best) must be incorrect.

Of course, there is not a sharp distinction between the two; Alex Jones, for example, falls into both

camp at various times. But while, in my experience, monolithic conspiracy theories always involve some measure of irrationality, of speculating beyond the data, this is not always true of specific conspiracy theories, so I think the distinction is important.

My favourite perspective on conspiracy theories comes from Carl Oglesby: "The arguments for a conspiracy theory are indeed often dismissed on the grounds that no one conspiracy could possibly control everything. But that is not what this theory sets out to show. [Carroll] Quigley is not saying that modern history is the invention of an esoteric cabal designing events omnipotently to suit its ends. The implicit claim, on the contrary, is that a multitude of conspiracies contend in the night. Clandestinitism is not the usage of a handful of rogues; it is a formalized practice of an entire class in which a thousand hands spontaneously join. Conspiracy is the normal continuation of normal politics by normal means." (*The Yankee and Cowboy War*, p.25.)

Waz Maz

By email

The term "conspiracy theory" is typically taken to be pejorative and to refer to a species of irrational belief or system of beliefs. Conspiracy theories are frowned upon in public discourse, despite the fact that we know conspiracies occur. Matthew Dentith might argue that the derisory definition of "conspiracy theory" is one that has developed over time. However, I would argue that ever since its inception in 1967 in a CIA memo, in which it was devised specifically to demonise critics of the Warren Commission, its real definition has been clear.

Paul Button

Chesterfield, Derbyshire

In hot water

The reason for washing your hands with warm to hot water [FT324:23] is not to kill germs but to help remove grease that harbours germs; the types of grease that you might find in excrement, preparing raw foods such as chicken, and any other kind of contact our hands might encounter.

Jai Davis

By email

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

Rustling of leaves

A few years ago, two friends and I hired a cottage on Bardsey Island [off the Llyn Peninsula in the Welsh county of Gwynedd]. The island is a magnet for twitchers as it is an important migration stopover for numerous species of bird. Our group of ladies had other interests in Bardsey, namely as the fabled Isle of Avalon and its link with Merlin, Arthur and of course the unique apple tree that grows there. We were keen to do our own investigation (www.bardseyapple.co.uk).

The stay was a week less one day (rough seas had delayed our departure from the mainland). We arrived and hauled our luggage, food and water to our accommodation; everything you consume must be brought with you and all waste taken away. The cottage was small, and had no running water or power. The privy was a grass compost toilet outside the main house. Needless to say you didn't want to have to go and use the loo during the night if you could help it unless you like dark, scary and weather-dependent conditions.

The weather during our stay was mixed – to be expected in early September in North Wales. In mediæval times Bardsey was an important place of pilgrimage. We explored the old churchyard; it is rumoured that 20,000 saints are buried on the island. Also rumoured to be buried in a glass coffin in a cliffside cave is none other than Merlin himself. During our visit we climbed the main hill, hiked the shore, and saw the seals and their pups at close quarters.

So, a wonderful and atmospheric place. A handful of people actually live on the island and keep sheep and cattle and a few turkeys. There was one sheepdog. Indigenous land mammals are limited to a single species of mouse. Insects are also present; we did see a wonderful hawk moth at dusk one evening buzzing around the bushes near the cottage. Other than native and migrating birds and seals, this is the extent of animal life on the island.

One evening my friend and I sat up late talking. Our other companion had gone off to bed. After a few cups of tea, nature called. I got up and opened the door to go outside to the privy. The night air was still with a hint of autumn crispness. The oil lantern we were using gave good light to illuminate the table where we sat by the front window near to the door. As I looked at the lawn with the light spilling out through the window, a movement suddenly zipped across the grass and clambered into the hedge, rustling the leaves as it went. It was as if a living thing had been peeking in through the window, leapt back and skittered through the grass and into the hedgerow. The only thing missing was whatever had made the movement.

I struggled to take in what I was seeing: movement certainly; and sound as the hedge was disturbed – except nothing visible to cause it. It definitely left a small track in the grass and caused a commotion in the hedge itself. We'd



BARDSEY ISLAND: STRAY CROC

“It is rumoured that buried in a glass coffin in a cliffside cave is none other than Merlin himself”

just come from a wildlife lecture earlier that evening, so I quickly ruled out cat, rat and other smaller mammals, as there were none on the island. We saw an example of the native mouse on the track as we walked home from the lecture. It was, of course, tiny. In any case, if there had been an animal or bird I had a clear line of sight. The problem was there was nothing to see. So what on earth was going on?

