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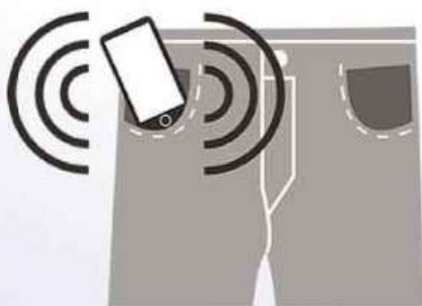


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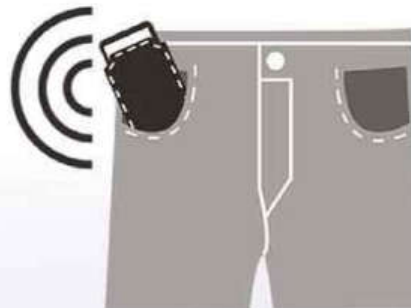


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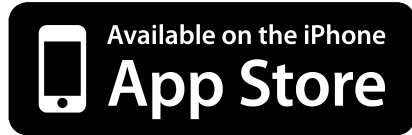
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strange days

'Alien hybrid' mystery man, horned granny, white wallaby on the loose, physical mediums, hopeless hold-ups, Arkansas black panthers, Dismaland, Ig Nobels 2015, Devil's Breath, insect electrosense, Neolithic discoveries – and much more.

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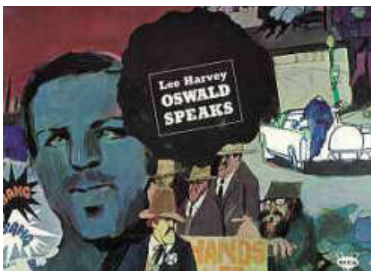
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Something nasty in the swamps...

ETIENNE GILFILLAN

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PRAKASH MATHEMA / AP / GETTY IMAGES

ETIENNE GILFILLAN

EDITOR
 DAVID SUTTON
 (drsutton@forteanimes.com)

FOUNDING EDITORS
 BOB RICKARD (bobrickard@mail.com)
 PAUL SIEVEKING (sieveking@forteanimes.com)

ART DIRECTOR
 ETIENNE GILFILLAN
 (etienne@forteanimes.com)

BOOK REVIEWS EDITOR
 VAL STEVENSON
 (val@forteanimes.com)

RESIDENT CARTOONIST
 HUNT EMERSON

SUBSCRIPTION ENQUIRIES AND BACK ISSUES
 www.subsinfo.co.uk
 ForteanTimes@servicehelpline.co.uk

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LICENSING & SYNDICATION
 FORTEAN TIMES IS AVAILABLE FOR INTERNATIONAL LICENSING AND SYNDICATION – CONTACT: Syndication Senior Manager
 ANJ DOSAJ-HALAI TEL: +44- (0) 20 7907 6132
 Anj_Dosaj-Halai@dennis.co.uk
 Licensing Manager
 CARLOTTA SERANTONI TEL: +44- (0) 20 7907 6550
 Carlotta_Serantoni@dennis.co.uk
 Licensing & Syndication Assistant
 NICOLE ADAMS TEL: +44- (0) 20 7907 6134
 Nicole_Adams@dennis.co.uk

YOU CAN REACH FT ON THE INTERNET
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 30 Cleveland Street
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 IAN WESTWOOD
 020 7907 6000

CIRCULATION MANAGER
 JAMES MANGAN
james.mangan@seymour.co.uk

EXPORT CIRCULATION MANAGER
 GERALDINE GROBLER
geraldine.grobler@seymour.co.uk

SENIOR PRODUCTION EXECUTIVE
 DANIEL STARK
 020 7907 6053
daniel_stark@dennis.co.uk

ADVERTISING DIRECTOR
 STEVE NICOLAOU
 020 7907 6633
steve_nicolaou@dennis.co.uk

SALES EXECUTIVE
 BRADLEY BEAVER
 020 7907 6701
bradley_beaver@dennis.co.uk

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editorial

In search of ASS

LIZARD MAN STRIKES AGAIN

We'd been planning to run Benjamin Radford's investigation into the classic case of the Lizard Man of Scape Ore Swamp (pp26-34) for some time now, but the need to tackle various other stories led its being put on hold for a few months. It turned out to be a fortuitous delay, as in the meantime new reports – including a rather astonishing photograph snapped on a mobile phone – of the monster of Lee County, South Carolina, have emerged. Sharon Hill, owner of the sceptical website Doubtful News, takes a look at the latest 'evidence' for the Lizard Man (p31), but remains unimpressed by both the photograph and a blurry video that has also emerged. Regular readers will know that Benjamin Radford is also a monster hunter of the sceptical kind, and his point-by-point demolition of the original Lizard Man sighting (made by 17-year-old Christopher Davis in June 1988) is a thorough one: thorough enough to make it hard to believe that what Davis saw that night – if indeed he saw anything – was really a 7ft-tall reptilian creature of unknown origin.

But doubt remains, and there were numerous other Lizard Man witnesses in 1988 (and later) whose testimony remains. The late John Keel pointed out that: "There's hardly a respectable swamp in the deep south that does not boast at least one ASS." By ASS, Keel meant 'Abominable Swamp Slob', his own name for the big, smelly critters reported from the marshes and bayous of the region. He also noted that these elusive entities – like the one that Chris Davis believed he'd encountered and unlike the generally shy and retiring Bigfoot/Sasquatch – had a tendency to give chase, noting 16 examples in which they were said to have approached or pursued cars. So, if the Lizard Man of Scape Ore Swamp is not unique in the fortean annals, does Ben's explanation of the Lee County case hold good for these other cases too? Or is further investigation of the ASS phenomenon needed? Readers will decide for themselves, but if you can dig up a copy you'll find further contemporary details on this case and others in **FT51:34-37**. See also John Keel's *Strange Creatures from Space and Time* (1975).

FT IN THE MEDIA

When our intrepid art director Etienne Gilfillan (pictured above) set off to photograph Dismaland, the pop-up 'Bemusement Park' created by Banksy in Weston-super-Mare this summer (see pp6-7), he didn't expect to get a

close-up of the world's most elusive artist – and he probably didn't. But Etienne's photograph of a car park attendant (or was that Banksy hiding in plain sight *cunningly disguised* as a car park attendant?) became a tabloid sensation when the *Daily Mail* website published it alongside an older photograph from 2008 of someone who, er, *might be* Banksy. One Dismaland employee was quoted as saying: "This is exactly the sort of thing Banksy would do". Perhaps

it is, but within hours the media frenzy appeared to be over, with the Mail "revealing" that the man Etienne had photographed was "a parking attendant for the local council". So that's that then – or is it? Does the *Mail* really expect us to believe that an unnamed parking attendant is not Banksy just because it tells us so? Like UFO-watchers the world over, Banksy-seekers will surely suspect a cover-up and demand full disclosure...

Meanwhile, in the *Times* daily quiz on 23 July 2015 was the following question: "Founded in 1973, which magazine's tagline is 'The world of strange phenomena'?"

ERRATA

FT332:23 The photo of the blue devil spider should have been credited to Carl Portman (not Karl Portman).

FT332:40 A number of FT readers and Twitter followers spotted a booboo we made in Sophia Kingshill's "Reclaiming the Mermaid" feature. The pull-quote on p40 turned out to be a bit of an unintentional cliffhanger, reading: "Most famous of all visual interpretations is the statue that has become a..."

The rest of the sentence should have read "national symbol of Copenhagen".



David Sutton
 DAVID R. SUTTON

Bob Rickard
 BOB RICKARD

Paul Sieveking
 PAUL SIEVEKING



Why fortean?

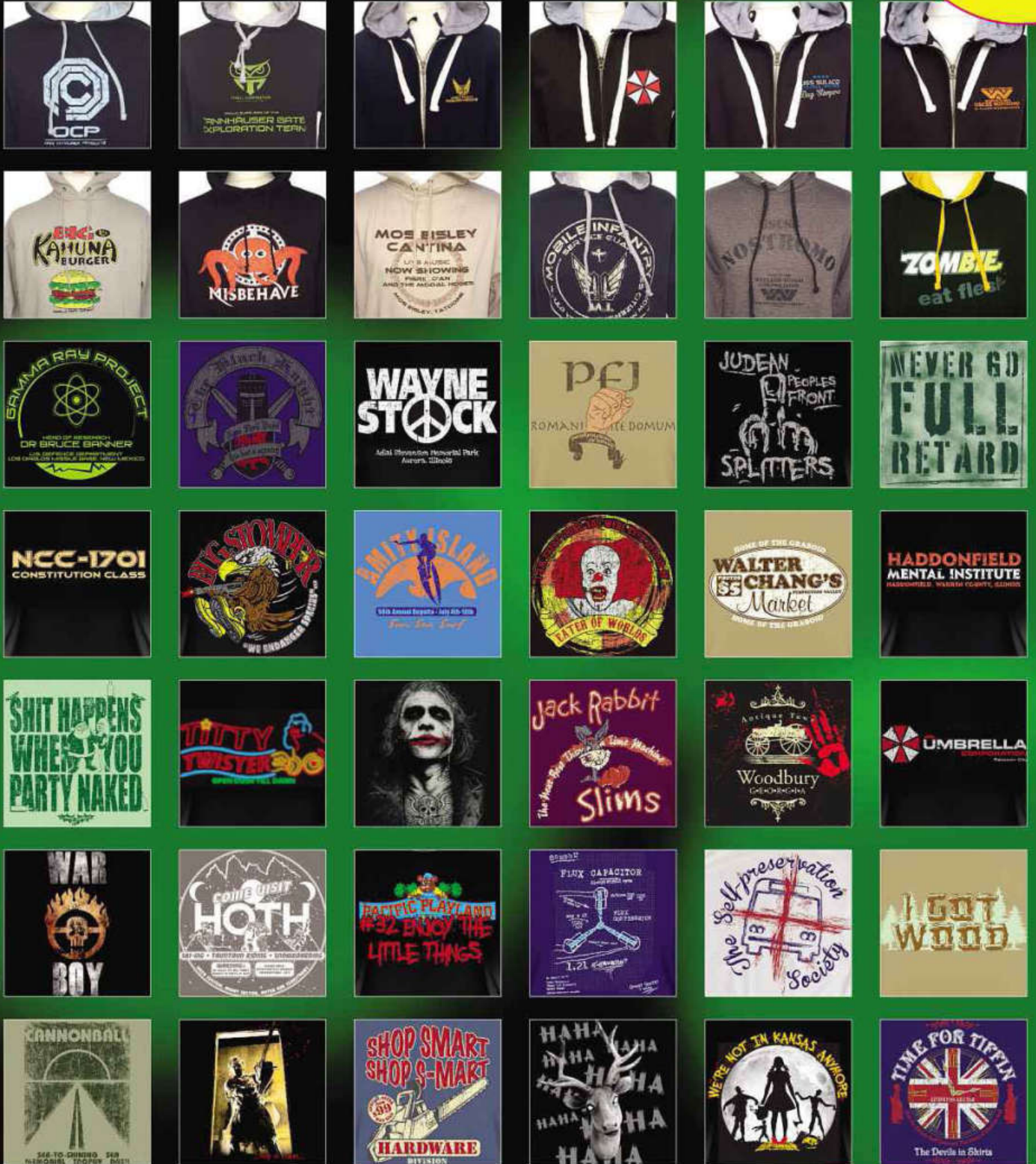
Everything you always wanted to know about *Fortean Times* but were too paranoid to ask!

SEE PAGE 78

Do you REALLY know your movies?

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A DIGEST OF THE WORLDWIDE WEIRD

strangedays

LA's gun-totin' alien spy

Confusion over estate of supposed spook with a lethal weapons collection

On 17 July, the badly decomposed body of Jeffrey Alan Lash, 60, was found in an SUV parked in the 1700 block of Pacific Palisades, Los Angeles. Inside his house, police found a massive arsenal of weapons, worth about five million dollars. There were more than 1,200 handguns, rifles and shotguns; nearly seven tons of ammunition; bows and arrows, knives, machetes; and \$230,000 in cash. Many of the weapons were still in boxes or had price tags. Some of the explosive-making material had to be detonated because it was too unstable to move. Among the 14 vehicles registered in Lash's name and kept in rented garages all over Southern California, they discovered several were modified for combat and a Toyota SUV designed to drive underwater.

The story that emerged was weirder than they could have imagined. When Lash collapsed in a grocery store parking lot in Santa Monica on 4 July, property manager Catherine Nebron, his live-in girlfriend of 17 years, along with her assistant Dawn VadBunker, tried to help him, but he didn't want to be taken to a hospital or have anyone call 911, so he died. The women were convinced Lash was a secret agent working for multiple unnamed government agencies, but was not entirely human. They believed "he was part alien and part human and was out to save the world," according to Dawn's mother, Laura VadBunker.

Nebron later told a friend she had specific instructions from Lash on what to do if he died: don't call the authorities; leave him in a car; get out of town, and let the secret agencies he worked for take care of the body. She left his body in his SUV



ABOVE: Mystery man Jeffrey Alan Lash.

"I can't believe this. It's worse than a *Twilight Zone* movie..."

parked not far from their condo and decamped to Oregon with Dawn VadBunker, 39, a mother of two, whose family reported her missing two days later. After two weeks, no one had come to get Lash's body. "When [Nebron] came back, she was shocked that the agencies hadn't picked him up," said her attorney, Harlan Braun, "so then she decided she'd better call police. The story itself sounds totally crazy, but then how do you explain all [the weaponry]? There's no evidence [Lash] was a drug dealer or that he stole these weapons, or had any criminal source of income or stolen property." Laura VadBunker told a radio station:

"I can't believe this. It's worse than a *Twilight Zone* movie and we've lived through hell."

Lash grew up in a modest home near the Los Angeles international airport and had ambitions at one point to become a microbiologist like his father. Then, according to his stepmother, he largely cut himself off from his family and became secretive about what he was doing. Nebron told her attorney that it wasn't unusual to hear Lash on the phone supposedly talking to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice or former CIA Director David Petraeus. Braun subsequently revealed that Nebron was essentially held captive at the Pacific Palisades condo for years while she financed his military endeavours. Lash apparently made her drive in a separate car when they went out to dinner, and they always paid in cash. Police said he had cancer, but told neighbours he suffered from nerve gas poisoning from his

time in the CIA. "Whether he really was working undercover for some government agency or not," said Braun, "he was convinced he was and he had my client convinced." It was not clear what, if anything, he did for a living.

Though it was only Nebron and VadBunker – along with, oddly, Nebron's dentist ex-husband, Philip Gorin – who were with Lash when he died, lawyers dealing with Lash's considerable estate said it appeared that at least two other women were involved with Lash and believed the story of his alien origins and secret government involvement. Lash kept a condo in Malibu with a woman identified only as "Jocelyn", whose neighbours knew Lash as "Bob Smith". He was also romantically linked to a third woman, Michelle Lyons. As a probate judge struggled to make sense of the Jeffrey Lash estate and to solve the mystery of where and how he got rich enough to afford all the weaponry, all three women were battling Lash's six first cousins for control of everything he left behind.

At the time of the news reports, Dawn VadBunker had not returned from Oregon or called her parents or her children. She did send a letter in which she confirmed she was there when "Bob" died and that he "fought to stay alive," according to her mother. Her estranged husband Jim Curry said that Nebron had introduced his wife to Lash three months earlier, and that she quickly began believing that he was, indeed, an alien-human hybrid. After meeting Lash, VadBunker began insisting that she needed to eat raw meat. Lash frequently ate raw filet mignon when he went out to dinner. VadBunker left her husband on 14 July, a little over a year after their marriage. *KTLA5*, 22 July 2015. *NY Daily News*, *Guardian*, *dailymail.co.uk*, 23 July; *inquisitr.com*, 29 Aug 2015.



**IG NOBELS
2015**
Latest awards
for science's
most improbable
research
PAGE 8



**HOPELESS
HOLD-UPS**
Are these
the world's
most inept
bankrobbers?
PAGE 18



**PAINT IT
BLACK**
The mystery
panthers of
Arkansas on
canvas
PAGE 19

The Conspirasphere

Conspiracy theorists have as many niche shopping opportunities as ordinary consumers. **NOEL ROONEY** looks at mainstream/fringe market segmentation.

The Blood Moon was spectacular, even from light-polluted London. Two things occurred to me while watching it. First, the Moon loses its flat appearance and really looks like a globe; if I noticed this, then I'm quite sure some people in the far distant past also noticed it, which may tell us something about astronomy in the ancient world. Secondly, I found myself thinking that if our culture had developed differently, we would all, always, have been celebrating eclipses for their ethereal beauty rather than fearing them as portents of evil. Ah, well. Since the event hasn't brought on an immediate apocalypse, despite predictions to the contrary, we can carry on for a bit.

The conspiracy theory world has (as I've discussed in previous columns) evolved into a huge market, with its own news media and a class of experts and celebrities selling books and DVDs to an eager audience, giving talks to packed halls, and even arranging group holidays with conspiracy and alternative history themes. It represents an increasingly important segment of the leisure market and, as a market in its own right, has developed its own segmentation.

In broad terms, this market segmentation is about topical choice; it's a superstore of belief reinforcement. If you choose to believe in shape-shifting lizards ruling the world, you can buy into a range of products and services, either slick, well-packaged products such as the David Icke juggernaut, or low-end, amateur efforts available on an impressive variety of sites. You can choose products that go with your wider beliefs; websites such as Before It's News, for instance, cater to a Christian audience who like their conspiracy diet spiced with prophetic visions and biblical references.

In the conspiracy news media, this segmentation is developing into a market one might characterise using

the traditional newspaper terms tabloid and broadsheet; part of this market also comprises products that might better be termed home-made (the equivalent of running off a few photocopies and stapling them together before selling them on street corners) but we'll concentrate on the mainstream for now. The fact that conspiracy theory now has its own mainstream (and thus its own fringe) is telling; both because it demonstrates the size of the market, and because it means that, out there, there are outlets that are really (I mean *really*) out there.

The tabloid/broadsheet divide is best exemplified by, on the one hand, the Alex Jones media empire (Prison Planet, Infowars) and, on the other, the academic respectability and in-depth coverage of Global Research, the website started by dissident Canadian academic Michael Chossudovsky. While they regularly host the same articles on the same topics, there is a clear distinction in delivery, and political viewpoint; Jones's audience is generally right-leaning, bellicose, patriotic and intrigued by sex and violence, while Chossudovsky's is liberal, relatively pacifist, and prefers its news shorn of sensationalism and dressed in the colours of humanitarian concern.

Have a look at their coverage of the crisis in Syria, global warming or the ongoing alternative investigation of 9/11 and you'll see, along with the common content, clear demarcations of taste, politics and style. Conspiracy has very nearly arrived as a mainstream movement, and its pact with Mammon is the smoking gun. And if you're looking for smoking guns, how about the fact that Global Research went online a mere two days before the events of 9/11? Just putting it out there...

www.globalresearch.ca/
www.prisonplanet.com/
<http://beforeitsnews.com/>

EXTRA! EXTRA!

FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES
FROM AROUND THE WORLD

Ex-scout master 'did not know rape illegal'

Canberra Times, 25 Sept 2014.

Mayor linked to dead furry animal furore

D.Telegraph, 26 Sept 2014.

Drunk witches found causing trouble in city street

Hull Daily Mail, 18 Oct 2014.

Six injured in model train crash

Daily Press, 21 Aug 2014.

'Cheating' Moses is a disgrace, says Monk

D.Mail, 20 Oct 2014.

Dismaland

Elusive guerrilla artist Banksy secretly created a pop-up art exhibition in the disused Tropicana lido in Weston-super-Mare, Somerset. The 'Dismaland Bemusement Park', described by the artist as "a family theme park unsuitable for children", opened on 21 August 2015 and featured 10 new Banksy pieces alongside contributions from a further 58 artists, including Damien Hirst, Jimmy Cauty and Jenny Holzer. PHOTOS: ETIENNE GILFILLAN





SIDELINES...

BONEY'S REVENGE?

The Wellington Monument (near Wellington in Somerset) was struck by lightning on 18 June, 200 years to the day after the Duke of Wellington's victory at Waterloo, which the stone needle commemorates. *Western Morning News, 9 July 2015.*

INTO THE UNKNOWN

A woman claiming to have built a fully functioning time machine in her garage in Exminster, Devon, posted an ad on Gumtree.com to recruit a companion to time-travel with her. She states she has made mice "disappear", but is unsure if the animals went back or forward in time. "Owner drivers would be a plus," she states, "as the machine needs to be taken to a wide open space like a beach to prevent property damage." *exeterexpressandecho.co.uk, 15 June 2015.*

TOAD LICKER

A barefoot Richard Mullins, 41, who licked a toad and refused to stop dancing, was expelled from a bar in La Porte, Indiana, but returned with a second toad and was busted for trespassing. *Times, 26 June 2015.*

ROYAL MONSTER

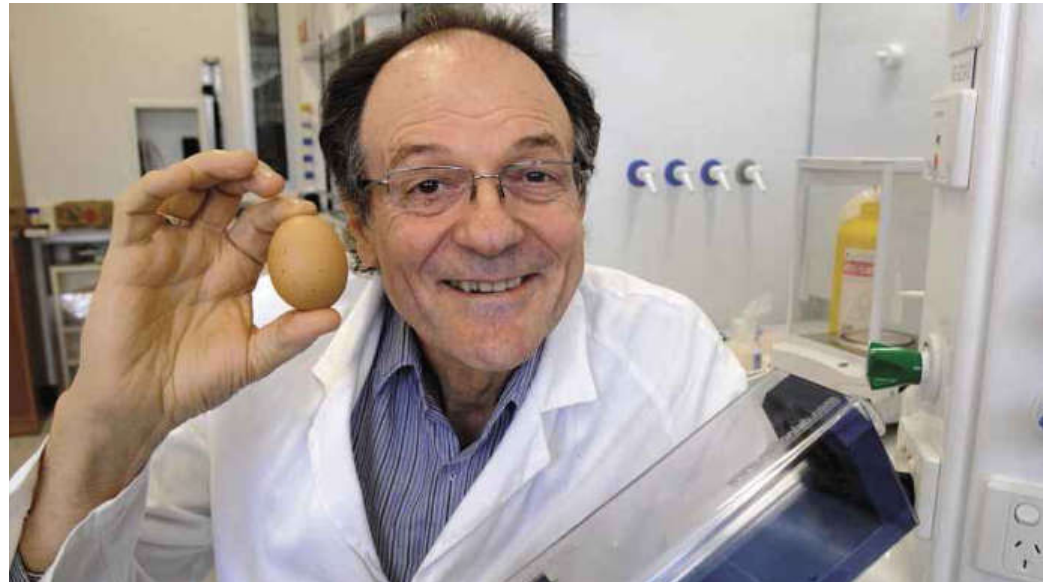
Newly discovered papers show that Sir Peter Scott, the eminent conservationist who at one time led the search for Nessie, asked the Queen in 1960 if it could be named *Elizabethia nessiae* after her – provided it was proved to exist. Palace officials were not keen, fearing the monarch could become associated with an embarrassing hoax. *Sunday Telegraph, 6 Sept 2015.*



MARTIN ROSS

Improbable findings

This year's winning research into the birds and the bees



FLINDERS UNIVERSITY

The 25th annual Ig Nobel ceremony, organised by the magazine *Annals of Improbable Research*, took place at Harvard's Sander Theatre on 17 September. These are awards to "make people laugh and then make them think". The physics prize was given for a study showing that most mammals take the same amount of time to pee. Using high-speed video analysis, the researchers modelled the fluid dynamics involved in urination and discovered that all mammals weighing more than 3kg (6.6lb) empty their bladders over about 21 seconds (plus or minus 13 seconds). Their subjects included rats, goats, cows and elephants – and although the findings reveal a remarkably consistent "scaling law" in bigger beasts, they also emphasise that small animals do things quite differently. Rats can pee in a fraction of a second, for example. The study's lead author Dr Patricia Yang said this made rodents a poor choice for studying urinary health problems, but there might be physical lessons to learn from the adaptability of the micturition system in bigger creatures. From water towers to drinking backpacks,



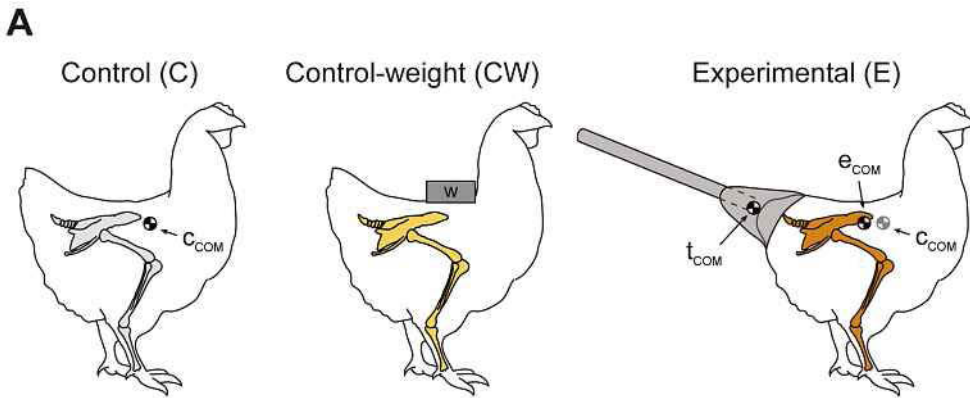
Rodents are a poor choice for studying urinary health

she said, "every time we need a new function, we figure out a new design for it. But in nature, they just have one system for all different sizes. This might inspire us – we could have a scalable design that fits different purposes."

Ig winners travelled from six continents to accept their trophies. The triumphant research included a chemical recipe to partially un-boil an egg, and the discovery that the word "huh?"

ABOVE: Professor Colin Raston of Flinders University, Adelaide, has found a way to unboil an egg.

(or its equivalent) seems to exist in every human language – or at least in the 10 examined – although no one is quite sure why. The conclusion was that this interjection "is linguistic in nature rather than being a mere grunt or non-lexical sound". The diagnostic medicine prize was awarded for testing whether pain experienced when driving over speed bumps can help diagnose appendicitis. The idea started as a running joke among surgeons, but Helen Ashdown decided to test it out while working as a junior doctor at Stoke Mandeville Hospital in Aylesbury. "It's quite a residential area, so it's a town that does have a lot of speed bumps," said Dr Ashdown. "We noticed that quite a few of the patients who had appendicitis said how bad the journey to hospital had been." Sure enough, in a formal study of 101 patients, 33 of 34 people who were diagnosed with appendicitis reported pain travelling over speed bumps. "It's a test that has high sensitivity, so it's a good rule-out test," said Dr

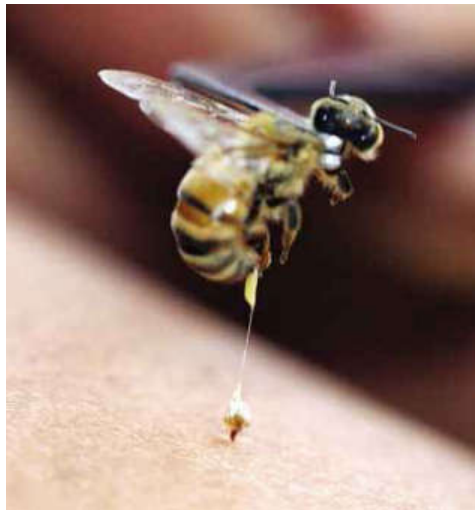


LEFT: At last, proof that chickens walk differently (and possibly like a non-avian theropod) with a stick attached to their bottoms.

Ashdown.

Dr Rodrigo Vasquez, from the University of Chile, received the biology Ig Nobel for observing that if you raise a chicken with a weighted, artificial tail stuck to its arse, it will walk like a dinosaur (more specifically a non-avian theropod). It is of course impossible to know for sure how extinct species like *Tyrannosaurus rex* might have moved, but palaeontologists had made educated guesses that are now closely matched by the gait of these stick-tailed chickens. Said Dr Vasquez: “[The gait] is a little bit crouching and the steps are a bit longer, because the centre of gravity of the animal is changed... and they have to counterbalance the weight of the tail by stretching their neck a little bit.”

The management prize was awarded for the discovery that many business leaders developed a fondness for risk-taking as children, when they experienced natural disasters (such as earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, tsunamis, and wildfires) that – for them – had no dire personal consequences. Economics went to the Bangkok Metropolitan Police (Thailand) for offering to pay policemen extra cash if they refuse to take bribes. (No one attended in person to receive that one.) Medicine was awarded jointly to groups in Japan and Slovakia for experiments to



study the biomedical benefits or biomedical consequences of intense kissing (and other intimate, interpersonal activities). A couple of academics from the University of Vienna took home the mathematics prize for trying to use mathematical techniques to determine whether and how Moulay Ismael the Bloodthirsty, the Sharifian Emperor of Morocco, managed to father 888 children between 1697 and 1727. It helped that he had four wives and 500 concubines.

The physiology and entomology prize was awarded jointly to two individuals: Justin Schmidt (Southwest Biological Institute, US) for painstakingly creating the Schmidt Sting Pain Index, which rates the relative pain people feel when stung by various insects; and Michael L Smith (Cornell University, US), for carefully arranging for honey bees to

sting him repeatedly on 25 different parts of his body over 38 days, to map pain intensity. The least painful spots were the skull, middle toe tip and upper arm, all of which he rated as a 2.3 on a pain scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being the most painful. The most painful locations – the nostril, upper lip, and penis shaft – received pain ratings of 9.0, 8.7, and 7.3 respectively. The Schmidt Sting Pain Index rates only on a scale of one to four, but also features the entomologist’s descriptions of 78 sorts of stings, written with the flair of a sommelier in a wine cellar

with something to prove. The bald-faced hornet, for instance, is in Schmidt’s estimation: “rich, hearty, slightly crunchy. Similar to getting your hand mashed in a revolving door.” Yellowjackets, on the other hand, sting “hot and smoky, almost irreverent. Imagine WC Fields extinguishing a cigar on your tongue.” Both rate a two. The four-plus-rated bullet ant, in contrast, punishes a victim with “pure, intense, brilliant pain, like fire-walking over flaming charcoal with a three-inch rusty nail grinding into your heel”.

For last year’s awards, see **FT321:9**. For full details of winners and published research, see www.improbable.com/ig/, livescience.com, 17 Sept; theguardian.com, [BBC News](http://bbc.com), 18 Sept 2015.

SIDELINES...

CASH WINDFALL

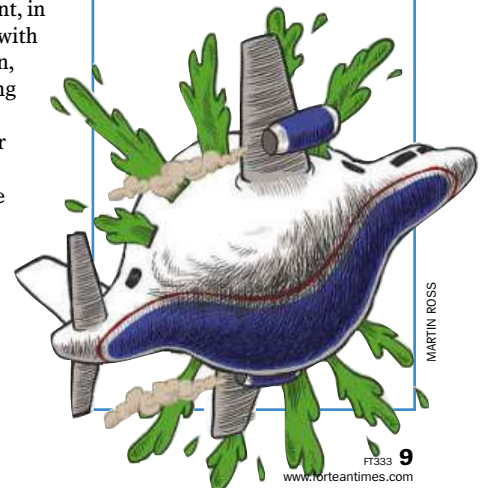
On 11 July, the equivalent of £130,000 in €50 notes rained down from an oak tree at a campsite near Mirow in northern Germany, startling a group of hikers. The money had been in a plastic bag hanging on a pipe between two branches, but after a heatwave the pipe bent and an elastic band tying the bag shut snapped, causing the banknotes to slip out. Under German law, the finders can keep three per cent of the money – and all the rest, should police fail to find the owners. [UPI] 11 July; *D.Mail*, 13 July 2015.

MOSSAD'S NEW STRATEGY

Asghar Bukhari, a founding member of the Muslim Public Affairs Committee UK, claimed on Facebook that ‘Zionists’ had broken into his home and stolen a shoe, “to let me know someone had been there”. These furtive Zionists had form: a year or so earlier, he had been told by another Muslim leader that they had been coming into her house and “re-arranging things”. *D.Telegraph*, 15 June 2015.

HEAVE-HO!

A US Airways flight became a vomit-soaked nightmare after a strange odour filled the cabin, prompting a chundering chain reaction down the aisle. The Philadelphia-bound flight made an emergency landing in Rome after take-off from Israel’s Ben Gurion airport on 6 December 2014. Two passengers and 14 crewmembers were unable to stop throwing up, while others were treated for nausea. *MX News (Sydney)*, 8 Dec 2014.





SIDELINES...

SUBTERRANEAN MUSIC

Since the summer of 2002, a number of tourists, fishermen and residents, in and around the towns of Sóller, Deià and Valldemossa on the island of Mallorca, have reported hearing strange improvised music apparently coming from underground, the origin of which is unknown. *Ling (Vueling Airlines inflight magazine)*, July 2015.

MIGHTY MOGG

Kenny, a massive Main Coon cat, jumped up and down on his sleeping owner's chest to alert him to a fire. Chris Oakley, 31, was able to put out the fire in his kitchen in Colchester, Essex, started when another cat turned on the cooker. *D.Mirror*, 19 June 2015.

IT'S A MIST-ERY

At least three people in Elmsett, near Hadleigh in Suffolk, reported suffering swollen and itchy eyes after a mysterious dust fell in the vicinity of Manor Road on 2 June. Tests on the substance indicated it was likely to be "food protein powder". *East Anglian Daily Times*, 4 June 2015.

EXOTIC IMMIGRANT

A Peruvian giant centipede – one of the largest of its kind in the world and toxic to humans – flew into England from Antigua as a stowaway in Jennie Esler's dirty washing. It is now at Bristol Zoo's Bug World exhibition. *Irish Independent*, 13 June 2015.

MEDICAL BAG

GIRLS WILL BE BOYS, MULTIPLE PENISES, HORNED WOMEN, LOOONG TONGUES AND OTHER ODDITIES



COUNTDOWN TO LIFE / BBC

ABOVE: Catherine and Carla, aged nine, who is undergoing the transformation.

GIRLS WILL BE BOYS

About one in every 90 children in Salinas, an isolated village in south-western Dominican Republic, are *machihembras* – men who are born as women – also known as *guevedoces*, which translates as "penis at 12". Despite appearing to be girls at birth, they are biologically male, but only develop male organs as they approach puberty. Johnny, 24, is one of the *guevedoces*. His parents named him Felecita and dressed him in a skirt because he had no visible testes or penis and what appeared to be a vagina. "I never liked to dress as a girl," he said. "When they brought me girls' toys I never bothered playing with them. All I wanted to do was play with the boys." His gender change happened at the age of seven. "When I changed I was happy with my life," he said. A little boy named Carla is currently going through the same transformation, aged nine. His mother noticed that from the age of five he was more inclined towards the rough and tumble play of boys. "I love her however she is," said his mother. "Girl or boy, it makes no difference." He has recently been renamed Carlos and had his hair cut short after wearing plaits.

The stories of these children

One in every 90 children are *guevedoces* – "penis at 12"

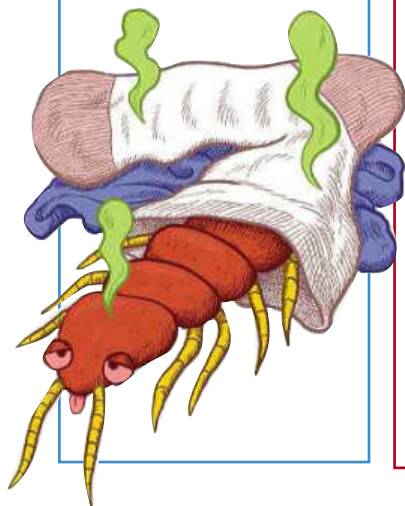
featured recently in a BBC documentary, *Countdown To Life – The Extraordinary Making of You*, presented by Dr Michael Moseley. The rare genetic disorder occurs because of a missing enzyme, 5-alpha-reductase, which prevents the production in the womb of a specific form of the male sex hormone, dihydro-testosterone. All babies in the womb, male or female, have internal glands known as gonads and a small bump between their legs called aa tubercle. At around eight weeks, male babies who carry the Y chromosome start to produce dihydro-testosterone in large amounts, which turns the tubercle into a penis. (In the case of girls, the tubercle turns into the clitoris.) However, *guevedoces* are missing the enzyme that triggers the hormone surge, so they appear to be born female. It is not until puberty, with another large surge of testosterone, that the male reproductive organs develop and

their voices deepen. Many decide not to change from their female names, so some men in Salinas have names such as Catherine. Other *guevedoces* go through an operation and remain female.

The delayed gender phenomenon was discovered in the 1970s by Dr Julianne Imperato-McGinley, an endocrinologist at Cornell Medical College. Further cases have since been found in the Sambian villages of Papua New Guinea, although the Sambians often shun their children – unlike the Dominicans, who celebrate the change. Imperato-McGinley discovered that the *guevedoces* tend to have small prostates. This observation, made in 1974, was picked up by Roy Vagelos, head of research at the multinational pharmaceutical giant Merck, which led to the development of the drug finasteride. This blocks the action of 5-alpha-reductase, mimicking the lack of dihydro-testosterone seen in the *guevedoces*, and is an effective way to treat benign enlargement of the prostate, a real cure for many men as they get older. Finasteride is also used to treat male pattern baldness. *BBC News, Sunday Telegraph*, 20 Sept 2015.

DIPHALLIA

A two-year-old boy in Uttar Pradesh, India, was born with three penises. Doctors described the extra organs as 'soft, bony' masses, and in doing an operation discovered he had no anus. The boy suffered from diphallia, an extremely rare condition that causes males to be born with more than one penis. There are only 100 cases in the medical literature since 1609. In a six-hour operation, doctors removed one penis and fused the two remaining into one that could be used normally. Dr Vishesh Dixit, a paediatric surgeon at Sion hospital in Mumbai, said: "The two functional penises were fused into one, by wrapping a mass of skin around them." Surgeons also performed a colostomy to



MARTIN ROSS



allow the boy to pass excrement properly. They said he should be able to father children as an adult. *Metro*, Sun, 26 Aug 2015.

TONGUE CHAMPION

Adrienne Lewis, 18, from Twin Lake, Michigan, has a tongue measuring 4in (10.2cm), which could be the longest in the world. She can lick her nose, chin, elbow, and even her eye, if she pushes her tongue up with a finger. A tongue this long, though, has its challenges. "I bite my tongue every single day," says Lewis in one of her videos – and often in the same place, over and over again. Ouch. She is hoping *Guinness World Records* will confirm she has beaten the current record holder, Nick Stoerberl, 24, whose tongue measures 3.9in (9.9cm). *D.Mail*, 9 May; *yahoo.com*, 9 July 2015.

HORNED WOMAN

Liang Xiuzhen, 87, has grown a 5in (13cm) hard mass resembling a horn from her head. The elderly Chinese woman is a resident of Guiyan village in Ziyang City, Sichuan province. According to Wang Chaojun, Xiuzhen's son, his mother had something resembling a 'black mole' growing on her head seven or eight years ago. "My mother complained that it itched all the time," he said. "We found ways to cure her itch using traditional Chinese medicine, and then let it be."

Two years ago, the mole gave way to a small horn-like mass the size of a little finger. Xiuzhen accidentally "broke" the small horn in February 2015, and in its place her current horn began growing rapidly over the past six months. Chaojun said: "Now the horn hurts my mother and prevents her from sleeping. It also bleeds from time to time." Her neighbours began calling her "the unicorn woman".

Doctors diagnosed the growth as *cornu cutaneum* (cutaneous horn), a keratinous skin tumour that has the appearance of a horn. Often small and benign, the growth can in some cases be much larger and malignant. Chaojun said doctors believe they can remove the growth through surgery, but the family has its reservations due to Xiuzhen's old age – and are considering other, unspecified, options. For other human horns, see **FT177:50-54, 225:12, 254:14, 268:12**. *mirror.co.uk*, 27 Aug 2015.

WORSE THAN EARWAX

Complaining of a painful and itchy right ear, 19-year-old Mr Li from the city of Dongguan in China's southern Guangdong province went to Chang'an Xiaobian Hospital, where Dr Yang Jing saw "an insect-shaped object" blocking his ear canal completely. This turned out to be female cockroach 0.3in (8mm) long. Dr Yang then found 25 baby roaches inside the ear canal, which he assumed

had grown from eggs laid inside the ear several weeks earlier. A female roach can carry a capsule contain around 40 eggs, with the development into adults from egg taking around three to four months. The doctor told Mr Li that if he had come to the hospital any later his ear "would have been destroyed". *independent.co.uk*, 28 Aug 2015.

NEEDLE IN BRAIN

For the past 46 years, Liu Kao, 48, of Huaipei, in eastern China's Anhui province, experienced painful headaches and thought the problem was with her heart, but tests revealed nothing wrong. It was only when she began suffering more headaches and numbness in half of her body that she was checked into hospital, where a CT scan of her brain found a 1.8in (4.6cm) needle standing straight up in the left hemisphere. The pain was "like being pricked with a needle," Liu often told her daughter. Liu will undergo a craniotomy to remove the needle.

"Mother has no recollection of the needle being inserted in her head," said her daughter Xiaozhang, "but doctors said it must have happened before she was 18 months old, when her skull was still soft and flexible as a child." Some kind of fiendish anti-acupuncture? *Fox5ny.com*, 8 Sept 2015.

SIDELINES...