The experience was unnerving. I went to the privy as planned, then ran back to the cottage and bolted the door. My friend asked what was wrong, as I looked quite shaken. I told her and laughed it off but it stayed with me. She queried me and we both had a look outside with a torch but found nothing except the little track in the grass. I was rattled by the experience to say the least. It stays with me to this day; I've never been able to shake off the other-worldliness of the whole thing. I know what I saw. I'd love to know what I didn't see.

Sharon Dolan-Powers
Dunstable, Dumfries and Galloway

Haunted Van?

In the late 1970s in Birmingham I had a job delivering bundles of newspapers to shops around the city. This involved getting up in the middle of the night and cycling in to the city centre, unloading papers from the early London train, taking

them back to the John Menzies depôt for sorting and then going off in a van delivering them to newsagents all over the city. It could be quite eerie, especially in winter because often, apart from foxes, you would not see another living soul for much of the round, which would be at about 3 or 4 in the morning. It also didn't help having interrupted sleep because my mind often filled with strange thoughts.

However, I did get used to it and rather enjoyed driving round the deserted city in the dark, especially when there was snow. One night I was driving along a straight stretch of road when I suddenly saw a face in the rear-view mirror. It was a peculiarity of those old Transit vans we used that although the rear doors had no windows, there was still an internal rear view mirror fitted above the front windscreen; so the eyes I was looking at had to be behind me in the back of the van. I almost drove off the road jerking round to see who it was but there was no one else in the van, just the bundles of papers I was delivering.

I probably would have forgotten all about the incident; but then, a few nights later, the exact same thing happened again and I realised it was the same van. When I got back to the depôt I asked the foreman if there was anything odd about that vehicle and he said that funnily enough it had been stolen a couple of weeks before. In freezing weather we used to leave the vans with their engines running in the yard while we sorted the papers and that night someone had just driven off with one. It had been found abandoned and apparently undamaged in Manchester a couple of days later. So what, I wondered, had the van been used for when it was stolen; and could that have left some kind of psychic imprint? Sadly, I never had the chance to drive it again as it was scrapped soon afterwards.

Nigel Suckling
By email



FORTEAN TRAVELLER

99. Transylvania

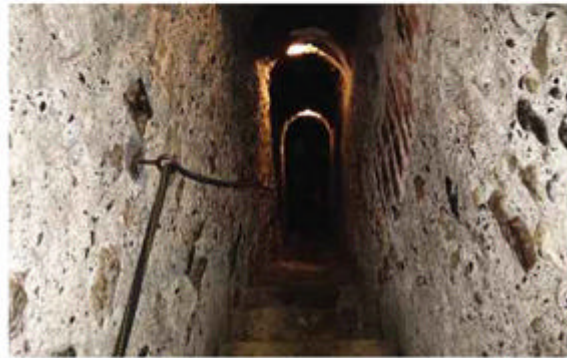
REV PETER LAWS goes in search of Dracula's castle and finds a country where faith and folklore continue to inform everyday life. Photos by the author.



Even the guy at airport security's giving me a funny look. He's rummaging through my bag, checking my toothpaste is really toothpaste, and asking where I'm off to. I say: "Transylvania". He pauses, then tilts his head. "Really..." he says. "And why?"

To be fair, it's the same reaction I've had from most people when I've told them where I'm headed for five days. I half expect them to cross themselves and take a step backward, or at least suggest I try Center Parcs instead. This nervousness around a country's name is an interesting echo of the gypsy innkeepers in Stoker's novel, who stare at Jonathan Harker with frightened bafflement when he says he's off to meet Dracula. It appears that even in 2015, the names of the Count and his country are almost interchangeable.

I'm staying in the traditional Saxon village of Ciasnadioara, and in the short drive from Sibiu Airport I look



I open the drawer to find a cross and some garlic

TOP: On the set of a Hammer film? No, it's the village of Ciasnadioara, complete with howling dogs

ABOVE: A spooky staircase in Bran Castle.

out of the window and spot a woman pushing a pram, frantically crossing herself on the street. Is there a vampire clinging to the car roof? Nope. Turns out that's just what religious people do whenever they walk past a church or shrine. Faith, I'll soon discover, is the framework on which much fortean experience hangs in Romania.