EASTER SPREE

At 2.30pm on Easter Sunday (5 April), Przemyslaw Kaluzny, 41, crashed a car in a Dundee retail park and ran into a crowded Toys R Us store with a cricket bat. He launched an incomprehensible tirade, lashed out with the bat, took off his clothes, and ran naked through the shop before being pinned down by about 20 shoppers. He faced various charges. *Scotsman*, 7 April; *Dundee Courier*, 8 July 2015.

JUST KIDDING

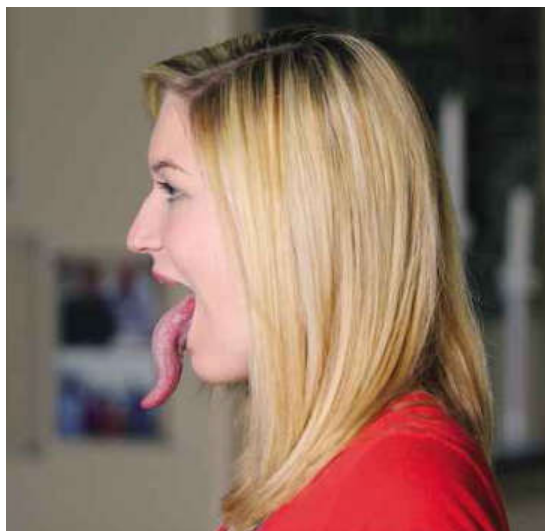
On 4 March, someone rang the police to say they had heard a child screaming for help in Cheddar Gorge, Somerset. A police helicopter was scrambled from Filton near Bristol, 20 miles (32km) away, but concluded it was just a goat and her kid. Then on 9 April, a dozen members of Ogwen Valley rescue team raced up Devil's Kitchen in Snowdonia after a hiker was reported "shouting for help"; it was goats again. *Guardian*, 6 Mar; *Sunday People*, 12 April 2015.

BURIED EIGHT DAYS

A woman picking herbs near a cemetery in China's Guangxi region heard an infant's cries coming from underground. She alerted the police, who dug up a muddied cardboard box containing a wailing newborn boy with a cleft lip. The parents had abandoned the baby on April 24. Two days later, and believing him dead, relatives returned and buried the child. He was buried for eight days, surviving because rainwater and oxygen seeped into his box. *D.Telegraph*, 14 May 2015.

COME AND GET ME

A would-be assassin was arrested after advertising his services on Facebook. Jonathan Giraldo used the alias 'Tony Garcia' and the nickname 'Anthrax' in an effort to evade police – but posted videos of himself with weapons and piles of cash. He was busted at his flat in Lima, Peru, while updating his profile. *Metro*, 24 Feb 2015.



BRIDGETTE PACHOLKA / BARCROFT USA



GEN / EUROPICS

ABOVE LEFT: Adrienne Lewis's troublesome tongue. ABOVE RIGHT: Liang Xiuzhen, 87, and the horn that disturbs her sleep.

SIDELINES...

SEA LION SAVIOUR

In 2000, Kevin Hines, a depressed teenager, jumped off the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco, but was saved from drowning by a sea lion that repeatedly bumped him to the surface until a rescue boat arrived. Less than one per cent have survived the jump. Spectators from the bridge saw the creature circling beneath him. Hines, now 33, devotes his life to suicide prevention. *[AFP] 5 Mar 2015.*

FATE'S FICKLE FINGER

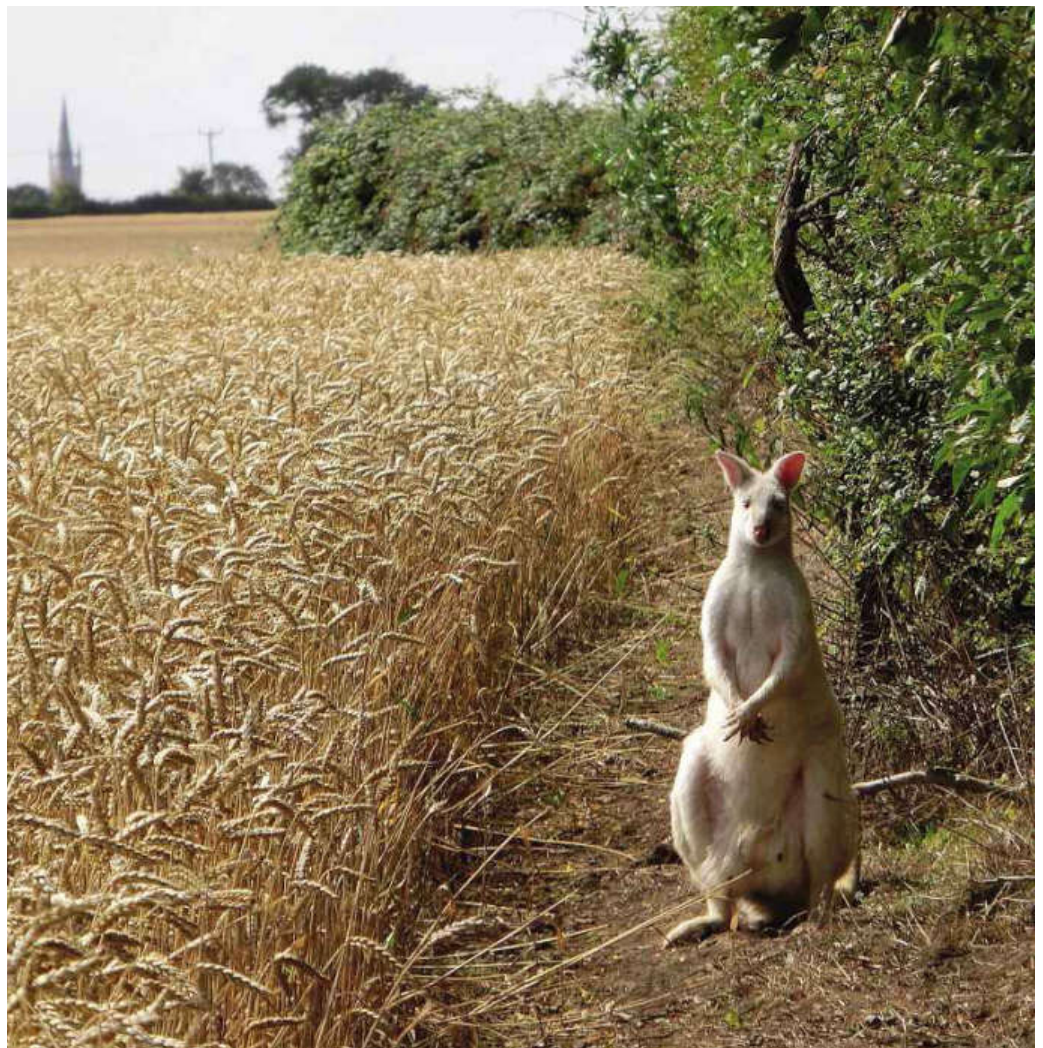
Daniel Askew and Jessica Croker were both born in Rush Green Hospital in Romford, Essex, on 1 May 1988. They shared a visitor after their birth who knew both families. The pair fell for each other at Haverling Sixth Form College without realising their connection, which they only discovered a year later after viewing an old video. They were due to marry on 10 September, after being together for 10 years. *Romford Recorder, 15 May, D.Express, 16 May 2015.*

SOUTH PAWS

Scientists have determined that wild kangaroos are left-handed – or, more accurately, left-pawed – for grooming, feeding and all observed types of behaviour. The report, published in *Current Biology*, provides the first demonstration of population-level ‘handedness’ in a species other than humans. It was found in eastern grey kangaroos, red kangaroos, and red-necked wallabies. *[R] BBC News, 18 June 2015.*

FAILED MAGIC

A Nigerian man was sentenced to 14 years’ jail for collecting large sums from cocaine traffickers looking to get his supernatural protection from the authorities. Christopher Omigie, a naturalised US citizen living in Lafayette, Louisiana, provided traffickers with card readings, massages with magic ointments, razor-blade cuttings and various magic powders, belts, coconuts and rocks. They failed to work. *Times Colonist (Victoria BC), 2 May 2015.*



NEWSTEAM / SWINS GROUP

White wallaby on the loose

Horse trainer Caroline Phillips, 41, was riding with a friend in Salcey Forest, near Roade in Northamptonshire, on 31 July when she saw a “white thing” at the bottom of her 16-acre field. She thought it was a piece of plastic stuck on the hedge, but as she got closer she realised it was an albino wallaby. Ms Phillips, originally from Australia, made a 51-second video of the unusual animal at a distance of 20ft (6m), and watched it for at least half an hour.

Then on 17 August, Ronald Newbould, 72, and his wife Linda, 69, were out for a walk near the village of Hanslope, Buckinghamshire, four miles (6.4km) from Roade, when they spotted a white wallaby between a field of corn and a boundary hedge about 45ft (14m) away. They watched it for almost 10 minutes, and Mr Newbould managed to take a good photograph of the marvellous marsupial, posing unfazed with crossed paws. It was almost certainly the same beast filmed earlier by Ms Phillips.

On 17 September farmer Nathan Chambers, 24, found an albino wallaby dead in a cornfield in Piddington, Northamptonshire, around 40 miles (64km) from Hanslope. It had severe throat injuries, and dark-coloured fur scattered nearby suggested that a dog was to blame. Michael Wells, who records sightings for the Mammal Society, said the only other albino wallaby spotted in the UK was at Stoke Mandeville Station, Buckinghamshire, in December 2004. Could it possibly have been the same one?

Wallabies are closely related to kangaroos and range in height from 12in (30cm) to 71in (180cm). There are colonies living in rural areas of Britain, including the Lake District, parts of the Peak District, and Loch Lomond in Scotland. Up to 120 can be found on the Isle of Man after a pair escaped from a nearby wildlife park in the 1970s. Experts say the latest sighting appeared to be a Bennett’s wallaby, which might have escaped from a private collection or zoo (or teleported 9,400 miles from Down Under). Bennett’s wallabies’ native habitat is Tasmania and the south-eastern coastal strip of Australia. *telegraph.co.uk, 3 Aug; Times, 19 Aug; D.Mail, 19 Aug, 19 Sept 2015.*

ESCAPE FROM IT ALL IN A BELL TENT



www.belltent.co.uk/fortean_times

ANTS AND ELECTROSENSE

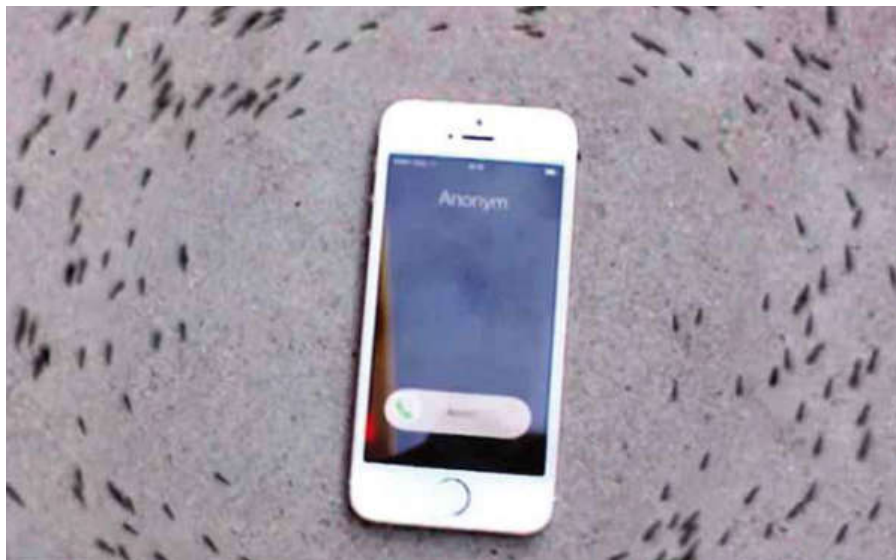
Even though a recent viral video of fire ants circling an iPhone is most likely a fake, many creatures – ants included – respond to magnetic fields. **DAVID HAMBLING** investigates.

A new viral video, 'Ants circling my phone', shows fire ants marching around an iPhone as it rings. This is not a marketing campaign by Apple, but supposedly a demonstration of a weird phenomenon. "I don't know the reason why the ants are controlled by the smartphone. I also don't know if a smartphone is able to cause injury because of electromagnetic radiation," says the video poster. Are the ants affected by the phone, or is something else going on?

A few decades ago, the suggestion that insects could respond to magnetic fields would have been wild speculation. Although migrations of many types of animal, including insects, had been studied for centuries, there was no indication of how they were navigating. Now researchers have shown that not just birds, but creatures as diverse as turtles, trout, wood mice and insects including cockroaches, fruit flies and indeed ants have a magnetic sense.

Birds have a compass in their eyes. They have receptors that are affected by changing magnetic field, so a bird may see direction in terms of getting lighter or darker. Trout, by contrast, have a nose for direction: cells in their nasal passages contain particles of magnetite, and changing direction causes these to move and stimulate the cells they are attached to. Given the location, trout may perceive north as a particular smell.

Further, this electric sense may be affected by external factors. In 2009 a team at Masaryk University in the Czech Republic published a paper with the descriptive title "Radio frequency magnetic fields disrupt magnetoreception in American



cockroach," describing how the insects lost the ability to orient themselves when exposed to a field of a particular frequency.

US Patent 7712247 B2, "Use of electromagnetic fields to affect insect movement", aims to harness the effect for a cockroach trap, using an electromagnetic field to draw in the insect to where it can be poisoned or electrocuted.

The electric sense was first identified in sharks, provided by a series of jelly-filled pores known as ampullæ of Lorenzini, which are believed to sense the electrical activity of muscles through the water over short distances. When prey is thrashing about, completely obscured by a cloud of blood, the ampullæ allow sharks to bite with deadly accuracy. This electrosense was only discovered in the 1960s. More recently researchers have found that insects have their own electrosense.

Bees build up a static charge in flight, which helps pollen stick to them. When a bee lands on a flower, some of the charge is transferred. The charge on the flower remains for some time, only leaking away slowly. In 2013 Daniel Robert of the University of Bristol showed that bees preferred to visit flowers with no charge, suggesting that they could sense the difference and went for blooms that had not

been visited recently by another bee.

Fire ants – the type shown in the iPhone video – have a reputation when it comes to electrical equipment. They often choose electric junction boxes and transformer equipment as nesting sites, as well as traffic lights, electric pumps, air conditioners and similar equipment. Some have suggested that the ants are attracted by the electricity, but a warm, dry space which is enclosed and protected from the elements and from predators is inherently appealing.

The problem comes when an ant chews through insulation or otherwise causes a short circuit, getting shocked in the process. When this happens, the dying ant releases a distress pheromone, a chemical signal to other ants. More ants arrive, are shocked on contacts with the first ant, and release more pheromone. The end result can be a ball of thousands of dead ants extending into contact with other parts of the electrical circuit, causing a major meltdown.

Another species of ant, *Nylanderia fulva*, known as the crazy ant, has recently started colonising Texas. It is causing a much higher rate of electrical problems and again, some suggest this is down to an innate attraction to electricity. However, it is known as a crazy ant because

of its rapid and seemingly random foraging pattern, which is more likely to bring it into contact with electrical components in the first place.

Given that ants do have a magnetic sense for navigation, and this sense may be disrupted by electromagnetic radiation – such as the radiation from a smartphone – and that fire ants are especially interested in electricity, the video appears to make sense. On the other hand, we should not give too much credence to random videos posted on YouTube, especially when they are linked to scaremongering about mobile phone radiation.

There are a whole series of bogus YouTube videos showing eggs apparently cooked by

phone radiation. As the Mobile Manufacturers Forum points out, a phone's radiated power of a quarter of a watt is much too feeble for such microwave cookery.

Similarly, the ant video appears to be a hoax, though it shows a genuine unusual phenomenon. The ant mill or death spiral is a curiosity of ant behaviour, caused by the way they tend to follow the pheromone trails left by other ants. The more a trail is used, the stronger it becomes, and the more strongly ants are impelled to follow it. This helps ensure that more ants are drawn to a trail that leads to a food source and is generally very efficient for foraging. However, if the trail loops round in a circle, ants can become trapped, constantly reinforcing their own trail so they are unable to leave it. Some ants can die of exhaustion when trapped this way.

This, then, is the likely explanation for the video. Someone saw ants circling around in a mill, with a space in the middle. They put their phone in the space and filmed the results. The ants are certainly circling, but it is doubtful whether the phone has anything to do with the behaviour.

The only way to be sure, of course, would be a little experimentation. Which is exactly how real science works.



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Contacts

British Union of Spiritist Societies
UK Charity No. 1136512
Room 2, 2nd floor, Oxford House
Derbyshire Street, Bethnal Green,
London-UK, E2 6HGUK

Phone: +44 (0)2034870508
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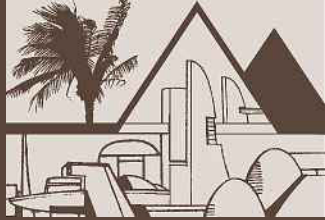


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ARCHAEOLOGY

PAUL SIEVEKING presents our round-up of archaeological discoveries, including a giant megalithic ritual site that may overturn our previous assumptions about Stonehenge and the Neolithic world...

SUPERHENGE UNEARTHED

The big news in British archaeology is the discovery of a huge ritual monument less than two miles from Stonehenge, dwarfing the world famous megalithic circle, and probably predating it. Durrington Walls, a roundish landscape feature, had long puzzled archaeologists because the south-eastern side is straight while the rest of the structure is curved – suggesting to one historian in 1810 that it had been “much mutilated” by agriculture. Ground-penetrating radar has now revealed that the straight edge is actually aligned over a row of up to 90 standing stones – about 30 still intact – that once stood 15ft (4.6m) high, and formed one side of a C-shaped arena, aligned like Stonehenge with the setting Sun on the Winter Solstice, and hidden for millennia. It is thought the stones were pushed over and a bank built on top, but both their significance and burial are currently a mystery – nothing else like it exists in the known Neolithic world.

Durrington Walls, near Amesbury in Wiltshire, the largest known henge monument in Britain and possibly in all Europe, was built at least 4,500 years ago and measures about 1,640ft (500m)



ABOVE: A computer recreation of the row of standing stones at Durrington Walls.

in diameter. It is surrounded by a ditch up to 54ft (16m) wide and a bank over 3ft (90cm) high. “This is archaeology on steroids,” said Vince Gaffney of Bradford University, who leads the Stonehenge Hidden Landscapes project. It was once suggested that the builders of Stonehenge lived at Durrington. Woodhenge nearby was thought to represent the land of the living, and Stonehenge the realm of

the dead. However, the new discovery suggests that Durrington Walls had an earlier and less domestic history. In fact, all our assumptions about Wiltshire’s megalithic complex will need revising. Last year, researchers found the remains of 17 new chapels and hundreds of other archaeological features scattered across the 4.6 square mile (12km²) ritual landscape of Salisbury Plain. *D.Telegraph, Guardian, 7*

ELONGATED SKULL FOUND IN RUSSIA

The remains of a woman with a strangely elongated skull have been unearthed at a Russian archaeological site called Arkaim, near the city of Chelyabinsk and known as Russia’s answer to Stonehenge. While the skeleton appears to be only about 1,800 years old, the site dates back about 4,000 years. In those days, it was a settlement of the Sintashta-Petrovka culture and covered an area of about

20,000m² (about 215,000ft²). Discovered in 1987, it allegedly comprises a primitive astronomical observatory and a village fortified by two large stone circular walls, with a central community square. In its heyday, it was home to around 1,500 to 2,500 people. When pictures of the egg-shaped skull emerged, some of the less restrained ufologists announced it was proof that aliens had once visited Earth; but archaeologists said the skull was elongated because the culture

of that time involved binding the head to make it grow out of shape, a phenomenon also found in Africa and Australia – and in a 1,000-year-old cemetery in Mexico [FT305:20]. The Huns also did it, and it was taken up by various Germanic tribes that came under Hunnish rule. Researcher Maria Makurova said: “I would not exclude the possibility that the skeleton belongs to a woman from the Sarmati tribe that lived in the territories of what is now modern day Ukraine, Kazakhstan and southern Russia. Her skull was elongated because the tribe did so by tying up the heads of their children with rope. It was clearly a tradition in the tribe.” The ufologists, however, didn’t concede the argument; they suggested the tribe was doing this as a way of mimicking the elongated skulls of the alien visitors to the area. *express.co.uk, 27 July; Yahoo News, softpedia.com, 29 July 2015.*



ABOVE: The elongated ‘alien’ skull unearthed at the Russian archaeological site of Arkaim.

MUTTON DRESSED AS LAMB

All that glistened was not gold in Anglo-Saxon Mercia. Research on the seventh century Staffordshire hoard, the largest cache of precious metal from the period ever found, has revealed a secret technique that gave 12-18 karat gold the appearance of 21-23 karat gold of a rich deep yellow. The technique was not written down in Anglo-Saxon times, and has never previously been

CLASSICAL CORNER



FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

192: DON'T READ MY LIPS



detected in metalwork from the period, but a similar technique was known from Roman accounts. It involved taking gold that was alloyed with up to 25 per cent silver, and heating it in a weak acid solution, probably ferric chloride, so that at the surface the silver and other impurities leached out and could be burnished off. The ferric chloride was probably made by heating up a mixture of water, salt and iron-rich clay – or dust from crushed-up old Roman tiles.

“They knew what they were doing,” said Eleanor Blakelock, the archaeometallurgist who discovered their secret. “This wasn’t something that could possibly have happened by accident.” She found the technique was sometimes used aesthetically to change the colour of the surface and create contrasting decoration. However, she and the experts at Birmingham Museum, where some of the hoard is displayed, believe it must usually have been done to disguise lower quality gold. The Staffordshire hoard was found in a field near the village of Hammerwich, near Lichfield in 2009 (with more finds in 2010 and 2012). It comprises more than 3,500 items, 839 of which are gold. Nearly all are martial in character, largely for use by elite warriors. By contrast, artefacts made for Anglo-Saxon *royalty*, rather than for mere nobility, were made of high karat material, with no need of ‘surface enrichment’. These include the Sutton Hoo artefacts and six items from the Staffordshire hoard. *Guardian, Independent, 17 Oct 2014.*



CHRISTOPHER FURLONG / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: An intricately decorated gold artefact from the Staffordshire Hoard.

First, ancient history of a different sort. One of the BBC comedies I grew up with was ‘Educating Archie’ (1950-58). Apart from the blazer-clad wooden hero, it was a forcing-ground for such future luminaries as Julie Andrews (no relation to Archie, but differently wooden), Max Bygraves, Bernard Bresslaw, Dick Emery, Bruce Forsyth, Benny Hill, Beryl Reid, Harry Secombe, and the Lad himself – Tony Hancock.

Archie’s manipulator was Peter Brough, a notoriously bad lip-mover. So, too, was his American predecessor Edgar Bergen (creator of Charlie McCarthy, Effie Klinker, and Mortimer Snerd). To conceal their labial inadequacies, both Bergen and Brough took refuge in the airwaves. Ventriloquists on the wireless – you couldn’t make it up...

‘Ventriloquist’ derives from the Latin words for ‘stomach’ and ‘speaking’, but there’s no such actual noun or verb in Roman literature. Our other term, ‘Gastromuth’, comes from Greek ‘engastrimuthein’ (‘To speak from the stomach’).

The earliest adepts were not stage performers but religious ones, their bombinations being thought to be those of the un-dead resident within their bellies. A cognate feature was their supposed ability to predict the future. Much scope, then, for fame and fortune as oracle-mongers and conductors of séances.

Many objurgations are aimed against them in the Old Testament: Leviticus 19. 31, 20. 6 & 27; Deuteronomy 12. 11; 1 Samuel 28. 3-8 (the Witch of Endor, whence Endora in the old American sit-com *Bewitched*). ‘Belly-speaking’ of one kind or another is also mentioned by Confucius; cf. Roger Ames, *Confucian Role Ethics: A Vocabulary* (Hong Kong, Chinese University Press, 2011), with concomitant online reviews and symposia.

Wikipedia and company trace Greek and Roman ventriloquism from the Pythian priestess of Apollo at Delphi. She seems (the sources are discrepant) not to have been a

gastromuth as such. However, the girl diviner whom Paul and Silas ‘cured’ (Acts 16. 16-18), to the fury of her owners who’d been making huge profits from their tame prophet, is described in the Greek as “having a Python spirit”.

Plutarch (‘Decline of Oracles’, ch9 = *Moralia*, ch2 para414e) says: “Those who used to be called ‘Eurycleis’ are now known as Pythones.” Eurycles was the first famous Greek gastromancer. Along with the puppeteer Potheinus (perhaps throwing his voice into a dummy), he was honoured with a statue in the Athenian theatre (Athenæus, *Learned Men at Dinner*, bk1 ch1paraE). His fame is confirmed by the mockery of Aristophanes (*Wasps*, vv1016-20) and Plato (*Sophist*, para252C).

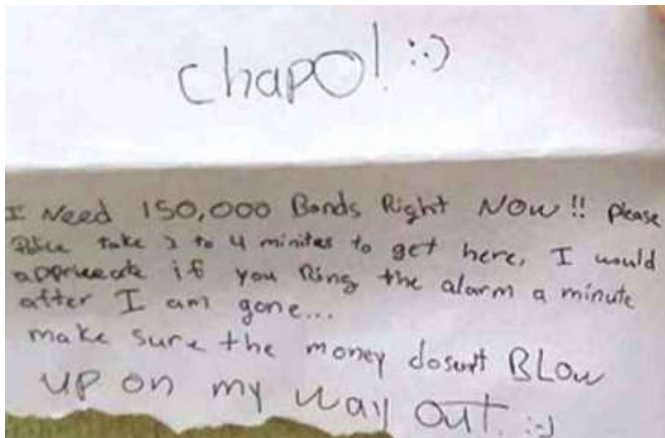
The geographer-historian Strabo mentions that some people thought the famous ‘Singing Statue’ of Memnon was actually a ventriloquial fraud by “some locals” (guides or priests out to make a quick drachma? (cf. my article in *Prudentia* 15 (1983), 53-7). Not hard to imagine similar tricksters being responsible for (e.g.) the statue that talked to Camillus or the one that laughed at Caligula (see their Lives, respectively Plutarch, ch6 para2, and Suetonius, ch57 para2); cf FT145:18, also F Poulsen, ‘Talking, Weeping and Bleeding Statues,’ *Acta Archaeologica* 116 (1945), 178-95.

The most elaborate hoaxes were the ‘autophones’ of Alexander of Abonoteichus (see Steve Moore’s excellent account, FT276:46), connected (so Lucian’s biography, ch26, says) to a faked head of Asclepius by a tube made of cranes’ windpipes running to an accomplice in the next room who uttered the prophecies, a common trick in later antiquity (Hippolytus, *Refutation of All the Heresies*, ch28), revived by Thomas Irson’s similar duping of Charles II (A Harmon’s Loeb *Lucian*, vol4 p211 n2), all prefiguring *The Wizard of Oz*.

“Toto, I’ve a feeling we’re not in Kansas anymore.” – You Know Who...

CRIME CROPPERS

A FURTHER FINE SELECTION OF FRUITLESS FELONIES, RIDICULOUS ROBBERIES AND HOPELESS HOLD-UPS FROM AROUND THE WORLD



ABOVE: Dominyk Antonio Alfonseca posted his hold-up note and wads of stolen cash on Instagram. BELOW: The unknown would-be robber foiled by the language barrier.

In a wonderful news report redolent of Dada and conceptual art, a man tried to rob a bank in Warsaw by holding up a drawing of a gun. The unnamed 33-year-old Briton entered the bank on the central Jerozilimskie Avenue at 9am on 11 August and showed a female cashier the drawing. He then brandished a second sheet of paper, on which he had written in broken Polish: “This is a robbery I have a gun give me all the money.” The woman told him to wait at the back of the queue, and he duly obliged. In the meantime, she called the police and the slow-witted chap was arrested shortly after. Polish police provided few details, saying merely that he had lived in Germany for a year and had only been in Poland for a few hours before trying to rob the bank. He pleaded guilty and was jailed for three years. *D.Telegraph, 15 Aug; Metro, 17 Aug 2015.*

- On 1 September, a woman walked into a bank in San Antonio, Texas, asked for a teller who spoke Spanish, and then handed over a deposit slip with the words “dame dinero” (Spanish for “give me money”) written on it. The Wells Fargo teller thought it said “Damien” and started looking up accounts under that name. When the teller asked the suspect to confirm the name, she apparently got tired of waiting for cash, took the



A man tried to hold up a bank with a drawing of a gun

slip back, and left. The police released surveillance photos in a bid to find the suspect, and offered a \$5,000 reward. *newser.com, 2 Sept 2015.*

- One early morning in March, a 25-year-old man mugged a woman in a Sunderland street and stole her bag. Later that day, realising he dropped his mobile

phone sometime during the robbery, he placed a call to police to inquire whether it had been turned in. Unsurprisingly, this quickly led to his apprehension. During his trial at Newcastle Crown Court on 8 May, where he was sent down for two years and four months, he was described as “stupid”, “incompetent” and “unsophisticated”. *[AP] 11 May 2015.*

- A mugger in Sweden demanded his victim transfer money to his account using a popular smart phone app. The app enables money transfers to be done using mobile phone numbers, giving the police all the information they needed to catch the culprit, who now faces six years inside. *D.Telegraph (Sydney), 1 Aug 2015.*

- A bank robber in Virginia Beach posted his hold-up note on the Internet. Dominyk Antonio Alfonseca, 23, uploaded to Instagram a picture of the note demanding cash that he handed to a teller. The note concluded: “I would appreciate if you Ring the alarm a minute after I am gone...Make sure the money doesn't blow up on my way out :)” Alfonseca was arrested soon afterwards, with a bag full of cash. He told a TV station he believed he was innocent, because asking for money politely was not a crime. “If it was a robbery, I don't think I would

videotape it, post the picture of the letter and do that all to come to jail,” he said. *Bless! Times, 8 May 2015.*

- A burglar was caught after he took a selfie on the iPad he had just stolen and sent it to the owner's mobile phone by mistake. Yanzi Ying, 27, was stunned to see the photo flash up on her phone soon after the iPad and cash were taken from her home in Zhangpu county, south-eastern China. She posted the picture on social media, and the thief, Wu Cai, 35, was soon arrested after a tip-off. *Metro, 1 May 2015.*

- A similar farce played out in Leyton, east London, on 5 August. The mugger accidentally sent a selfie to his female victim as he tried to unlock the smartphone he had stolen from her. The victim told police she had downloaded an app that takes a photo of the user when the pin code is entered incorrectly – and sends the image to the owner's email. The mugshot was published in the press and FT presumes the suspect has been identified by now. *D.Telegraph, 18 Aug 2015.*

- A robber was arrested when he returned to his victim in Miami, Florida, to complain that a gold necklace he stole was a fake. *Sun, 11 May 2015.*

A^z ALIEN ZOO

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



AMERICAN BLACK PANTHER ARTWORK

In previous Alien Zoo reports and *FT* feature-length articles, I've documented several fascinating examples of apparent cryptids depicted by famous artists. Here's another such example, one that may not have attracted any cryptozoological publicity before. I am grateful to American correspondent David McAvoy for bringing to my attention a remarkable painting on display at the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art in Tennessee. Entitled 'Story Told By My Mother', it was produced in 1955 by highly acclaimed Arkansas-born artist Carroll Cloar (1913-1993), and depicts a snow scene in which a woman is stepping briskly away from a very large black panther-like cat standing at the edge of some trees. David informed me that it was inspired by tales that Cloar had heard from his mother concerning black panthers that had once roamed Arkansas.

Moreover, David himself hails from Arkansas, and he mentioned that he has heard such stories for as long as he can remember. Indeed, mysterious, unidentified big cats of black panther-like appearance (i.e. resembling melanistic leopards) have been reported all over North America for centuries. Leopards of course are not native to the New World, so if such beasts are indeed roaming the wilds here, they can only be escapee or released individuals from captivity. However, their eyewitnesses often claim that these cats are not black leopards anyway, but are instead black pumas. Yet no such cat form has ever been scientifically confirmed from North America, only two such specimens have

been procured in tropical Latin America, and no captive individuals are currently known to exist anywhere. (I have documented elsewhere one possible example exhibited at London Zoo during the 19th century.)

In short, even if they do occur, black pumas are exceptionally rare as far as physical evidence for their reality is concerned. Countless normal-coloured (tawny or grey) pumas have been shot in North America, and there are numerous reports of black panther-like cats on file from this continent, so whatever this cat form is it does not appear to be especially rare; so why have no specimens been found if it is indeed a melanistic version (morph) of the puma? This apparent paradox remains a major riddle for American cryptozoology – but at least we do now have an additional and most interesting, unexpected piece of evidence supporting the existence of black panther-like cats in North America, regardless of their identity. *David McAvoy, pers. comm., 9 Aug 2015.*

WHERE TO GO FOR WEREWOLVES

A three-day conference devoted to werewolves and the fascinating, albeit highly controversial, subject of lycanthropy took place on 3-5 September 2015 at the University of Hertfordshire in Hatfield. Entitled 'The Company of Wolves', its eclectic offerings included workshops, walks with real wolves, picnics alongside the Berkhamsted grave of Peter the Wild Boy from the 18th century [FT161:36], a keynote speaker, and an international array of papers featuring such memorable titles as 'I'm Hairy on the Inside', 'Rabid Bitches and Fanged Whores',

and 'Barebacking Werewolves in Rural America'. Interest in the UK'S only werewolf conference was considerable. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-beds-bucks-herts-33971546> 22 Aug 2015.

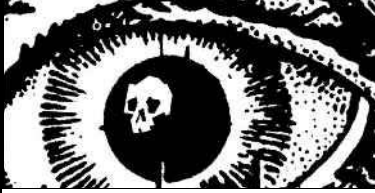
TEARING APART A PTEROSAUR

For decades, cryptozoologists, creationists and iconography researchers have been discussing the likely identity of the tantalisingly pterosaur-like creature, bright red in colour, depicted in ancient artwork decorating Black Dragon Canyon in Utah. True, there is indeed a resemblance to a pterodactyl with outstretched wings and

even a possible crest on its head like some latter-day *Pteranodon*, which had led some cryptozoologists to suggest that it offered proof of modern-day pterosaur survival in North America.

However, new research has effectively torn apart this visual testimony. Dating back to the agrarian Fremont culture (c. AD 1-1100) but remaining undiscovered in modern times until 1928, this ambiguous artwork has been revealed by researchers co-led by freelance archaeologist Paul Bahn to be a composite pictograph, not a single one as previously assumed. In fact, the 'pterosaur' is actually a combination of no less than five separate pictographs, respectively depicting a sheep, a dog, a tall person with protruding eyes, a smaller person, and a snake-like entity.

In 1947, a certain John Simonson traced over what he believed to be the outline of the one, single pictograph with red chalk, yielding the pseudo-pterodactyl image, but this artefact was recently exposed by Bahn and company using a portable X-ray fluorescence device and a special program/tool called DStretch. This enables researchers to photograph a pictograph, upload it onto a computer, and then highlight its original pigments (even if invisible to the naked eye) while also distinguishing pigments that have been added later. So when DStretch removed the confusing effect caused by Simonson's red chalk, the true, five-piece artwork was duly revealed, with the pterodactyl of Black Dragon Canyon unceremoniously jettisoned into the dustbin of historical howlers. www.livescience.com/51886-winged-monster-rock-art-deciphered.html 18 Aug 2015.



GHOSTWATCH

ALAN MURDIE reports on how physical mediumship continues to cause controversy today

“The history of physical mediumship is the history of fraud!” declared Professor Peter Mulacz from Austria at the joint international conference of the Society for Psychical Research and the Parapsychology Association held at Greenwich over 16-19 July 2015.

His comment was part of a blazing controversy among psychical researchers still raging this autumn, ignited by the reports surrounding a German physical medium, Kai Mügge of Hanau. Mügge has gained an increasingly high profile in the last few years with claims that he is producing a wide range of séance manifestations including ectoplasm, floating lights and the materialisation of small objects during sittings of his ‘Felix Circle’ (so-called after the name of the first spirit to make contact). The judgment of Professor Mulacz is drawn from his extensive knowledge of the history of the topic and his own opinion after one sitting with Mügge at which he noticed a distinct lack of controls. The inability to control proceedings – especially in the dark – obviously risks the manifestations reported around Mügge being manufactured.

This is unfair, say defenders of Mügge who have been convinced by his mediumship, with the dispute spreading into the pages of the *Paranormal Review* published by the Society for Psychical Research. Both sides in the argument have been given the opportunity to ventilate their views by the editor Dr Leo Ruickbie who has interviewed Mügge at length and also attended one of his boisterous and noisy séances, concluding that for the moment the circle is best studied from a social science perspective, as a sociological rather than psychical phenomenon (See ‘The Séance’ by Leo Ruickbie in *Paranormal Review* summer 2015, issue 76).

The dispute centring upon the Felix Circle is a crystallisation of wider arguments that have repeated themselves in every generation since the beginning of modern spiritualism at Hydesville, New York State, in 1848. Initially, all spiritualist manifestations were of the physical variety, consisting predominantly of knocks, raps and table movements, progressing to flying objects, eerie glows and the materialisation of spirits. Effects were presented as objective manifestations by spirits, later claimed as being registerable on camera and measuring apparatus.

In his comment, Peter Mulacz was echoing the hard-line approach of original SPR pioneers of the 19th century whose philosophy could be summed up as “one strike and you’re out”, whereby mediums were dropped as subjects as soon as any fraud was detected, or if they refused to comply with stringent experimental controls. Offending mediums were almost invariably refused the benefit of



LEFT: ‘Ectoplasm’ emerges from the mouth of medium Marthe Beraud (aka Eva C) during a séance, circa 1910.

there were people for whom a “broom and a sheet are quite enough to make up a grandmother for some wild enthusiasts who go with the figure in their eye, and see what they wish to see... I have had pictures that might be anything in this or any other world sent to me, and gravely claimed as recognised portraits”. (*Human Nature*, May 1875). Difficulties with eyewitness testimony in emotionally charged proceedings remain with us, posing a problem for the historian, as with medium Helen Duncan tried in 1944 under the Witchcraft Act 1735 and convicted by an Old Bailey jury (see FT103:24, 107:13 and Malcolm Gaskill, *Hellish Nell*, 2001). Of course, eyewitnesses can be mistaken, duped or be victims of wishful thinking. But it is only because eyewitness testimony has been established as reliable and accurate

on other occasions that we can ever consider trusting it to begin with. Unfortunately, there may be profound difficulty with personal testimony, no matter how sincere or authoritative the witnesses.

An example is a remarkable story involving the psychical researchers Frederic Myers and Sir William Barrett, early in their careers. In the 1870s the artist William de Morgan held séances at his studio in Cheyne Row, Chelsea. One of the most fascinating was when a medium named Husk materialised the spirit of a pirate, John King. The séance was held in an almost bare room furnished with a small deal table about 3ft by 5ft (90cm x 1.5m), and a few chairs. Myers brought Husk to the studio by hansom cab, and the group comprising William de Morgan, his mother and sister, Myers and Barrett sat down with the medium at the table, the wrists of all present being loosely joined together by silk thread. Husk went into trance after the candle was extinguished by Barrett who recalled how “lights, very like fireflies, were seen darting about over our heads, the movement of some objects in the room was heard, and a deep guttural voice spoke to us.”

A violent convulsion of the medium occurred, and Barrett recalled that “right in front of me appeared a clothed human figure from the waist upwards: the lower part of the body might have been concealed by the table. The face was illuminated by a bluish light which seemed to issue from an object held in the hand of the materialized figure.”

Barrett stated: “The face was undoubtedly a living one, for I saw its eyes open and close and its lips move; I asked who it was and the guttural voice said, ‘John King.’” Barrett described the face as “a dark, bearded and rather unpleasant face, quite unlike that of the medium.” Barrett exclaimed, “Do you

any doubt – although eventually this policy was marginally relaxed with acceptance of unconscious fraud in altered states of consciousness, it being acknowledged that whilst in a trance a medium might behave suspiciously or fraudulently, rather like a sleepwalker.

Unfortunately, the number of mediums willing to be subjected to rigorous controls has declined enormously since 1945, coinciding with the wider availability of infra-red photography to penetrate the darkness of the typical séance.

Can all physical mediumship be attributed to the stunts perpetrated by quicksilver comen and women? History shows this is not an easy question to answer and it must be said at the outset that the least reliable place for information is Wikipedia and the Internet where information is all too often filtered, biased, partial, inaccurate and chronically limited in its treatment of sources. One must go to original sources.

Mediums themselves have warned against chicanery in the dark. The outstanding physical medium of the 19th century, Daniel Dunglas Home, warned against such deceptions in two chapters in his *Lights and Shadows of Spiritualism* (1877), condemning ‘dark séances, puppet shows, and third rate jugglery’ (p412). Home made a point of performing in good light and his reputation has largely survived, despite the efforts of generations of critics denouncing him. Although hated and despised, the fact remains Home was never detected in fraud, which even the most grudging sceptics have to admit, rather to their annoyance (e.g. Ruth Brandon *The Spiritualists*, 1983).

Another (and unjustly forgotten) physical medium was the Revd. Stainton Moses (1839-1892). But he warned regarding materialisations and psychic photography;

all see the figure? I am going to light the candle". The figure vanished the moment the match was struck, and the medium was found in deep trance, lying back in his chair and groaning. Barrett and Myers found it impossible to reproduce the appearance and agreed "it was extremely difficult to explain the phenomena by trickery on the part of the medium."

Barrett was one of the few SPR pioneers showing interest in physical mediumship and poltergeist phenomena. Unfortunately, many early SPR leaders disliked physical mediumship because it was seen as disreputable and vulgar, with Society founders Professor Henry Sidgwick and his formidable wife Eleonore wanting to distance the organisation from spiritualism. Thus, Barrett, who received a knighthood for his work as a physicist, did not publish his account of the Husk séance until 1924, having been discouraged by the reception to his reports on poltergeist cases. By this time Myers had been dead a quarter of a century and the delay in publicising his experience might cast doubt upon his recollections. Yet would we doubt Barrett if he had been recalling his laboratory experiments on the properties of flames? (William Barrett, 'Reminiscences of fifty years', *Proceedings of the SPR* 1924, v.34).

Assessment is even more complicated in the case of Eusapia Palladino (1854-1918), one of the most extensively tested mediums of the early 19th and 20th century. Eusapia thrived on attention, admitting faking phenomena herself during experiments, claiming she could not help it. Yet a wide range of observers were also convinced she could produce genuine effects such as knocking sounds, object movements and the materialisation of spirit hands. The Palladino case provides a difficult one for sceptics when the totality of the evidence is addressed, the evidential testimony being not only that of "hordes of hard-headed academics, but also that of the sceptical conjurers". (See Adrian Parker 'A Sceptical Evaluation of A Sceptic's Handbook of Parapsychology' in *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research* 1988 Vol. 55, No. 811).

Hereward Carrington (1880-1958), a prolific author and investigator who spent many years detecting fraudulent mediums, was convinced by Palladino, producing a book on her mediumship (*Eusapia Palladino*, 1909) following extensive testing in the Grand Victoria Hotel in Naples by SPR investigators the previous year. In 1910 Eusapia was caught cheating in the United States, marking the end of her career.

Her case still provoked passionate arguments 80 years later. An extensive discussion in the *SPR Journal* in 1991-94 saw Dr Richard Wiseman proposing that deceit was achieved by means of a hidden trapdoor through which

an accomplice popped up like the Demon King at a pantomime, yet unnoticed by any investigator. Notably, the limitations of this "undetected accomplice" theory are soon exposed as soon as one asks basic questions such as "How wide was the trapdoor?" "Was this accomplice male or female?", revealing the trapdoor and the mysterious accomplice theories as mere suppositions, unsupported by any actual evidence.

Regrettably, neither side in this argument was prepared to attempt the obvious (at least to me) forensic step of testing the hidden trapdoor theory by establishing if the building that formed the Grand Victoria hotel in Naples had survived (the city was bombed heavily in World War II), or finding out whether architectural plans or records existed which might shed light on the existence of any trapdoor. (See Richard Wiseman, 'The Fielding Report A Reconsideration', *JSPR* vol 58, 1991-1992 128-58; and *JSPR* vols 59 and 60 for discussion).

Some of the most impressive evidence of physical mediumship accumulated during 10 years of testing conducted between 1923-33 on two teenage mediums, Rudi and Willi Schneider from Braunau am Inn, Austria – infamous as the birthplace of Hitler. In the difficult times following World War I, the Schneider family had begun experimenting with séances as an evening entertainment, with their sons showing marked mediumistic abilities. Josef Schneider, their father, made a careful record of these from 1923, in addition to those made by others who attended. A Herr Kogelnik, a sceptic, was stunned by witnessing manifestations and called in Baron Schrenck-Notzing, then Germany's leading

psychical researcher. Schrenck-Notzing tested the boys after Rudi was content to have some level of illumination at séances where object movements and materialisations of hand-like apparitions were observed.

In 1929 Harry Price brought Rudi to England for a series of tests, inviting a wide range of people to some 26 experimental sessions, including the actors Stanley Holloway and Laurence Olivier, along with scientists and professional conjurers, many of whom testified to witnessing inexplicable manifestations. Though Price was condemned for having such an eclectic mix of people attend séances with Rudi, I find it significant that no one claimed to have detected any fraud, the sheer diversity of individuals ruling out a giant conspiracy. Price offered a £1,000 reward for anyone reproducing the Schneider phenomena under comparable conditions; there were no takers. Sceptics either ignored these invitations or if they attended were baffled by Rudi. Price rushed out a book *Rudi Schneider* (1933) and experiments continued in 1930-32 with Dr Osty in Paris involving infra-red beams. However, it appears that when Price felt he was being shut out of experiments by other researchers, he retaliated by releasing a photograph to the press suggesting that Rudi had freed his hand to fake phenomena at one session. The resulting publicity had the effect of discrediting the entire mediumship in the eyes of many. But by this stage Rudi was becoming a healthy, robust youngster, more interested in cars, football and his sweetheart Mitzi than further testing, so the séances soon ceased. Star psychic subjects getting fed up with endless testing rounds was repeated in the case of Matthew Manning and Uri Geller in the 1970s. (See *The Strange Case of Rudi Schneider*, 1985, by Anita Gregory and FT229:28-36).

Ultimately, the position that one takes on physical mediumship is likely to be determined by pre-existing beliefs. Even with sophisticated technology, debate on trickery by mediums is inevitably set to continue; indeed, a paper on the prosecution of fraudulent UK mediums was presented by Mark Norman at the Folklore Society's Conference 'Law and Crime in Legend and Tradition' over 5-6 September 2015 at the Town Hall at Huntingdon, Cambridgeshire. As an aside, whilst attending this event, I spoke with a caretaker of the building, who told me of his experience of seeing the unexplained apparition of a woman with blonde hair looking out from an upstairs window one winter's evening after he had checked and locked everything securely. Hearing his story, it occurred to me that whilst phenomena occurring within group settings in dark séance rooms remain contentious, the proper experience of seeing a ghost is more likely to come your way when you are alone, simply going about your ordinary, daily business.



ABOVE: Eusapia Palladino levitates a table in Milan in 1892.

FORTEAN FOLLOW-UPS

Parisian hypno-heist, jumping lice vs Japanese knotweed and more of those creepy clowns

DEVIL'S BREATH [FT60:32, 79:48]



In late August, two Chinese women, aged 42 and 59, were arrested at the entrance to a Metro station in Paris's 20th arrondissement, accused of stealing millions of euros from unsuspecting victims by blowing a powerful hypnotic drug – recently dubbed “devil’s breath” – into their faces. “The victims targeted, very often old, were accosted in the street by a first woman,” said a source close to the investigation. “This person claimed to be looking for a mysterious ‘Doctor Wang’ before being joined by her accomplice. They managed to isolate their victims, then got them to breathe in a mixture of plants on the grounds they had powerful curative qualities – even protecting them from misfortune... They then took advantage by getting the victims to take them to their home, where they asked them to put all their jewellery and money into a bag and hand it over to them.” One Parisian victim lost €100,000 (£73,500) worth of valuables and cash in this way.

The pair had reportedly been operating in Paris since the spring. In a subsequent raid on their hotel room in Seine-Saint-Denis, a north-eastern suburb, police discovered an array of vials including “various Chinese medicinal substances as well as weighing scales, filters and gloves”. Analysis of the hypnotic’s ingredients was under way at the time of the report. A third suspect, a 56-year-old European man who allegedly prepared the drug compounds, was later arrested. Chinese authorities informed their French counterparts that the trio belonged to a notorious Chinese Triad-style criminal network, which “acts around the world and specialises in



ABOVE: Scopolamine can be obtained from most species of datura.

mental submission with the aid of unknown products,” according to *Le Parisien*. Other members have reportedly been arrested in China and South Korea. The two women’s passports suggested that they had recently travelled to Madrid and Mexico.

The basic ingredient of ‘devil’s breath’ is said to be scopolamine. It can be obtained from henbane, datura (thorn apple) or a shrub of the belladonna family known across northern South America as *el borrachero* (“the intoxicator”). In the early 20th century, it was administered by some doctors as a pain-relief drug – or rather a drug that led to the forgetting of pain – in childbirth. It was noticed how women who had been given it answered questions with rare candour. Dr Robert House, a Texas obstetrician, was so astonished by this side effect that he managed in the 1920s to persuade the authorities to let him use the drug on two prisoners in Dallas County Jail. He found their protestations of innocence had not changed and, since they were (supposedly) unable to lie, they were acquitted. A local newspaper covering the case coined the term ‘truth serum’. The drug ceased to be used in court cases in the 1930s after subjects reported horrifying hallucinations and depression – but both the Soviet authorities and the CIA reportedly used it as a truth serum during the Cold War. Dr Crippen is believed to have

killed his wife Cora in 1910 using the drug before trying to flee to Canada.

Also known as hyoscine, scopolamine is used as a sedative in cases of mania and delirium, in the treatment of Parkinson’s disease, and in patches that prevent travel sickness. Larger doses can lead to disorientation, memory loss, hallucinations, great suggestibility and convulsion. In ancient Greece, the priests of Apollo used datura to achieve subliminal, prophetic states. Indian dacoits (bandits) would put datura leaves on campfires to knock out their victims or make them more co-operative. When Cristoval Acosta visited India in 1578, he learned that datura seeds were used by “mundane ladies” (prostitutes) to sedate and rob clients; a similar stratagem is used today by Bangkok’s sex workers [FT72:9].

Food secretly laced with scopolamine was said to have been fed to British soldiers during the 1676 Bacon’s Rebellion, when settlers in Virginia revolted against their Governor, Sir William Berkeley. The result was that they spent “several days making monkey faces and generally acting like lunatics”. One soldier was found “stark naked, sitting in a corner like a monkey, grimacing at his comrades.” They sobered up after 11 days (!), “not remembering anything that had passed”. In

ancient times, we are told, the drug was given to the mistresses of dead Colombian kings to make them enter their lovers’ graves to be buried alive.

Since the 1950s, Colombia has allegedly led the world in the criminal use of *burundanga*, a narcotic preparation including scopolamine, as an instant zombie powder. In the previous decade, Joseph Mengele, the notorious Nazi physician, had it imported from Colombia to use in interrogations. Early practitioners had to contend with an aggressive response the drug often provoked. Many victims died, not from toxic effects, but from the beating they were given to subdue them. Around 1982, rogue chemists added the barbiturate Ativan and came up with new, improved *burundanga* – although any sufficiently strong tranquilliser would have done. The highly soluble white powder with no taste or smell can be slipped into a drink or blown into the face of a chosen victim.

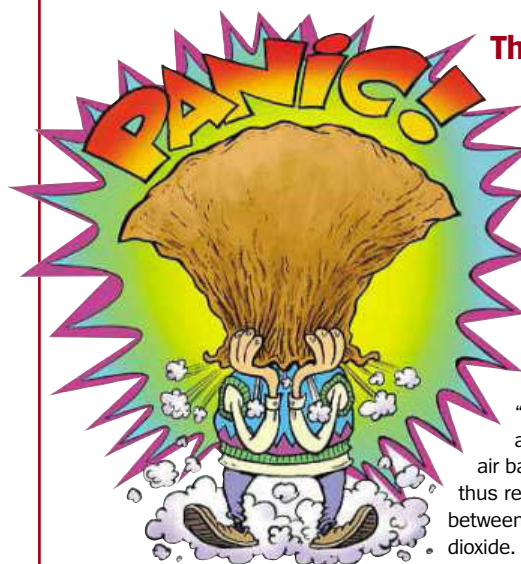
Dementia Black, a drug dealer (we do so hope that’s a real name), told the news website Vice News that the effects of blowing ‘devil’s breath’ into someone’s face are almost instant. “It works in a flash. You wait for a minute for it to kick in and then you know you own that person. You can guide them wherever you want. It’s like they’re a child.” Intoxication induces obedience and a condition similar to transient global amnesia. According to the US State Department, unofficial estimates put the number of annual scopolamine incidents in Colombia at approximately 50,000. “Scopolamine can render a victim unconscious for 24 hours or more,” its website warns. “In large doses, it can cause respiratory failure and death. It is most often administered in liquid or powder form in foods and beverages. The majority of these incidents occur in night clubs and bars, and usually men, perceived to be wealthy, are targeted by young, attractive women.”

Some experts remain deeply

93: THE MIRACULOUS BROWN BAG

The myth

When you're having a panic attack, you should breathe into a paper bag. This is because hyperventilating causes your levels of carbon dioxide to fall, so that when you practise "rebreathing" you are taking expelled air back into your lungs, thus rebalancing the mix between oxygen and carbon dioxide.



The "truth"

Although rebreathing is still prescribed by many doctors and nurses, first aid experts have long opposed it. Not only is it unlikely to do any good, they argue, it might make matters worse – and in some circumstances reducing oxygen and increasing CO² can actually be dangerous. There are cases on record of people mistaking the symptoms of asthma or heart attacks for hyperventilation, using the paper bag technique, and dying. Various studies have shown that rebreathing is no more effective against hyperventilation than ordinary breathing, while some have suggested a link between anxiety attacks and too much CO².

Sources

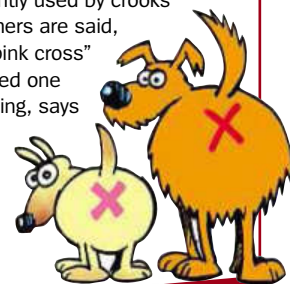
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Disclaimer

As always, this column makes no claim to medical expertise, and welcomes corrections and further discussion via the letters page.

Update

In **FT151:26** we discussed "burglar's signs" – those mythical chalk marks supposedly left outside houses by cooperatively-minded criminals to help their peers decide which properties are and aren't worth robbing. In an interesting twist to the usual story, a Neighbourhood Watch leaflet distributed in Nailsea, North Somerset, describes the secret code apparently used by crooks who specialise in stealing dogs. The pet-pinchers are said, for instance, to mark people's doors with a "pink cross" to signify that a small dog lives there, and a red one for big dogs. Numerous dogs have gone missing, says the leaflet, and anyone finding a crayon mark on their front door should call the police. The police response is hilariously weary: no dog thefts have been reported in the area, say the cops – and anyone finding such markings is advised to "wash them off". *Western Daily Press*, 3 Sept 2015.



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sceptical. If 'devil's breath' is so effective, why isn't its use ubiquitous? "You get these scare stories and they have no toxicology, so nobody knows what it is," said Val Curran, of University College London's Clinical Pharmacology Unit. "The idea that it is scopolamine is a bit far-fetched. The degree to which any of this stuff is true is unknown. There's a lot of myth." What's more, 'hypnoheists' can apparently occur without the use of any drug (see, for instance, **FT323:9**). *telegraph.co.uk*, 1 Sept; *D.Mail*, *Guardian*, 3 Sept 2015.

JAPANESE KNOTWEED [FT138:14, 314:22]



Japanese knotweed (*Fallopia japonica*) grows up to 4in (10cm) a day, with roots 15ft (4.5m) deep. Plucked from the sides of Japanese volcanoes, it was named the "most interesting new ornamental plant of the year" in 1847 by the Society of Agriculture in Utrecht. First recorded in the wild in Britain at Maesteg, South Wales, in 1886, it is today one of the country's most invasive and destructive plants. It pushes through concrete and road surfaces, chokes riverbanks, weakens flood defences and railway embankments, invades houses, blights development sites, and crowds out all other vegetation. Knotweed damage costs the UK economy around £166 million a year in weed control and property devaluation. Homeowners who ignore orders to control it can be fined up to £2,500.

The Government has now admitted defeat in the knotweed war, as eradication would be prohibitively expensive at £1.56 billion. For a while, hope was pinned on the introduction of the psyllid *Aphalara itadori* – small jumping lice that control knotweed in its native

Japanese habitat by sucking its sap – but environment minister George Eustace has admitted that the strategy had failed "because only small populations of the psyllid have survived in the wild." However, scientists are planning to release more of the jumping lice in area with above-average humidity in the hope that they will live long enough to start feeding on the weed. Perhaps the little critters can be bred to resist the vagaries of British weather. *Independent*, 20 Oct; *D.Telegraph*, 25 Oct 2014; *D.Mail*, 27 July; *Sunday Telegraph*, 26 July 2015.

MORE SINISTER CLOWNS [FT321:4, 322:16]



Last July, Julia Graham and her husband were driving through Chicago late at night when they saw a figure dressed as a clown with shiny trousers running towards the Ravenswood Avenue entrance of Rosehill Cemetery and scaling the 7ft (2m) gate, quite a feat for anyone, let alone someone in a clown suit. "I mean, this was somebody putting forth a lot of effort, and being really weird," said Mrs Graham. Her husband managed to film the strange figure on his cell phone, and the result was posted on YouTube. Such clown sightings have occurred at other cemeteries around the US, apparently. *chicago.cblocal.com*, 23 July; *Raycom News Network*, 24 July 2015.

At 4.30am on 7 August, a man wearing a clown mask and a multicoloured wig knocked on a woman's door in Hickory, North Carolina, and swung an axe at her. She was not hurt, and managed to remove his mask and recognised him as an acquaintance before he ran off. The next day she reported the incident to the police and requested the man's arrest. Victim and perpetrator were not named. No motive for the attack was given. *[AP]* 10 Aug 2015.



NECROLOG

This month we say goodbye to the world's shortest man, the biochemist who became the public face of vodou and the mild-mannered master of modern horror movies



CHANDA DANGI

Dangi, 21.5in (54.6cm) tall, was recognised by *Guinness World Records* as the shortest living man in 2012 – and also the shortest human adult in recorded history [FT286:6]. Since his Nepalese home village of Reemkholi (or Rhimkholi) was so remote, he had not gained notice until 2012. He beat the previous record set by Gul Mohammed from New Delhi, who was 22.5in (57.2cm) tall and died aged 40 in 1997. Dangi, who had a normal-sized head and weighed just 26lb (11.8kg), used his trips abroad to raise money for Reemkholi. Before winning the world record he made placemats and *namlos* (jute headstraps for carrying heavy loads). Three of his five brothers are less than 4ft (1.2m) tall, while his two sisters and two other brothers are of average height. Last November in London, Dangi met Sultan Kösen, a Turk reportedly the world's tallest living man (98.75in/251cm). *Chanda Bahadur Dangi, world's shortest human, born Reemkholi, Nepal 30 Nov 1939; died from pneumonia in American Samoa 3 Sept 2015, aged 75.*

MAX BEAUVOIR

Beauvoir was born in Haiti in 1936, the son of a doctor and grandson of a *houngan* (vodou/voodoo 'priest'). In 1958 he graduated from City College, New

York, with a degree in chemistry. In 1962 he took another degree, in biochemistry, at the Sorbonne, after which he became a research scientist in the US, synthesising metabolic steroids. He returned to Haiti in the early 1970s to conduct experiments on traditional herbal remedies, but shortly after his arrival he was summoned to the bedside of his dying grandfather. "Grandfather turned to me and said, 'You will carry on the tradition.' It was not the sort of thing you could refuse."

In 1974 Beauvoir founded Le Péristyle de Mariani, a *houngan* (vodou temple) in his home in Haiti, and established himself as the public face of the popular religion. One writer described the *houngan* as a "bizarre mix of an ancient temple, a touristy



cabaret, a sacred, secret voodoo ceremony and Rick's Café from Casablanca". Bill and Hillary Clinton visited Beauvoir's *houngan* on their honeymoon in 1975, where the saw a man walking on hot coals and a woman biting the head off a live chicken. Beauvoir insisted vodou has a genuine effect: "It does work, 100 per cent. It always works."

Vodou, originating in the 17th century, is centred on trances said to be induced by spirit possession and includes animal sacrifice, dancing, drum-beating and elements of Catholic liturgy. In this fusion, Christian saints became vodou spirits. The 400-strong vodou pantheon includes Kouzin Zaka (St Isidor) and Papa Lekba (St Lazarus). The Peruvian St Martin de Porres was syncretised as Baron Samedi, usually depicted as a corpse dressed in top hat, dinner-jacket and dark glasses; he is known for obscenity, debauchery, and a fondness for tobacco and rum infused with hot peppers. Beauvoir himself sometimes assumed the spirit of Papa Ogou (St James the Great), one Western witness of his performance describing how the spirit "through Beauvoir, downed a bottle of what the celebrants told me was the spirit's favourite scotch, Johnnie Walker. Then, his balance intact, Beauvoir resumed dancing."

Vodou *houngans* (and *mambos*, their female counterparts) are often the most influential people in Haitian communities, acting as healers, soothsayers, exorcists and counsellors – and in remoter places, even as mayors and notaries. Francois 'Papa Doc' Duvalier (President of Haiti 1957-71) relied on vodou to bolster support for his regime and recruited *houngans* for the Tontons Macoutes, his brutal secret police. Papa Doc's son, Jean-Claude 'Baby Doc' Duvalier, had a more strained relationship with vodou, though after he fled Haiti in 1986, mobs killed more than 100 *houngans* and a crowd even gathered outside Beauvoir's walled estate, demanding his death.

Intrigued by the tale of the resurrected man, Clairvius Narcisse [FT78:28-30], Wade Davis, a Harvard professor of ethnobotany, in 1982 visited Beauvoir, who introduced him to a *bokor* (sorcerer) called Marcel Pierre. Pierre gave Davis a *coup poudre* ('zombie powder') recipe with the power to resurrect the dead and turn them into 'mindless slaves', a condition reinforced with regular doses of *Datura stramonium*, which causes amnesia, delirium and suggestibility (see page 22). The most significant ingredient of the *coup poudre* came from a poisonous puffer fish whose liver and reproductive organs contain tetrodotoxin, a nerve toxin about 500 times stronger than cyanide. Convinced by the wonder powder's effectiveness, Davis wrote *The Serpent and the Rainbow* (1985), which Wes Craven (see below) turned into a movie in 1988, sparking a new interest in the traditional zombie in movies, myths and horror stories.

In the 1990s Beauvoir moved to Washington, where he set to work 'demystifying' vodou for Americans. In 2008, when Haiti's 6,000 *houngans* formed a national federation, Beauvoir was invited back to assume the newly created position of 'Ati' or supreme chief of the religion. After the terrible 2010 earthquake, he urged his network of *houngans* to help with the recovery effort; but in December that year he appealed to the authorities to intervene to stop the lynchings of vodou priests, whose scattering powder and spell-casting were blamed for causing a cholera outbreak. He believed that vodou was a solution to Haiti's problems and he called for the country's *houngans* to be given a formal role in government. *Max Gesner Beauvoir, biochemist and vodou 'pope', born Haiti, 25 Aug 1936; died Port-au-Prince, Haiti 12 Sept 2015, aged 79.*

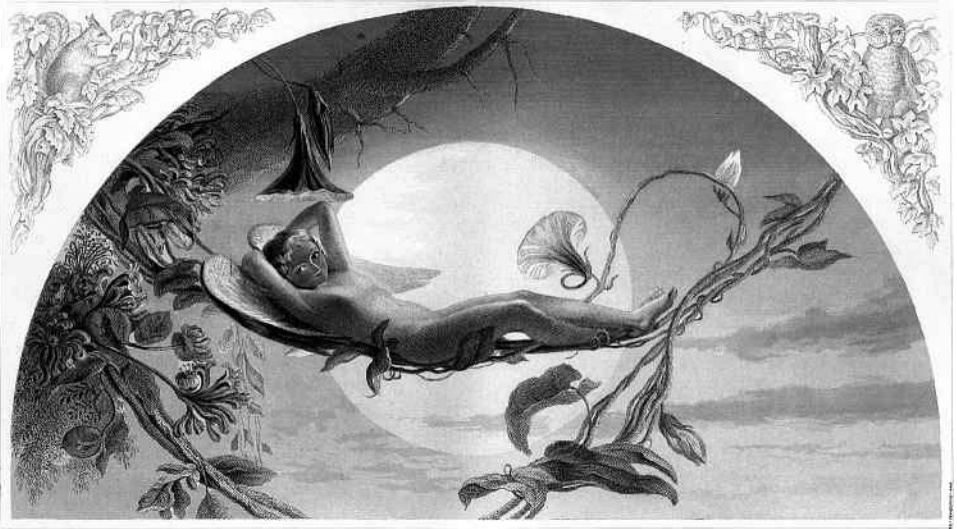
WES CRAVEN

The so-called 'Sultan of Slash' made his living out of scaring the wits out of people. Later, he poked

fun at the horror genre with such films as *Wes Craven's New Nightmare* (1995). Some critics denounced him as a purveyor of gore with a dazzling technique and nothing to say; others compared him to Ingmar Bergman. He created some of the most memorable bogeymen in film, most notably the blade-taloned Freddy Krueger, a murdered child-molester in a moth-eaten sweater and filthy fedora who is brought back to life via the dreams of the teenage descendants of his killers (*A Nightmare on Elm Street*, 1984). Craven subverted the horror genre again with *Scream* (1996), the tale of a high-school student who becomes the target of a mysterious killer known as Ghostface. It is full of ironic self-reference: "This is like something out of a Wes Carpenter film," one character observes.

Craven earned a master's in philosophy and writing from Johns Hopkins University, and worked as a humanities professor at Clarkson University in Potsdam, New York State. In 1971 he left teaching to work as a film editor in Manhattan. After writing and directing pornographic films under pseudonyms, he made his debut under his own name with the ultra-low-budget shocker *The Last House on the Left* (1972), about a gang of psychotic killers who rape, torture and murder two teenage girls, only to meet a more horrific fate at the hands of the girls' parents. His follow-up, *The Hills Have Eyes* (1977), about cannibalistic mutants stalking a suburban family who have become stranded in the desert, established his reputation as a cult director.

Craven was a prominent defender of the horror genre, which, he argued, gives people the mental equipment to deal with a frightening world. "You're talking about the beasts in the forest that come after you... but in a way that's under control. So, in a sense, you can own the beast." People were sometimes surprised to learn that Craven was not (in his words) "a Mansonite crazoid", but a charming, humorous man whose hobby was bird-watching. When asked to name the thing that most terrified him, he replied "my ex-wife's divorce lawyer". He is survived by his third wife, Iya, and by a son and daughter. *Wesley Earl Craven, film director, born Cleveland, Ohio 2 Aug 1939; died from brain cancer in Los Angeles 30 Aug 2015, aged 76.*



FAIRIES, FOLKLORE AND FORTEANA

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

PIXY-LED PLUS

BM was, in 1935, a 19-year-old Irish girl working in a house at the base of the fort of Lis Ard in County Mayo. One afternoon, she went out for a walk that took her up through the fort, and there on the heights she had a strange experience. Crossing the fort, she walked through a narrow gap into a prehistoric ditch and then along that ditch. At the end of the ditch she felt a 'muscular jerk' and found herself involuntarily returned to where she had come from. She tried again and again to escape from every point of this ditch but there was an invisible barrier around the area.

"Like a wild animal in a cage, she kept moving up and down that stretch of ditch and probing the bank in a ceaseless effort to find a way through the magic wall which inexorably shut her in". The magic wall not only trapped her but apparently kept others out. Many hours later, BM saw a rescue party sent to find her, but they could not hear her cries, though she could see and hear them. In fact, she was just feet away when they walked past her, quite oblivious to her presence. The 'magic wall' finally disappeared a little before 11pm and she made her way home: BM had been trapped for as long as 10 hours in a ditch on a hill.

The account appears in Dermot Mac

Manus's *The Middle Kingdom*, one of our best collections of 'raw' fairy experiences. Should we associate this, as Mac Manus does, with 'the stray sod', an Irish version of being pixy-led? We have looked at being pixy-led previously (FT323:25) and that experience typically involves stumbling around a known

place that suddenly becomes unfamiliar. What happened to BM might be better called 'pixy-led plus': involuntary movements, invisible walls, an inability to communicate with people who are walking close by and invisibility to those outside the space. Some of these features turn up in pixy-led experiences – there is, for example, a terrifying instance of a bark stripper near Torrington who was paralysed in a wood in 1890 – but they are not common.

In fact, the most interesting parallels would be with a number of the missing persons cases gathered together by David Paulides in the United States under his 411 series. Paulides's master thesis is that something is kidnapping people in America's national parks: he artfully avoids the question of what. But Paulides has done a very good job at bringing together witness accounts of temporarily missing people who have experienced extreme disorientation: in one case a woman saw people but could not communicate with them...

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

SHE KEPT PROBING
THE BANK IN
A CEASELESS
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A WAY THROUGH
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WHICH SHUT
HER IN

THE LIZARD MAN OF SCAPE ORE SWAMP

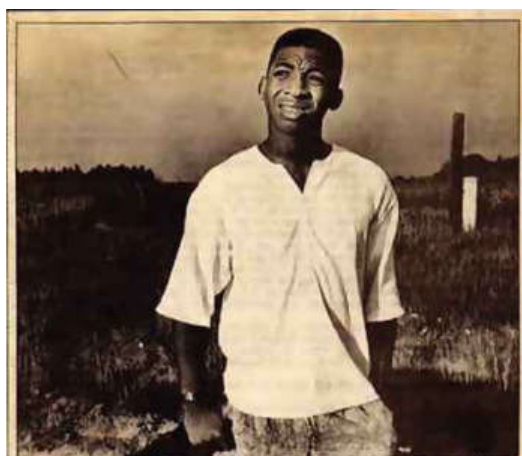
In the spooky swamps of South Carolina lurks one of America's most mysterious and menacing monsters: a seven-foot-tall reptilian terror with a taste for trashing motor vehicles.

BENJAMIN RADFORD sets out in search of the elusive Lee County Lizard Man...

Among the mysterious creatures said to lurk in the remote regions of North America, the Lizard Man is surely among the strangest. The monster goes by several names, including the South Carolina Lizard Man, the Lizard Man of Scape Ore Swamp, and the Lizard Man of Lee County. Whatever you call the beast, it's something no one would want to encounter: Seven feet (2m) tall, powerful, aggressive, incredibly fast, and – according to some – with a penchant for chewing on automobiles. It was first sighted near a butterbean field in a spooky area called Scape Ore Swamp (originally named Escaped Where Swamp).

Most monsters have one signature world-class sighting to their credit. For Bigfoot, the gold standard is Roger Patterson and Bob Gimlin's 1967 sighting and film; for the chupacabras, the best evidence is eyewitness Madelyne Tolentino's seminal 1995 account; for Champ – the Lake Champlain monster – it's Sandra Mansi's 1977 sighting; and so on. In the small South Carolina town of Bishopville, a teenager named Christopher Davis is considered the godfather of Lizard Man lore; his dramatic sighting in the early hours of a summer morning in 1988 remains the definitive account of the creature (a full report appeared in FT51:34-36) and appeared in the *Sumter* (SC) *Item* of 20 July 1988, pictured at right).

Though a handful of others have reported the beast, most of these cases were not first-hand eyewitness sightings but reports of damaged, mangled metal attributed after the fact to the Lizard Man. Davis is credited with spawning the legend and indeed “became somewhat of a celebrity over this sighting... [he] was taken under the wing of a local talent agent who had him doing



Christopher Davis recounts experience with alleged seven-foot tall lizard. Davis shows site off Brownstown Road where he says he was attacked. (ITEM photo / Andy Lavinsky)

Bumps in the night?

Lee County seeks 'lizard' with bad attitude

By GEORGE GEORGAS
ITEM Staff Writer

There's something amiss in the Brownstown community, where a mystery creature described as a scaly lizard has reportedly been making waves in the Scape Ore Swamp.

Seventeen-year-old Christopher Davis said he was recently attacked by a 7-foot lizard-type creature while changing a flat tire on Brownstown Road. He said its scaring red eyes, three clawed fingers and snake-like scales made him initially believe he was under siege by the devil himself.

Two other men told Lee County Sheriff's Deputy Chester Lighty about two weeks ago they also were chased by a similar beast while they were getting water from a spring.

The mystery has led to rumors, which have multiplied since Tom and Mary Way's car was "mashed" last Thursday night while they slept. Their Ford's rear molding, identical sidewalls, broken hood ornament, along with red hairs and

footprints left behind, indicate some animal was responsible.

A wildlife officer on the scene said he would guess the damage was caused by a red fox.

Nary a Lee County resident hasn't heard of the Lizard Man, a.k.a. the Swamp Monster, and each person by now has developed definite opinions about it.

Waitress Lynn Mathis said she doesn't believe in such things. "It must've been that one-eyed cow that lives around here. I don't know if they can go 40 mph, though," she joked.

One man she was waiting on then piped in, "I don't know if it's a one-eyed cow, but I do know they make some good whiskey back in that swamp, suggesting people in high spirits can easily misperceive what they see."

A Texaco cashier said she initially doubted the stories, but she knows enough Brownstown residents who swear by the creature that she has become convinced.

Davis said he saw the creature about three weeks ago. (See LIZARD on page 3A.)

tours, selling autographs, and making media appearances".¹

What began as a local curiosity blew up as national and international news media got wind of the story. Television shows from *Good Morning America* to the *Oprah Winfrey Show* called; newspapers and magazines, including *Time*, *People*, *The Los Angeles Times*, and *Charlotte Observer*, all clamoured for a story. By one estimate, 50,000 people visited Bishopville in the weeks and months following Davis's sighting, creating a booming crypto-tourism business that survives to this day, trading in T-shirts, hats, mugs, figurines, and Lizard Man hamburgers. Several reports of the Lizard Man were proven hoaxes – including faked footprints created because a local man wanted to keep the story alive.

Despite, or perhaps because of, all the publicity surrounding the Lizard Man, relatively little critical scrutiny has been brought to bear on Chris Davis's original sighting over the years, and his remarkable story merits a closer look.

CHRIS MEETS THE LIZARD MAN

Here is the story Chris Davis told:

“Driving home from his job, he had run over something sharp near the swamp, which caused a flat tire. Just as he finished changing the wheel, he suddenly heard a noise and looked across a moonlit butterbean field and saw something that stood more than seven feet tall. According to Davis's report on the Associated Press wire service, the creature ‘was about 25 yards away and I saw red eyes glowing. I ran to the car and as I locked it, the thing grabbed the door handle. I could see him from the neck down – the three big fingers, long black nails and green rough skin. It was strong and angry. I looked in my mirror and saw a blur of green running. I could see his eyes and then he jumped on

**“HE LOOKED ACROSS
A MOONLIT FIELD AND
SAW SOMETHING
MORE THAN SEVEN
FEET TALL...”**





ABOVE LEFT: The road to Scape Ore Swamp. ABOVE RIGHT: The spot by the swamp where Christopher Davis stopped to change a flat tyre.
 BELOW: Early press coverage of the story made a link between the Lee County Lizard Man and the 'Gill Man' from the *Creature from the Black Lagoon* film.

the roof of my car. I thought I heard a grunt and then I could see his fingers through the rear windshield, where they curled around on the roof. I sped up and swerved to shake the creature off.”

Dolores Riccio and Joan Bingham pick up the account in their book *More Haunted Houses*: “A shaken Davis reached home, ran in, and told his father. Together they went to inspect the car for damage. The first thing they found was that the side mirror had been terribly twisted. When Chris Davis’s father looked at the roof of the car, he found deep scratches penetrating the paint and even denting the metal.”²

Davis’s story was endorsed by local sheriff Liston Truesdale. Part of the reason that Sheriff Truesdale found Davis credible is that his story never wavered or varied: “What impressed me was that he told the same story every time. And he had to tell the story over and over again to the media and others. If you’re lying, you can’t tell the same story twice,” said Truesdale of Davis.³

Not only that, but some sources claim that Davis was administered a polygraph (lie detector) test by police in an effort to get to the bottom of the mystery: “Christopher Davis drew an image of the being that attacked his car and got wired up for the test. A series of questions about the event were put to him and Christopher answered them without hesitation. Although believing that they were victims of an imagination gone wild, the officers administering the lie detector test and Liston soon realised otherwise. Christopher had passed the test with flying colours.”⁴

A CLOSER LOOK

It all makes for a vivid and compelling story, but several important aspects wither under sceptical scrutiny. For example – contrary to Sheriff Truesdale’s statement – Davis’s story had in fact changed several times in the months and years following the sighting: “As he told and retold the story some of the details changed. For instance, while he first said the creature had scales, he later said the creature was caked with mud...”⁵ As Lyle Blackburn notes in his book *Lizard Man: The True Story of the Bishopville Monster*, Davis “didn’t discount the possibility that it

could have been a bear with wet, green mud covering its fur.”⁶ Davis also gave different accounts of how far away the creature was when he first saw it, and other details.

Another account from the local newspaper, *The (Sumter) Item* of 20 July 1988, offered a somewhat different version in an interview with Davis conducted at the site of his sighting: “I had just put the tyre in the trunk when I see this thing coming from those trees (about 50 yards away), kicking up dust as it ran.’ He said the creature grabbed the car door just as Davis sped off. When he reached 40mph (64/kmh), he said he noticed it had

caught up with him. ‘I looked in the rear-view mirror and I saw something, and heard a crash on the roof’”.⁷

This version is puzzling not only for the details it includes but for those it leaves out. Davis states that he sees the Lizard Man under some trees running toward him and “kicking up dust”. This is a curious detail, partly because swamps are not known for being particularly dusty, and partly because Davis is claiming to have seen dust being kicked up in near-darkness from 50 yards away – half the length of a football field, and twice as far away as he claimed in other accounts. There’s no mention of the three green fingers he later saw clinging to the car as he drove, terrified, at 40mph trying to shake off the creature.

Furthermore Davis’s claim that he saw “a blur of green” coming at him as he drove away cannot be true. Car taillights are red, not white, and thus everything just behind Davis’s car would be bathed in a red hue giving

BEAST FROM THE BLACK LAGOON

ANOTHER MONSTER EXCLUSIVE

SCIENTISTS are hunting a real-life Creature from the Black Lagoon.

It's a 7ft-tall "lizard man," with scaly green skin, red eyes "like lasers," and only three fingers on each hand.

The monster lives in a swamp, but he's pretty nippy on dry land. Dozens of motorists reckon he has chased them at up to 40 mph.

He's also bad-tempered.

One couple say he climbed on their car and began thumping on the roof.

People claim the Lizard Man ripped the bonnet from a parked car.

In another incident the creature chewed off a car bumper.

Terror

Six passers-by almost jumped out of their skins when they saw the creature surface in the swamp.

And a teenager reckons the Lizard Man attacked him as he was changing a flat tyre one morning.

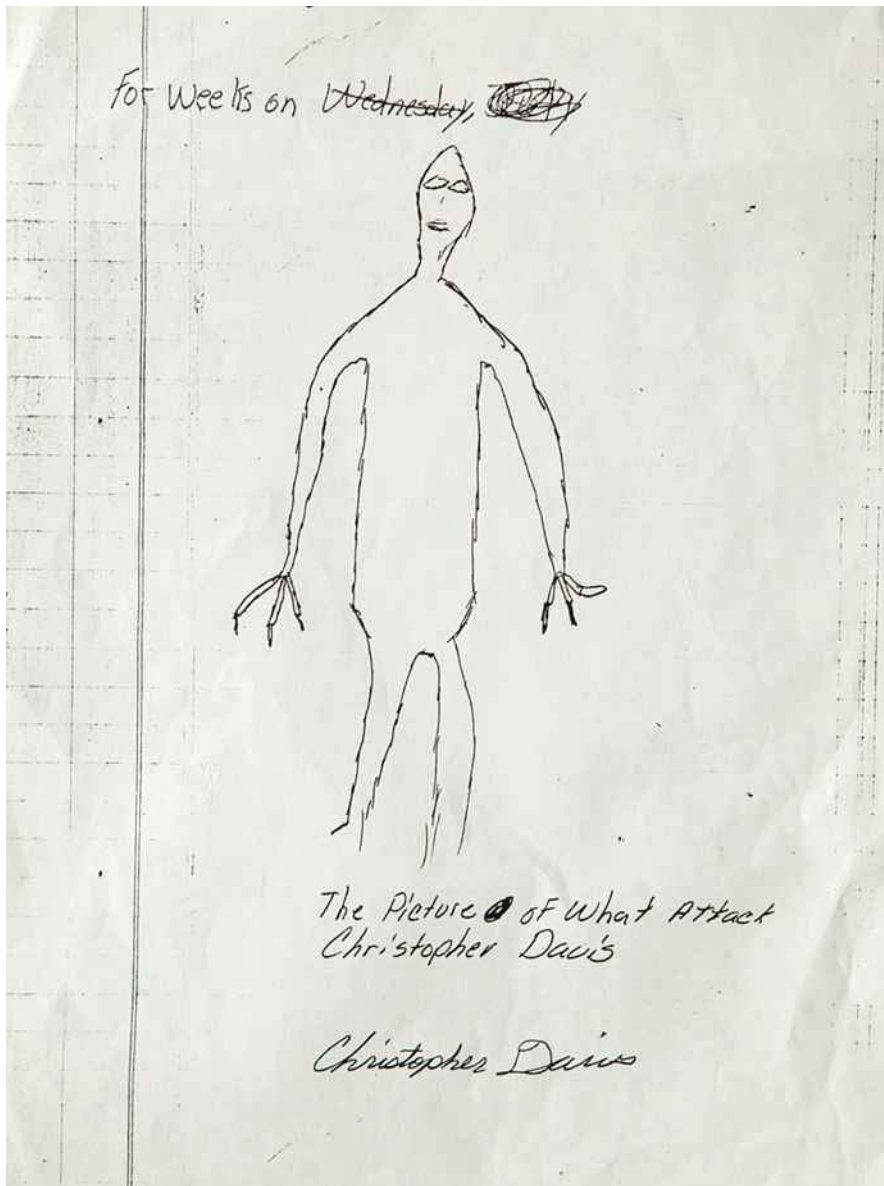
Chris Davis, 17, punched him with all his might and ran home, terrified.