That's where Transylvania is: Romania. It seems worth mentioning, as some of my friends assume it's in Hungary (it used to be part of the kingdom of Hungary) while others even think it's as fictional a place as Anthony Hope Hodgson's Ruritania, or Thomas the Tank Engine's Sodor. Yet Transylvania is very real. First mentioned in a mediæval Latin document in 1075 (described as "beyond the woods") the country's been home to many different cultures and races. Yet despite its rich and complex history, globally speaking it's a land known for forbidding castles, supernatural mysteries and, of course, vampires.

I'm as brainwashed by its reputation as everybody else – it's the reason I'm here, after all – so when the car pulls into the village I immediately feel as if I'm on the set of a Hammer movie. Not that the place is ugly or evil-looking – far from it. There's a rustic beauty to the Saxon buildings, heaving against one another in various bright shades, most with a wide wooden door big enough to get a horse and cart through. Yet as night falls, and a full, fat Moon hangs in the sky, I notice the dogs. The barking seems to come from *everywhere*; from up on the wooded hills, from across the farmers' fields, but mostly you hear it in the village itself. I figure it's from people's backyards, until later I crunch through the snow-filled streets, well after midnight, and spot stray dogs circling under the streetlights, padding around me as I walk. It's irresistibly spooky... yet not quite as nerve-wracking as you'd expect; after we can't finish a hefty meal in Sibiu one night, we drive the Land Rover to the centre of the village and feed the grateful dogs our leftovers.

We're travelling with an excellent English company called Secret Transylvania, which offers fully inclusive trips with adaptable itineraries. Just as well, as there's lots to see. As I settle into my room, the dogs barking outside, I open the drawer to throw some socks in and find a cross, some garlic and an Egyptian Ankh. I guess it's sensible to cover all the bases.

LAND OF CONFUSION

FT readers may already be aware of it, but more casual Dracula fans on a visit here need to prepare themselves for confusion, perhaps



GETTY IMAGES

even disappointment. While Dracula tourist hotspots like Bran Castle (a gorgeous hilltop fortress and national landmark) certainly *look* like the type of place you'd find a vampire scurrying down the external walls, the links to the world's most famous bloodsucker are extremely tenuous. Author Bram Stoker certainly never set foot in Romania and may never have even read about Bran. This doesn't stop the locals pushing the Drac merchandise to the max, but hey... I'm a sucker for horror tat and I load myself up with mugs, shot glasses and the ubiquitous fridge magnet. Staring out of most of these products is Vlad the Impaler – a national hero in Romania, but a bloodthirsty psychopath to the rest of the world. He was the



ABOVE: Two views of Bran Castle.

LEFT: A portrait of Vlad Tepes in Bran Castle.

inspiration for Dracula, right? Well... not necessarily.

While they certainly weren't the first to make the link, American college professor Raymond T McNally and Romanian historian Radu Florescu published the influential book *In Search of Dracula* in 1972, which popularised the idea that Vlad Tepes (meaning 'the impaler') was a direct inspiration for the count (see 'The Men who Invented Dracula', FT288:50-53). The theory's become widely quoted and accepted by many (even the man in the cape himself: Christopher Lee insists it is so.¹ Francis Ford Coppola took the fusion even further in his 1992 film version. His supposedly 'scrupulously true'² adaptation of Stoker's novel presented Vlad Tepes and the Count as basically the same person, with a Barnabas Collins-style crush on a long-dead lover thrown in for good measure.

Yet this Vlad-Dracula connection makes some scholars' blood boil. Elizabeth Miller, who made a painstaking study of Stoker's notes, puts it bluntly: "The bottom line is that Stoker knew next to nothing about the historical Dracula".³ The little he *did* know was that Vlad's family, and particularly his father, was known by the name Dracula, which was Wallachian for Devil (the word also meant to have courage and great cunning). It appears that Stoker simply thought the name sounded cool, with its devilish connection, rather than directly modelling his character on a ruler he knew hardly anything about. Miller argues there's no evidence from Stoker's notes that he'd even *heard* of the impaling stuff, either. Vlad himself is without doubt a key figure in Romanian history, but even the locals are confused about whether he had fangs or not. A man from the village described Vlad to me as "the first vampire" due to the legend of him sipping a drop of his enemies' blood

DRACULA'S TORTURE CHAMBER

Tucked away in Bran Castle, behind a heavy wooden door, I discovered a stomach-churning exhibition of torture implements that tells you two things about the mediæval mindset: these people were masters of cruelty and they had a serious issue with women. The grisly equipment on display was used mostly on women accused of anything from stealing to intercourse with the Devil. There's a queasy sexual nature to it all, with anal and genital mutilation being a favourite.

I saw a set of iron prongs that looked like something you'd use to flip meat on the barbecue. The little sign told me this was the 'Oral, Rectal and Vaginal Pear', a device designed to open the walls of orifices until

they become irreparably torn. Next to it was the 'Breast Ripper' (aka 'The Tarantula'), an iron clamp built to tear the chests off unmarried mothers suspected of self-abortion. At one



point I stumbled down some stairs and had to grab what I thought was a bannister to steady myself. I pulled my hand back to find I'd just grabbed the tip of a 'Judas Cradle': a hefty wooden pyramid on the end of a stake, designed to violate the anuses of supposed evil-doers as they were forced to sit on it while being dragged downward. Tourists giggle nervously at the horrors on show and to be honest so do I, but when you slow down to touch the blades themselves you feel a sting of tragic revulsion at everything these monstrous gadgets must have witnessed.



the funerals of such women can include a symbolic wedding service, where a local man is married to the deceased, thus resolving her relational issues and allowing her to rest peacefully in the ground.

The *strigoi* are an adaptable bunch, too, and aren't bound only to return to their own bodies. Those who die in pain or regret for example, may return as dogs or cats to torment their relatives. Perhaps that explains why the dogs round here bark so much: maybe they're really dead locals walking the streets on all fours in an attempt to freak people out. Fortunately, however, it appears the *strigoi* are easily pleased. One wheeze, apparently, is to bury a corpse with a bottle of whisky. The *strigoi* will drink it and will be so enamoured of the liquor that he won't bother returning home.

All of this might sound like little more than quaint, if slightly strange, local customs; yet the authorities don't always agree. Keen to modernise, they can sometimes find themselves clashing with the old country beliefs. For example, in a remote village called Marotinu de Sus in south west Romania in December 2003, labourer Petre Toma died in an accident. Tragic, sad, but not that unusual you might think; but when a relative became ill soon after Toma's death, his sister complained that the family might have a *strigoi* on their hands. Six local men stepped in to help. Just before midnight, they gathered around Toma's grave and then dug him up, opened the casket and split his ribcage open with a pitchfork. The heart was removed, stakes were driven into the body and garlic was sprinkled. Once they'd burned the heart, they mixed it with water and passed the grisly cocktail around, including to the sick relative. Apparently, it worked, and the sick woman became well, though the police brought a prosecution for grave desecration.⁴

with wine. The legends and pop culture assumptions about this place can be quite disorientating.

STRIGOI

Looking at the customs of Transylvanians, you get the impression that, psychologically speaking, they're completers/finishers: they don't like leaving things unresolved. For example, there's a fear that people who die with some unfinished business hanging over them (a mortal enemy unforgiven, a love affair left in uncertainty) will return from the dead as something called *strigoi*. They're an interesting mash-up of ghost, zombie and vampire, where the spirit climbs back inside its dead flesh to sort out old affairs. Not a desirable situation for Transylvanians (or, indeed, anyone), and to avoid it, the locals have

They gathered round Toma's grave and then dug him up

invented cultural solutions that might sound ghoulish to the outsider. A vivid example is provided by the weddings of the dead. A young lady of marriageable age dies suddenly, perhaps due to accident or illness. The fear is that she'll return as a *strigoi* to search for a husband, eager to fulfil her societal role as wife (not to mention her sexual needs). To avoid this spectral menace,

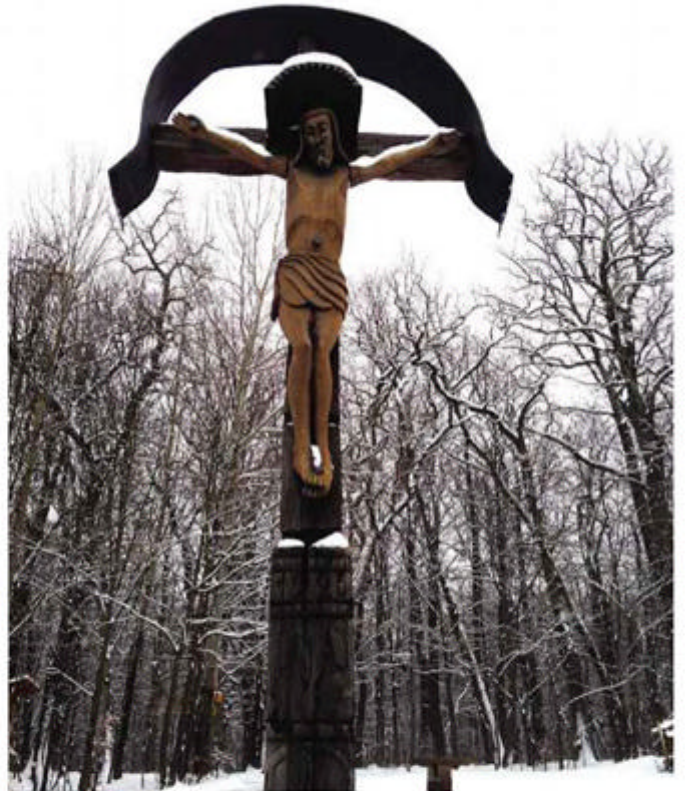
ABOVE: By cable car to the Carpathians.