"It lunged out of the swamp at me," says Chris. "That's when I saw it only had three fingers."

Stories of the Lizard Man have brought sightseers and TV crews pouring into Brown town, South Carolina.

One radio station has offered a million dollars to anyone who brings the monster into the studio.

The Lizard Man . . . an artist's impression



LEFT: Christopher Davis's sketch of the creature he claimed pursued him as he drove away.

supernatural and cryptozoological creatures including chupacabras, the Mothman, and even Satan (one source notes that Davis at first thought he was seeing the Devil himself because of the red eyes).

- How, exactly, did Davis even see the Lizard Man creature at 2am? The area is a swamp, and therefore there was little or no ambient, available light from any nearby houses, businesses or buildings (Lyle Blackburn states that "there were no houses for at least a half mile"). This was and is a very rural area, and photographs of the scene taken at the time show no streetlights. Most writers and researchers have ignored this issue, though a few note that perhaps Davis saw the creature by moonlight. This seems plausible until you consider that the area is overgrown with trees, as swamps tend to be; if the creature emerged from the swamp and under trees (as he claimed in one interview), it would have been hidden in shadows cast by the trees above. I consulted an almanac to determine what phase the Moon was in that night. It was not full, but nearly so. Even under the best of circumstances the Moon is not very bright; an ordinary person might be able to see some details at close range under a full Moon, assuming the moonlight was not blocked from above, but Chris Davis's detailed description beggars belief. Either Davis's eyesight was nearly superhuman or his imagination filled in many of the details he saw – or claimed to see. Try it yourself: try to describe details of an unknown object from 25 (or 50) yards away in near-darkness. Psychological studies have shown that under such conditions, the human mind is very poor at accurately perceiving, remembering, and reporting even basic elements of the experience. Our brains often "fill in" details with what we expect to see – not necessarily what we actually see – and we bias our reports accordingly.

- How did Davis escape from the creature? The logistics of Davis's account don't add up; he claimed to have spotted the Lizard Man from about 25 (or 30, or 50, depending on the source) yards (at least 23 metres) away (in near-darkness), and that it caught up with his car even as it raced at a speed of up to 40mph (65km/h). A creature that could move that fast would take less than five seconds to reach Davis's car from where it was seen. It should have been able to grab Davis in the time it took for him to notice the Lizard Man, see the details he described, realise it was running toward him, close the trunk of his car, go around to the driver's side, open the door, get the keys out and start the ignition, close and lock the door, get the car in gear and speed off. Time it yourself in a vacant parking lot to judge its plausibility.

- Why would the Lizard Man chase Chris Davis in the first place? He was no threat to the beast. If the behaviour that Davis described was accurate and typical of the

a false colour. Davis could not have seen a green blur behind him as he claimed because both red and green are primary colours, and nothing looks green under a red light; a light green object in red light appears yellow, and a dark green object in red light appears black. Though many writers have taken Davis's description at face value, a bit of logic and research reveals that whatever he did or did not see that night, several of his important details cannot be accurate. If he imagined or assumed the creature's colour, what other details might he have imagined or assumed?

- How did the creature go from running in a forward direction to chase Davis's car to having its *fingers* (not its toes) being seen through the *rear-view mirror*? Any bipedal creature running and jumping on the roof of a car would land with its head, hands, and fingers toward the front of the car and its windscreen. Yet if Davis's account is correct somehow this acrobatic Lizard Man ended up with its fingers on the *rear* windshield.

If the Lizard Man was bipedal, as Davis claimed (and as represented in the sketch he drew), then his description of the creature

"I LOOKED IN THE REAR-VIEW MIRROR AND I SAW SOMETHING, AND HEARD A CRASH ON THE ROOF"

running toward him on its "hind legs" makes little sense; lizards are tailed quadrupeds (with the notable exception of the Jesus Christ Lizard or common basilisk, which can run for short distances on water) and cannot run bipedally. What Davis drew (and described) is simply not very lizard-like – especially since it lacked a tail. Lizards also do not have eyes that emit light; in fact no animals do, though the pupils of many animals can *reflect* light if it shines on them. The red eye-shine has been claimed for many

creature, why is he the only person to claim being chased? While there are other reports of something odd in the area, Davis is the only person in the world to ever describe such an encounter. Real, known animals have typical temperaments and repeated behaviours: even the few land animals that are known to be aggressive against humans at times (such as bears protecting their cubs or apes defending their territory) exhibit the same behaviour under the same circumstances. If the Lizard Man had existed for years or decades in the swamp, surely this was not the first time it had seen humans, and logically there should be dozens of reports similar to Davis's. Instead, his is unique.

- According to one account written the year after the Lizard Man encounter, Davis "waited three weeks before he reported [the incident] to authorities",⁸ though he may or may not have reported it to his father immediately. Lyle Blackburn states that Davis reported it to police on 16 July, just over two weeks later. There seems to be no record of Davis mentioning his dramatic, life-changing encounter with an unknown monster to any friends, co-workers, or anyone else until weeks after his experience. Even granting that eyewitnesses to strange events may sometimes be reluctant to come forward, this is curious behaviour.

Unfortunately, we may never know the answers to these questions: Davis died in 2009, killed in what police described as a drug-related incident, sticking by his story to the end. There are, however, several issues that bear on the credibility of his sighting.

THE LIE DETECTOR

The fact that Davis passed a lie detector test has become an important element of the story, giving it the implicit endorsement of the police. After all, police (even in small Southern towns) are typically assumed to be

sceptical, hard-nosed types who would see through any deception. If both the police and a lie detector believe Chris Davis's story, then who is anyone else to doubt it?

Many reports state that Sheriff Liston Truesdale administered the lie detector test in the course of investigating the incident, but this is not true. No crime was reported or committed, and therefore it was not a criminal matter; why would a police department spend valuable time and resources giving someone a lie detector just because they said they saw something strange near a swamp? A little digging reveals the truth: according to news reports on 18 August 1988, Davis was given a private polygraph test "paid for by Southern Marketing Inc., a company formed by two Sumter men to arrange personal appearances for Davis".⁹ (Tuten 1988).

In other words, the polygraph was not given as part of any police investigation or procedure (though an officer administered the test), but was instead a publicity stunt. Because the test was informal, unofficial, and private, the results could only be given to, and released by, Davis's promoters, who could choose what information, if any, to make public. Because there was no criminal or civil legal matter being investigated, there were no consequences to the outcome. Polygraphs work (to the degree to which they do "work," the machines being inadmissible in court because of concerns about their validity and reliability) only when there is some penalty for knowingly and falsely lying to an authority such as the police. Being interviewed by police who can charge you with a crime for lying to them is a very different situation than being interviewed by your publicity team, who can simply pretend the polygraph test didn't happen if they don't like the results. In any event, at best the polygraph only detects signs of nervousness or physiological reactions to intentional

deception, not mistakes or false information. If Davis sincerely (but mistakenly) believed he saw something unknown he would likely pass.

A CAR-CHEWING LIZARD MAN?

Regardless of any questions about the validity of his polygraph test, Chris Davis had one piece of evidence that was unimpeachable: the damage done to his vehicle. There were (apparently) no eyewitnesses to Davis's sighting, and little or no evidence to show that his encounter was real – except for the damage done to his car, the "deep scratches penetrating the paint and even denting the metal". Another account¹⁰ states that "the driver side mirror was bent and twisted" and there were scratches on the car's roof. In fact, "mysterious" car damage would later become integral to Lizard Man lore, as later "chewed up" auto fenders would be seen as evidence of its presence. If a seven-foot tall animal as large and powerful as that described by Davis leapt onto a car from a 40mph run, surely it would have cracked a window, or at least badly dented the roof of the car.

In his book on the monster, Lyle Blackburn asks: "How do we explain the damage to the side mirror and roof of the car? Sure, Davis could have damaged the car himself to back up his monster story, but would a kid who worked for minimum wage at McDonald's want to bust up his own car?" This scenario is indeed far-fetched; however, there are two other, far simpler plausible explanations. The first is not that Davis intentionally damaged his own car as proof of his Lizard Man encounter, but exactly the opposite: Davis accidentally damaged the car (perhaps through speeding or typical teen recklessness) and later made up the Lizard Man encounter to explain it. Alternatively, assuming Davis did in fact see something strange and scary as he claimed, he could



ABOVE: Since Davis's 1988 encounter, many local instances of damage to vehicles have been attributed to the Lizard Man of Scape Ore Swamp.

RETURN OF THE LIZARD MAN



SHARON HILL reports on a recent rash of reptoid sightings in South Carolina's swamps...

Bishopville's infamous Lizard Man made a surprise appearance on a Sunday summer afternoon about a mile from his old Scape Ore Swamp stomping grounds. The sighting was reported via email to the local news station in Lee County, South Carolina, on 2 August 2015, accompanied by a photograph of the monster strutting along a tree line. The witness, "Sarah", said she saw the creature after leaving church and swore: "I am not making this up". The photograph, taken with a mobile phone, is low-resolution, but the distinctive, pointed, lizard-like face, red eyes, three-fingered hand, and buff physique are clearly discernible, just as described in previous accounts.

The news report was updated the next day to include a video from an unidentified man who said he had captured what he thought was the Lizard Man in a short clip taken in May 2015 in Bishopville's Scape Ore Swamp. The video shows a dark, human-like figure darting among trees in the distance. The photo can best be described as a person in a creative Halloween costume, while the video is no better than the average "blobsquatch" clip – shot from too far away and too indistinct to be of any real value. Both pieces of "evidence", though, were prime fodder for



social media sharing and take their place as the latest bits of poor-quality evidence supporting the claim of a bipedal reptilian humanoid living in Lee County.

The Lizard Man (or Bishopville Monster) story began in 1988 when Sheriff Liston Truesdale responded to a call regarding damage to a car parked in a rural area of Browntown, South Carolina. The car was described as "chewed on". Witnesses came forward with reports of seeing a seven-foot tall, green or brown, bipedal creature with red eyes roaming the area. One witness, Chris

LEFT: The mobile phone photo taken by 'Sarah'.
BELOW: A frame and enlargement taken from the video supposedly shot in May 2015

Davis, gained notoriety for his frightening back road encounter with a monster he claimed attacked him and his car. The creature was said to run upright and to have three fingers and three toes. Crude, three-toed prints Lizard Man prints duly appeared. Sheriff Truesdale took all this mighty seriously, and the legend of an aggressive, possibly dangerous, definitely freaky creature lurking in the dark was born. The town embraced its native monster.

Later reports of damaged cars, complete with teeth marks, continued to be attributed to the Lizard Man. Documented cases of dogs causing remarkable amounts of damage to cars in attempts to get to a cat hiding in a wheel well were glossed over if a Lizard Man attack could be invoked.

Lyle Blackburn wrote the first comprehensive book on the Lizard Man in 2013. Blackburn expressed serious doubts about the latest encounters saying: "It appears to be some sort of costume or miniature model rather than a real creature." Neither did he find the video clip credible. While the Lizard Man reports gained web hits and popularity, no reporters bothered to contact Blackburn. The Sunday-strolling Lizard Man story (based on just one email) was repeated by a myriad of web sites, with little research and no follow-up provided.

Lizard Man's popularity is greater than ever thanks to his appearance on mystery-themed television shows, Blackburn's book, and now this latest flap. What the eyewitnesses saw, if anything, is undetermined. Telling a good story and getting attention for it is easy. Supporting the idea of an actual (and biologically implausible) bipedal man-like lizard is a big stretch. Lizard Man is a creature of legend, not zoology – but the Bishopville Monster has achieved the status of a pop culture icon, so you can bet he'll be around for a long while.

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Sharon Hill is an advocate for science and scepticism but loves monsters. She is the owner of Doubtfulnews.com. Contact her at sharonahill.com.

easily have damaged and scratched the vehicle as he drove away in a panic, swerving through trees and shrubbery.

Yet there may be no need to speculate on what damaged Davis's car, because though the mangled metal certainly makes for a dramatic story, there is little evidence that it is a true one. Several versions of Davis's story state that his car sustained significant damage, although one early local news report offers the following: "When he reached 40mph, he noticed it had caught up with the car, but he escaped with no more than a scratch on his fender, Davis said".¹¹ Not only do newspaper reports quote Davis himself as saying that the encounter left little more than a scratch, but there seem to be no extant photographs of any damage to the car. A handful of photographs related to Davis's encounter can be found – in books, magazines, and on the Internet – of vehicle damage attributed to the Lizard Man in other, later cases, but I have been unable to find a single image of damage to Davis's car as a result of his encounter with the powerful, aggressive, car-mangling monster.

The absence of any photos of the only hard evidence of Chris Davis's Lizard Man encounter is very curious. Surely, if the car's mirror was indeed nearly torn off and "deep scratches penetrating the paint and even denting the metal" of the car were found, Davis and his publicity team would have eagerly circulated photos of them to bolster the credibility of his story; instead, they inexplicably neglected to photograph the damage. On the other hand, if the teen's terrifying encounter resulted in "no more than a scratch on his fender" – as the original reports said – then there would be no reason to highlight an ambiguous, unimpressive scratch that could have been caused by anything.

The inconsistencies and contradictions in Davis's story, plus the matter of the polygraph test and the lack of evidence of car damage, should give even the least sceptical investigator pause. Still, this brings us no closer to knowing what, if anything, Davis saw

in the Scape Ore swamp early one summer morning. The obvious explanations include a hoax, a misidentification, or a genuine Lizard Man monster.

THE HOAX THEORY

Could Chris Davis have simply made the whole thing up? Davis's account is gripping, scary – and suspiciously cinematic. It has many of the standard hallmarks of a scene from a monster or horror film, starting with a car breaking down late at night on a dark and lonely section of road. When the victim/eyewitness is almost through fixing the problem, he sees something terrifying in the distance: a monster that nobody has ever seen before! He rushes into the car, starts the engine, and the creature runs after him; he guns the engine and speeds away. Thinking he's managed to escape, he starts to relax – but, to his horror, he realises his nightmare isn't over as he sees a monstrous hand through the windshield and hears a horrifying thump on the top of the car. Panicked, he drives like a madman, trying to shake loose the monster clinging to the roof, and finally he does so. He rushes home, wondering if it was all some horrible dream or nightmare – until the classic and terrifying reveal: monstrous claw marks on the car prove his story.

From a folkloric point of view, this story has several recognisable motifs that are used in the traditional plot narrative structures of legends and tales. Of course, just because something *sounds* like it came from a movie doesn't mean it didn't really happen. But it does counsel caution before accepting such extraordinary claims.

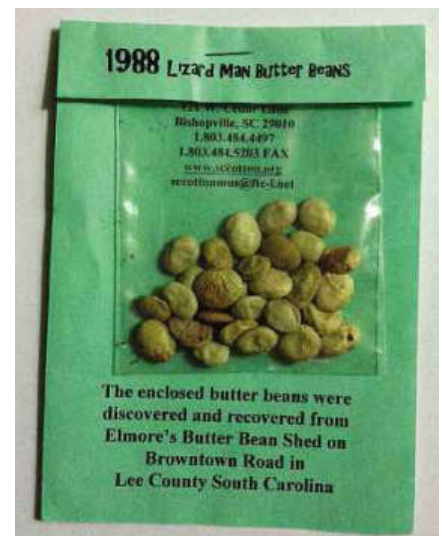
There's another curious element to Davis's story; in a big city on a weekend night, one might expect a fast food restaurant to be open until midnight or later. But Bishopville was a small town, and 29 June 1988 was a Tuesday night/early Wednesday morning. Though it's not impossible that the teenager was working at a national fast food franchise until nearly two o'clock in the morning, he seems more likely to have gotten off at midnight at the

latest. Why was Davis still driving home two hours after his shift likely ended? Having worked many years in food service myself, I know that workers do not leave when the doors close. But a two-hour delay is unusual, and suggests that perhaps Davis had not left work and gone directly home, as he'd claimed. Perhaps he'd stopped off at a friend's house, or was out having a drink or smoke, as many people do just after getting off work late at night.

Even though there was apparently little or no damage to the car, perhaps Davis had been in a minor accident. As a 17-year-old working the night shift at a fast food joint, it's unlikely that Davis owned the car outright, and he had only recently gotten his licence to drive. Any damage to the vehicle would be noticed by his father and might jeopardise not only his continued use of the car but perhaps his employment as well. The idea of a teenager concocting some outlandish story about minor damage to a car to cover up for carelessness or illegal behaviour is hardly unknown. Perhaps he had been drinking, using drugs or speeding that night and had an accident – one that was not severe enough to seriously damage or disable the car, but enough to cause a noticeable scratch. Perhaps in the darkness Davis couldn't see the extent of the damage, and he decided to come clean before his father saw it the next morning. Or perhaps his father was awake when he returned home and wanted to know why he was so late. Though a hoax seems like a real possibility, there are more charitable explanations.

LUCIOUS THE LIZARD MAN?

If it wasn't a hoax, what, if anything, did Davis see? There's little real evidence from which to draw a solid conclusion, but one part of his report that stands out is the red eyes, and locals have a few theories that might explain that. A longtime resident who lives near Scape Ore Swamp, Joe E Moore Jr, told one researcher: "I doubt very seriously if anything 'chased' Davis's car down that night. I think he saw a bear's eyes reflecting his brake lights as he was closing his trunk, and



ABOVE LEFT: Lucious 'Brother' Elmore's butterbean shed on Browntown Road. ABOVE RIGHT: Visitors to Bishopville can even buy a sample of 'Lizard Man Butter Beans'.

JIMMY S. EMERSON, DVM

BENJAMIN RADFORD



ABOVE: Movie monsters may have influenced Davis's interpretation of what he saw that night, as appears to have been the case with the Thetis Lake monster of 1972.

by the time he had gotten into the car and gotten it started, the bear had climbed on top of it, which park bears are notorious for doing. Everything I observed led me to believe it was probably a black bear in that particular instance".¹²

One intrepid Lizard Man investigator from the College of Charleston, Alicia Lutz, visited Bishopville recently and was told by several locals that they had a pretty good idea what Davis saw that night – and it wasn't a Lizard Man. It was instead a local named Lucious Elmore, a butterbean farmer who had a shed not far from where Davis had his flat tyre.

"Lucious 'Brother' Elmore was a lucrative butterbean farmer, with 40-something acres of butterbeans... In order to keep his harvest moving quickly, he dumped the beans onto drying tables in his shed on Browntown Road, which he equipped with air-conditioning window units to further speed up the drying process. 'In those days, not everybody had air conditioning, and I guess it got so hot sometimes that it went to people's heads, because people kept stealing the units right out of Brother Elmore's shed,' Al Holland, owner of the local feed and seed, had told us that morning. 'Well, he'd just picked up three new units from the store, and people knew this. But he was determined to make sure no one stole them.'"¹³

Annoyed by the nighttime thefts, Elmore stayed up overnight at his shed guarding his new air conditioning units, sitting quietly alone in the dark to catch a thief. He was "on a stakeout the night that Christopher Davis's tyre blew, and – when he heard the car stop just 100 yards down the road from the butterbean shed, he thought he'd found his culprit. 'He walks out to the road, which is lower than the yard, so he's up high, hiding in the dog fennel,' Holland told us. 'So he's standing there, he's looking down, when the kid turned around and screamed and took off.... Davis' taillights reflected in Elmore's glasses, causing an illusion of red glowing eyes.'"

Though not definitive proof, this account seems plausible, and there would seem little

IT WAS A SCALY BEAST WITH A "POINT STICKING OUT OF ITS HEAD" AND "GREAT BIG EARS"

incentive for Elmore to make up a story about encountering Chris Davis near his butterbean shed that night; as Blackburn notes, "It would certainly be coincidental that Davis reported having a flat near the Butterbean Shed on the very night Elmore chased away a thief."¹⁴ Though Davis would have been aware of any passing cars from their headlights as he changed his tyre on the dark, lonely stretch of road, it's unlikely that he (or anyone else) would expect to see someone walking toward him in the moonlit darkness from the nearby swamp. Any one of us could have been startled and spooked by such a sudden appearance, and in his panic Davis's imagination may have filled in the other details. This explanation also jibes with the fact that there was little or no damage to Davis's vehicle. We need not assume that Elmore actually jumped on Davis's vehicle, and in fact in some statements Davis suggests that he was not sure that the Lizard Man actually *did* jump on his roof: "I looked in the rear-view mirror and saw something. And I heard a crash on the roof"; "He never saw it fall but eventually the swerving must have worked because the creature was no longer clawing and banging on the roof".¹⁵

As Davis only mentioned seeing "something" behind him and was swerving back and forth through a swampy, wooded area, it's possible that he scraped low-hanging tree branches that in his panic he mistook them for something in his roof. If there was indeed a scratch on the car's roof, that might account for it.

THE HOLLYWOOD CONNECTION

Perhaps Davis saw Elmore, or something else he didn't recognise, and his mind raced to make sense of it, perhaps drawing from a movie monster he'd seen. It may seem outlandish, but there are precedents for just such an event (this is part of the explanation for the very first chupacabras report in 1995; see FT271:30-35 and my book *Tracking the Chupacabra*).

Karl Shuker has noted that the Davis report is just one of several encounters with reptilian man-monsters astonishingly similar in appearance to the amphibious 'gill-man' from the Hollywood film *Creature from the Black Lagoon* movie.¹⁶ It's also interesting to note that a popular comedy/horror film, *The Monster Squad*, was released a year before, and featured a Lizard Man-like creature.

In 2009, Canadian researcher and *Skeptic* magazine editor Daniel Loxton investigated reports of a monster in British Columbia's Thetis Lake. It was 1972, and according to several books, the monster was described by eyewitnesses as a fish-like humanoid "with silvery scaled skin, sharp claws and spikes on its head." Two teenagers saw the creature emerge from the lake and look around; a newspaper headline the next day read: "Thetis Monster Seen by Boys". According to one eyewitness, Mike Gold, the creature "was shaped like an ordinary body, like a human being body but it had a monster face and it was all scaly". Furthermore, the scary beast had "a point sticking out of its head" and "great big ears". Several authors of monster-themed tomes cite the case in their books as a genuine mystery, possibly representing a new type of creature.

Other than the pair of seemingly sincere eyewitnesses, there was no other evidence of the creature. Nothing of that size or shape had ever been seen in the man-made lake before or since, and the incident was very bizarre. Loxton noted that the Thetis Lake monster seemed outlandish and suspiciously cinematic (almost like *The Creature from the Black Lagoon*), and wondered if somehow the boys' description of the monster had been

influenced by something they had seen or heard.

After careful research, Loxton discovered that though *The Creature from the Black Lagoon* had not been shown recently in Victoria, British Columbia, a very similar low-budget knockoff, *Monster from the Surf*, (1965, aka *The Beach Girls and the Monster*) had. In fact, as Loxton discovered: “*Monster from the Surf* played twice one weekend – and the first Thetis Lake monster sighting was reported within a week! That’s right: local TV showed a monster movie about a scaled, humanoid gill-man attacking teenagers at the beach after dark. Four days later, local teenagers reported being attacked at the Thetis beach after dark by a scaled monster!”

Furthermore, the boys’ description of the monster they saw exactly matched the creature in *Monster from the Surf*, down to the point and the large, ear-like gills on the creature’s head. This is an open-and-shut case of people taking their detailed eyewitness description of a supposedly real, mysterious monster they had seen directly from a movie. When Loxton contacted one of the now-grown men about their sighting decades later—something no other researcher had done before – the man admitted it was all a hoax. They had described the monster they had seen in the film, and pretended they saw it in real life.

A REAL MONSTER?

A quarter-century after the events of that night in Scape Ore Swamp it’s impossible to know what, if anything, Chris Davis saw, but a seven-foot tall Lizard Man is among the least likely explanations. There have been few if any credible reports in over 20 years, and most of those were not actual sightings but cars that sustained some ambiguous damage blamed on the Lizard Man. This phenomenon of assuming an unknown creature’s presence from ambiguous indirect evidence is not uncommon in cryptozoology. For example it occurred in many chupacabras ‘reports’ in which the animal was never actually seen but inferred from the presence of dead livestock (in fact killed by ordinary predation). Unremarkable damage to cars in the Bishopville area that otherwise would have been attributed to minor vandalism or careless driving was seen as mysterious and alarming in the context of the Lizard Man publicity.

Why would a fully-grown, man-sized creature only be seen once or twice and then disappear? This fact can be interpreted in several ways. The first is that the Lizard Man was real, and was actually sighted by one or more of the witnesses but is no longer seen, perhaps because it has radically changed its behaviour (from openly attacking and chasing humans and cars) and has been remarkably adept at hiding. Alternatively, it may have been killed or died of natural



RIGHT: Lizard Man T-Shirts and bumper stickers are available in a variety of designs.

causes without ever being found, and this explains its disappearance. However this presumes the beast was unique. As with other cryptids, if it’s a real flesh-and-blood animal then of course it cannot be a single solitary creature – unique animals do not simply pop into existence, and certainly not for brief periods of time. Like all other animals it would need to have parents, and in order for there to be a surviving population there would need to be enough of them to ensure genetic variation. For example it has been estimated that there would need to be between 6,000 and 10,000 Bigfoot in North America alone to sustain a breeding population. Bigfoot reports are far more common than Lizard Man reports, and simply from a biological perspective the Lizard Man’s singular existence is implausible in the extreme.

An alternative explanation is that the Lizard Man never existed in the first place, and that its mythology was created by one or more misidentifications, misunderstandings, hoaxes, or some combination of those. If that’s true, then the fact it is no longer seen

needs no explanation other than that many monster sightings, like many UFO sightings, occur in flaps that gradually fade away. Chris Davis’s report – the most celebrated and detailed encounter on record of the Lizard Man – is quite literally incredible, riddled with both implausibilities and impossibilities. It may be sincere or it may be a hoax, but in either event no hard evidence of the creature has been found. Davis is gone, and it seems that the monster he made famous is gone as well. Still, if you ever visit the small town of Bishopville, South Carolina, you can find the Lizard Man – on shirts, caps, bumper stickers and mugs. **F**

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BENJAMIN RADFORD is a longtime researcher and writer. He has degrees in psychology and education, and is author of eight books including *Tracking the Chupacabra*, *Scientific Paranormal Investigation: How to Solve Unexplained Mysteries*, and most recently *Mysterious New Mexico: Miracles, Magic, and Monsters in the Land of Enchantment*. His Web site is www.BenjaminRadford.com.

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THE STRANGEST FAMILY IN ENGLAND

In an extract from his new book, *Great British Eccentrics*, **SD TUCKER** tells the story of the real-life Addams Family who wrote poems, hunted ghosts and tried to paint cows to fit in with the crockery.

Nobody writing a book about eccentricity can avoid putting pen to paper in the shadow of Dame Edith Sitwell (1887-1964). Not only was she the author of perhaps the most celebrated of all books on the subject – 1933's *The English Eccentrics* – she was also a member of arguably the strangest family ever to have lived. The exploits of the three Sitwell siblings, Dame Edith and her younger brothers Sir Osbert (1892-1969) and Sir Sacheverell (1897-1988) were legendary, so much so that tales of their eccentricities have often overshadowed recognition of their very real achievements in the fields of literature, music and the arts.

Seemingly, the Sitwells were attracted to other unusual people like moths to a flame. After achieving fame, for instance, Edith and Osbert composed a questionnaire to send out to any correspondents whose fan mail seemed weird enough to mark them out as being potential loons. As well as asking for deliberately nonsensical information like the “Age, sex and weight of your wife”, and demanding they provide passport photos signed by clergymen, the siblings also made several personal queries relating to the mental health of the letter-writers’ families. “Has any relative of yours ever been confined in a mental home?” was one such question; “If not, why not?” was the next.

Given this taste for the agreeably grotesque, it is perhaps no surprise that Edith Sitwell chose to write a book about eccentrics, generously using the royalty-payments to help support a cancer-stricken friend of hers named Helen Rootham (1875-1938). Rootham herself, though, was



TALES OF THEIR ECCENTRICITIES HAVE OVERSHADOWED THEIR VERY REAL ACHIEVEMENTS

a striking example of the kind of curious acquaintance the Sitwells liked to cultivate. Coming from a difficult background – her insane sister occasionally tried to murder people – Helen first became known to Edith after being appointed her governess

in 1903. A talented musician, as well as a translator of French poets such as Rimbaud, Rootham became an important influence upon the young Edith; it has been suggested that without her governess’s artistic example Sitwell would never have become the famous poet she did as an adult. Another influence that may have rubbed off on Edith, though, was Helen’s undoubted eccentricity. As well as translating Rimbaud, Rootham had tried to introduce the 19th-century Russian mystic Vladimir Solovyov to the English-speaking world. An inspiration for both Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky, Solovyov had argued for a synthesis of Christianity with Buddhism and the teachings of Plato, and claimed to have had mystical encounters with a being named ‘Sophia’, the very personification of Divine Wisdom.

Rootham had a weakness for this kind of thing, being drawn to arcane movements like Theosophy and its offshoots, engaging in bare-footed ‘nature-dances’, and becoming convinced that she was the reincarnation of a mediaeval Yugoslavian princess named Yelena. At one point, Helen became abnormally obsessed with a dream in which a giant leaf had emerged from the body of what she rather vaguely termed “a Being”; she asked everyone she met if they knew what it meant. Many said they did, but, being English, were much too polite to add out loud: “It means you’re mental”.

MARCHING TO HER OWN DRUM

The weirdest incident involving Rootham and the Sitwells occurred in 1915, however, when the governess took it upon herself to expel a demon – or ‘elemental’, as she had it – from the family home of Renishaw Hall



in Derbyshire. Built in 1625 and occupied by successive generations of the Sitwell family ever since, the Hall certainly had plenty of time to acquire some ghosts to haunt its lonelier corners, but the one that Rootham claimed to have expelled was particularly horrible in nature. Edith apparently met it herself as a child; she heard lame-sounding footsteps dragging their way across empty rooms, and on one occasion saw a door-handle repeatedly turning around by itself before the door burst open, revealing... nothing, other than the melancholy sound of the invisible spook, limping away into the distance.

Clearly this was a poltergeist infestation, and on a trip back to Renishaw during WWI, Rootham decided to play ghost-buster, wandering around the place with Edith and Osbert saying prayers for the dead. Suddenly, standing at the bottom of a staircase, Rootham announced: "It is coming!"; whereupon the sound of the halting footsteps began once more. Overcome by a sense of evil, Helen retreated to join Edith and Osbert, the latter gulping: "It is coming for us." Seemingly, it was; a sound like whispering waves filled the trio's heads, and a shapeless black mist appeared, floating down the steps and interfering with their brains in a strange, trance-inducing fashion. Perhaps disturbed by all the praying, the ghost then veered off at the last moment

and passed through a doorway. Rootham later swore blind that the elemental had visited her again in bed that night, where she engaged in a "battle" with it whose precise details have sadly never been revealed.

Osbert wrote a poem about this uncanny event called *Night*, and Edith herself was also inspired to versify by poltergeist phenomena, her poem *The Drum* being based upon one of the most celebrated of all English hauntings, the famous 'Demon Drummer of Tedworth' (see FT48:54-56, 202:38-44). The poem presents an interesting demonstration of Sitwell's own peculiar poetic craft; often, she was concerned above all with the sound her lines made when read aloud, and the rhythm of *The Drum* is an extreme example of this, for it is surely the only poem in the English language to take its tempo direct from the noises allegedly made by a real-

life ghost. Edith had discovered the story of the Drummer in a 1682 edition of Joseph Glanvill's tract *Saducismus Triumphatus*, a book of witchcraft-tales that provided the first comprehensive account of the haunting. The story, which has a fairy-tale air to it, begins with a Wiltshire magistrate named John Mompesson confiscating the drum of a local beggar named William Drury. Robbed of his livelihood, Drury is then supposed to have cursed the official, leading to his home being plagued by poltergeist phenomena, including loud raps and knocks. Seeing as these knocks seemed to play distinct tunes from thin air, they were interpreted by contemporary observers as being drumbeats caused by the supernatural agency of Drury in revenge for his instrument being impounded. Sitwell's poem was supposed to imitate the sound of this unearthly tattoo – and lines like "Dust doth clack/Clatter and quack/To a shadow black" do indeed sound like the regular beatings of an invisible drum if you read them correctly.

A BLACK MIST
APPEARED, FLOATING
DOWN THE STEPS AND
INTERFERING WITH
THEIR BRAINS

CURIOUS GEORGE

Renishaw Hall was apparently so full of spooks that it sometimes seemed the place had more dead occupants than living ones – not that Edith's father, Sir George Resesby Sitwell (1860-1943), would have agreed. Sir George was a truly odd man, as we shall soon see, but when it came to ghosts he was



HANWOOD IMAGEE / PICTURE POST / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: Osbert Sitwell at work in the gardens of Renishaw Hall, Derbyshire. The family home's numerous ghosts inspired some of the Sitwell's literary endeavours.



ABOVE LEFT: Reginald Farrer, way out East. ABOVE RIGHT: The Sitwell Family by John Singer Sargent. LEFT: Edith and Osbert in 1956.

utterly orthodox in his opinions; he didn't believe in them one bit. He accepted that people *saw* ghosts, but considered them hallucinations or "reverse impressions of something seen in the past, and now projected from an overtired and excited brain", as he put it. Sir George simply saw spooks as silly 'women's matters', caused by the supposed inferiority of the female nervous system. "Ghosts are sometimes met with, but they are not ghosts," he said. When it came to his own wife's nervous system, Sir George may have had a point: an unstable alcoholic and occasional ghost-seer with a taste for self-dramatisation, Lady Ida Sitwell (1869-1937) was given to explaining away any sleepless nights by reference to Renishaw's spirits being noisy, kept an expensively-acquired hangman's noose on display at the top of her bed for luck, and squandered a fortune of her husband's money on a pet pig she was convinced was psychic.

Perhaps Sir George's cynicism stemmed not only from his wife's foolishness but also from a youthful experience whilst studying at Oxford. Attending a séance arranged by the British National Association of Spiritualists on 9 January 1880, George had witnessed a notorious 24-year-old medium named Florence Cook (see FT179:30-37) walk behind a curtain only to re-emerge moments later having apparently transformed into a dead 12-year-old girl called Marie. On a previous visit to the séance-room, however, George had noticed something suspicious about Marie – beneath her white shroud-like robes, the dead child was sporting a corset. Pondering this fact later, George had concluded that ghosts were unlikely



to require any underwear and that, even if they did need to purchase fresh knickers in case of ectoplasmic accidents, there was no reason for a 12-year-old spectre to wear such an adult undergarment. This time, however, Sitwell had come prepared. When 'Marie' emerged from behind the curtain, he jumped up and grabbed her, establishing that, beneath her shroud, the 'little girl' was indeed wearing only her undies, thus no doubt allowing him to observe that she was unusually well developed for a girl of such alleged tender years. Tearing down

the curtain between two worlds, Sitwell was unsurprised to find Florence Cook's discarded clothing scattered all over the floor behind it. The séance then broke up amidst shouting and abuse, but Sir George later appeared in the pages of the *Times* and the *Telegraph*, where he was praised for having exposed a fraud.

THEY'RE CREEPY AND THEY'RE KOOKY

Whilst most of the Sitwells were more than a bit abnormal on their own, it was on a collective basis that the family's true eccentric strength rested. Edith's paternal grandmother, for example, Lady Louisa Sitwell (1827-1911) was an excessively religious woman whose favourite pastime was driving through the streets of Scarborough in her coach together with a suffragan bishop, kidnapping prostitutes (or, more accurately, women she thought *resembled* prostitutes) and carting them off to a home for 'fallen women' she funded. Here, the whores were stripped naked, forcibly bathed by a burly matron to wash away their sins and then dressed up like policemen, before being put to work as laundresses behind closed doors. Cousins and second-cousins provided further weird delights, most notably one Reginald Farrer (1880-1920), a Yorkshireman with a cleft palate who turned both vegetarian and Buddhist after accidentally eating his pet cat whilst visiting Japan; he became the world's leading authority on oriental rock-gardens,

adopting the bizarre alpine-planting method of filling his shotgun up with rare Himalayan seeds and then firing them into cliffs in order to lend an element of chance to his horticultural compositions. In 1913, Farrer stood for Parliament, but lost after blowing his entire campaign-budget on flower-bulbs.

As a family, then, the Sitwells could take on the entire world in the ever-popular sport of competitive nuttiness, but their only real hope of a solo world-champion lay with Sir George. George, like Reginald Farrer, was a fan of gardening, devoting much of his time (and his fortune) to planning alterations to his estate, constructing numerous tall wooden pillars upon which he would sit perched with an umbrella for hours on end, surveying his lands through a telescope, fantasising about adding lakes and statues and bulldozing away annoying hills which interfered with his line of sight. Today, visitors to Renishaw Hall's beautiful formal gardens may well be pleased that Sir George took such troubles over his hobby; but most people will no doubt be rather more pleased that his son Osbert took equal pains over the careful presentation of his father's life-story in his five-volume 1945-50 autobiography *Left Hand, Right Hand!*

DADDY QUEEREST

Osbert's very funny book is a treasure-trove of mad anecdotes about his parent. Eager to present his father as crazy from birth, Osbert related how, after inheriting his title as a toddler in 1862, the young Sir George immediately began to feel a sense of superiority and entitlement. There was the time, for instance, when travelling on a train with his nurse, that an avuncular old man sitting opposite had asked him "And who are you, young fellow?" The enquiry was to elicit an alarmingly precocious response: "I am Sir George Sitwell, Baronet," the tiny tot answered. "I am four years old and the youngest Baronet in England."

Sir George's odd ways continued whilst boarding at Eton between 1873 and 1878, where he is alleged to have devised two amazing inventions; a musical toothbrush that played as you scrubbed your teeth,

and a tiny revolver for firing miniature projectiles at wasps – devices that are still being searched for by his descendants. As an adult, his unsuccessful marriage to the alcoholic Lady Ida sent him retreating further and further inside himself. Convinced he was always right about everything, ever, Sir George once published a pamphlet pointing out to Einstein where he was going wrong, and deliberately tried to alienate any visitors to Renishaw by having a notice made, reading: "I must ask anyone entering the house never to contradict me or differ from me in any way, as it interferes with the functioning of the gastric juices and prevents my sleeping at night".

Appalled by modernity, Sir George became an expert on the Middle Ages, a period he thought better than his own day in every respect, banning electricity from his presence until the 1940s, rationing visitors to two candles apiece during their stays, and calculating Osbert's allowance upon the basis of the amount one of his ancestors had given his own son during the years of the Black Death. Appropriately enough, he began devoting much of his time to highly specialist historical research, writing a

series of quite unpublishable books whose titles ranged from the wilfully obscure – *The History of the Fork, The Use of the Bed, Leper's Squints, The Introduction of the Peacock into Western Gardens* – to the absurdly specific – *Domestic Manners in Sheffield in the Year 1250, Rotherham Under Cromwell, Acorns as an Article of Medieval Diet* and his analysis for curing insomnia, *The Twenty-Seven Postures of Sir George R Sitwell*. A weird mixture of miser and spendthrift, Sir George was perfectly happy to buy a mediæval Italian castle on pure whim, but once attempted to persuade Eton to accept Osbert's school-fees in the form of potatoes. Frequently, he would question trivial household expenses, buying his children utilitarian 'presents' like bars of soap at Christmas, and yet when it came to his own interests of landscape-gardening and antiquities, money was no object. Even the cows that wandered through the fields of Renishaw were not safe from Sir George's aesthetic attentions; he seriously conceived the idea of paint-stencilling their hides with blue and white willow patterns to match his tasteful Chinese crockery. Sir George died in Switzerland in 1942, though for him, in many respects, it might as well have been 1342.

JEEVES AND BLUSTER

So eager was Osbert to portray his father as a modern-day Don Quixote that he even gave him his own Sancho Panza figure, Sir George's faithful butler Henry Moat (1871-1940). Moat may have described his master as "the strangest old bugger you ever met", but he was a little odd himself. Described as resembling a "benevolent purple hippopotamus", the burly Moat was forever having bust-ups with Sir George and walking out on him before returning to patch things up again. Moat's chief role was to try and curb Sir George's madder schemes as tactfully as possible. There was the time, for instance, that Sir George called Moat into his presence and informed him excitedly of his new idea that, from now on, all knife-handles "should always be made from condensed milk". Taking his time to ponder this bizarre suggestion, Moat eventually formulated the following droll response: "Yes, Sir George... but what if the cat gets at them?" When Lady Ida died and was buried in 1937, Moat consoled the household thus: "Well at least now Sir George will know where Her Ladyship spends her afternoons." When Moat finally died in 1940, 43 years after first entering the Sitwells' service, Sacheverell, typically, thought he heard his ghost banging about in the pantry at Renishaw. When she heard this claim, Edith fondly imagined that Moat was returning home to check up on the poor neglected children whom he had tried his best to protect from their parents' harsh inadequacies during their earliest and most tender years.