THE ICE CHURCH

While Stoker's knowledge of Vlad the Impaler might be debateable, one thing he certainly *did* know about was the Carpathian Mountains, which loom over Transylvania in appropriately ominous fashion. Once Europe's longest volcanic range, they get plenty of mentions in Stoker's novel. Winter visitors can experience them for themselves, with some unusual side benefits. High up in one remote area is Bâlea Lac. It's only accessible by cable car in the winter months, but if you head up there you'll find a hotel and church built entirely of ice, chainsawed into blocks and cemented together with water. A few days before I visited, the church was consecrated by clerics from the Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant churches, putting aside their usual doctrinal differences to bless the unusual structures.

When the final cable car of the day left to trundle down the mountain I stayed up there, finally getting a real sense of how remote it feels. I stayed over in the ice hotel, eating a four-course meal served on ice filled plates, and had a surprisingly warm and comfy eight-hour sleep in what's effectively a giant fridge, lying on a massive ice cube with animal furs on it. Fortean travellers may wish to look out for unusual lights in the stunningly clear sky, or simply imagine they're in John Carpenter's *The Thing* or Lovecraft's *At the Mountains of Madness*. I know I did.



GOD AND THE DEVIL

It doesn't take a lot of digging into local folklore to discover that much of it is defined by religion. For example, when I meet Doris, the adopted daughter of the village wise woman, she tells me that near to where I'm staying is a place called Frog Rock – a geological quirk with fish fossils and a strange history. Legend has it that God miraculously helped the villagers build a bridge to cross the river, but when they weren't faithful to him he destroyed it, leaving a frog-shaped rock jutting out from the ground. The Saxon dwellers here, it turns out, have had a rocky relationship with the divine. A proud people, they tried hard to excel in some skill or craft, but their attempts were always overshadowed by other villages. God seemed to be ignoring their prayers for fame. Someone in the village decided to try the other team instead, and appealed to the Devil, who quickly responded with a deal. He'd make them famous for growing the very best cherries in Romania... and all he asked for in return was their souls. Eager for fame, they agreed and now, hundreds of years on, the village still takes enormous pride in its exceptional cherry harvest. Whether eternal damnation is a good price to pay depends, I guess, on how much you love your cherries.

Religion is *big* in Romania (90 per cent are Eastern Orthodox) but it took the end of Communism to allow contemporary followers to fully express it, and it leads to some fascinating practices. Even today, people avoid taking babies out of the house before they're blessed, lest some evil spiritual influence befall the infant. Indeed, some even keep the baby indoors for months until it's been christened. There's a fear

that someone 'might make a fuss of the baby' which will somehow 'put the Devil in the child'. If that ever happens, the parents have to light matches, throw them into water and pray a blessing over the baby, marking out wet crosses on its body. In the UK, such home-made exorcisms might well prompt calls to social services; here, I'm told, it's just part of life.

Just a casual drive through the nearby villages reveals elaborately painted wooden crosses nailed to tree trunks or at crossroads. Even when the roads themselves are long gone, the locals still maintain the crosses placed there. Tourists might be forgiven for thinking the crosses are just stuck there for Dracula tourism, or even from a genuine fear of vampires. Doris says that neither is the case: they protect the people from the Devil himself. This fear of the demonic extends to suicide cases too, where those who choose to take their own lives are assumed to be destined straight for Hell. The Orthodox Church usually refuses a full burial service for such victims.

I'm picking up a running theme here – that the supernatural battlegrounds of Transylvania may well involve legends of vampires, zombies and ghosts but that, ultimately, this is a *religious* fight. Terms like 'God' and 'Devil' keep cropping up. It's very different from Western Europe or North America, where so much *forteana* exists in relation to that other great system of 'faith based on evidence': science. Cryptids aren't monsters, they're natural creatures, albeit undiscovered ones. Poltergeists and hauntings aren't quickly labelled demonic, but are studied as potential quirks of physics, or as doorways into a spectral world that might easily exist without the

ABOVE LEFT: Dracula-themed spirits for sale.