These are marvellous stories. The only question is – how accurate are they? Osbert did not like his father, for a variety of reasons, and what must be remembered with the paternal portrait painted in *Left Hand, Right Hand!* is that it is extremely partial. Nothing in it is untrue, as such, but Sir George's



TOP: Sir George Sitwell. ABOVE: Osbert's autobiography portrayed his father as an eccentric on a grand scale.

numerous episodes of weirdness were stitched together by his unfaithful son in such a way as to obscure the general day-to-day pattern of his life. While he was undoubtedly very strange, for most of the time Sir George acted in a reasonably rational manner, and no doubt whole months would sometimes pass without him appearing to need a straitjacket. He was, for example, a well respected Tory MP, sitting for five years in the Commons. I looked up the contributions he made there – there aren't many – hoping they would be filled with insane ramblings, but they were not. In some ways, this is all most unfair; and yet, at the same time, Osbert's skewed version of Sir George is undeniably a great literary creation. Exaggeration and selective quotation is, essentially, the method of all eccentric biography; a presentation of an unusual life with all the dull bits taken out in order to leave us with a heightened, slightly inaccurate, yet not untrue, portrait of the subject. You can make more-or-less anyone resemble a fruitcake using such a method, I would suggest – including Dame Edith herself.

QUEEN OF THE GOTHS

One of Sir George's many unpublished masterworks was called *The Errors of Modern Parents* – a subject upon which he really was qualified to write, particularly in relation to Edith's childhood. Sir George was not deliberately vindictive towards his daughter, but many of his kindnesses seemed to her very much like cruelties. For example, genuinely concerned about her wellbeing, Sir George allowed himself to be convinced by misguided doctors that the 11-year-old Edith was in danger of growing up with both a crooked spine and a severely misshapen nose, thus condemning her to spend years locked up within a kind of artificial bodily prison. Specially-made iron-lined boots and a weighty metallic corset restricted Edith's movements during the day, while at night her legs were sealed within a locked cage that rendered it impossible for her to leave her bed – even, as she complained, if there were to be a fire. She was also made to wear a nose-truss, with two steel prongs constantly locked into place against either side of her proboscis, forcing it to grow straight. So hideous did this apparatus look that, callously, her hated mother used to encourage friends to visit Edith during her home-schooling lessons in order to peer at the infant freak-show.

With a childhood this gothic, no wonder Edith grew up to be somewhat unusual. The very word 'gothic', for example, is surely the best way to describe the manner of dress she adopted in adulthood; long flowing velvet dresses, fingers covered with antique rings, and strange, mediæval-style head-wear and golden turbans were far indeed from the usual fashions of the day. With her tall, thin frame, elongated fingers, unusual nose (in spite of the childhood truss) and even more unusual outfits, Edith certainly made a striking figure, and, to many, a strikingly ridiculous one. Ever the self-dramatist, she eventually began claiming to have modelled her appearance on that of Queen Elizabeth



HAROLD CLEMENTS / EXPRESS / GETTY IMAGES

TOP: Dame Edith photographed in 1953 sporting typically mediæval-style garb and one of her antique rings.

I, about whom she wrote two bestselling books. So strongly did she begin to identify with the Virgin Queen that Sitwell, finding they shared a birthday, hired a professional astrologer to cast their charts for comparison. According to Sitwell, the astrologer tentatively concluded his client might well have been the reincarnation of Good Queen Bess, an idea she found pleasing.

As all this suggests, Edith Sitwell felt a very real need to engage in acts of self-reinvention, perhaps in an attempt to escape from the miseries of her childhood. Deciding upon life as a poet, she started to view herself as different from other people and more 'sensitive'. She believed, for instance, that she and her brothers were slightly psychic, having access to what she called "a leakage in time" that facilitated prophetic dreams. She claimed that, when asked as a toddler what she would be when grown, had answered "A genius!" a prediction that, it was implied, had since come true. Determined to embark upon the literary life, as a young woman Edith began performing acts of faintly embarrassing poetic pilgrimage, travelling to Algernon Swinburne's grave on the Isle of Wight and pouring libations of milk over it as an offering to his soul, or leaving red roses on the doorstep of WB Yeats and then running away.

Because of such eccentricities, it remains an inescapable fact that the Sitwells are today more celebrated for their bizarre lifestyle and humorous escapades than they are for their art. But is it really such a terrible fate to be remembered by the multitude as

being slightly mad? Not necessarily. The last word, as ever, must go to the formidable Dame Edith, who in a 1923 lecture assessed her family's reputation for insanity and weirdness thus: "Let us speak of our madness. We are always being called mad. If we are mad... at least we are mad in company with most of our great predecessors... Beethoven, Schuman and Wagner, Shelley, Blake, Keats, Coleridge, Wordsworth, were all mad in turn. We shall be proud to join them in the Asylum to which they are now consigned."

So, surely, would anybody remotely sane. **FT**



This is an edited and condensed extract taken from SD Tucker's new book *Great British Eccentrics*, released in September 2015 by Amberley Publishing (ISBN:978-1-4456-4770-8). All references can be found

listed within. (For a discussion of Sacheverell Sitwell's theory that Adolf Hitler was a poltergeist-medium, see **FT293:46-49**)

AUTHOR BIORAPHY



SD TUCKER is an FT regular whose most recent books are *Great British Eccentrics* and (forthcoming) *The Hidden Folk*. Currently at work on a book about forgotten science,

he loves strange people, but only from a distance.

Tragic Songs from the Grassy Knoll

A MUSICAL HISTORY OF THE JFK ASSASSINATION

The assassination of President John F Kennedy in November 1963 sent shockwaves around the world, but its impact on popular music and recorded sound remains largely neglected.

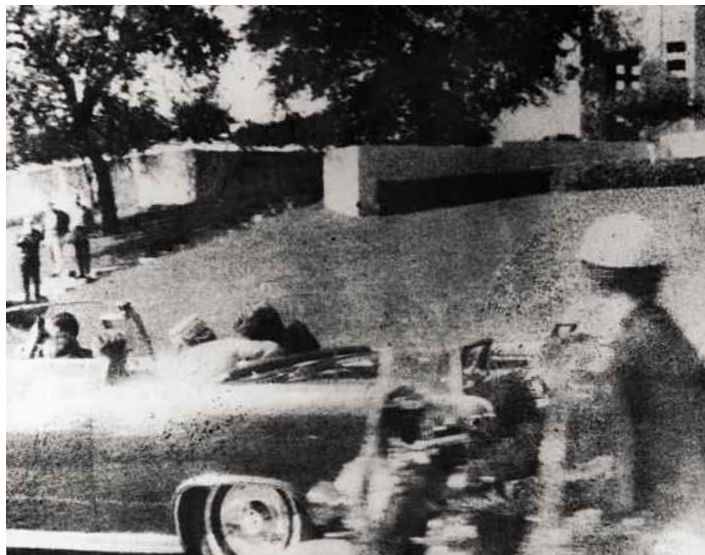
DAVID THRUSSELL assesses a forgotten legacy of discarded vinyl artefacts.

A watershed political and historical moment, the 22 November 1963 assassination of John F Kennedy approaches its 52nd anniversary and still stirs passions and debate.

Visitors to Dealey Plaza, in Dallas, Texas, consistently remark how time appears 'frozen' at the the scene of the crime: little has changed since that infamous date and a haunting stillness hangs over the fateful intersection. Likewise, the momentous event is captured in a mountainous range of forgotten, discarded and ghostly vinyl artefacts.

No one can deny the seismic impact on culture, politics and the popular consciousness of the assassination of the 35th US President. Some sources assert that over 40,000 books (is that possible?) have been written that relate in some way to JFK's demise, scores of major and minor films have reflected upon the murder, and hundreds of documentaries have presented various conflicting theories and versions of events. Even select names or phrases ('Grassy Knoll') have seen their usage or cultural resonance forever altered, and Kennedy's slaying regularly appears (in some form or another) in such pop-culture touchstones as *The Simpsons* or *South Park*.

While the public appears to be divided between those who adhere to the establishment Warren Commission conclusions (or those of the House Select Committee on Assassinations) and a wide landscape of competing alternate theories (FT72:30-33, 176:32-36, 292:25, 307:30-36), it's worth reiterating that there was never a trial and no one has ever been found guilty of the crime (mainstream assumptions about Lee Oswald's guilt notwithstanding).



ON THE MARGINS

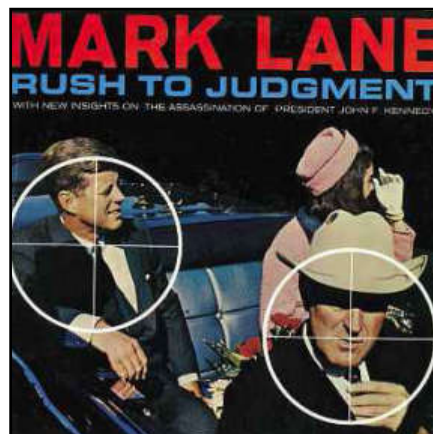
One aspect seldom considered is the assassination's impact on music and the field of recorded sound. A sincere and global tide of grief greeted the young President's death (frankly unimaginable for incumbents of recent memory) and a legion of scribes and wordsmiths hastily took up pen, microphone, guitar or baton.

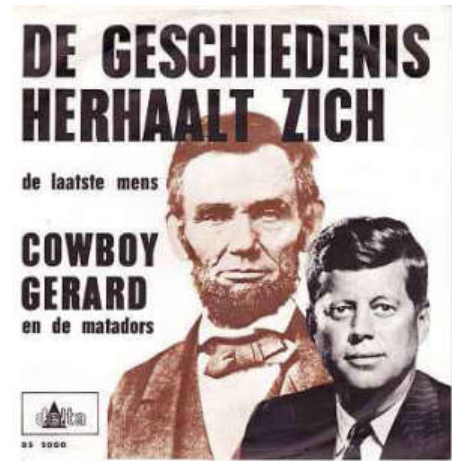
Perhaps fortuitously, late 1963 also lay at the apex of an era when recording and record (LP and 45) pressing technology (while never cheap) were accessible and many, especially in the genetically entrepreneurial USA, expressed themselves

A sincere and global tide of grief greeted the president's death

musically or in spoken-word form in small editions or regional releases and private pressings. Pop music, with its commodified corporate parameters, national or international marketplace and rigid schedules barely registered the assassination (with notable exceptions from The Byrds, Phil Ochs and a few others) but out on the margins, with less commercial imperatives but considerable popular sentiment, hundreds of artists committed odes or laments to the fallen President to wax, sometimes within weeks or even days. Where today a blog, YouTube post or Facebook thread might register social disquiet or topicality, in 1963 a troubadour, singing group or organisation could tap into the popular ferment in recorded song or spoken tract. Media outlets were relatively few and generally inaccessible, but modest recording studios were plentiful, and do-it-yourself or independent releases a roughhewn, entry-level democracy.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Country music, with its southern lineage, preternatural sentimentality and historical claims to





ABOVE: Country singer Buddy Starcher (below) had a regional hit with his JFK tribute; it was picked up by bigger labels and spawned cover versions, including one in Dutch.

authenticity and sincerity, spawned a veritable cottage industry of JFK threnodies.

The exception that proves the rule is the notably bizarre 1966 hit 45 'History Repeats Itself' penned, recited and recorded by journeyman West Virginia Country singer, radio personality and renowned 'pitchman' Buddy Starcher (1906–2001). Over a stirring rendition of 'The Battle Hymn Of The Republic' Starcher recites a litany of eerie coincidences and connections



between the assassinations of Kennedy and Abraham Lincoln. Like a tuneful James Shelby Downard (of 'King-Kill/33' infamy), Buddy intones his striking (and disarmingly fortean) list with stentorian, authoritative aplomb. Originally released in 1965 on his own microscopic BES (Buddy Edgar Starcher) label, regional interest motivated the independent Boone label to reissue the 45 (complete with transparent orange vinyl promo edition) in 1966, landing this surreal slice of pseudo-historical/political patter all the way at #2 in the national Country charts

and #39 in the Pop charts, thus evidently persuading Decca Records to license the master and rush-release an LP of sibling recitations, including toe-tappers like 'The Fall Of A Nation' [a comparison of then contemporary America and the fall of the Roman Empire] and 'A Tax-Payer's Letter'.

Starcher's song created enough traction to result in a charting cover version cut by bluesman Cab Calloway, a Dutch version ('De Geschiedenis Herhaalt Zich' naturally), a

parody by irreverent duo Homer & Jethro that chronicled further eerie coincidences between Lyndon Johnson and Batman, and a sequel, Buddy's own and somewhat tired 'History Repeats Itself Part II'.

RED RIVER DAVE AND OTHERS

Red River Dave is the kind of storied itinerant troubadour who deserves a book. Raised as a cowboy "within a rifle shot of the Alamo" in San Antonio, David Largus McEnery (1914–2002) soon took up the guitar and became a successful radio entertainer

and apparently the first ever singing cowboy to appear live on television, at the 1939 New York World's Fair. McEnery turned his talents to topical songwriting and became a prodigious chronicler of current events in song. His 1937 ode 'Amelia Earhart's Last Flight' reputedly sold in the millions and has become a standard, performed by Kinky Friedman, Joan Baez and countless others. For a time, Red River Dave was a genuine cowboy singing star.

Once in 1946, at a San Antonio radio station, McEnery sat handcuffed to a piano for 12 hours ("not goin' to the bathroom or nothin'") and composed 52 songs. Moving to Hollywood, Dave spent time in 'talkies' before roaming and selling topical 45s from his car boot. Tall, with a white flowing 'Buffalo Bill' beard, gold-sprayed cowboy boots and a steer-horned Cadillac, during the late 1950s, 1960s and 1970s McEnery waxed and yodelled about Lee Harvey Oswald, the Bay Of Pigs incident, the deaths of Marilyn Monroe, JFK and James Dean, Korean War brainwashing, Elvis's mother, the Jonestown massacre and Patty Hearst among a multitude of other, essentially lost, recordings. 'California Hippie Murders!' is a lyrically harrowing, journalistically accurate



RED RIVER DAVE SETTING A NEW WORLD'S RECORD IN MARATHON SONG WRITING WHILE CHAINED TO A PIANO



ABOVE: Red River Dave was a singing cowboy and topical songwriter who tackled topics from the JFK assassination to the Manson murders and the Jonestown Massacre.

retelling of the infamous Manson-masterminded Tate-LaBianca slayings. Released while the trial was still ongoing in September 1970 on the homespun 'Reveal' label, original 45 copies are sadly so rare as to be almost mythical.

McEnery's homily to JFK, 'God's Game Of Checkers' (available for \$1 postpaid at the time), made it to market just weeks after the tragedy; it's copyrighted 1963, with his then home address in San Antonio listed as the label headquarters. It takes the appropriate form of a letter, delivered as recitation, from a gnarled, silver-haired cowboy to the son he never had (JFK Jr. - who 'celebrated' his third birthday the day his father was buried). Red River Dave speaks eloquently about checkers as a gladiatorial metaphor for the "great game of life" and reassures John John that his father was sacrificed so that others might live and prosper. The song ends as the weary old cowboy mounts his steed to deliver the letter to a far-off post office where 'Old Glory' "still hangs" at half-mast.

Another talented but largely unappreciated Country and Rockabilly singer, Autry Inman (1929-1988), plugged away at the Bullet, Decca and RCA labels during the 1950s with little commercial success. He also rushed his catchy and really rather fine 'The Ballad Of John F Kennedy' onto the market via the independent Sims label within weeks of the assassination. The cut was earwormish enough to receive sporadic radio play and decent distribution on 45, and later turned up as an album cut on an Alshire budget label LP.

By the mid-1960s Inman had traded careers to become an 'adult comedian' and cut spicy releases like 'Riscotheque/



Saturday Night: Volume One' and 'Nudist Marriage' (which veered towards the Neil Hamburger 'so unfunny, it's kind of funny' style comedy).

1968 saw Autry return to Country and record (with Bob Luman) his greatest commercial success, 'The Ballad Of Two Brothers' (nope, not the Kennedys), a delirious cowpoke juggernaut of hyper-patriotic agitprop that vividly portrays two brothers (one fighting/burning babies in Vietnam, the other a loafing campus hippie) on either side of the Vietnam War social divide. As entertaining a late 1960s time capsule as one could possibly hope to find, 'The Ballad Of Two Brothers' was a sizeable hit, #14 on the Country chart and #48 on Billboard.

Nevertheless, by the early 1970s, Inman had been nabbed heading a massive operation allegedly pirating LPs onto 8-track tapes in Nashville and Memphis. At trial, Autry (rather convincingly) argued that despite decades of hard slog, he'd never been paid a cent in the music business previously and was determined to make a go of it, one way or another. Unfortunately, he eventually did jail time and drifted into other pursuits.

BALLADS AND BLUES

Innumerable other privately pressed or regionally released JFK homages exist. Some, like Leamon Allen Jr's fine, folksy, rustically engaging 'The Ballad of John F Kennedy' were completed so quickly that there is no flipside to the 45, just blank

vinyl. Allen was a musically inclined North Carolina Korean War veteran so moved by Kennedy's death that he made his only extant recording soon after.

Similarly, southern Colorado construction worker and weekend musician Phil Albo was so shaken by the assassination that he immediately wrote and recorded (at the local Gordon's Music Store) his heartfelt ode 'The Ballad of John F Kennedy'. His wife Maria reports that Phil sent copies of the resultant privately pressed 45 to Bobby, Jackie and Ted, receiving in return "the nicest letter from them, thanking him for the record." Sadly, just a few years later Phil passed away from leukemia.

Though contested, it is most likely that 'Johnny Rebel' is the pseudonym of Clifford Joseph Trahan, a Louisiana, Cajun Country musician. Trahan is infamous for composing and recording a number of overtly racist

45s for notable producer JD Miller's 'Reb Rebel' label in the mid-1960s.



Spawned at the height of the Civil Rights era, these cuts received no radio play but were apparently sold under the counter at juke-box joints and other establishments. Recorded at Miller's Crowley, Louisiana, studio, some of the 'Reb Rebel' releases reportedly sold over 200,000 units in underground trade.

When cornered about his deep stable of sometimes dubious recordings, Miller would protest that they were only waxed as a "joke," and the fact that Miller often recorded interracial bands and also (over decades) a notable cast of local bluesmen only serves to muddy the waters. Bootlegged and banned, with their ownership often in dispute, these incendiary records are today available only via ominous sounding white-supremacist groups like the "Condor



WROTE WORDS AND MUSIC

Girl's Ballad on JFK Published

A ballad composed by a 16-year-old Waterloo girl following President Kennedy's assassination has been published by Broadcast Music Incorporated and recorded by popular artist Doc Williams.

Suzanne Belanger, a daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Paul Belanger, 136 Ellis Cres. South, Waterloo, wrote words and music for Oh, Why Do The Good Die Young? a few hours after the assassination.

Williams, who sings at the K-W Collegiate Thursday night, will include the ballad on his program and will introduce Suzanne to the audience.

Most surprising is the fact this was the Waterloo girl's first serious attempt at composition.



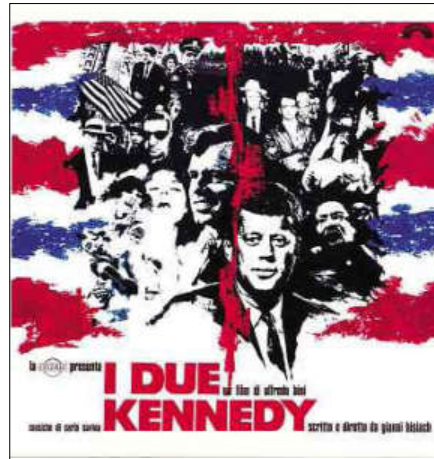
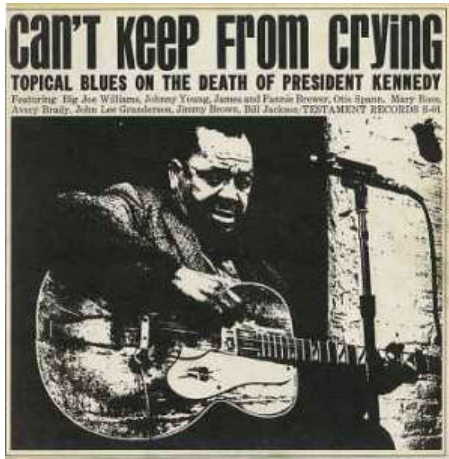
SUZANNE BELANGER
First Attempt
Record Photo

Although she studied piano three years and is interested in singing and picking out tunes, she had never been previously moved to attempt a complete song.

First favorable reception came when Suzanne sang it over the PA system at St. Mary's High School on request of her teachers. The sisters were very impressed and later Michael Bergauer, Kitchener Separate Schools music teacher, did the arrangement.

Suzanne's three brothers, Paul, 9, Joseph, 10, David, 14, and her mother are all interested in music but so far she is the first to reveal a composing flare. She is also keenly interested in art.

ABOVE: Many Country artists recorded homages to the fallen JFK, including Autry Inman ('The Ballad of John F Kennedy') and Doc Williams ('Oh Why Do the Good Die Young?')



ABOVE: Other vinyl responses to JFK's killing included an album of Chicago blues, an Italian film score and an instrumental tribute from eccentric British producer Joe Meek.

Legion Ordnance”.

For his troubles, ‘Johnny Rebel’ was reportedly offered an honorary membership in the Klu Klux Klan. On the rare occasion that Trahan (by day, a driving school owner) wasn’t recording racist tracts, however, he showed himself to be a fine Country singer. His 1967 45 ‘Keep A Workin’ Big Jim’ (flipside: ‘(Federal Aid Hell!) The Money Belongs to Us’) commends and encourages New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison (“Keep a workin’ Big Jim, we want to know the truth!”) and his controversial investigation into the Kennedy assassination. A spirited, swinging (and rare) musical rebuke to the Warren Commission, Trahan’s record nevertheless receives no mention in Garrison’s iconic book (the inspiration behind Oliver Stone’s 1991 film *JFK*), *On The Trail Of The Assassins*.

From Doc Williams to The Country Gentlemen, Jimmy Newman to David Price, legions of Country artists – big and small, known and unknown – mourned Kennedy’s violent, shocking death.

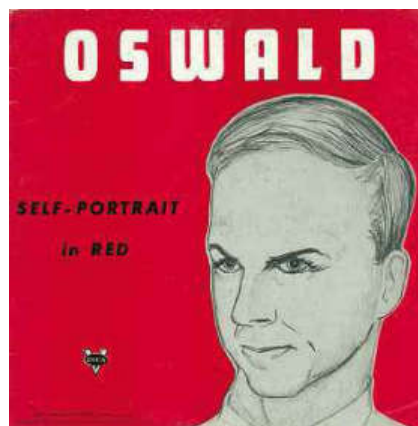
Dispelling the illusion that perhaps only white southerners grieved enough to put needle to wax, the 1964 LP *Can't Keep From Crying: Topical Blues On The Death Of President Kennedy* proved that blues artists also penned tributes to the fallen president. Largely recorded around the Chicago area in the weeks following the assassination, the album is composed entirely of emotive African-American blues laments to JFK, and features well known singers Big Joe Williams and Otis Spann (whose ‘Sad Day In Texas’ is a particular highlight) amongst a cast of relatively lesser known artists.

Fast forward a few decades, and just in time for the 50th anniversary of the assassination (22 November 2013), the excellent NYC-based Norton Records (co-founded by former Cramps drummer Miriam Linna) issued *Tragic Songs From The Grassy Knoll*, a compelling compilation LP of obscure period Country songs mourning JFK’s murder (the set doesn’t contain any cuts mentioned here, such is the wealth of relevant and forgotten material).

INTERNATIONAL RESPONSES

Though undoubtedly the bulk of Kennedy

The 45 commends Jim Garrison and his controversial investigation into the assassination



tributes came from the USA, internationally the tragedy also left ripples etched deep in wax. Maverick British producer Joe Meek and his orchestra dedicated their spritely yet haunting ‘The Kennedy March’ to the slain president, and Scottish blues-rocker Alex Harvey wrote (according to the lyrics) ‘The Ballad Of JFK’ a week after the event. Harvey’s song was unreleased at the time and only exists today because of an acetate/demo recording recovered through the deceased estate of his manager. It paints a remarkably sympathetic portrait of alleged assassin Lee Harvey Oswald, comparing him favourably to renowned and railroaded Italian anarchists Sacco and Vanzetti, as well as murdered unionist Joe Hill, while hinting at darker forces behind the scenes.

Rarely seen outside of Italy, the fascinating 1969 documentary film *I Due Kennedy* (‘The Two Kennedys’) presents the assassination as a domestic political intrigue at the nexus of ‘Big Oil’, CIA malfeasance and mob muscle.

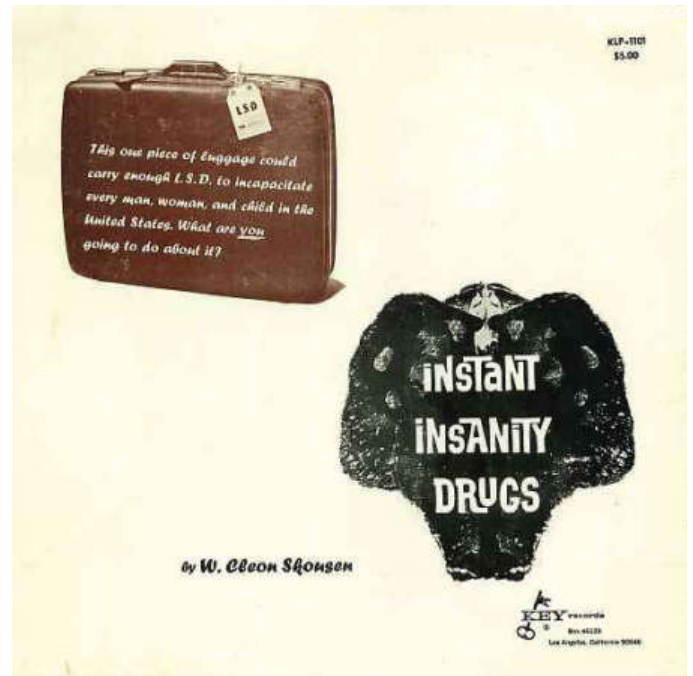
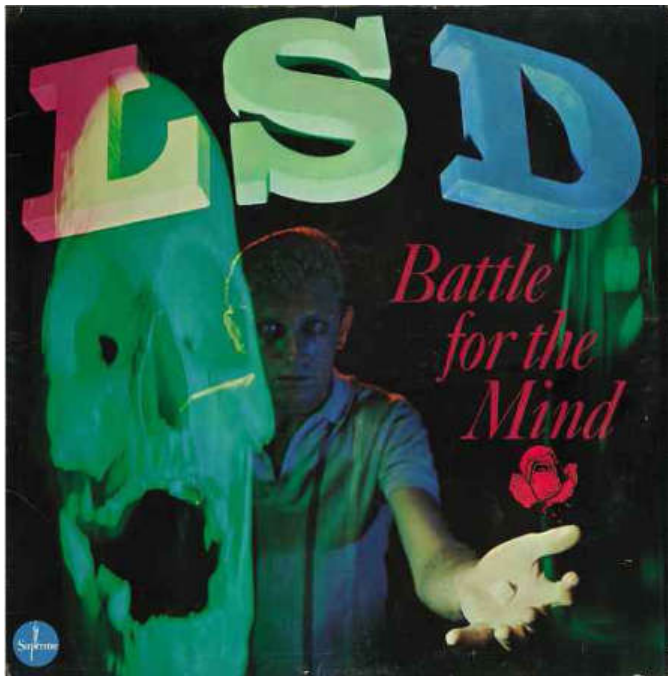
According to some researchers, fleeting and distant footage (seemingly only available in this particular film) depicts Oswald, notorious assassination figure David Ferrie and future Watergate burglar and CIA operative Frank Sturgis, together training for an anti-Castro operation. If that is the case, the theory of Lee Oswald as lone assassin becomes essentially untenable.

Lauded Italian musician Carlo Savina (music director on *The Godfather* and composer on more marginal titles like *Feast Of Satan* and *School Of Erotic Enjoyment*) wrote the film’s suitably funereal score, which was issued in extremely limited numbers on a Cinevox label LP.

SELF-PORTRAIT IN RED

Parallel to all this musical activity, another, even more subterranean industry thrived. Though largely forgotten now, record albums were once seen as a suitable vehicle to capture and distribute audio documentaries, solemn lectures and apocalyptic tirades. Especially amongst those denied access to the mainstream media, LPs were used to propagate often unconventional or marginalised views. Running the gamut from Russian/American Objectivist Ayn Rand reading her short stories and delivering philosophical treatises (she released at least half a dozen LPs during the 1960s) to religious tracts denouncing hallucinogenic drugs (1966’s *LSD: Battle For The Mind* and 1968’s *Instant Insanity Drugs* among others) the battlefield of ideas played out on vinyl as it did in print and on the airwaves.

Oswald: Self-Portrait In Red is a 1964 LP pressed and distributed by INCA (‘The Information Council Of The Americas’), a group linked by some to the CIA. It presents a 21 August 1963 radio appearance by Oswald on New Orleans’s WDSU with inserted commentary by Dr Alton Ochsner, Congressman Hale Boggs and Ed Butler. Ochsner was President of both INCA and the Alton Ochsner Medical Foundation (he also released an LP *The Death Of A Smoker* on the Waco, Texas, ‘Word’ label) and, according to Judith Vary Baker, he hired her, her ‘boyfriend’ Lee Oswald and David Ferrie to work in a clandestine cancer laboratory to develop a carcinogenic bio-weapon to be



ABOVE: Vinyl as a battlefield of ideas: the Kennedy assassination wasn't the only topic addressed by spoken-word recordings. BELOW: The debate about the assassination, and the guilt, or not, of Lee Harvey Oswald raged across a slew of releases at the time.

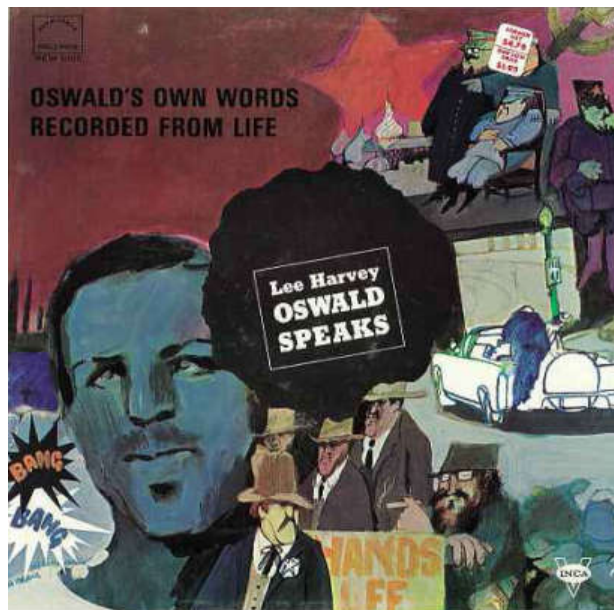
deployed against Fidel Castro.

Numerous other LPs of the period feature that same Lee Oswald radio interview (or another, less familiar one from a week earlier) with additional commentary. The privately distributed *Hear! Kennedy's Killer: An Interview – Lee Harvey Oswald, The President's Assassin Speaks* (on the Los Angeles based Key Records, founded and run by Frank Sinatra songwriter and John Birch Society associate Vic Knight) and *Lee Harvey Oswald Speaks* (among others) alleged Oswald's guilt.

On the other side of the debate are at least three LPs that feature notable Warren Commission critic Mark Lane: *The Oswald Case: Mark Lane's Testimony to The Warren Commission* (a 1964 double-LP box set on Folkways) and two different audio LPs documenting the (then popular on campuses) film version of Lane's best-selling book *Rush To Judgement*, one on the well-regarded left-of-centre folkie Vanguard label (home to Buffy Sainte-Marie, Tom Paxton and others) and another on Happening Records Inc.

Folkways also issued in 1964 *The Oswald Case: Mrs Marguerite Oswald Reads Lee Harvey Oswald's Letters from Russia*, wherein Lee's mother plainly states her opinion that her son was an intelligence "agent of the United States government".

Auschwitz survivor and left-leaning writer/publisher MS Arnoni wrote presciently in an early 1964 edition of his fascinating journal *The Minority Of One* about the assassination as a possible 'deep state'-inspired regime change or subterranean military coup action. His clear and provocative reasoning showed no sign of the Establishment Left's later allergy to



'conspiracy' and 'conspiracy theorists' and is worth perusing even today. Arnoni released his impassioned 15 October 1965 speech at a Berkeley 'teach-in' (delivered while he was wearing a concentration camp uniform) on the privately pressed LP *A Manifesto Of Belief In Man*.

Uncountable other elegiac JFK audio artefacts also exist, from albums of poetry like *JFK: 30 Poems On The Death Of A President* (on Folkways again) to *The Controversy* (on Probe/Capitol), a wide-ranging analysis of heatedly divergent opinions.

We're left with a vast and unremembered archive, largely consigned to oblivion, that sonically captures events, emotions, recollections, grief, pain, anger, pleadings, protestations, exhortations, misinformation, disinformation, propaganda and a desperate yearning search for the truth; a plasticised 'Stone Tape' formed in cultural detritus and reverberant rubble; a catalogue of innocence and optimism lost.

As the controversy around John F Kennedy's death refuses to subside, so these vinyl relics continue to whisper from the shadows. **FT**

All records, covers and images are from the collection of the author. Much information is gleaned directly from the actual records/covers themselves. Some of the records described can be heard on YouTube and other corners of the Internet. Some can't. Good luck. This article is far from exhaustive; no complete discography of Kennedy assassination-related recordings exists and the above largely reflects the author's own tastes and interests.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



DAVID THRUSSELL is a musician/composer/writer/record label mogul/filmmaker/closet-hillbilly who lives deep in the Australian outback and is best avoided.

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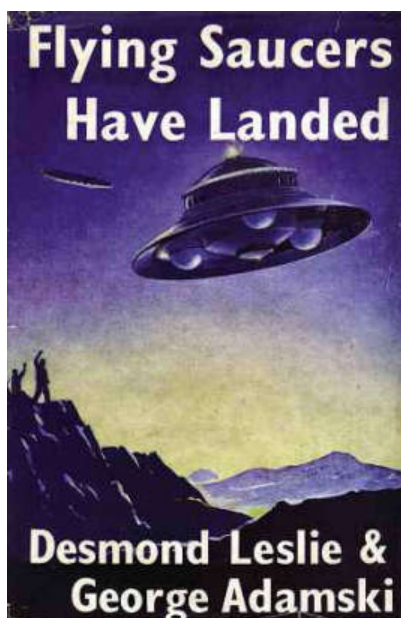
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BUILDING A FORTEAN LIBRARY

4. A MOUND OF VENUS

There was no one quite like the contactee George Adamski, and half a century after his death he remains as potent an invitation to spill ink as when living. It is strange to us that anyone, even in the early 1950s when he first burst upon an astonished world, took him at all seriously – that's to say, literally. But as a supernova of the ufological firmament, he should be taken seriously, although in another sense. His story, the tales he spun, the import of the messages he brought from 'outer space', and his sheer brilliance at self-promotion, all illuminate his own times and the wider context of the history of ufology. And he casts an interesting light on ufologists, too.

The first 'must read' volume here is Adamski's first book, *Flying Saucers Have Landed*. Some background is worth reviewing before looking at the book itself. It was first published in the UK by T Werner Laurie. Their newly arrived editor-in-chief, Ian Waveney Girvan, as a director at Carroll & Nicholson and Westaway Books, had not long before commissioned and published Gerald Heard's *The Riddle of the Flying Saucers*. Girvan was, if not obsessed, certainly deeply fascinated by flying saucers: he had begun subscribing to a clippings agency for UFO-related newspaper reports in 1949, and in 1954, along with others such as Brinsley le Poer Trench, became one of the founders of *Flying Saucer Review* (later *FSR*). As Steve Holland tells it (<http://bearalley.blogspot.co.uk/2013/10/waveney-girvan.html>), "Girvan's arrival at T Werner Laurie coincided with the arrival of a manuscript from a member of the Anglo-Irish aristocracy, Desmond Leslie (1921-2001). While he was touting his book around various publishers, Leslie heard of a Polish-born American, George Adamski (1891-1965), who claimed to have photographed alien spaceships in the Californian skies and who later, in 1952, said he was taken on a trip to Venus by an alien visitor to Earth. Leslie contacted Adamski who sent him copies of his photographs and then sent him a manuscript detailing his adventures. Leslie submitted both his and Adamski's manuscripts to Werner Laurie..." Waveney Girvan thought the two manuscripts were too slim to publish individually, so he combined them into a single book. *Flying*



Saucers Have Landed was published in 1953 to a chorus of derision from reviewers, soon followed by massive sales on both sides of the Atlantic.

Leslie's contribution amounted to about three quarters of the book, and one can see why, in the innocence of those early saucer days, Girvan would have been intrigued. As his *Daily Telegraph* obituary put it: "To Leslie, ancient monuments and artefacts were proof of a sophistication of culture and technology that could not be attributed to the people of their times. The makers, he concluded, were evidently super-human – or came from elsewhere" – that is, from Mars or Venus. Leslie believed these visitors were "of a higher

plane", both literally and figuratively, did not have wars, and were "kindly people who come to us more often in time of stress and trouble." Leslie openly looted, and treated as fact, large chunks of his 'history' from early Theosophists, forerunners in their own special way of 'ancient astronaut' theory. What was most startling, and undoubtedly new to the Anglophone world, was his lengthy treatment of *vimanas*, the sky-chariots of the Hindu gods, later treated at great length by Richard L Thompson in *Alien Identities* (1993). But that was as nothing beside Adamski's claim to have met the occupant of a flying saucer in California on 20 November 1952.

Adamski said he had no more than a hunch that a spot about 11 miles down the highway from Desert Center was the place he and his invited companions should start their vigil. But there they went and, after a light lunch, sat scanning the sky. Then: "Riding high, and without sound, there was a gigantic cigar-shaped silvery ship, without wings or appendages of any kind." The craft moved as if drifting in the direction of the group, then stopped, hovering. Adamski felt that the ship had come specifically for him, and on another hunch demanded to be taken down the road. Adamski was duly driven onto a dirt road. After half a mile or so, fearing the presence of his companions would deter the aliens, he sent them back to their parking spot, to watch from there.

Within five minutes, he saw a flash in the sky and "almost instantly a beautiful craft appeared" and settled on a ridge, and Adamski took photographs. Then it lifted and flew out of sight. After some minutes Adamski realised that a man was beckoning him from the opening of a ravine about 450 yards (411m) away. Adamski made his way toward the figure. Only when he was within arm's length of the man did Adamski realise that he was looking at a visitor from another world.

"The beauty of his form surpassed anything I had ever seen," he wrote. If that raises an eyebrow and a quick flick of the eye at the closet, we should remember that only two years previously Al Jolson (generally conceded to have been a bloke) had had a hit with the song 'I'm Just Wild

About Harry', which goes in part: "The heavenly blisses/ Of his kisses/ Fill me with ecstasy." No identity politics in those days. The man was about 5ft 6in (1.7m) tall, weighed about 135lb (60kg), and seemed to be about 28 years old. He had shoulder-length, sandy, wavy hair "glistening more beautifully than any woman's I have ever seen". He appeared to be beardless. Adamski's attempts to speak to the alien failed, but he succeeded in communicating with a mixture of hand signals and telepathy. The first thing he told Adamski was that he was from the planet Venus. The Venusians were there, he said, because they were concerned about radiation from atomic explosions: too many of these explosions would destroy all of Earth.

The saucer had not brought the Venusian – who on this occasion did not divulge his name – directly to Earth, but had been launched from within the atmosphere by the giant mother ship that Adamski had seen earlier. The craft was powered by 'magnetism'. Asked if he believed in God, the spaceman replied yes, but observed that Venusians lived according to the laws of the Creator and not the laws of materialism as Earthmen did. People from the other planets in the Solar System – all of which were inhabited – and from other systems too were visiting Earth. All aliens were essentially human in form. Some of their craft had been shot at and crashed on Earth. Saucers landed only in remote places to avoid panicking people, but the time would eventually come when they would land openly near centres of population. There were numbers of aliens living in our midst already, and for this reason the Venusian refused to be photographed, lest his features become recognisable. Adamski was then allowed to approach the saucer hovering nearby, but was not allowed inside it. After this, the Venusian climbed aboard his craft, and it glided silently away. Adamski prints affidavits from his companions – his secretary Mrs Lucy McKinnis, Mrs Alice K Wells, Mrs and Mrs Al C Bailey, and Dr and Mrs George Hunt Williamson – that confirm they were witnesses to all this.

We would not be the first to notice that the lovely Venusian (whose name, Adamski later revealed, was Orthon) bears a distinct resemblance to an angel as depicted in Western iconography. Magic technology replaces the impossible celestial wings, but the androgynous Orthon flies down from Heaven (the planet of Love) bearing a message of peace – of pacificism, even. One can wax sociological about this: the Soviets had had nuclear weapons since 1949 and, three days before Adamski's alleged encounter, the *New York Times* announced somewhat obliquely that the US had detonated a prototype nuclear fusion ('hydrogen') bomb on 1 November; it was more than 20 times more powerful than the fission ('atom') bomb that wiped out Hiroshima. 'Cold War paranoia' is misnamed: the possibility of

IN BOOKS I HAVE
TRAVELLED NOT
ONLY TO OTHER
WORLDS, BUT
INTO MY OWN
Anna Quindlen

mutual annihilation was real. But we also recall that tall blond humanoid aliens soon became known as 'Aryan' or (less provocatively) 'Nordic' types. Which brings us back to Ian Waverly Girvan.