ABOVE RIGHT: A carved wooden crucifix at the museum in Sibiu.

NOTES

- 1 In *The Dracula Book* (Scarecrow Press, 1975) Donald F Glut quotes Lee as saying that Stoker was "fully acquainted with the historical aspects concerning the life of... Vlad".
- 2 Francis Ford Coppola and James V Hart, *Dracula, The Film and the Legend*, Pan, 1992, p3.
- 3 Elizabeth Miller, *Dracula: Sense and Nonsense*, Kindle Version, 2012.
- 4 See "the vampire slayers" **FT186:22**; [AP] 26 Feb; *Sunday Times*, 11 April 2004; *Observer*, 19 June 2005.

need for divine personal figureheads at either end of it. Yet, here in Romania, I'm finding much paranormal activity hangs on a religious rather than a scientific framework. It's a helpful reminder that we all view the unexplained through particular glasses, that may skew us towards some conclusions and push us away from others, something any researcher into the unknown ought to be wary of.

As I down another uic – a local home brewed spirit made from plums (not cherries, I notice) – I ask Doris if all this folklore simply works as a system of moral and social control to make people behave themselves. She agrees, and proudly admits she doesn't go to church and doesn't really believe in God. "Give it time," she says, and these old legends will fade away, just as they have in the West. Yet when I press her she admits she's not ready to *completely* ignore the old traditions: "Just in case". Later when we're done and I've switched my little recorder off she smiles broadly and lets us all see the ring on her finger – yesterday she got engaged. Her face is full of laughter and light. I'm convinced the thought never crosses her sharp mind, but I see the ring glistening in the light and figure that, at least for her, the business of marriage is being resolved. Better that, than my generous, sensible host return to this village one night as a stalking, love-struck *strigoii*. **FT**



REV PETER LAWS is an ordained Baptist minister and a regular contributor to FT. He explores the worlds of the sacred and the scared in his podcast 'The Flicks That Church Forgot'.

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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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BLEAT!



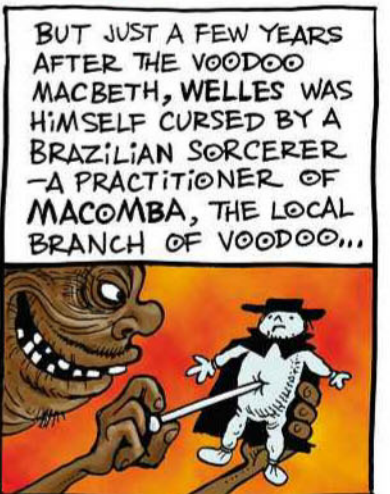
THE **VOODOO MACBETH** GOT RAVE REVIEWS! ONLY ONE CRITIC HATED IT, SO THE DRUMMERS PUT A CURSE ON HIM...



FIVE DAYS LATER HE DIED!

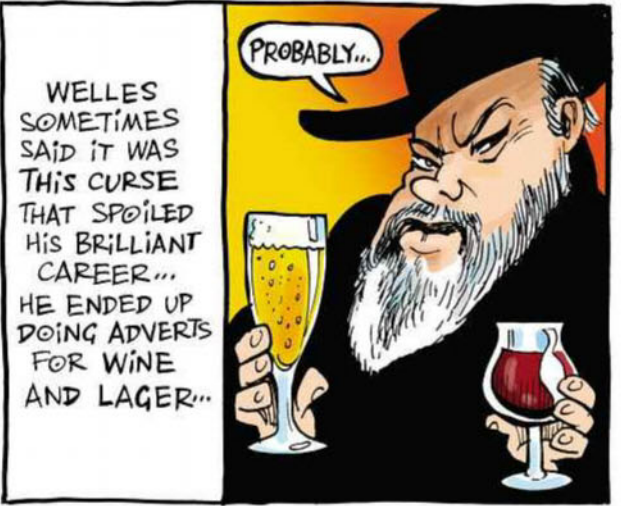


BUT JUST A FEW YEARS AFTER THE **VOODOO MACBETH**, WELLES WAS HIMSELF CURSED BY A BRAZILIAN SORCERER - A PRACTITIONER OF **MACOMBA**, THE LOCAL BRANCH OF **VOODOO...**



WELLES SOMETIMES SAID IT WAS THIS CURSE THAT SPOILED HIS BRILLIANT CAREER... HE ENDED UP DOING ADVERTS FOR WINE AND LAGER...