It's not entirely unreasonable to wonder quite what, besides a simple fascination with UFOs and perhaps a good nose for the market, decided Girvan to publish such a patently dodgy work. The Aryan angel may have had something to do with it, along with Desmond Leslie's patronising notion that a great, spacefaring, peace-loving race had built the world's more enigmatic ancient monuments. The key term is probably *race*, which leads to politics. Girvan's own politics were so questionable that from 1941 the British security services kept a file on him (<http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C11135023>). One memo therein, stamped SECRET, notes: "He is a right-wing extremist; is anti-Jewish; anti-Socialist; anti-Communist and anti-war. He specialises in spreading doubt of the wisdom of the Government policy and our war aims." Steve Holland (*loc. cit.*) tells us that at Westaway Books, Girvan's co-director was John Warburton Beckett, one-time director of publications of the British Union of Fascists, and that Girvan knew Beckett "through his involvement with the British People's Party (BPP), an anti-war party founded by Beckett and Lord Tavistock after Beckett split with the National Socialist League in 1939." Girvan was involved with other extreme right-wing organisations, among them the National Front After Victory, which was "briefly allied with the BPP, which drew the interest of people as diverse as philanthropist Viscount Nuffield, fascist Jeffrey Hamm, and author Henry Williamson (also a former member of Moseley's British Union of Fascists)."

In that context, Girvan's pacifism was possibly a trifle selective – maybe he would have felt a little more belligerent had the enemy been the Red Army, not his revered Nazis. Nonetheless one can see the appeal to him of Leslie's and Adamski's visitors' anti-war sentiments, and the implication that the aliens belonged to an interplanetary 'master race'. It may be no more than coincidence that George Hunt Williamson was an associate of William Dudley Pelley, founder of the antisemitic, Nazi-aping Silver Legion ('Silver Shirts')

in the US, and there seems to be no direct evidence that Adamski himself had Nazi, Fascist or antisemitic leanings. But these connexions are provocative. And it's ironic to say the least that Girvan introduced the world to what's been called one of the founding documents of the (love-and-peace-touting) New Age.

Flying Saucers Have Landed was certainly a seminal book. It spawned a host of Adamski imitators, and still generates ructions among ufologists about the nature and causes of close-encounter claims. It is reviled by 'serious researchers' as a hoax and distraction. But, as we pointed out in the *Dictionary of the Damned* (FT269:50–52), Adamski and his cohorts set in train many of the themes of later abduction lore. This book is pivotal in ufological history.

Having read it, you should promptly download your free copy of Belgian ufologist Marc Hallet's *A Critical Appraisal of George Adamski: the man who spoke to the space brothers*, written with Richard Heiden.

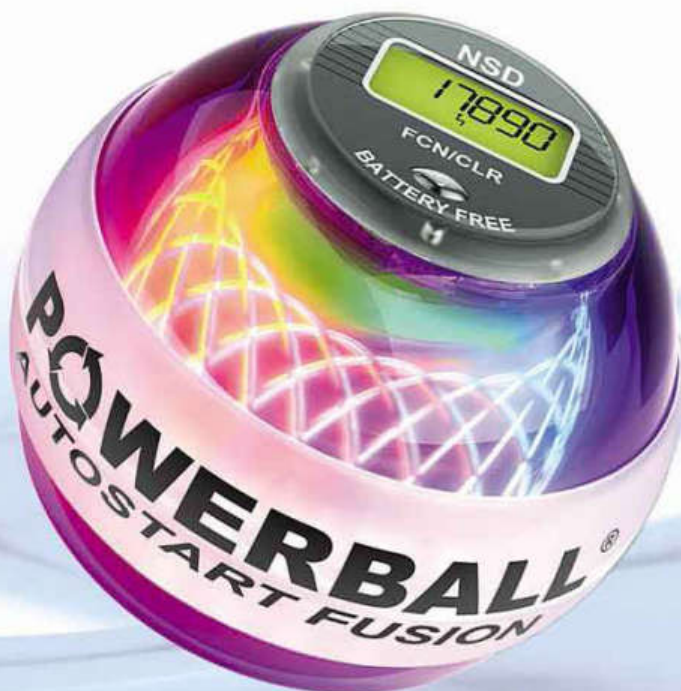
Hallet has spent decades picking the bones out of Adamski's claims, having travelled that well-trodden path from believer to sceptic. Not much work is needed to dismantle his former hero's most outrageous tales, such as seeing lush vegetation on the far side of the Moon, but he is exceptionally good in analysing the way Adamski set up his first meeting with Orthon and how (for whatever motive) his companions signed false affidavits – they simply could not have seen what they said they did. The notorious photos are thoroughly debunked, as are Adamski's stories of meeting John F Kennedy and half the crowned heads of Europe plus the Pope. Even Adamski's 'confession' that he got into "all this flying saucer crap" solely because the end of Prohibition kyboshed his bootlegging business gets hammered on the head. All this is backed by interviews, documentation, and steely logic.

Hallet also puts the late Colin Bennett in his place in a short appendix, describing him as "not a serious critical historian" and his *Looking for Orthon* as "not worth quoting." Readers may recall an hilarious stand-off between Supreme Commander James Moseley and Bennett over the matter of Orthon at an FT UnConvention some years ago. Adamski is dead: long live Adamski! **FT**

Flying Saucers Have Landed
George Adamski & Desmond Leslie
T Werner Laurie, 1953.

A Critical Appraisal of George Adamski: the man who spoke to the space brothers
Marc Hallet with Richard W Heiden,
2015 (various formats; free to
download from archive.org/details/ACriticalAppraisalOfGeorgeAdamskiTheManWhoSpokeToTheSpaceBrothers).

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Dancing with the Devil

CHRIS SAUNDERS wonders whether filmmaker Kenneth Anger really cursed one of rock's guitar greats

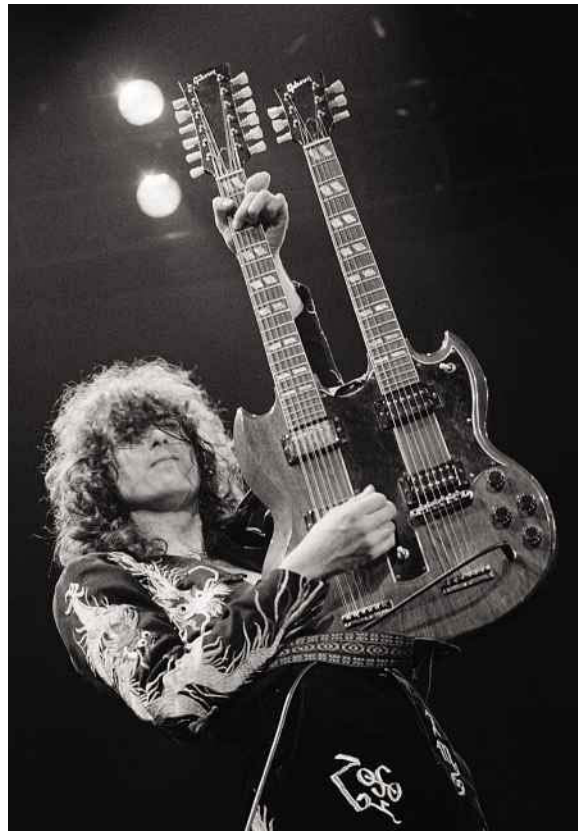


CHRIS SAUNDERS has written for *FT* on Welsh portents, the 27 Club, the Boston bombing and Chinese UFOs. He writes fiction under the name of CM Saunders.

Rock music has always had its links with the dark side, whether real or imagined. One of the great proponents is Led Zeppelin guitarist Jimmy Page, his love of the arcane being well documented. He even ended up living in Boleskine House, Aleister Crowley's onetime residence on the shores of Loch Ness, which Page insisted was haunted by a spectral severed head.¹ Page's fixation with the Great Beast was at least part of the reason the cover of Led Zeppelin's fourth album was adorned with occult imagery and symbolism. Released in 1971, the record went on to sell 37 million copies and is widely regarded as one of the best albums ever made. It was reissued last year.

Just prior to the album's release, Page struck up an unlikely friendship with the filmmaker Kenneth Anger. The two bonded over a mutual fascination with Crowley, the story going that they met at Sotheby's whilst bidding on pieces of memorabilia, and for a time became good friends. In 1973, Anger commissioned Page to write and record the soundtrack to his film *Lucifer Rising*,² and later moved into the basement of Page's Tower House mansion in London. Everything seemed hunky dory, but trouble was brewing.

In October 1976, while Page was on tour in America, Anger had a blazing row with the musician's partner Charlotte, who kicked him out on the street. A few days later, the filmmaker called a mystified Page and fired him from the *Lucifer Rising* project. But that wasn't all. He went on to vilify Page and suggested that the rocker only 'dabbled' in the occult – the implication being that Anger did more than dabble. Speaking publicly, Anger said: "He's a multi-millionaire



miser. He and Charlotte, that horrible vampire girl. They had so many servants, yet they would never offer me a cup of tea or a sandwich. Which is such a mistake on their part because I put the curse of King Midas on them. If you're greedy and just amass gold you'll get an illness. So I did turn her and Jimmy Page into statues of gold because they've both lost their minds. He can't write songs anymore".³

Noted rock journalist Mick Wall,⁴ who researched the episode in depth for his *A Biography of Led Zeppelin: When Giants Walked the Earth* (2009) says: "I interviewed Anger, and he talked about the big falling out in '76 when he put the Curse of King Midas on Jimmy. What that does is turn someone into a 'golden statue,' so all that see you admire you from afar, and can't comprehend your beauty. But the fact is that you are a statue, and you'll

never move again. Nothing will change. I often wonder whether that curse actually worked, because Jimmy hasn't produced fuck all of note since Zep finished. *Outrider*, his one and only solo album, is truly average. I would love to hear Jimmy invoke his influences and just make some beautiful music. But the truth is, he can't do it. It's not that he won't, but he can't."

The notoriously difficult Anger had a history of cursing people; this time, it seems to have worked. Every project Page has been involved in since that era has indeed been a critical and commercial failure. What's more, the perceived curse seemed to have had wider repercussions, as a succession of tragic events befell what was then the biggest rock band in the world. Singer Robert Plant's five-year-old son Karac died suddenly in 1977, the non-appearance of several band mates at the funeral prompting him to quit the band. The following year, Sandy Denny, who had sung with Plant on the track 'The Battle of Evermore' on the aforementioned fourth album, died after falling down a flight of stairs, and then came the tragic death of drummer John Bonham three years later that ended Led Zeppelin's reign once and for all.

Yes, this could be nothing but a tragic string of coincidences. But two things make this chain of events particularly interesting; Anger's very public curse, and the fact that it was common knowledge that certain members of Led Zeppelin were heavily involved in occultism.

"To people who practise the occult, it's not like Spinal Tap with a Ouija board," says Mick Wall in summary. "To those who are into it, it's serious as Judaism or Catholicism. The whole basis of occultism is to invoke often, or practice often. It's not a once a year meeting in a forest. It's all the fucking time. Anger was always at it, and so was Jimmy. He's still sitting in the same room he was sitting in when Bonham died. The clock stopped for Page right then, and he's still there waiting for it to start again." **FT**

NOTES

1 <http://beforeitsnews.com/paranormal/2015/04/updated-article-hess-crowley-and-the-loch-ness-monster-2487718.html>

2 The music Page recorded for the film was later scrapped, and remained (officially) unreleased until 2012.

3 http://dangerousminds.net/comments/lucifer_rising_jimmy_pages_insane_amazing_unused_soundtrack_to_the_kenneth

4 Mick Wall's latest book, *Foo Fighters: Learning to Fly*, is published on 27 October by Orion.

The Cryptid Petting Zoo

ROB GANDY attends an unusual event in Liverpool, and gets up close and personal with some monsters...



ROB GANDY is a visiting professor at the Liverpool Business School, John Moores University. He has written for *FT* on Merseyside dop-pelgängers, ghostlore, football curses and phantom hitchhikers.

I was browsing the programme for LightNight¹ in Liverpool when my eyes settled upon *The Cryptid Petting Zoo* in the wonderful Picton Reading Room of Liverpool Central Library. It stated that you could “see undiscovered animal oddities from around the world! Often thought to be creatures of myth and legend, this is a chance to meet some truly remarkable animals, with presentations from trained handlers”. Naturally, I put this at the top of my list.

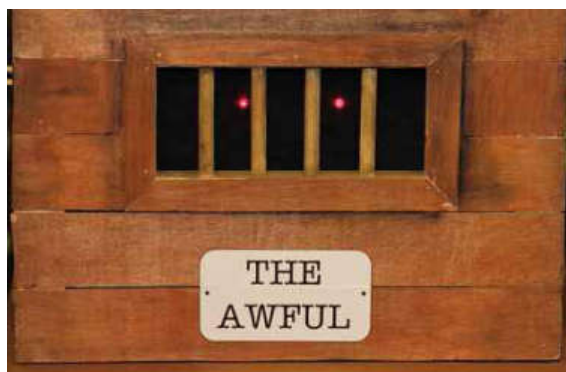
In the event, the room was packed, with parents seating dozens of young children at the front only inches from cages and boxes with labels suggesting that the Jersey Devil and a Sasquatch were inside – surely a tad dangerous if any of these cryptids fancied a snack?

On the balcony, I spied compere Beatrice Balfour III, dressed in traditional explorer attire and reading the current issue of *Fortean Times*. Obviously, a lady of taste! She descended the steps accompanied by Harry the Hybrid Hound, a chimera – with the head of a boar, the body of a lion and the tail of a fish – who liked having his tummy tickled. He bounced around the floor escaping the attentions of small, clutching hands.

Beatrice explained that cryptozoology was the study of hidden animals and highlighted that this was a rare opportunity for people to see so many of them at first hand and in a safe environment. Then, she introduced five more fortean fantastics:

The Awful: There was near catastrophe when the handlers almost dropped its cage. Fortunately the bars were strong and it was only able to growl and flash its red Mothman-like eyes from the darkness for the rest of the show.

The Wetlands Indigenous Mer-Pixie, or WIMP: This shy, nervous creature answered to the name of Trixie and had to be coaxed out from behind the covers to her cage. Her timid disposition, big eyes and blue colouring meant she



ABOVE: Beatrice Balfour III in the Picton Reading Room of Liverpool Central Library; the Beast of Borneo is visible at right. **LEFT:** Beatrice introduces Harry the Hybrid Hound. **BOTTOM:** The Awful – caged, thankfully.

was greeted with a loud “Aaah!” from the audience, and was popular at the subsequent petting session.

The Mongolian Death Worm: Smaller than I had anticipated, Bertie the Mongolian Death Worm lives in his handler’s airing cupboard. Apparently this is the nearest thing in Liverpool to the climate of the Gobi Desert. Bertie has something of a vicious temperament, and when he stuck his head out from inside his bucket, he bit one of the handlers with his strong beak, releasing his electric venom. This caused the light bulb she was holding in her other hand to flash on and off. Happily she recovered.

Baby Dragon(s): Tyson the baby dragon was roused from his slumber in his incubator, unfurling his wings. All of the children knew that dragons love gold and the handler wanted to demonstrate this to them. It wasn’t her day, as Tyson greedily swallowed her gold ring and nearly took her fingers with it. Attention then switched to the large egg at the other end of the incubator which started to shake and



LEFT: The Mongolian Death Worm (smaller than expected) and handler. CENTRE: A pair of baby dragons. BOTTOM: The shy Wetlands Indigenous Mer-Pixie, or WIMP, needed to be coaxed from the corner of her cage.



Beast was quickly placated with its favourite sugar lumps, although this required Beatrice, in the interests of dental hygiene, to clean its rather large teeth with what looked like a bath brush. The Beast performed some of its party tricks to the delight of the children, before Beatrice thanked everyone and said that there was time for petting the cryptids before they returned to their cages.

And so finished a show full of visual fun, tricks and humour.

I suppose I should add that the cryptids weren't actually real, and were puppets designed, built and performed by the Headstrung Puppet Company (HPC), which consists of three puppeteers: Katy-Anne Bellis, Eilidh Bryan and Beccy Hillam, augmented for shows by trusted associates Aisling Leyne, Alice Rowbottom and Jan Rule. Their interests and skills complement one another: Katy-Anne focuses on choreography and costume; Eilidh is a designer and puppet-maker; and Beccy is the Techy. Puppetry attracted them because of the creativity it involves: there are no rules and much scope to experiment. HPC formed in 2012 and developed within the late-night cabaret/clubland environment of Liverpool, with acts including knife throwing, fire breathing, circus and burlesque. However, reactions to the (original) Beast of Borneo, who tap-dances to "Sing In The Rain", encouraged HPC to broaden their repertoire by developing *The Cryptid Petting Zoo* as an indoor and outdoor street show for families, with humour at multiple levels.

Eilidh says that she and her husband are keen on cryptozoology and regular readers of *FT*, while cryptids offer innumerable opportunities for puppetry. She and her colleagues hope that *The Cryptid Petting Zoo* will give children a sense of wonder and inspire them to keep open minds about whether there might be unknown creatures out there.

If any cryptozoologists or fortune tellers want to add some cryptid puppetry fun to their planned events, contact HPC at info@headstrung.org or visit the website: www.headstrung.org **FT**

crack. Finally another baby dragon popped out, drawing another "Aaah!" from the audience and an interesting look from Tyson.

The Beast of Borneo: Beatrice did the big build-up for the final cryptid, the Beast of Borneo. She described its habitat and how it was related to Orang Pendek. Unfortunately, neither she nor the handlers had noticed that it had already entered the room, and was looming over them. Only pantomime cries of "It's behind you!" made them aware of the creature's presence. The



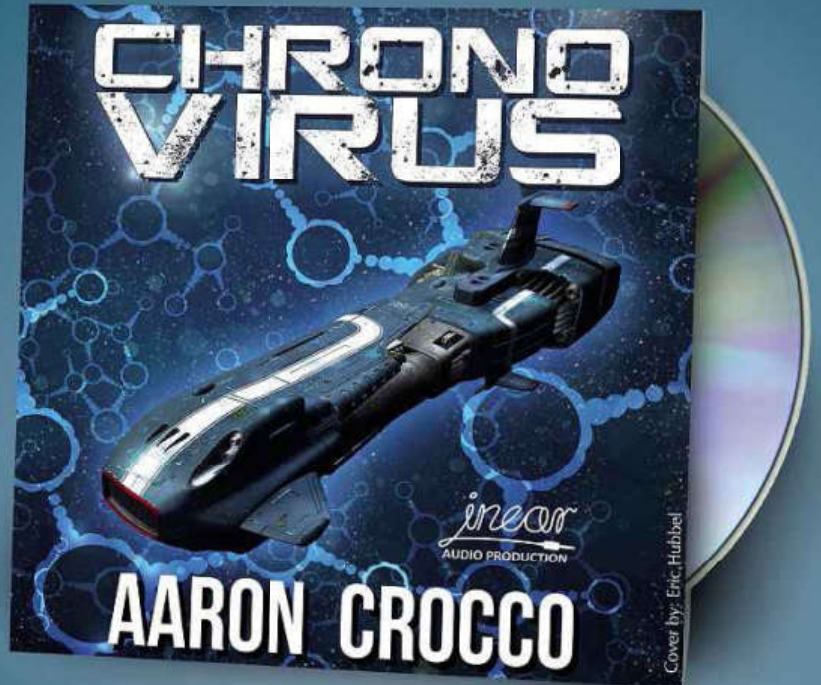
¹ LightNight Liverpool, 15 May 2015: www.lightnightliverpool.co.uk

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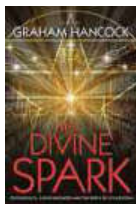
This month's books, films and games

reviews



The modern shamanism

More cynical observers of the psychedelic scene can dismiss it as fun cloaked in spirituality; others may see clear links to shamanism's spirit worlds



The Divine Spark

A Graham Hancock Reader:
Psychedelics, Consciousness,
and the Birth of Civilization

Ed: Graham Hancock

Hay House UK 2015

Pb, 288pp, £12.99, ISBN 9781781805626

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £11.69

Graham Hancock is no stranger to fortean topics. His examinations of ancient cultures and their mysteries in books such as *Fingerprints of the Gods* opened avenues of interest for the ontologically curious. More recently, in *Supernatural*, he opened up discussions about the use of psychedelic drugs throughout history. His interest in psychedelics was triggered, as it was for many forteans, by encounters with LSD in the 1960s and 1970s, in his case at the 1974 Windsor Free Festival. That experience left Hancock in awe of the potential of mind-altering substances, but it was not until he was in his 50s that he chose to explore them.

Not wishing to write about altered states of consciousness without first-hand knowledge, Hancock embarked on a psychedelic odyssey, taking DMT, psilocybin, ayahuasca, ibogaine and other drugs. These experiences convinced him that the 'spirit world' of the shamans may be more relevant to the modern world than previously thought – and it may also be a

more valid view of humans' place in the planetary environment. Hancock rails against our technological society, framing it as 'demonic' because it treats humans as production units to further the endless cycle of birth/school/work/death, a belief that chimes with many Westerners who take psychedelics. *Divine Spark* is, therefore, a timely and welcome collection of essays, curated by and with contributions from Hancock, examining how psychedelics interact with consciousness and where this can lead us as individuals, societies and cultures – and what they mean for the future of the human race.

Surprises include Russell Brand, a high-profile supporter of the responsible use of psychedelics, though a debatable poster boy for the psychedelic Renaissance. Elsewhere, Paul Devereux, Rick Doblin, David Jay Brown and several others psychedelic luminaries give their views and theories about the purpose of psychedelic drugs. For the general reader unfamiliar with psychedelic culture, Rick Strassman's brief but comprehensive essay about how the curious individual should prepare for the psychedelic journey deserves close reading. The cynical observer of the rapidly expanding psychedelic scene might easily dismiss the ideas expressed here as just another excuse for people to justify taking mind-bending drugs for fun, cloaked in the dubious mantle of spirituality. And it may be. Psychedelics are not for everyone, but if they have taught us anything, it's that what we call 'reality' is not what it seems. While Western

"Devereux writes about psychedelics being a tool to contact plant intelligences"

consumerist culture encourages tools such as the telescope to explore outer space and the microscope to explore the minutiae of reality, it does not look kindly on those wishing to explore inner space and altered states of consciousness via the agency of psychedelics. Yet as several essays here make clear, psychedelics can be used in so many useful ways. Artist Alex Grey, for instance, has used DMT to enhance the creative process, and there is now a worldwide community of visual artists whose work draws on drug-induced altered states of consciousness. There are also explorations of more complex matters, such as how psychedelics can inform how we perceive and interact with the wider environment we live in, the Great Mystery, and how we can, put simply, use psychedelics to help save the Earth. A naïve hope, perhaps, but many of the early environmentalists of Greenpeace and other ecological organisations were inspired by the psychedelic experience.

Expanding on this idea, *FT's* Paul Devereux writes about psychedelics being a tool to contact plant intelligences, such experiences being enshrined in shamanic cultures across the globe. If that's too far out, then David Jay Brown's suggestion that psychedelics could be integrated

into general problem-solving (as the US military has done), or to probe the potential of our consciousness for telephony, remote viewing and so on, is eminently sensible.

Many of the contributors do not shy away from one of the fundamental truths of most psychedelics: that they are pleasurable beyond imagining, to the point of evoking states of cosmic ecstasy – a state which itself is worth the price of admission to the strange invitation offered by psychedelics.

Readers who see Hancock's historical revisionism as joint-the-dots New Age nonsense need not worry. This is an intelligent collection of essays; unpretentious and sincere, written by people with an insatiable curiosity to explore who we are and what we might become in the great mystery we dwell in. The unspoken sadness here, and a potential drawback to further exploration is that these remarkable plants and chemicals are, for the most part, forbidden and controlled by legislation with punitive sanctions applied to those who would seek to manufacture or use them.

That these substances are largely harmless and have such potential for person and planet can only make the curious question why this state of affairs is so and what implications it has for our future as sovereign human beings wishing to explore our consciousness in accordance with our will.

Andy Roberts

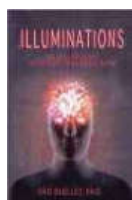
Fortean Times Verdict

WHAT GOES AROUND COMES AROUND, UNNECESSARILY MAYBE

8

The magic roundabout

Ufology (like fashion) is having a 1970s moment, revisiting the theory that UFOs are caused by macro-psychokinesis...



Illuminations

The UFO Experience As a Parapsychological Event

Eric Ouellet

Anomalist Books 2015

Pb, 223pp, bib, ind, \$14.95, ISBN 9781938398537

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £9.88

Everything comes around eventually, and here we have the revival of a largely forgotten obsession of 1970s ufology. In 1975 Loren Coleman and I wrote *The Unidentified*, which captured the spirit of the era: Jungian theories and parapsychological UFOs. He and I soon moved on, relegating the book to youthful excess and embarrassed recall. It still has its defenders, among them the author of *Illuminations*, Eric Ouellet, a Canadian professor of defense studies and an active parapsychologist.

In short, not much new here: macro-PK creates UFOs, and experiences of them are symbolic, generated in response to “social stresses”. This hypothesis, if that’s the word for it, persuades no more now than four decades ago, when it passed out of fashion. Some of the original advocates woke one morning with a terrifying realisation: their rejection of extraterrestrial UFOs would not render them socially respectable if at the same time they advocated something just as heretical, namely psychic phenomena. In a blink or two they were promoting the “psychosocial hypothesis,” a shiny, freshly minted moniker for rusty, old-fashioned debunkery. Some of us, on the other hand, turned to scepticism of sweeping explanatory approaches, both those that dismissed and those

that embraced.

After all this time, I am modestly confident that UFOs do not constitute a single anomaly. I wonder if we have gone to a lot of unnecessary trouble because we keep trying to cram them into one box, as Dr Ouellet (hardly alone) essentially does here. It would also help if we stopped dragging in creaky concepts such as macro-PK, on its best days a hugely speculative notion, to explain anything. And let’s keep “social stresses” out of it too. There are always social stresses, and there is no empirically demonstrated reason to link them to UFO sightings. If there were such a link, the Middle East would be so thick with UFOs that all concerned would be distracted from the pursuit of ceaseless, bloody conflict. One wishes.

Early in *Illuminations* Ouellet denies the existence of physical evidence for UFOs, thus apparently eliminating a whole category of cases (close encounters of the second kind and radar/visuals), though he eventually addresses them, if rather ambiguously. He represents CG Jung as endorsing parapsychological/psychosocial views like his, while in fact Jung distinguished dreams and visions from real-world UFO reports, which he suspected were produced by space visitors quietly going about their business. As he wrote in the last chapter to *Flying Saucers: A Modern Myth* (1959, p150), “By all human standards it hardly seems possible to doubt [UFO reality] any longer.” That Jung specifically rejected parapsychological and psychosocial theories about UFOs has not stopped either camp from citing his authority.

Unfortunately, Ouellet is taken with the late demonologist John Keel, whom many of us would not have trusted with breakfast, as I’ve had occasion to document in these pages (FT156:39–42;

305:56–57). Typically, Ouellet does not engage with the ETH, just dismisses it with waving hand, no reference to or awareness of the seminal writings on the subject by the likes of environmental scientist/ufologist Michael D Swords, space journalist/non-ufologist Edward Ashpole, and others. Like you, I don’t know if the ETH is valid or false, but it is one reasonable working inference, awaiting decision for the day when all the facts are in, from the small subset of CE2s/radar-visuals that hint at the presence of a not-earthly technology.

A more modest, intellectually agnostic approach – perhaps the only one possible in our (ufology’s, culture’s, science’s) current ignorance – may also be a pluralistic one. What if the phenomenon of landing traces, radar/visuals, and multiple/independent witnesses is fundamentally unrelated to the extreme, high-strangeness cases so beloved of paranomalists and self-styled psychosociologists? The latter are the most thinly evidential, the hardest from which to glean information, beyond the obvious one that it appears possible to undergo really weird experiences which, unverifiable in any conventional sense, live on only in memory and testimony, however vividly and confusingly. Well-researched CE2s give scientists something to work with, on the other hand, and such research should be encouraged, not ridiculed into extinction.

Meanwhile, the absence of knowledge ought not to give us free rein to insist upon certainties that are nothing of the sort. Show me real evidence that macro-PK, working through selectively defined “social stresses,” creates UFO events, and we’ll talk.

Jerome Clark

Fortean Times Verdict

WHAT GOES AROUND COMES AROUND, UNNECESSARILY MAYBE

6

Ghosts

A Haunted History

Lisa Morton

Reaktion Books 2015

Hb, 208pp, illus, £16.00, ISBN 9781780235172

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £14.40



Since beginning her career in 1988, Lisa Morton has worked on film, television, short horror fiction and novels. In recent years, she has branched out into the factual, *Ghosts: A Haunted History*, being her latest on paranormal history. *Trick or Treat: A History of Hallowe’en* (2012) won the Bram Stoker Award.

Morton manages to pack a lot into a relatively short book, proving her mettle as a writer and her extensive knowledge of the history of ghosts around the world. That said, *Ghosts* isn’t exhaustive; details on each facet of ghostly history are quite brief. But given the large number of hefty tomes on the social history of the ghost, some of which go into excruciating analytical detail, and are equally excruciating to read, this is a good thing. What Lisa Morton has to offer is something for those who may wish to delve a little further into the subject and not run the risk of being put off by high-falutin’ discourse.

Ghosts gives the reader a little taste of everything, allowing them to find what may be of the most interest, which they then might follow up in reading the more complex histories and studies.

Ghosts starts off trying to define just what a ghost is, a difficult task given the various shapes and forms the entity takes. It then harks back to the Ancient World, where ghosts were more deadly than they are now, recounting the famous legends of the ghost met by Athendorus in Greece, the epic of Gilgamesh and the Witch of Endor. The Ancients certainly could spin a ghostly yarn.

The following significant part of the book is quite a refreshing take on Spiritualism, where Morton gives the impression she is somewhat sceptical of the movement. Instead of the well-worn story of the Fox sisters being given the usual revered

treatment, Morton chooses to touch briefly upon them, mentioning other founders of the movement, who don't get much attention in other books.

Perhaps the best part of the book is the space given to ghosts and spirit belief in other parts of the world, giving a good sense of the variation of ghosts in different cultures. Although the detail is brief, Morton reflects the richness and quirks of cultural variation well. She could very well have ended the book here, but adds an extra dimension by exploring scientific investigation of ghosts and their appearance in popular culture via literature, film and TV. The chapter on ghost research is particularly good as it goes into great detail explaining the science and function – and shortcomings – of all the gadgetry such as the K II meter and Ghost Box that appear on paranormal reality shows like *Ghost Adventures*. The final chapter on the ghost in popular culture may lead to the reader compiling a list of books, movies and TV shows with which to scare themselves silly.

Mandy Collins

Fortean Times Verdict

BRIEF, PUNCHY AND DOWN-TO-EARTH BOOK FOR GHOST NEWBIES **8**

The Making of Stanley Kubrick's 2001: A Space Odyssey

Piers Bizony

Taschen 2015

Hb, 562pp, illus, £49.99, ISBN 97838365589546

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £49.99



With Stephen Hawking and Elon Musk

warning of the potential dangers of artificial intelligence, *2001: A Space Odyssey* seems more relevant as we inch closer to sentient computers like the film's HAL-9000. Back in 1970, *The Making of Kubrick's 2001* by Jerome Angel provided tantalising glimpses behind the scenes, but this new approach by Piers Bizony conveys the gruelling effort and creativity that went into history's most creative effort of science-

fiction filmmaking; a monolithic tome on a feat that seems almost miraculous the more you discover about how it was done, the struggle towards something cinematically sublime.

Expressed through hundreds of images with dozens presented on fold-out pages, the world Stanley Kubrick made at Shepperton Studios during the mid-1960s comes alive, with photographs and conceptual illustrations on the film's most groundbreaking technical stages.

The most obvious thing that seemed missing was a 'making the monolith' shot, so the genesis of the OOPART that kickstarted humanity will (rightfully) retain its mystery.

The accompanying text is the subordinate component, but gives solid background to the lengths the crew went to give form to the conceptual duelling between Kubrick and Arthur C Clarke as they absorbed a welter of contemporary reports on space travel and the implications for humanity of the existence and discovery of extraterrestrial civilisations. As for unsung crew members, a standout contribution comes from Dan Richter, who directed the ape performances, and Joseph Gelmis, who got a rare enlightening interview with the director.

Given it was all half a century ago, some of the historical and scientific research inevitably covers old ground (e.g. the Fermi Paradox), but the deep perspective on the film's development compensates for this, with visual highlights including the conceptual artists' attempts to fulfill the director's request for hardware, worlds and an alien design in "a shape that doesn't remind you of anything in a color that doesn't exist". Kubrick's vision and idiosyncratic methods were too much for some of his crew (and the critics) to bear, yet the near-miraculous achievement has never been surpassed in its genre, and this book is a monument, both physically and in substance, to that end.

Jerry Glover

Fortean Times Verdict

BLOWS OPEN THE POD DOORS ON A LANDMARK S.F. FILM **9**

Why a duck?

It's not about Tunguska, the characters are dead and the audience is uncertain



Tunguska, or the End of Nature

Michael Hampe, trans. Michael Winkler

Chicago UP - 221p

Pb, 240pp, \$35.99, illus, ISBN 9780226123127

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £24.50

First off, if you are interested in the Tunguska event, don't buy this book. Despite the title, that is not what this book is about. Tunguska is used as a hook on which to hang a series of philosophical dialogues between four fictional characters based on real people (a philosopher, a physicist, a biologist and a mathematician), broadly on the subject of Man's place in Nature, how we can perceive it, and how we should rationalise our perceptions.

The idea of using dialogues as a way of presenting arguments is something that goes back a long way, most famously to Plato. It has some advantages, in that one can use one character to put up straw-man opinions that can then be reasoned away from, and Hampe makes the most of this, perhaps at the expense of maintaining a clear thread of exposition through the book. But matters are not helped by the bizarre setting in which all four appear as ghosts on a fog-bound cargo ship, three of them apparently having been killed in

the bombing of Nagasaki (cutely rendered in anagram – why?). Having your characters dead gives them rather a privileged perspective, which complicates their discussions needlessly. It would have been better (since the characters are presented as fictional) to have them alive and simply gather in the senior common room over port.

Michael Hampe is a German philosopher, trained at Heidelberg, and currently Professor of Philosophy at ETH Zurich (that's AY-TAY-HAH to you). And oh, this book is so German in style! The dense and florid text leaps around from idea to idea, packing in thoughts and notions like fruit in a fruit cake. The translator has generally done a good job, but in places is reduced to citing the original German in brackets.

This book is jam-packed with ideas, and there is much food for thought. But... I am very unsure who is the ideal audience for it. Anyone without a good grounding in basic philosophy already is likely to find it much too heavy going, particularly given the dense style. The author thinks nothing of firing off abrupt references to Heidegger, Kant, and so on. On the other hand, it isn't an academic work either. It seems to be a sort of very high-brow philosophical *jeu d'esprit*. If that appeals, there is plenty here to set you thinking.

Roger Musson

Fortean Times Verdict

SOMETHING FOR PHILOSOPHERS TO CHEW ON, PERHAPS **6**

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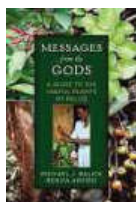
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Traditional healing

Fortean, neopagans, environmentalists – and bioprospectors – share an interest in ancient indigenous plant wisdom



Messages from the Gods

A Guide to the Useful Plants of Belize

Michael J Balick & Rosita Arvigo

Oxford University Press 2015

Hb, 539pp, illus, ind, refs, £32.99, ISBN 9780199965762

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £32.99

It's easy to forget how many drugs have botanical roots. Metformin, a mainstay of type 2 diabetes management, originally derives from Goat's Rue (*Galega officinalis*). For centuries, European herbalists used it to treat symptoms doctors now ascribe to type 2 diabetes. Aspirin is a modification of chemicals in willow bark and meadowsweet (*Filipendula ulmaria* the herb previously known as *Spiraea ulmaria* – hence aspirin's name) traditionally used for headaches, pains, and fevers. Pacific yew (*Taxus brevifolia*) yielded paclitaxel, an important treatment for breast, lung and some other cancers. Indeed, according to the *Journal of Natural Products* (2012;75:311–335) almost half of cancer drugs introduced between the 1940s and 2010 are natural products or direct derivatives.

Not surprisingly, the rainforest is a rich source of new drugs – and many pharmaceutical companies 'bioprospect'. According to the Eden Centre, more than half the world's terrestrial species of animals and plants call the rainforest home. Yet 99 per cent of these species remain unstudied. So, Balick's and Arvigo's book is an important contribution to the ethnobotanical, medical and pharmacological literature – as well being fascinating

for fortune, neopagans and environmentalists.

Traditional Belizean medicine mixes ancient indigenous wisdom and Christian rituals. The Conquistadors didn't fully control the Yucatan's remote southern forests, including those in today's Belize. This helped Mayan refugees keep their traditions alive alongside teachings imposed by the Conquistadors. Even today, many prayers and incantations for sick people refer to Mayan gods as well as Jesus. A ceremony marking the Day of the Holy Cross was initially "sombre and sacred" with Catholic prayers, hymns and rituals. Around midnight, the ceremony became a celebration that included loud music, wild dancing, drinking and passing a freshly severed, bloody pig's head from guest to guest. Balick and Arvigo suggest that this may be a recreation of a Mayan ritual.

The Belizean healing network encompasses shaman-like priests and priestesses (called *h'men* – 'one who knows'), village and 'granny' healers, massage therapists, midwives, bonesetters, snake doctors and specialists in using prayers to heal. In addition to aches, pains, constipation and the other diseases everyone's flesh is heir to, healers manage several 'culturally bound syndromes', such as *mal vientos* – bad or evil winds, or malevolent spirits controlled by evil magic – *maldad* (a curse that can prove fatal if not treated) and *mal de ojo*, the evil eye.

Several traditional treatments seem empirically rational even to a sceptical, scientific, Western eye, such as using the white, milky latex of the Dog Balls plant (*Tabernaemontana alba*) to extract parasites including beefworm and screwworm. Other plants have 'magical' and 'medical' roles (although this is a scientific rather than indigenous distinction). Preparations of the Copal tree (*Protium copal*) treat headache, wounds and sores, colds, and

intestinal worms. It's easy to speculate the plant might contain chemicals responsible for these actions. But the Copal tree is also used as an incense in rituals to tackle, for example, *mal de ojo*, witchcraft and evil generally. Its resin also makes a nail polish.

Messages from the Gods highlights how many medicines could be awaiting discovery. For instance, the world's herbal heritage might yield the long sought-after male contraceptive. Men in the Papua tribes of Indonesia traditionally used a plant called *Justicia gendarussa* to control family size. An extract from *J. gendarussa* reduced the activity of hyaluronidase, an enzyme that helps sperm penetrate the egg. Early results from clinical studies seem promising (see my article at <http://bit.ly/1LVciRS>). Similarly, people in Belize use a mix of four herbs – including Billy Webb (*Acosmium panamense*) and skunk root (*Chiococca alba*) – and a drink made of the mashed leaves of *Tococa guianensis* as male contraceptives.

Since 1987, Balick and Arvigo interviewed "dozens of traditional healers", surveyed "hundreds of local people" about plants and their uses, and collected botanical specimens from more than 220 sites. The book draws on data collected during more than 8,000 plant collections by various groups. *Messages from the Gods* details some 900 plants. Yet Balick and Arvigo suggest that the book may represent less than five per cent of the knowledge about plants in Belize. With the destruction of the rainforest and other biodiverse habitats continuing, *Messages from the Gods* is a sobering reminder of what we might be losing.

Mark Greener

Fortean Times Verdict

ESSENTIAL MESSAGES FROM THE GODS – IF ONLY WE'D LISTEN...

10

Mind Wars

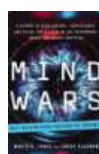
A History of Mind Control, Surveillance, and Social Engineering by the Government, Media, and Secret Societies

Marie D Jones & Larry Flaxman

New Page Books 2015

Pb, 240pp, £13.99, ISBN 9781601633583

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £13.99



Marie D Jones and Larry Flaxman, the team who penned *This Book Is From The Future*, take a look at how since the dawn of

human history, from the Ancient Egyptian Pharaohs to the CIA of today, the rich and powerful have used various techniques to control the human mind for their own ends. Topics covered include: Operation Paperclip, the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) programme which brought Nazi scientists, engineers, and technicians to the United States for employment in the aftermath of WWII; as well as the CIA's MK-Ultra programme to create a Manchurian Candidate style assassin. Jones and Flaxman are not simply just conspiracy theorists, however, as well as exploring the real life origins of terms like "brainwashing" in Mao's China, they also examine how the concept of mind control has entered into popular culture via films such as the *Manchurian Candidate* and TV series like *The X-Files*.

The text also explores the creeping Orwellian surveillance state as well as some of the positive impacts mind control techniques can have, for instance brainwashing yourself to be a better athlete, or hypnotising someone to quit smoking.

In *Mind Wars*, Jones and Flaxman don't pretend to have written the definitive text on the history of mind control and state surveillance; instead the 238 pages serve as a good introduction to the paranoid world of parapolitics, where secret societies and social engineers control the course of human history.

Richard Thomas

Fortean Times Verdict

GOOD PARAPOLITICS PRIMER (AND YES, THEY ARE WATCHING YOU...)