PROBABLY...



BUT EVEN IN HIS LONG DECLINE HE MADE SOME BRILLIANT FILMS - LIKE **F FOR FAKE** - A KIND OF PERSONAL ESSAY ON FILM AND TRICKERY, WHICH SAYS THAT THE HEART OF CINEMA IS ...**MAGIC!**

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FORTEAN TIMES 327

ON SALE 30 APRIL 2015

STRANGE DEATHS

UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL



Every year, a number of Japanese people choke to death on New Year rice cakes or *mochi*; last January, there were at least nine fatalities. The cakes are a New Year holiday tradition and are given out at shrines and temples. The glutinous treat, grilled or cooked in broth or with sweet beans, can stick in the throat. The *Yomiuri* newspaper said at least 128 people were taken to hospital after choking on *mochi*, with nine dying. Tokyo's fire department advised people to cut *mochi* into small pieces, chew slowly and learn first aid. (*London Eve. Standard*, 5 Jan 2015.

Two transplant patients died within days of each other in December 2013 after receiving kidneys from an alcoholic donor turned down by other hospitals. The brains of Robert Stuart, 67, and Darren Hughes, 42, were infected with a parasite thought to have come from their organ donor. There have been only five previous cases of the parasite, *halicephalobus*, in humans – all fatal. This was the first known case of person-to-person transmission. The parasite usually lives in soil and is found in horses. No post mortem examination had been carried out on the 39-year-old organ donor – a rough sleeper from Manchester – who had died of suspected meningitis. Uncertainty over his death prompted seven hospitals to refuse his organs, but the University Hospital of Wales accepted them, unaware of the earlier refusals. The transplant doctors were subsequently exonerated over the deaths. *D.Telegraph, Sun, 19 Nov; Metro, 19 Nov + 5 Dec 2014.*

A man died on 5 August 2014 after his e-cigarette exploded into flames and ignited oxygen equipment – specifically, the tube of an oxygen concentrator, used to relieve breathlessness and other symptoms of low blood oxygen. Housebound David Thomson, 62, was found dead in the living room of his flat in Wallasey, Merseyside, after the blast set fire to his bedroom, where he was charging the device (with the wrong kind of charger, apparently). It was the ninth fire involving e-cigarettes on Merseyside in the previous six months. *D.Telegraph, D.Mirror, Guardian, D.Mail, 9 Aug 2014.*

When books went missing from a village school in south-western Kenya, the school's directors hired a witch doctor to brew a potion to seek out the thief. "The [school bus] driver was dared... to prove his innocence by drinking the mixture," said Simon Kiragu, a local police chief. "The 33-year-old collapsed and died immediately after the drink." Villagers took revenge by torching the school bus and the house of the school's deputy director. *D.Telegraph, 21 Jan 2015.*

A man who was acting out the role of King Balthazar, one of the Three Kings, in an Epiphany parade in Nijar, southern Spain, died after the throne he was riding in hit an overhead cable on 5 January. This caused the throne to topple off the chariot it had been placed on, said mayor Antonio Jesus Rodríguez. The unnamed 20-year-old died of his injuries in hospital. *Shropshire Star, 7 Jan 2015.*

Stephanie Greene, 39, was sentenced to 20 years in jail in Columbia, South Carolina, for killing her baby daughter with an overdose of morphine delivered through her breast milk. Alexis was born healthy, but was found dead in her parents' bed just 46 days after she was born in November 2010. An autopsy found a level of morphine in the baby's body that could have been lethal for an adult. This is the first time a mother has ever been prosecuted – in the US and possibly in the world – for killing her child through a substance transmitted in breast milk. (*Queensland Sunday Mail, 6 April 2014.*

Hyphemkemberly Dorvilier, 22, doused her newborn baby girl with an accelerant and set fire to her in the middle of a street in Pemberton Township, New Jersey. She appeared 'calm' as she tried to flee, but was detained by onlookers. Police managed to put out the fire, but the baby died around two hours later at a hospital in nearby Philadelphia. Dorvilier was charged with murder. *D.Mail, 19 Jan 2015.*

Last December, a Latvian migrant living in a graveyard in Tooting, south-west London, pleaded guilty to infanticide after admitting burying her baby alive in 2012. Elita Amantova, 39, had a hospital order imposed at the Old Bailey. *D.Telegraph, 6 Dec 2014.*

Alex Osborne, 24, from Lanner in Cornwall, was electrocuted while taking a shower in a hotel in Ghana. The engineer was working for Fugro Seacore, a marine drilling firm, in the city of Sekondi-Takoradi. *Sunday Mirror, 13 Mar 2013.*

Graverobber Jet Ming, 26, died when part of a 3,000-year-old tomb he and two friends were raiding collapsed on him in Xianyang, China. *Sun, 19 June 2013.*

Adam Pye, 26, dug a hole about 10ft (3m) deep at Francis State Beach in Northern California and was standing in it when the sand started caving in around him. About 30 people, including his friends, frantically dug with their hands, buckets and other improvised tools to expose his head, but when they reached him he was dead. (*Sydney*) *D.Telegraph, 25 July 2014.*

A US soldier admitted shooting his friend accidentally while trying to scare away his hiccups. Patrick Myers, of Spartanburg, South Carolina, was sentenced to three and a half years in jail by a military court in Fort Hood, Texas. Myers fatally shot Isaac Young, 22, in September 2012. He thought the weapon had dummy rounds. *Irish Independent, 2 Feb 2013.*

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BOOK OF STRANGE
DEATHS VOL 2

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By Marian Ashcroft

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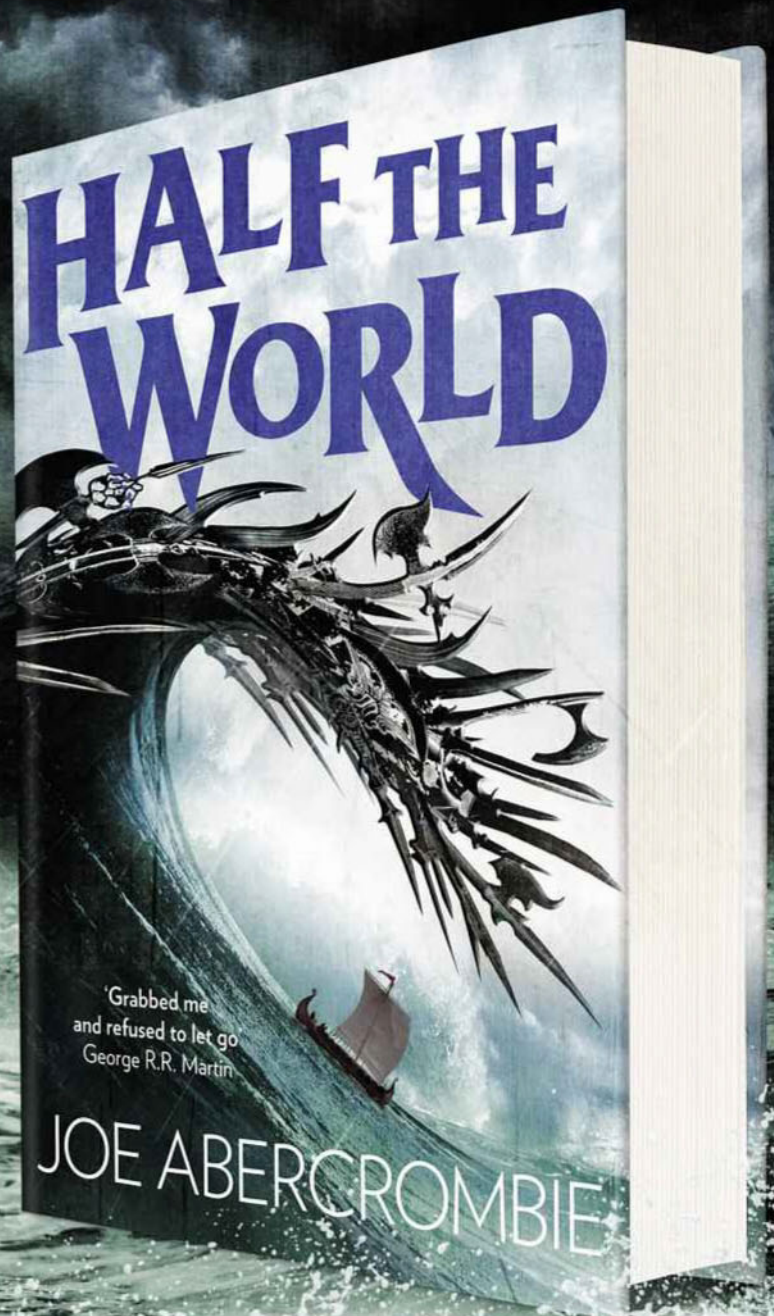


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