9

ALSO RECEIVED

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

The Sasquatch Seeker's Field Manual

Using Citizen Science to Uncover North America's Most Elusive Creature

David George Gordon

Mountaineers Books 2015
Pb, 172pp, resources, illus, ind, \$14.95,
ISBN 9781594859410

If we were in a quibbling mood, we'd wonder why this book has to have a rhetorical question on the cover: "Does the Sasquatch really exist?" The book's existence answers for Gordon's belief, laid out in a selection of sightings from USA's Northwest Territories. However, the main part of the book forms a comprehensive guide for any would-be Sasquatch hunter; covering the planning and mounting of search expeditions, equipment, the gathering of different kinds of evidence and, probably critically important these days, how to disseminate any discoveries and evidence you may be lucky to find. Throughout there is a sensible emphasis on protocols and responsibility, on having a sound scientific basis for your expectations and methods, and respect for the wilderness.

Esoteric Egypt

J S Gordon

Bear & Co. 2015
Pb, 408pp, illus, bib, index, \$25.00,
ISBN 9781591431961

Lauded by his colleagues for his "deep insight" into the esotericism of the ancient Egyptians, Gordon here embarks upon a survey of the prehistoric origins of the magical and mystical beliefs that underpinned its historically influential civilisation. Given that Gordon is a senior fellow of the Theosophical Society, it seems inevitable that he focuses on the Egyptian interpretation of reincarnation and 'spiritual evolution'. Given, also, that he finds traces of star and astronomical lore in the other civilisations adjacent to Egypt and the Mediterranean, whose purest form was in Egypt,

and argues that they had a common ancestor in the people that colonised Egypt around 100,000 years ago, it comes as little surprise that he claims they were descended from "the 4th and 5th Root races of Atlantis". Classic Theosophy, reinvented for the New Age; that said, it is well written and well argued, but probably addressing only a sympathetic audience.

Journal of Cryptozoology

Vol 3, Dec 2014

Ed: Karl PN Shuker

CFZ Press 2014
Pb, 97pp, illus, refs, \$6.99,
ISBN 9781601633422

It is to Jon Downes's credit that he has kept going this journal, one of the last remaining outlets for research into cryptozoology, now edited by *FT*'s old friend Karl Shuker. Articles in this issue: 'The Thunderbirds of Western Pennsylvania: Mistaken Identity or Migratory Cryptids?' by Jonathan D Stiffy; 'New Material on the Moha-Moha' by Ulrich Magin; 'Target Practice: Evaluating Available Fine-Resolution Satellite Imagery as a Potentially Useful Tool in Cryptozoology' by Edmond W Holroyd III; 'Searching for the Pink-Headed Duck in Myanmar' by Richard Thorns; and 'Bessie, the Lake Erie Monster: Assessed and Assembled' by Scott E Strasser. Subscription details are on the CFZ website: www.journalofcryptozoology.com/

The Wars of Atlantis

Phil Masters

Osprey Adventures 2015
Pb, 80pp, illus, colour plates, notes, bib, ind, \$19.99, ISBN
9781601632913

After a fairly sound summary of the historical sources and theories about the city-state and its eponymous island, Masters launches into an imaginative evocation of its conflicts with peoples on both sides of the Atlantic – including the Amazons, the proto-Athenians, the Gorgons, and the Egyptians – and the even-

tual destruction of its sea-going empire in a mighty catastrophe. This slender book is made all the more exciting by dramatic full-colour illustrations, and would make an inspiring gift to any youngster interested in the lore and legends of lost worlds.

Nordic Goddess Magic

Alice Karlsdóttir

Destiny Books 2015
Pb, 240pp, bib, ind, \$19.95, ISBN 9781620054074

The revitalisation of the ancient Asatru (Northern Paganism) in the modern era is arguably less well-known today than Klingon and relatively sparsely documented, so this 'manual' from one of America's leading practitioners

seems all the more welcome. Alice Karlsdóttir has championed the 'Germanic Heathen' revival in the USA since 1974, and here presents a primer on the Allmother Frigg, wife of Odin, and the 12 Asynjur goddesses associated with her; in fact, these 13 form a model for constructing a coven. Against this background, Karlsdóttir, also a Master in the Rune Guild, outlines a system of meditation exercises for each goddess. These are extended into shamanic-type invocations and 'direct' experiences of their different principles or personality traits. For good measure, accounts of Frau Holle and the Three Spinners are added from the Brothers Grimm, and of Queen Olga from a Russian source.

FORTEAN FICTION

The Unbeatable Squirrel Girl Vol 1

Ryan North, Erica Henserson

Marvel

Pb, 128pp, £11.99, ISBN 9780785197027



Batman, Spider-Man and even Ant-Man (at least since his big screen debut) are familiar names... but Squirrel Girl? You've got to be kidding, right?

Well, yes, a bit... sort of: this is a book that doesn't take itself too seriously and is intent on having – and providing – plenty of fun: *The Dark Knight* it ain't, and fanboys of a grimdark persuasion should probably give it a wide berth, as should Gamergaters and others upset by a noticeable trend toward inclusivity in geekdom. For those of us of sunnier dispositions, this upbeat take on the superhero comic proves hard to resist: while it stops short of deconstructing the genre, it plays affectionately with its tropes, sending them spinning off in unexpected directions and making the familiar Marvel universe dance to its tune.

Our unlikely superheroine is Doreen Green, a chubby-cheeked, buck-toothed, first year computer science student who tucks her prehensile tail into her trousers and has a female squirrel companion called Tippy-Toe. Doreen communicates with squirrels and "eats nuts, kicks butts".

Her squirrel powers, and infectiously positive attitude, are tested by college freshers' week, a random encounter with Kraven the Hunter, and an Earth-threatening visit from Galactus, Devourer of Worlds and wielder of the Power Cosmic. Doreen triumphs – I won't say how – not so much by having super powers as through confidence, quick thinking and a nice line in diplomacy: the results are uplifting and hilarious.

This is a warm, witty and rather wonderful series suitable for all ages, and a playful riposte to the idea that comic books are filled with pneumatic sex objects and violence. Included in the collection are issues 1-5, plus SG's one-shot 1992 debut, courtesy of a certain Steve Ditko. Highly recommended for lovers of comics, squirrels and life.

David Sutton

SEND REVIEW COPIES OF DVDS, BLU-RAYS AND GAMES TO:
FORTEAN TIMES, PO BOX 71602, LONDON E17 0QD.



The Nightmare

Dir Roddy Ascher, US 2015
On UK release from 9 October

Sleep paralysis sounds like a self-explanatory condition, and in part it is; however, that paralysis is accompanied by nightmares of a particularly vivid and frightening nature. This documentary, from the director of *Room 237*, the mind-bending documentary about Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining*, combines sufferers' accounts with reconstructions of their individual terrors.

In fact, one element of the nightmares – the imagery – is common to a number of separate experiences. Multiple interviewees speak of seeing three-dimensional shadow figures, often accompanied by a hatted figure that seems to be superior to, or in charge of, the others. This imagery is similar to a number of characters from folklore and, more recently, cinema: specific films are cited as reference points for these characters, for example *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, *Insidious* and *Communion*.

Many of the interviewees complain about the short shrift they've been given by health professionals, but some of them then go on to discount the possibility that their sleep paralysis is a physiological issue. One ascribes it to a spiritual conflict between good, represented

by Christianity, and evil; another suggests it is an alternate universe intruding into our own. One interviewee suggests that 'alien abductees' are merely sleep paralysis sufferers, while at the same time resolutely maintaining that his own encounters amount to a genuine supernatural experience.

The condition seems to beset people regardless of gender, age, ethnicity or nationality, which suggests it is linked to human neurology or physiology, as opposed to anything supernatural, but director Rodney Ascher doesn't provide a scientific benchmark against which we can judge the validity of these other interpretations. It doesn't help the viewer to hear the physiological explanation being poo-pooed if we've not been told what it is, especially when the alternative theories are somewhat outlandish.

A friend of mine used to say that there is nothing more boring than listening to accounts of other people's dreams; *The Nightmare* contradicts that view, but only just, because after about half an hour one really has heard the full range of experiences. Beyond that point, there are really only slight variations on the basic theme; as intriguing as the condition is, personal recollections of it are not quite enough to sustain interest for 90 minutes.

The reconstructions are

designed to correct this imbalance, but are rather flatly staged, a bit like those reconstructions in Ray Mears survival programmes where we see five men adrift on a lilo surviving on rainwater and albatross meat. The problem is that they tend to undercut the interviewees' stories of unbearable terror by failing to stir up any real fear. After all, if you don't find the reconstructions frightening then the whole premise of the film becomes redundant.

The familiarity of the images is another problem. If you've seen any the films cited above, or scores of similar ones, then the substance of the nightmares is not going to appear particularly unusual. We've all had bad dreams, and most of us will have had nightmares in which we've tried to run away from something horrible but have been unable to. Surely this begs the question of whether sleep paralysis is merely a more powerful version of this universal experience or a separate and far more serious condition; the film provides no answer.

I completely understand the need for ambiguity in certain kinds of documentary – the invitation to reach your own judgement or seek out further information – but *The Nightmare* doesn't deal with an emotive or ethical subject as do, for example, the films of Michael Moore. It is, in contrast, an appar-

ently neutral consideration of a phenomenon that is misunderstood if it is acknowledged at all. Unfortunately, the lack of context and of a basic structure to frame the testimonies means that if one is to take anything away from the film at all one is obliged to make a judgement based solely on the interviewees' statements (or even their characters), which is desperately unfair. As fortune tells, we are all too aware that witness testimony is merely one source of potential evidence and often an unreliable one at that. By offering us nothing more, Ascher has barely dipped a toe into the deep and murky waters of this phenomenon.

Daniel King

Fortean Times Verdict

A RATHER SUPERFICIAL LOOK AT A FASCINATING SUBJECT

6

The Lobster

Dir Yorgos Lanthimos, Greece/UK/Ireland/France 2015
On UK release from 16 October

David (Colin Farrell) is newly divorced, but being single is simply not permitted in the dystopian society in which Greek director Yorgos Lanthimos has set his first English-language feature, *The Lobster*. The grey and misty land may resemble rural Ireland but the regime that oversees it is closer to the one that bred children for organ donation in *Never Let Me Go* or forced over-30s to their premature deaths in *Logan's Run*.

The solution open to David – and every other singleton – is to be checked into a tawdry institution run by the evangelically married Hotel Manager (Olivia Williams) as a nightmarish cross between Pontius and Borstal. Here, David has 45 days to fall authentically in love; if he fails, he will be turned into an animal of his choosing and let loose in the wild. While fraternally close to his dog (it is after all his own, once single brother), David has decided that he wants to become a lobster, for reasons it would be a spoiler to reveal. In fact, it is difficult to go into much detail about the incidents of this weird and, at times, hilarious film without spoiling the surprise of what on Earth – or wherever it might be – is coming next.

Uncharismatic, heavily moustachioed and pot-bellied – but strangely self-assured and accept-

ing of his situation – Colin Farrell as David is riveting to watch as he attempts to find a partner, rarely exchanging his hangdog expression for the mildest flirtation or smile. There is much to squirm at in one potential relationship with Heartless Woman (Aggeliki Papoulia), who is devoid of any human feeling. The Limping Man (Ben Whishaw), skinny and nervously stammering, succeeds a little better in his quest for love, inducing his own nasal hæmorrhages so that he has at least something in common with Nose-bleed Woman, on whom he has set his affections.

The whole story is narrated by Short Sighted Woman (Rachel Weisz), a 'single' who has escaped the hotel to live with others like her in the woods, where they are frequently shot at by hotel inmates, who gain an extra day at the facility for every body they bring in. David and Short Sighted Woman's paths eventually cross and give to the film its moments of poignancy. The film finishes abruptly, but not before David shows his willingness to make an extreme sacrifice in order to be able to empathise fully with her.

The suddenness of the ending leaves you wondering what exactly it is you just witnessed – for days, if not weeks, afterwards. *The Lobster* does seem to have a very darkly humorous message – satirising the strong emphasis society places on the pressures to couple, the compromises that a person is willing to make, and the lies he or she is willing to tell, in order to win the affections of another.

The filmmaker who comes most frequently to mind during *The Lobster*'s many bizarre juxtapositions and situations is Luis Buñuel, whose brand of cinematic surrealism similarly questioned accepted social behaviours and turned them on their head. Following in his footsteps, Lanthimos is a new European surrealist to watch. He has created a film that is funny, beautiful, strange, chilling, and fully deserving of the Jury Prize it won at the 2015 Cannes Film Festival.

Rob Weinberg

Fortean Times Verdict

RICH AND STRANGE SLICE OF CONTEMPORARY SURREALISM

8

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.theficksthatchurchforgot.com; @revpeterlaws)

MADMAN

Dir Joe Giannone, US 1982
Arrow Video, £14.99 (Dual Format)

EATEN ALIVE

Dir Tobe Hooper, US 1976
Arrow Video, £14.99 (Dual Format)

NIGHTMARE CITY

Dir Umberto Lenzi, Italy/Mexico/Spain 1980
Arrow Video, £14.99 (Dual Format)

ZARDOZ

Dir John Boorman, Ireland 1974
Arrow Video, £12.99 (Blu-ray)

It's slashers, swamps and Sean Connery's shielded scrotum this month, with a clutch of mad cult movies hitting Blu-Ray. First up, an insane farmer hacks his family to bits then returns after his own execution to behead anyone who speaks his name above a whisper. *Madman* was overshadowed by the higher profile slashers of the time (this was 1982, after all, a critical-mass year for the genre), yet what looks like a straight rip-off of *Friday the 13th* is a fun, likeable movie. Yes it's a summer camp and yes there's plenty of head-chopping, but it's surprisingly eerie too. Shots of Marz swinging his axe mid-stroll or standing in a tree staring

down at his victims still manage to chill, and there's a quirkiness to the characters and performances that makes the viewer care when they finally get sliced. Watch out for the funky closing song, too.

There's more blade wielding madness in Tobe Hooper's *Eaten Alive*. Known in the UK as *Death Trap*, it's an unsettling tale of a crazed hotel owner murdering his guests and feeding them to his prized crocodile. It lacks the gritty realism of *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* but Hooper consciously replaces it with a sort of theatrical, colourful and stagey horror. The result feels surreal, dreamlike and as unsettling as *Chainsaw*, but in a different way. It may well follow the themes and rhythms of Hitchcock's *Psycho*, but Hooper's thoughtful despair has a terror all of its own.

The whole world turns mad, in Umberto Lenzi's high-octane horror romp, *Nightmare City*. The monsters might technically be zombies, but they're a frenetic, eager breed, sprinting across aircraft tarmac for victims, and doing something not often seen in zombie cinema – using weapons! Exciting horror action like



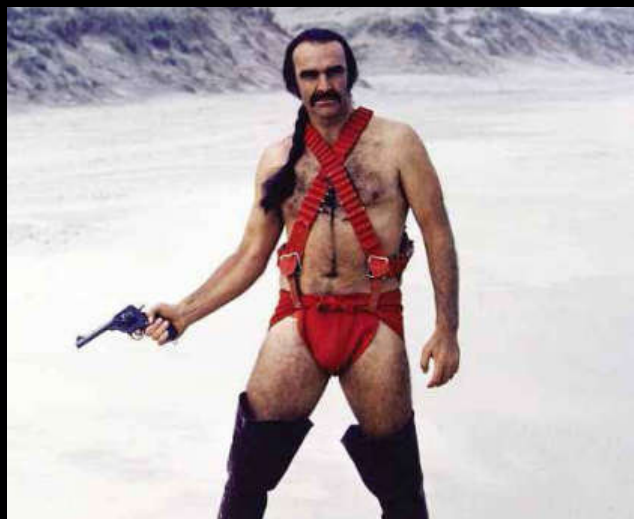
this has 'party movie' written all over it. Be warned though, while Arrow Video present the very best print they can, they're open and apologetic about the sometimes uneven picture quality. To help, they provide two different versions, so you can pick your favourite flavour.

Finally we get *Zardoz*, a film so creative and out there, it sometimes feels as if you're having a mini-stroke just watching it. Sean Connery is Zed, a moustachioed 'Brutal' on a post-apocalyptic Earth. He kills anything that moves for his stonehead God, Zardoz (the scene when Zardoz vomits rifles is as awesome it sounds). When Zed stumbles into the Vortex and discovers a Shangri La land of chilled-out Eternals, he finds he can offer them things they may desire. Like violence... and an erection. Throughout the film Connery races around in a sort of Terry Towelling Mankini. The film's been lauded as one of the best 'bad' movies ever made, but let step into its world on its own terms and you'll find a fascinating explosion of creativity. Catch all four of these mad and marvellous movies from Arrow Video.

Fortean Times Verdict

A QUARTET OF THE MAD AND THE MARVELLOUS

8



Howl

Dir Paul Hyett, UK 2015
On UK release from 16 October

“British Rail would like to apologise for the delay to your journey. This is due to lycanthropes on the line.”

Reviewing smaller horror films, rather than blockbusters, can lead to trepidation; filmmakers tend to have big ideas but small budgets, the cast tries too hard and special effects are not all that special. Paul Hyett's new film may be a small one, but its concept and delivery are worthy of many a bigger release.

On a dark and stormy night, Joe (Ed Speelers), a London train guard, draws the unenviable late shift on the last train out of the capital, dealing with drunks, clubbers and exhausted office workers. The only bright spot of the journey is that Joe gets to work alongside Ellen (Shauna MacDonald), the train's trolley-pushing hostess. Off they trundle into the night, only to come to a screeching halt somewhere down the line when the train hits something, forcing the driver (Sean Pertwee providing the cameo) to check before the journey can continue. But the driver never returns, and the train is stuck on a lonely stretch of track, surrounded by dense forest, with something nasty lurking in the woods...

So begins what is part claustrophobic psychological horror, part gore-fest, with a fresh and truly beastly take on the werewolf. The creature starts to pick off the passengers one by one, until they decide to attempt the walk to the next station; travelling through woods at night while being stalked is not such a good idea, though, and results in a panicked sprint back to the safety of the rail carriage. Joe rallies the passengers to attack the creature with successful results... but, as we all know, wolves hunt in packs.

Hyett directs well, and characters that are essentially one-dimensional are given enough telling dialogue that their deaths register, although not always in sympathetic terms; when the self-absorbed teenager got it, I wondered whether she was tweeting: “Being eaten by werewolf... lol”. The effects and monsters are very good and were created by Hyett's own company, which was responsible for the creatures in Neil Marshall's *The Descent* and *The Woman In Black*. The werewolves are lean, supernatural and vicious,

purposely designed to capture the most horrific aspect of lycanthropy – not the fully transformed wolf, but the transmutation stage of part human, part animal; they're just the right side of creepy when you first encounter them. The cast performs well and portrays a nice cross section of the capital's commuters, from the fat, guzzling football fan to the smarmy investment banker who initially takes charge but dooms various passengers to death. The film's climax made me wonder if it wasn't the director's exploration of interpersonal relationships between men and women that made me want to watch it a second time. Hats off to Hyett, who has taken a mundane British rail journey and turned it into a feast of bloody horror.

Mark McConnell

Fortean Times Verdict

WEREWOLVES ON THE LINE!
A HORRIFYINGLY FUN RIDE **8**

Jurassic World

Dir Colin Trevorrow, US 2015
BFI, £9.99 DVD, £12.99 (Blu-ray)

I'm astonished that *Jurassic World* beat all comers to take the box office crown of 2015. It's a painfully unimaginative affair, moving with the leaden plod of a constipated diplococcus rather than the zippy attack of an angry velociraptor; it simply tramples its open-mouthed audience into submission over a very long two hours in which the same thing (dinos escape, chase people, get taken down) simply happens again and again until – the end! The film's plot – corporate hubris and a jaded public lead to the creation of the world's biggest and deadliest dinosaur ‘attraction’ – appears to be self-reflexive, meditating somewhat ruefully on its own overinflated and empty nature; when our heroes discover traces of the original Jurassic Park, it serves as both Ozymandian warning and aching nostalgia for a lost world in which blockbuster films were actually fun. Chuck in irritating kids in peril, everyday sexism, lashings of schmaltz and a criminal waste of the cheeky talent Chris Pratt displayed in *Guardians of the Galaxy*, and tedium ensues.

David Sutton

Fortean Times Verdict

GARGANTUAN DINO-FEST
LACKS REQUIRED BITE **5**

SHORTS

DEMONIC

Icon Entertainment, £7.99 (DVD)



What's that... another attempt to re-invent the found footage genre? This time around, police question the sole survivor in a house filled with corpses, while officers watch the video shot by the now dead people. It's a reasonably effective back-and-forth between shaky-cam and standard movie techniques. There are a few spooky moments and subtlety and plot twists are at least attempted, if not always achieved. Horror hit-meister James Wan produces, and you do get the sense of him hovering about on the margins, which is no bad thing. Just praise the good Lord this wasn't all shot shaky-style. It's getting boring.

Rev PL 5/10

STUNG

Entertainment One, £9.99 (DVD)



Two party planners have to deal with the common annoyance of wasps screwing up an outdoor event – only these critters are huge and homicidal. Plus, when they sting you, new giant wasps climb right out of your skin. This is an energetic fusion of 1950s big-bug movies and 1970s 'nature attacks' films, but *Stung* is smart, funny and self-aware. It's also gooey and gory fun, with a refreshingly high quota of practical effects. Plus Lance Henriksen shits himself: bonus! Rev PL 7/10

THE VOICES

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



This is certainly a left-field directorial choice from Marjane Satrapi, the Iranian-born writer/director whose animated adaptation of her autobiographical graphic novel *Persepolis* won her admirers the world over. *The Voices* is unlikely to repeat that trick: it's a ham-fisted retooling of *Psycho* as a black comedy about a likeable factory worker/delusional schizophrenic driven to kill by his talking cat. It fails to deliver either proper laughs or real unease, while its overbearing visual whimsy consistently mistakes itself for cinematic style. Ryan Reynolds deserves praise for his performance as the lonely nutcase Jerry, and extra marks for also voicing his talking pets (Roscoe the dog is an all-round good egg, unlike his scheming and psychopathic feline housemate); but Mr Whiskers has no business sounding like a super-sweary reject from a Danny Boyle film. I suspect that nine out of ten cats will be offended by this hopelessly crude portrayal that captures none of the hauteur or Machiavellian cunning of their tribe. DS 5/10

INSIDIOUS 3

Entertainment One, £12.99 (DVD), £14.99 (Blu-ray)



I liked the original *Insidious*, James Wan's horror-riff on astral projection. It had some nice Argento-inspired splashes of surrealism and colour. This prequel starts promisingly enough, with a young woman seeking out a medium to help her contact her dead mother. She soon learns, however, that when you call out to one of the dead, all of them can hear you. The film's spooks at least look distinctive; yet the final result isn't particularly scary and it's all surprisingly schmaltzy.

Rev PL 5/10

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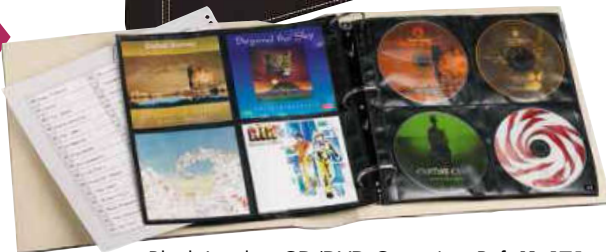
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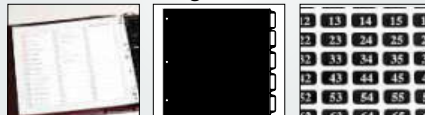
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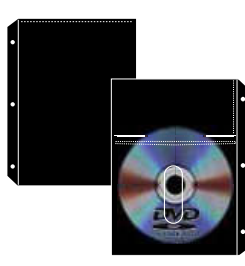
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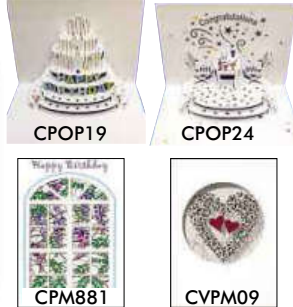


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Dear FT...

letters



An Ice Surprise

I was very interested to read Malcolm Christophers's letter [FT331:73] in which he reported seeing "dozens of coots and moorhens" entombed in a sheet of ice on a Cornish pond, these fowl apparently having been "instantly frozen in the postures they assumed going about their normal business". Sadly I can't provide an explanation for this, but I can provide an (alleged) further instance of the same type of phenomenon on an even grander scale, and involving a different type of frozen animal – namely, horses!

It appears in a 1944 book called *Kaputt* by the Italian writer and adventurer Curzio Malaparte, an account of his escapades in Nazi-occupied Europe, and describes an event he says occurred in Finland in 1941, when he was a war correspondent embedded with German troops during the 'War in the East' against Russia. According to Malaparte, one day in the icy Finnish wastes he came across a frozen lake filled with hundreds of (bathing?) horses which had been transformed to ice by a flash-freezing event so sudden that it appeared to have beheaded them. Malaparte (or his English translator, anyway) described the scene thus:

"The lake looked like a vast sheet of white marble on which rested hundreds upon hundreds of horses' heads. They appeared to have been chopped off cleanly with an axe. Only the heads stuck out of the crust of ice. And they were all facing the shore. The white flame of terror still burnt in their wide-open eyes. Close to the shore a tangle of wildly rearing horses rose from the prison of ice." (Cited in John Gray, *The Silence of Animals*, Allen Lane, 2013, p.24)

As for whether this is actually true or not, I have no idea – Nazi war correspondents were not, as a rule, the most honest of men I suppose, and Malaparte appears to have been one of those adventurous piratical types who idolise war and actively seek out

Simulacra corner



This photo of a flint nodule resembling a human face apparently disfigured by fire was sent in by someone called Christer Stone. *We are always glad to receive pictures of spontaneous forms and figures, or any curious images. Send them to the PO box above (with a stamped addressed envelope or international reply coupon) or to sieveking@forteantimes.com – and please tell us your postal address.*

its arenas for æsthetic reasons, with his book apparently being a curious mixture of accurate real-life reportage and odd, surrealist fantasy. Maybe Malaparte made it all up. Maybe he saw a dead frozen horse or two in some water and simply exaggerated the sight. Or, then again, maybe he really did see something genuinely anomalous. My guess would be the second option, but seeing as Malcolm Christophers apparently really did see some birds which had been killed and insta-frozen in this manner, who knows? Maybe one day some mad scientist could perform a deeply unethical experiment upon some livestock and find out for us. It was just a truly bizarre image and I thought I'd share it.

SD Tucker
Widnes, Cheshire

Thai Ghosts

I've been watching Thai ghost *lakorn* (soap operas) with my wife, followed by royal family news, all proper and prim, as well as Thai news. I wish there were a primer on Thai ghosts. There must be a

couple of dozen kinds. My favourite is the *Pee-ka-sua*, human during the day and a ghost after midnight. This one's head separates from the body that is left behind. The head trails the spinal cord and organs. This ghost has an appetite for raw meat and afterbirth. There is also a folk hero, *Su-tee-chai*, who was apparently an actual person. He took your words literally and then did exactly as you said. Leaving the house, his mother said: "Clean the house inside and out

as well as your sister". He cleaned his sister on the outside and then opened her torso and proceeded to clean. Another story is one about a bird fight, normally roosters, and in this case between Burma (Myanmar) and Thailand. He said he would bring his 'bird' to the fight and the Burmese accepted his generic word. You guessed it, he brought a hawk. The rooster lasted a few seconds.

On a totally different subject: when on a field trip collecting rocks in streambeds in southern Indiana, my old elementary school friend, the late James Drew, came across a Mediæval coin, partly embedded in a nodule of quartz. In later years James told me someone had stolen the coin.

Terry W Colvin
Prachuabkhirikhan, Thailand

Indian poltergeist

For the fortean database I submit the following datum: "The Indians [specifically the Shuswap people] aver that unknown beings sometimes throw stones at them, particularly at night, when stones may be noticed occasionally falling into the fire." (Recorded in 1877 or 1888-1890). This comes from GM Dawson, 'Notes on the Shuswap People of British Columbia', (*Proceedings and Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada* for 1891, 9. 2 (1892), 3-44: 38)

Marinus van der Sluijs
Philadelphía



"I LIKE WHAT YOU'VE DONE WITH YOUR SHADOW."

J08000

New light on Adamski

In November 1980, an elderly Milwaukee psychic named Lillian (“Myrah”) Lawrance provided information to help fill in a previously unknown period in the life of flying saucer contactee George Adamski. That month she appeared on a Milwaukee television programme, taking calls from viewers about personal problems, and giving them her predictions. Near the end of that portion of the show, the interviewer, Ms BJ Raab, asked her about UFOs. Myrah replied: “I’ve been acquainted with UFOs since 1926. When George Adamski first came out with his theory that there were UFOs, everybody laughed, tried to laugh at him – [Raab, interrupting: Are they from another planet?] Oh, yes!”

I had never seen the programme before, but Jerome Clark and I happened to be in the TV studio for the segment on UFOs. When Myrah said that about Adamski, Jerry and I looked at each other in astonishment. But apparently it didn’t make a lasting impression on him, as in later years he had forgotten all about it – though Jerry is gracious enough to add that he takes my word for it.

During the commercial break, I got more details from Myrah. She had known Adamski in St Paul (Minnesota) in 1926, and also knew his wife and sister-in-law there. “He was an ordinary milkman then,” and was also into the psychic. Myrah suggested to Adamski that he get out of St Paul, telling him, “You’ll be world-famous.” He protested, “What am I going to do?” But later he did move to California, where he was set up by a very wealthy woman, to establish an observatory and a (UFO) landing area. (Naturally, I presumed that this woman was Alice K Wells, but Myrah did not recognise the name.)

In 1944, Myrah had predicted that Liberace (the flamboyant pianist, a native of suburban Milwaukee) would become world-famous. Of course, it is easy to talk about such predictions selectively and in retrospect.



The psychic told Adamski that he would be world-famous

There was a presidential election the day after the TV programme, and Myrah said she did not see how Jimmy Carter could lose. Of course, Ronald Reagan was the winner, and served as president 1981-1989.

To people who know something about Adamski (or even about UFOs in general), some of what Myrah said does not ring true. Nevertheless, research does confirm her main point. This was done using the Library Edition of Ancestry.com, with access to census records, city directories, family trees, etc. In 2014 I started using it to research George Adamski and his family, for a book about him that I am collaborating on with Marc Hallet of Belgium.

Mary Adamski (née Shimber-sky) was the fifth of 10 children. Her younger sister Ella Blanche (Mrs Elmer C Rasmussen) lived in St Paul, and during that period she often moved around – in the 1925 city directory, she was at 100 E 11th St; in the 1926 directory at 666 Selby Ave; and in the 1927 directory at 1591 Schwabe. Ella eventually died in 1976.

The St Paul city directories for 1924, 1925, and 1927 gave Adamski’s occupation as painter. He had also worked as a painter in Yellowstone National Park in 1917 (an FBI office memorandum

dated 16 December 1953 gave the year incorrectly as 1916), and in Portland, Oregon, in 1918. Although Adamski was an accomplished artist, that probably isn’t the kind of painting that these

documents are talking about. In fact, his 1920 census record (in Portland, Oregon) specifically says house painter.

But Adamski could also have been a milkman in St Paul (as Myrah said), either during a certain part of that four-year period, or perhaps at a different time of the day – because delivering milk would have only kept him busy in the early morning hours.

Adamski was missing from the 1926 directory, and in the 1927 one he had a different address. (He had moved from 775 Raymond Ave to 374 Sturgis.) There are multiple possible explanations for this, including that in 1926 he moved before the first block was canvassed, but after the second block was canvassed. Many entries in the city directories included the name of the wife, but Adamski was by himself. (But then, Myrah Lawrance wasn’t listed with her husband either.) Mary Adamski was as obscure then as she was later, in the pages of George Adamski’s books.

Whether George Adamski did it at Myrah’s suggestion or not, within a couple of years he did leave St Paul. By 1928, he was back in Los Angeles, where he had lived previously – still identified as a painter. In 1930 the census-taker there recorded George’s occupation as lecturer, in the field of “gener. Religion.” As they say, the rest is history.

Adamski was the subject of the exposé issue of James Moseley’s *Saucer News* (October 1957). In my opinion, this was Jim’s major contribution to ufology. Later he turned to treating the subject in a less-than-serious manner, such

as when he conspired with Gray Barker to fake “official” support for contactee George Adamski with the “RE Straith” letters, written in December of 1957. Their colleague who provided the official State Department stationery they used was James D Villard.

Villard wrote an article about the Straith letters for Max Miller’s *Saucers* 6:4, of winter 1958/59 (pp. 2-6). The article included the type of paper used and the non-existence of an RE Straith in the State Department. He said his father was the US Ambassador to the United Nations in Geneva. Donald Keyhoe had sent him a letter about the rumour that Villard was an accomplice in the Straith matter, as provider of the stationery, but Villard denied it. I have some issues of Villard’s own newsletter, *The UFOloger*. He sent it out from Switzerland for a while when his father was stationed there.

I had long suspected Villard of providing the stationery, and Jim Moseley finally confirmed it, in a letter to me dated 2 August 2011: “Yes, it was James Villard (whom I met only once, much later). Your info about him + his father is correct.”

See also the incriminating correspondence between Barker and Villard about the stationery, written in November and December of 1957. Michael D Swords quoted from it in *CUFOS’s International UFO Reporter* 17:6, Nov./Dec. 1992, p. 10.

Jim Moseley wrote in *Saucer Smear* (10 Jan 1985, when he confessed that he and Barker had hoaxed the letters) that Straith’s initials were “in deference to R.E. Palmer [sic].” Even though – as I reminded him – Ray Palmer’s middle initial was A rather than E. Oops.

The FBI has an extensive file on their investigation of the Straith letters. Gray Barker seemed to be their prime suspect, though of course proper names like his were deleted. This file was separate from the FBI’s other material on Adamski, and required a specific FOIA request.

Richard W Heiden
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Gloves advised

Regarding Steve Yates's 'Posh Soot' [FT330:73] I can vouch that most mechanics treat carbon black with respect, but the best-known substance to avoid is Viton, a 'fluoroelastomer' produced by DuPont. It is used in many applications and provides proven resistance to chemicals and extreme temperatures. It is mainly used in fuel system seals and hoses, O-rings and some rubber gaskets. Story has it that although safe when cool, once its been heated to its limit Viton becomes aggressive in the sense that if it comes into contact with flesh it eats its way in and like a necrotic bug doesn't stop until there is none left to consume. How true this is I don't know but I always wore gloves when removing seals and 'O' rings. Most classic car fanatics will know the story of designer Giovanni Michelotti – author of numerous superb designs for Triumph (Stag, TR4, Herald), Jaguar, BMW, Lancia, Ferrari, Maserati Alfa etc. – who was once presented with a block of 'blue-grey plaster of paris' for sculpting models. It proved to be an excellent medium, and Michelotti with his typical sleeves-rolled-up approach, couldn't wait to use it; in fact it quickly became his favourite material for fleshing out ideas. It seems initially he wasn't told that protective clothing was a must, but apparently even after being warned he still carried on. The dust is said to have been absorbed into his system through his lungs and skin and he died of cancer in Turin in 1980.

Jack Romano
Worksop, Nottinghamshire

Recalling Warminster

I read David Clarke's faintly amusing article on David Simpson, Warminster and tripods ['Warminster Syndrome', FT331:40-47] with interest as I attended the meeting called by Elwyn Rees in Warminster Town Hall in August 1965. Clarke describes Simpson as "a reserved, quietly spoken man". However, he had a reputation for being argumentative in an unpleasant manner.

When Council Chairman Rees

called the public meeting, some 200 or more people crammed into the Town Hall. My BUFORA colleagues, Dr Geoffrey Doel, BUFORA Chairman, and 'Dr' John Cleary-Baker, journal editor, were on the platform with Rev Ing. (Cleary-Baker was never BUFORA Chairman, as stated by Clarke.) Afterwards, Dr Doel told me that they had felt obliged to reassure the public that they were not in any danger. I felt Cleary-Baker lacked objectivity on occasion.

The late Arthur Shuttlewood was the mainstay of the Warminster phenomena. I saw at first hand how he manipulated lights-in-the-sky and satellites into UFOs. And yes, people went on skywatches "wanting to believe". I was told Shuttlewood's colleague Bob Strong had threatened me (for my scepticism) and I later learned that he had been mauled by a lion at the Longleat estate. Shuttlewood wrote some seven books as I recall, and *More UFOs Over Warminster* suggested he was running out of titles.

Much is made of *Flying Saucer Review* and others falling for the SIUFOP hoax. I am pleased to say that, as publisher of the internationally circulating *Spacelink* magazine, I chose to ignore this story. While Simpson prides himself for his elaborate hoaxes, some regard this activity with the sort of contempt reserved for graffiti taggers. Did they contribute towards scientific data?

In my 1986 booklet, *The Moving Statues of Ballinspittle*, I explained the phenomena at this remote grotto in County Cork, using the autokinesis theory. However, this did not account for the wave of religious phenomena reported from over four dozen locations. So may I point out that the mysterious sounds that triggered the 'Warminster Syndrome' have not been adequately explained?

Curiously, Clarke makes no mention of the Bedford UFO Society's caravan that was located near Warminster. It contained several chart recorders for monitoring events in the area. Although Simpson worked for the National Physical Laboratory, I am not aware that this equipment contributed anything useful in studying the alleged local anomalies.



Clarke compulsively mentions Rendlesham. At the 'briefing' at Woodbridge Community Hall on 11 July 2015, Colonel Charles Halt (former Base Commander at RAF Woodbridge) told us that the event in 1980 interrupted the base Christmas party and that he remained mystified.

Clarke pads the end of his lengthy feature by rubbishing the study of UFOs. Now, back in 1979 (the year of the House of Lords UFO debate), I put some effort into running a well-attended UFO conference at Morley College, not far from Waterloo Station. (The course made BBC national news.) At the end of term I asked the Principal about continuing. I fancy he had had a couple of drinks that evening, and his reply was roughly: "Mr Beer, I have been told by County Hall [just up the road] that if I let your [UFO] course continue, my [college] funding will be cut." That was more than Clarcean ridicule – that was brusque censorship.

Lionel Beer
Hampton, Middlesex

From the mid-1960s until well into the 1970s, the Warminster area of Wiltshire generated many reports of strange phenomena (unusual sounds, UFO sightings, apparitions, etc.). David Clarke cites incidents in which people were duped by hoaxers, and implies that the whole case can be satisfactorily explained in terms of psychosocial factors, such as misinterpretation, credulity and a 'will to believe'. But his highly selective portrayal doesn't do justice to the complexity of the wide-ranging events.

Admittedly, Arthur Shuttlewood (1920-1996), the main conduit for published reports about the phenomena, wasn't the most reliable of writers. He was a local journalist, and wrote several books bearing on the manifestations, starting with *The Warminster Mystery*, which was first published (by Neville Spearman, London) in 1967 (not 1968, as Clarke asserts). Shuttlewood's writings contain direct quotes from witnesses. But judging from the relative formality of the wording, I suspect that he exercised some licence in formulating the quotations. Similarly, I suspect that he paraphrased written testimony and passed it off as direct quotation. He was prone to exaggeration¹, but I don't think that entitles us to write off the testimony of the many witnesses that he cited. Indeed, a positive aspect of his reporting was that he often gave background details about them (even their addresses, on occasion). Some of them would have been well known in the local community. Fabricating completely bogus stories about them would have exposed him to reputational damage and the risk of losing his job with the *Warminster Journal*.

Even if we disregard *all* of the witness testimony cited by Shuttlewood, there remain grounds for thinking that the area was the setting for paranormal phenomena. In his 2007 book *UFO Warminster: Cradle of Contact*², Kevin Goodman describes unusual manifestations that he and some friends experienced there in the 1970s. He mentions, for instance, an unsuccessful attempt to photograph a UFO in

Star Jelly?

On my morning dog walk in early July 2015, the white blob visible in the first picture [right] caught my eye at the side of the road – Pot House Lane, Oswaldtwistle, Lancashire. It had the initial appearance of frogspawn but not a single black speck as you would expect, and was of a brighter-white colour and much denser-looking than the amphibious spawn we get in our ponds. It was lying under some pretty dense trees and hedgerow and as you can see from the curbstone in the foreground, right next to the road. Handily for scale, a standard size can lid was lying just within shot.

This would have been an odd talking point had it not been a fairly regular occurrence in this neighbourhood. My father and I have walked dogs over the west Pennine Moors every week for years, which means we have ‘got our eye-in’ when it comes to spotting the out-of-place: and we’ve spotted this stuff at least half a dozen times in all seasons. For those who claim it’s a gift from the Gods, this would appear to vindicate the “non-terrestrial, anti-organism” rationale as frogs and the like certainly wouldn’t be out on the top of the moors after heavy snows in November (I nearly put my hand in the stuff making snowballs), nor should the spawn still be ongoing half-way through the year.

I’d like to add my own humble theory (pure conjecture, of course): I always assumed that this “Meteor Shit” (to quote Stephen King’s character in *Creepshow*) was the result of the interaction between vermin and amphibians; i.e. that a fox or mink had guzzled some unfortunate critter, and that due to some biological/digestive



incompatibility had returned the plasma up the way it had gone down, but in a new chemical form. I’ve witnessed the canine precedent of dogs chowing down on the discarded umbilici of new-born lambs, only to start the ‘bilge-pump’ two days later and bring back an ungodly black oil that no decent person should have to deal with in the early hours.

The second photo was taken about 14 days later. The stuff has thickened up/evaporated somewhat, but not into thin air as the legend says it should, (rain, thunder, humidity as factors?), and by my observations it has held no nutritional value for any other scavengers.

The other anti-space factor is the dense overgrowth: unless the goop de-con/re-congealed



as it passed through the trees it must have been laid (barfed) at ground level.

There is a specific spot on the moor where we have come across this more than twice: it is within a quarter of a mile of a sinkhole where frogs breed in profusion (and presumably hibernate), and is on a route where we have tracked foxes and mink in winter as they make beelines for the bins at the back of a fairly remote pub.

If anyone has touched this slime and been transformed I shall stand corrected, but I’ll admit I’m not man enough to go sticking my digits in space-snot for the sake of fortean-furtherance.

James Crossley
Oswaldtwistle, Lancashire

the summer of 1977 (pp. 113-115). At the time, he and his friend Chris Butler were staying at a Warminster guesthouse. Butler was lying on his bed, gazing out of a window. Goodman writes:

“I sat on my bed reading a book [...]. Suddenly, Chris [...] ran to the window, crying out, ‘What the fuck’s that?!’ I got off my bed [...] and joined Chris at the window. Over Cop Heap, slowly traversing the sky from right to left, was a silver, cigar-shaped object. Chris fumbled for his binoculars, and through the lenses could see a uniform elliptical object. He passed the binoculars to me and I confirmed what Chris had seen. I handed the binoculars back to Chris and began to rummage through my camera equipment. [...] As I started to screw on a 400mm telephoto lens, I left the room, running down the stairs into the back garden [...] As I was

using a long, heavy lens I needed to avoid camera shake. I hadn’t brought a tripod to Warminster with me, but I knew I could use the post in the garden to brace the camera. [...] The film in the camera] had a rating of 400ASA – one of the fastest film speeds commercially available at that time – so I felt certain that I would be able to catch the object in mid-flight, without any blurring. I reached the post, lined up the camera and carefully focused. The object was in the viewfinder, with blue sky and high, light grey cloud in the background. I carefully took three exposures, manually winding the film on, refocusing each time, before the UFO went behind the trees on Elm Hill and out of my view. As I finished, Chris yelled from the bedroom window, binoculars still to his eyes, ‘There are people on the hill, and they’re pointing at it too... It’s got to be a real object!’ [...]

“My film was developed when we returned to Stourbridge. When the prints came back, there was blue sky, white clouds but *no* UFO! In the left bottom corner of the final print were the tips of the trees on Elm hill. [...] I assure you, I had the object dead centre in the viewfinder, and we could see from the print that the exposure had obviously been correct. [...] I had, at the time, my own enlarger and printing equipment at home. Both Chris and I spent a good few hours looking at the negatives through the enlarger, at different settings. At no time did we ever see any sign of that UFO.”

In an email to me in March 2010, Chris Butler stated that, at first, the UFO looked like the fuselage of a plane reflecting the sunlight, but no wings or tail were apparent.

Goodman may not have been the only person to experience difficulty in capturing images of

the local UFO phenomena. For example, according to Shuttlewood’s second book³, Bill Nixon of Pathé News had taken movie shots of UFOs from Cradle Hill (near Warminster), in both colour and black-and-white, but nothing appeared on his film (p. 41). In my view, this raises the possibility that some of the sightings were paranormal hallucinatory experiences, perhaps engendered by a tricksterish higher intelligence.

¹ See, for example: Steve Dewey & John Ries, *In Alien Heat: The Warminster Mystery Revisited* (Anomalist Books, San Antonio, Texas, 2006); Peter A McCue, *Zones of Strangeness: An Examination of Paranormal and UFO Hot Spots* (AuthorHouse, Bloomington, Indiana, 2012).

² Southampton, Swallowtail Books.

³ *Warnings from Flying Friends*, Warminster, Portway Press, 1968.

Peter A McCue
By email

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

Comforting presence

My wife Carol and I have had many odd experiences over the years. As a teenager she would wake on several occasions with the feeling someone was either stroking or nuzzling her hair. This feeling would continue after she woke and would continue until she fell asleep again. She never found it unsettling or scary. She described the stroking as soothing, as if someone were comforting her and reassuring her with their presence.

My wife's brother moved into her room when she moved out and one day he mentioned in passing about being woken by the feeling of having his hair stroked in the night. One of my wife's friends was sleeping over when they were kids; the girl woke up screaming that someone was in the room touching her hair and refused to go back to sleep until my wife had opened the wardrobe and checked under the bed for an intruder and left the light on for the rest of night. Many years later, after we'd married and were living in our first home together, the comforting presence returned, visiting when I was away on business, leaving my wife and children alone in the house.

Some other odd phenomena happened in that house. We had things appear and reappear in weird places, in cupboards and under the covers at the foot of freshly made beds. Several times my wife and children caught sight of a small blond-haired girl in one of the rooms. She would appear for an instant, stand staring at them, then vanish without a sound.

It seemed we also had a pet we weren't aware of. I'd been napping one afternoon when I felt what I thought was our dog jump onto the bed and walk along beside me, finally stopping to stand on the pillow right by my head. I distinctly felt the small feet land on the bed, the feet walking on the bed and the pressure on the pillow beside me when it stopped. I opened my eyes ready to tell what I thought was the dog to get off the bed. Nothing. There were prints on the bed and pillow, but no dog. My wife told me later that she'd had similar experiences in the house: the feeling of something small walking beside her on the bed and then standing beside her head on the pillow. She'd open her eyes to find she was alone. When talking about it later, we both agreed that the feeling was actually more like a two-legged rather than four-legged creature. A tiny biped.

We only found out about these shared experiences years later when we talked about the odd things that had happened in that old house. We also agreed that the experiences increased when we were renovating the house.

I can recall my youngest son, when he was about four or five, asking me about the coloured balls of light that followed me around the house



all the time. When I told him I didn't know what he was talking about, he became upset, insisting that he could see the balls of light and that they were there behind me as we spoke. It freaked me out at the time, but I wish now I'd asked him more about those lights. He never mentioned them again.

Gary Smith
Victoria, Australia

A busy house

When my husband and I relocated to Manchester 11 years ago, we had very little time to find somewhere to live between getting married and getting the go-ahead to move. On visiting letting agencies we found our choice in the location we wanted limited to a tiny flat or a large, turn-of-the-century house. Naturally there was no contest, and at that time the cheaper rent after living down south meant that an Edwardian house in north Manchester was affordable.

I am usually a bit sensitive to what I term 'busy' houses, but in the chaos and stress of moving in I was too preoccupied to notice anything out of the ordinary. It wasn't until we put our first picture up that I began to wonder if the house was as quiet as it first seemed. The picture was a glass-covered frameless print of nudes dancing by Rodin. My husband firmly secured it (or so we thought) to the wall above the large, marble fireplace, but about 20 minutes later it fell, clearing the large mantelpiece by a good few inches and landing on the floor. The glass was smashed irreparably and it frightened the life out of us. We couldn't work out how the picture had managed to avoid the wide mantelpiece below it, but we were too relieved that no other damage had been done to worry about it any further. And so it began.

The toilet would flush itself at night so often that we began to ignore it; keys would jangle in the back door lock, and on one occasion my husband watched transfixed from the toilet as the shower curtain 'shook' by itself and a shampoo bottle jumped into the bath. Some of these incidents are perhaps easy to debunk, but others were not so easy to explain away. One night I awoke to see a shape bending over my bed as if to look more closely at me. The only way I can describe it is to say that it looked as if it was made up of the 'snowiness' you would get on pre-digital television sets when the signal was weak or receiving interference.

One weekend my parents visited and my mother swore she saw a gold-framed mirror appear on the bathroom wall when we only had a frameless modern version above the sink. The next incident followed closely after that. My mother had made some slightly disparaging remarks about who might have lived in the house and I cautioned her not to say such things in a 'busy' house. Shortly after my parents had left to drive home, the biggest haunted house cliché of all took place: a small picture of my parents in a metal stand-up frame which had been on the mantelpiece for months crashed to the floor. It was unharmed and I replaced it and then made a quick call to my parents' mobile to check all was well. It never fell down again in the remaining time we lived there, and neither did my mother ever mention the previous occupants again.

The strangest thing of all is that I never felt scared in the house, even when alone at night; I was more annoyed than anything. I recall misplacing my purse just before going out and I could have sworn I just had it in front of me. In exasperation I shouted to the house that I had enough of flying pictures, flushing loos and jangling keys and yes, you guessed it, suddenly there it was, on the table right in front of me.

As I say, in general the house did not feel uncomfortable apart from one of the two reception rooms that we used for storage. This particular room had a horrible blood-red carpet and bizarrely an old sword propped up against one wall. Very off-putting. In time we found a house we wished to buy and moved out. It wasn't until a number of years later that I realised that the only time the house was quiet was when I had been very ill and had required an emergency operation. Was the house sensitive enough to know I needed peace or was I just too busy recovering to notice anything at that time?

In March 2014 we noted that the house was up for sale. Looking at the pictures on the estate agent website, the sword was gone but the horrible red carpet remained... and what else?

Vicky Holt
Manchester

POLICE

THE ILLUSTRATED
LAW COURTS AND WEEK

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

42. THE RAT-KILLING MONKEY OF MANCHESTER

In Victorian times, the 'sport' of ratting enjoyed considerable popularity. In this unsavoury pastime, a number of rats were put into a rat-pit, and then an angry terrier was released. Bets were made how many rats the dog could kill within a certain amount of time, or how long it would take for the animal to kill 20 or 100 rats.

It would appear that ratting originated as a form of 18th century dog trial, where the killing instinct of young terriers was tested by giving them a few rats to kill. With time, the



The Great 100 Rat Match

sport spread from rural areas to London and other cities. Instead of just being dog trials, the ratting matches became increasingly competitive, with a greater number of rats put into the pit, and a good deal of betting

going on. A dog owner might announce in the newspapers that his animal was capable of killing a certain number of rats in a certain amount of time – say 20 rats in five minutes – and bets were placed as to whether the dog would be capable of this feat. After a sack of live rats had been emptied into the pit, the dog was let loose on its path of destruction. The best dogs dispatched each rodent with a swift bite, without worrying at it or carrying it around, before attacking the next rat. The rats scurried around as best as they could, sometimes piling up in the corner of the rat-pit as if to seek protection, at other times desperately fighting for their lives.

Already in the early 1800s, there were several rat-pits in London, the most famous of which was the Westminster Pit, located in Duck Lane, Orchard Street. In the 1820s, this sleazy establishment became the catalyst of the growth of London ratting, thanks to Billy the Raticide, the most famous ratting dog ever. Billy was a muscular dog of 26lb (12kg), mostly white in colour, with strong jaws and a fierce glare in his eye. He had set a record already in 1820, by killing 20 rats in 71 seconds, at the cost of being deprived of one of his own eyes by one of the infuriated rodents. In September 1822, Billy was wagered for 20 sovereigns to kill 100 rats in less than 12 minutes. Since ratting of this magnitude had rarely been seen before, the Westminster Pit was completely full. The audience, nearly 2,000 strong, laid many hundreds of pounds on the outcome of the



TOP: The Great 100 Rat Match. ABOVE An old colour print depicting the famous ratting dog Billy.

STRATED
WEEKLY RECORD: NEWS

match. There was a huge cheer when Mr Dew brought the squirming, growling Billy down to the pit, and another when a huge sack of large sewer rats was carried into the arena. The gentlemen puffed hard at their cigars to escape the pungent smell of the rodents, and tankards of beer were liberally swigged. There was a roar as the umpire and timekeeper checked their watches, and Billy was set free. To the delight of his supporters, the fierce little dog dispatched all 100 rats in eight minutes, 45 seconds – a new world record.

There could be serious grudge matches when two ambitious dog fanciers or rat-pit proprietors matched their best dogs against each other. Syndicates were formed to back the dogs, hundreds of pounds were bet, and crowds gathered in their thousands to back their favourites. The beer and the excitement sometimes got the better of the audience, and serious fights could break out. When a celebrated provincial ratting dog challenged one of the London stars, the atmosphere might resemble that of a present-day football game between a London club and an out-of-town rival. In 1848, the London dog Jack was carried round the streets in a drunken procession after beating the Southampton bitch Beauty by 106 rats to 100 in a fiercely contested encounter. In another epic ratting match, the Manchester bitch Miss Lily, under eight pounds in weight, was wagered to kill 100 large barn rats. After a frenzied effort, she narrowly lost by one minute, 40 seconds; still, the London sportsmen gave her a standing ovation.

The Godfather of the London Ratting Fancy was Jemmy Shaw, a dog-fancier and publican who kept his rat-pit at the Blue Anchor, Bunhill-row, St Luke's. Jemmy was proud of his little dog Tiny, only five and a half pounds (2.5kg) in weight, since this fierce little terrier had once won him a large bet by killing 200 rats in less than an hour. By the 1840s, the ratting matches were governed by a strict system of rules, constructed to ensure fairness for the dog-owners and fair play for the betting fraternity. There was always a match umpire, and a time-keeper as well. The dog's second was strictly forbidden to interfere with the gory proceedings in the pit, except to cheer the animal on with gestures and verbal commands. He was also allowed to take the dog out of the pit if he felt it needed rest or refreshments, and to blow on the rats when they had piled up in the pit corner, in order to disperse them. After some distressing incidents involving

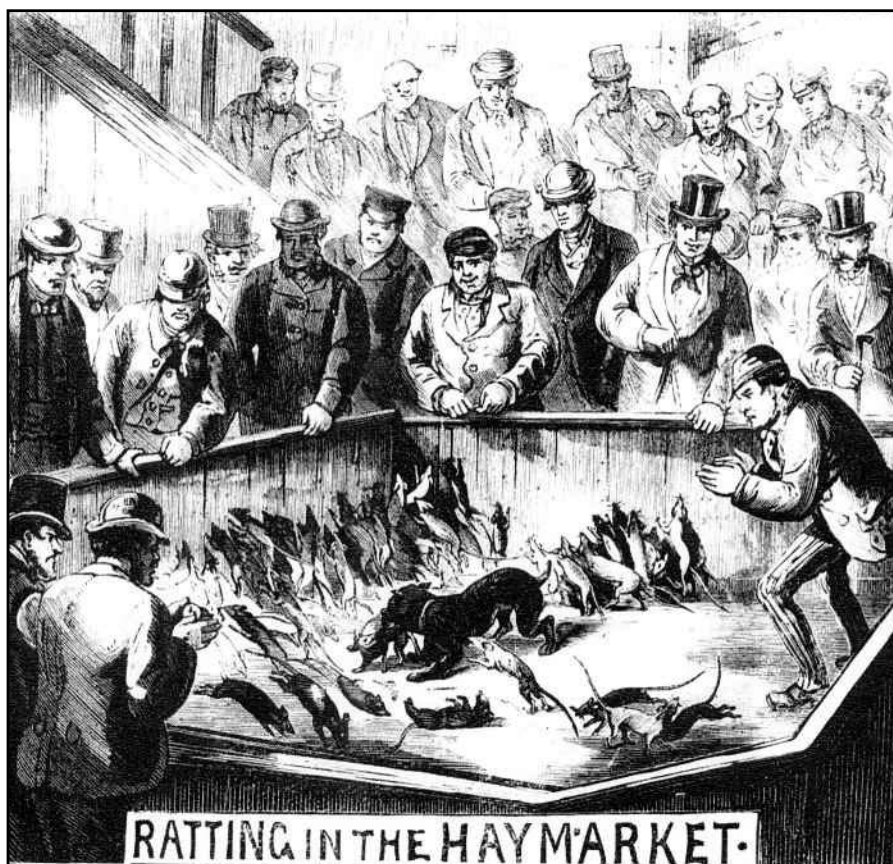
frenzied sewer rats running up the handler's legs and inflicting very painful bites, the dog handlers made it a habit of wearing their trousers tied to their boots.

A sample of the rats was closely examined before the match, to rule out that they had been drugged with laudanum beforehand to make the dog's task easier. A dog could be disqualified for a false pick-up, or for jumping out of the pit. A badly trained dog worrying the rat after killing it or carrying it proudly around the pit brought a volley of oaths from its backers.

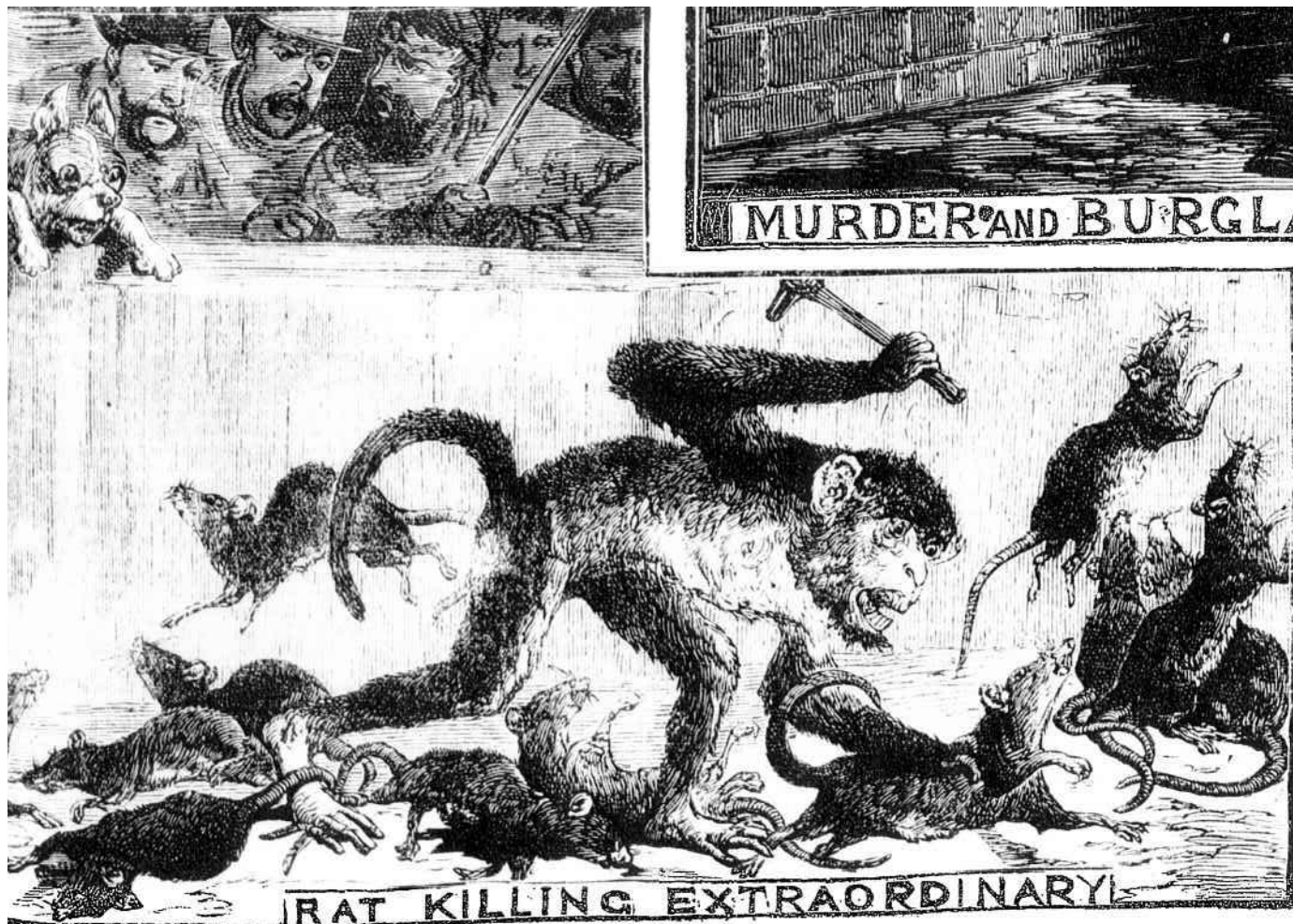
A tricky question was what to do if some of the rats played dead. In a 50-rat match, three rats, and three rats only, were allowed to 'come to life' after time had been called and the dog lifted out of the pit. The opposite party was allowed to make an appeal by calling out That 'un 'baint dead, guv'nor!' and pointing at the rodent in question. The umpire would then put the rat within a chalked circle on his table, and strike its tail three times with a metal rod; if

the rat managed to crawl out of the circle, it was 'alive', otherwise it counted as 'dead'.

Supplying rats for London's 70 rat-pits was an industry of its own. If we assume that these establishments were each open twice a week, and that 200 rats were destroyed at each session, this would imply that the rat-pits of London alone would require 4,000 rats each day. The rodents were supplied by a network of rat-catchers, who scavenged for live rats in warehouses, hedges and ditches, and often in the sewers as well. Jemmy Shaw, who boasted that he never had less than 2,000 rats on the premises, had a number of rat-catcher families dependent on him. He bought between 300 and 700 rats each week, paying two or three pence for large, well-fed specimens. Jemmy kept his rats on a diet of good barley meal, not from kindness of heart but to keep them from eating each other. In spite of the relatively good financial rewards, rat-catching does not appear to have been a very amusing line of work. Henry Mayhew once spoke to one of the rat-catchers, who

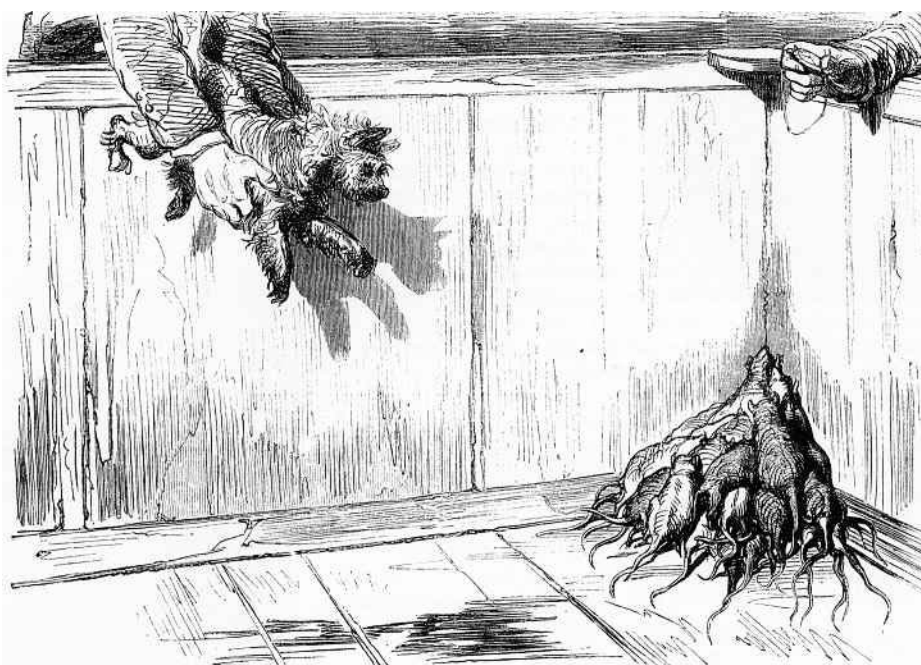


ABOVE: Ratting in the Haymarket, from the *IPN*, 24 Dec 1870.



gave a graphic demonstration of what it felt like to have your finger bitten to the bone by a large sewer rat, and showed the best technique to pull out a rat's teeth that had broken off inside a bite wound.

The long-time aim for Jimmy Shaw and other dog-fanciers was of course to find a dog capable of matching the exploits of Billy the Raticide. During the 1840s and 1850s, there were several attempts at beating Billy's epic 100-rat record, but none was successful. Then in 1861, Jimmy Shaw's black-and-tan Bull Terrier Jacko was spoken of as a future star in the London rat-pits. Jacko destroyed 60 rats in two minutes, 42 seconds, with a killing time of just 2.7 seconds per rat. In 1862, Jacko beat Billy's record, killing 100 rats in just five minutes, 28 seconds. There have been claims from various 'experts' alleging that the exertions of Billy, or Jacko, or both, had been aided by some person drugging the rats beforehand.



But as we have seen, there were safeguards against such skulduggery, and the matches took place before numerous and critical spectators; had the rats been drugged, they would surely have detected it. The crowning moment of Jacko's career was the famous 1,000-rat match of 1862, in which Jimmy's famous dog killed 100 rats once weekly for 10 consecutive weeks, destroying all 1,000 rodents in less than a 100 minutes. Jacko was still alive in 1866, when he and Jimmy were guests of honour at the Crystal Palace dog

unknown quantity, and the dog a formidable ratter, Turk was the favourite. After the dog had killed the 12 rats in very good time, the monkey was put into the rat-pit. Mr Lewis handed it a hammer, which the clever primate made good use of, bashing the rodents' heads in with alacrity and winning the match with time to spare.

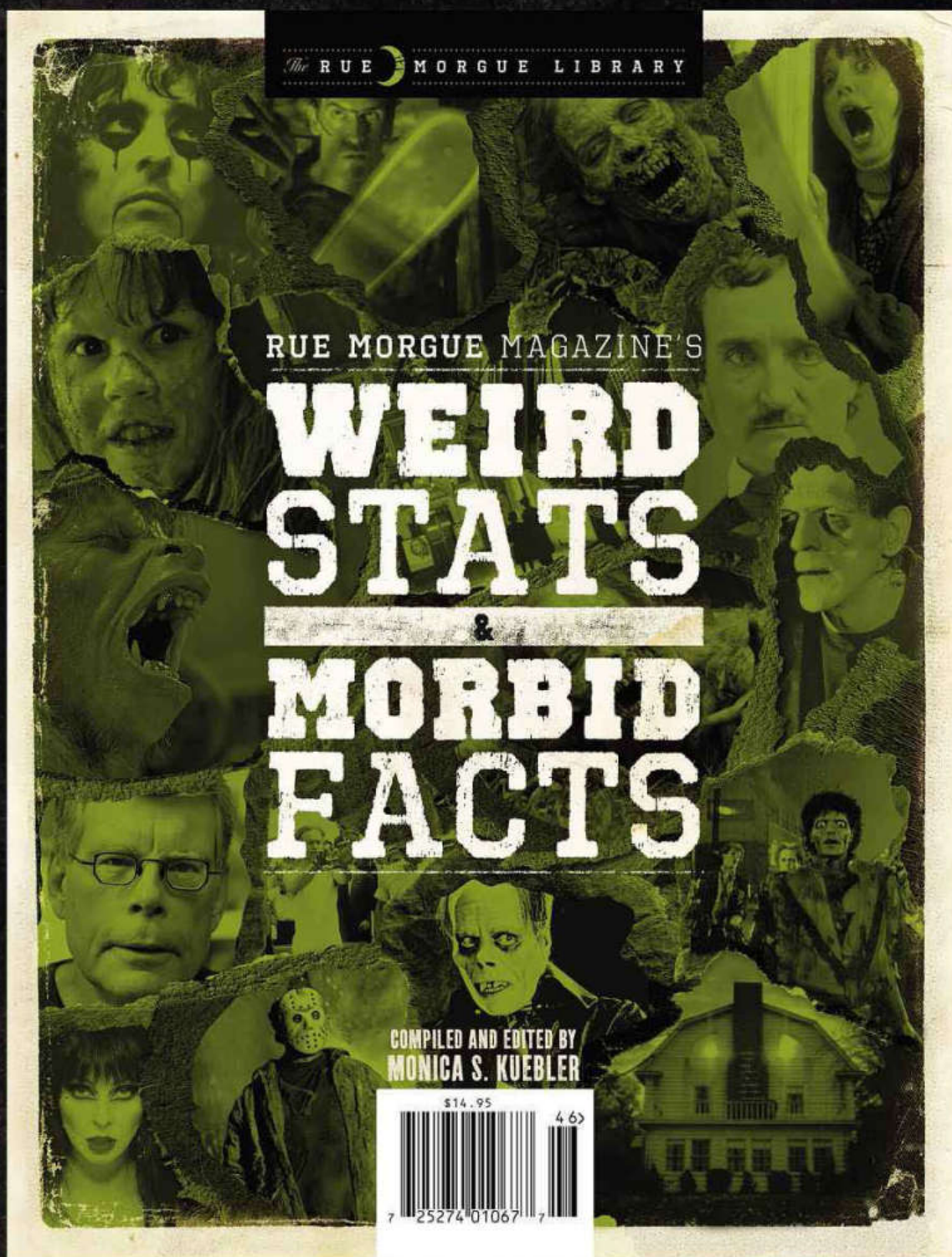
Several months later, it was still debated whether the rules of ratting should be amended to exclude monkeys wielding blunt instruments.

ABOVE: The amazing Ratting Monkey, from the IPN, 4 Sept 4 1880. Note the expression on the dog's face in the background. LEFT: A ratting scene.

show; between 1861 and 1866, Jacko had won 300 matches, and destroyed 8,000 rats. Just like Billy, Jacko was stuffed after death; his record still stands today.

There was turmoil among the Manchester Ratting Fancy after an unprecedented match in 1880. Mr Benson's fox-terrier Turk was matched against Mr Lewis's monkey, in a 12-rat match. Since the monkey was an

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FORTEAN TRAVELLER



103. Oddities of the Jurassic Coast

PAUL JACKSON and **ANDREW MAY** seek out the stranger side of the UNESCO World Heritage Site – from dinosaurs and Daleks to nodding donkeys.

The “Jurassic Coast” is the tourist-friendly name given to the 100-mile stretch of coastline between Swanage in Dorset and Exmouth in East Devon. In 2001, UNESCO added it to their list of World Heritage Sites, in recognition of “the area’s important fossil sites and classic coastal geomorphologic features”. Officially known simply as “The Dorset and East Devon Coast”, the popular name comes from the fact that most of the exposed rocks date from the Jurassic period, approximately 200 to 145 million years ago.

For many people, the word Jurassic is synonymous with dinosaurs, but most of the fossils to be found on the Jurassic Coast represent marine animals – including ‘Loch Ness monster’-style plesiosaurs – rather than true dinosaurs. There’s a good reason for this: the whole area lay underwater during the Jurassic period. The only thing a land-dwelling dinosaur would have been likely to do there was drown. Fortunately for fossil-hunters (but not for the dinosaurs), a small group of them did just that.

Scelidosaurus – a large, armoured plant-eater similar in appearance to the better known Stegosaurus and Ankylosaurus – is the Jurassic Coast’s very own dinosaur. The stretch of coast between Charmouth and Lyme Regis is the only place in the world where specimens of the genus – about eight in all – have been identified with any certainty. It is possible that the whole group of them was swept into the sea in a single flash flood. The most complete fossil of Scelidosaurus was discovered near Charmouth, where a replica can be seen in the Heritage Coast Centre (the original is now in Bristol Museum).

The Jurassic Coast was a popular tourist destination long before it acquired its modern name. Lying



There’s a cannonball in the wall of the ladies’ toilet

roughly at its centre is the seaside town of Weymouth, which was attracting summer visitors as long ago as the 18th century. One person who returned year after year was King George III, and it was largely thanks to his patronage that the town became one of the most fashionable seaside resorts in England. In gratitude for this, a group of locals decided to immortalise the King – and his favourite horse, Adonis – in the form of a gigantic figure carved into the

ABOVE: Barnes Wallis’s Highball bouncing bomb on display at Abbotsbury Swannery.

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

chalk of Osmington Hill. Britain has many “white horses”, but the one at Osmington is unusual in that the horse has a rider. It is also one of the largest; at just under a 100m (330ft) it is second only to the Uffington White Horse in Oxfordshire, which dates from the late Bronze Age or Early Iron Age. Near-disaster struck the Osmington horse in 1989 when the TV show *Challenge Anneka* covered the chalk figure with 160 tonnes of limestone chippings in a misguided “makeover” stunt. The immediate effect was indeed to enhance the figure’s appearance, but over time the chippings began to slide down the hill, causing severe damage to the original outline. It was not until March 2012 – a few months before Weymouth was due to host the Olympic sailing events – that all of the limestone chippings were finally removed and the original chalk carving was properly restored.

Weymouth has a long history. Among other things it’s said to be the place where the Black Death came ashore from France in 1348, but the town’s most intriguing historical oddity dates from a few centuries after that. It can be seen in Maiden Street, on a building which today is a public convenience. Lodged high up in the wall, above the sign saying “Ladies”, is a 17th century cannonball.

The Crabchurch Conspiracy was a Royalist plot during the English Civil War, and Weymouth was right at the centre of it. The aim was to seize back the port, which was under Parliamentary control, so that a force of French soldiers could land and add their weight to the Royalist side. The attempt to take the port led to several weeks of heavy fighting, and it was during this battle that the cannonball is said to have found its way into the wall of the ladies’ toilets.

The stretch of Jurassic Coast to the west of Weymouth is dominated by Chesil Beach: a long, straight barrier of shingle that was formed at the end of the last Ice Age, around 10,000 years ago. Between the beach and the mainland is a saltwater lagoon called the Fleet, which has become a haven for wading birds and other wildlife. At the westernmost end of this lagoon, near the village of Abbotsbury, another spherical munition can be seen – in just as unlikely a setting as Weymouth’s cannonball.

Abbotsbury Swannery is a popular destination for tourists wishing to get away from the hustle and bustle of Weymouth. But its peace and quiet was shattered during WWII when the RAF used the lagoon as an experimental bombing range. The most famous weapon to be tested there was the Barnes Wallis “bouncing bomb”. Two competing designs were evaluated: a cylindrical design called Upkeep



and a dimpled sphere called Highball. The tests showed that Upkeep worked best, and this was the bomb that went on to be employed in the legendary Dambuster raids. However, it was a bomb of the other type – the spherical Highball – that was dredged up in 1992 and put on public display at Abbotsbury Swannery (this is an inert prototype, filled with concrete and cork).

On the other side of Weymouth, near East Lulworth, there's another strange reminder of WWII. In 1943, the entire village of Tyneham, together with much of the surrounding area, was commandeered by the Army for use as an artillery firing range. At the time, the residents were told this was just a temporary measure and they would be able to return to their homes at the end of the war. That was not the case though, and the site remains in Army hands to this day. The Lulworth Ranges, as they're known, are still used for live firing exercises, although they're open to the public most weekends, as well as during the whole of August and over the Christmas period. For the visitor, it's like stepping into a timewarp. The cottages, abandoned since the 1940s, have been left to fall into picturesque decay, untouched by the second half

of the 20th century, or the 21st (see FT216:40-43).

A few miles east of the ghost town of Tyneham, on the edge of Kimmeridge Bay, there's another sight more reminiscent of the western United States than the English countryside: a "nodding donkey" oil well. Oil operations in the local area began in 1935, when people began searching for the source of small oil seepages observed at various locations along the coast. Between 1958 and 1980 six wells were drilled around Kimmeridge Bay, but only one of these, the K1 well, found commercially useful reserves of oil and gas. The nodding donkey at the Kimmeridge K1 site has been pumping non-stop since 1961, making it the oldest working oil well in the UK. Drawing oil from 350 metres (1,150ft) below sea level, the K1 pump produced 350 barrels a day at its peak, although this has now dropped to less than 100. The K1 well now forms part of the larger Wytech Farm complex, which ranks as the largest onshore oil field in Western Europe – even though the majority of Jurassic Coast tourists remain blissfully unaware that black gold is being extracted beneath their feet.

TOP: Winspit Quarry, aka Skaro, the Dalek homeworld
ABOVE LEFT: The 17th century cannonball lodged above a ladies' toilet in Weymouth.

ABOVE RIGHT: The lost village of Tyneham.

Kimmeridge lies on the so-called "Isle of Purbeck", which is not an isle at all but a peninsula. The area is particularly known for its high quality stone, which has been used for prestigious building projects in London and elsewhere. As a result, the Purbeck stretch of the Jurassic Coast – its easternmost section – has seen its fair share of quarries over the years. One of these, the now disused Winspit Quarry, is now a popular tourist destination for adventurous climbers... and for anorak-clad sci-fi geeks.

Winspit Quarry can only be reached on foot, by walking along the coast path from the village of Worth Matravers. The quarry was worked until around 1940, when the site was taken over for use as part of the south coast's naval and air defences during the war. Now open to the public, the quarry and surrounding cliff are probably best known for their use as a filming location on numerous low-budget TV shows.

For example, Winspit appeared in the *Doctor Who* adventure "The Underwater Menace" in 1967, which saw the second Doctor (Patrick Troughton) encounter a band of survivors from Atlantis on a supposedly deserted volcanic island. More famously, the fourth Doctor (Tom Baker) also visited the quarry in 1979 for "The Destiny of the Daleks". In this instance, Winspit stood in for the planet D-5-Gamma-Z-Alpha – better known as Skaro, the homeworld of the Daleks. The quarry's ruined buildings provided a suitably bleak representation of what an abandoned Dalek city might look like.

With a ghost town, an oil well and a stand-in for an alien planet – not to mention bouncing bombs, Civil War cannonballs and giant chalk figures – the Jurassic Coast has no shortage of attractions for the fortean traveller (and did we mention the dinosaurs?).



This article is extracted and adapted from *Weird Wessex: A Tourist Guide to 100 Strange and Unusual Sights* by Paul Jackson and Andrew May, published by CFZ Publishing Group (Fortean Words imprint), 2015.



PAUL JACKSON is a frequent contributor of news clippings to FT. He has a worryingly large collection of Lego and a blog called Random Encounters with the Unusual.



ANDREW MAY is a former scientist and regular FT contributor with a lifelong interest in pulp fiction and weird stuff. He blogs at forteana-blog.blogspot.co.uk/

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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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PHENOMENOMIX

Mme. Blavatsky - Part 3

HUNT EMERSON & KEVIN JACKSON

IN THE 1850s, HELENA PETROVNA BLAVATSKY SPENT A COUPLE OF YEARS IN INDIA, WHERE SHE WITNESSED THE NOTORIOUS INDIAN ROPE TRICK...



A RIDING ACCIDENT LEFT HER IN A COMA FOR MONTHS. WHEN SHE CAME TO, SHE FOUND HER MAGICAL ABILITIES INCREASED! SHE COULD LEVITATE HEAVY FURNITURE!



COMMUNICATE WITH SPIRITS...



... CONTROL MINDS...



... AND SUMMON "DAIKI" - ELEMENTALS!



IN 1873 SHE TRAVELLED TO NEW YORK, DRAWN BY REPORTS OF A SPIRITUALIST CRAZE!

SOON, HER STRANGE POWERS WERE THE TALK OF MANHATTAN!



THE GHOST OF CHARLES DICKENS DICTATED THE ENDING TO EDWIN DROOD TO HER!



SHE TOOK TO OPIUM AND HASHISH!



STORIES OF HER EXPLOITS REACHED THE LAWYER AND JOURNALIST COLONEL OLCOTT, WHO WROTE ADMIRING STORIES ABOUT HER FOR THE POPULAR PRESS! SOON SHE WAS FAMOUS!

The New York Helper

BLAVATSKY BABE WOWS N.Y. WEIRDOS!

Colonel Olcott reports:

INSIDE Mme. B. Bikini Shots

Mme. B AND OLCOTT BECAME INSEPARABLE FRIENDS! TOGETHER, THEY WOULD ASTOUND AND ENRAGE THE WORLD!



NEXT TIME: THEOSOPHY! MORE INDIAN MAGIC!! YEATS & THE CUCKOO CLOCK!!!

COMING NEXT MONTH



MURDER MOST WEIRD

THE STRANGE CASE OF THE
HEADLESS EVANGELIST



A WOOLF IN THE FOLD

THE BLOOMSBURY SET AND
JACK THE RIPPER



OCCULT BLACK DAHLIA,
FRANCE'S LOST LAKE,
BLIND ARTISTS,
AND MUCH MORE...

FORTEAN TIMES 334

ON SALE 12 NOV 2015

STRANGE DEATHS

UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL



John 'Goldfinger' Palmer, 64, was shot dead at his home in South Weald, Essex, on 24 June, the latest underworld figure to fall victim to the "curse of Brink's-Mat". Tried for melting down gold bars stolen in the £26 million theft of bullion and jewellery from a warehouse at Heathrow Airport, Palmer is the eighth man with close links to the 1983 robbery to be shot dead. The earlier victims were Nick Whiting (1990), accused of being an informant (1990); Great Train Robber Charlie Wilson (1990) and Donald Urquhart (1995), hired to launder some of the proceeds; Keith Hedley (1996), suspected money launderer; and Solly Nahome (1998), Brian Perry (2001) and George Francis (2001), who handled some of the gold. Kenneth Noye, the most notorious member of the gang, is currently serving a life sentence for a 1996 'road rage' murder. Around half the stolen gold remains unaccounted for. *D.Telegraph, 2 July 2015.*

Say Phalla, 25, climbed 10m (33ft) down a well in Cambodia after his dog fell in. A male neighbour, followed by Phalla's mother, 64, then climbed down in a bid to save him, but all three suffocated because of a lack of oxygen. *MX News (Sydney), 7 July 2014.*

In August a Utah man in his 70s died from the plague, probably contracted from a flea after it had bitten an infected prairie dog. (In July, plague killed 60 to 80 prairie dogs in an eastern Utah colony.) Squirrels, rabbits and ferrets are also known to carry the plague bacterium, *Yersinia pestis*. The man was the fourth 'Black Death' fatality in the US in 2015, double the 2014 toll, although the first case in Utah since 2009. Plague occurs naturally in rural and semi-rural areas of the Western US, most commonly in New Mexico, Arizona and Colorado. *[CNN] 27 Aug; Sun, 29 Aug 2015.*

A couple from Normandy, both aged 31, fell 40ft (12m) to their deaths while having sex on top of an historic fort in the English Channel. Police found the man's naked body in a dried-out section of the moat of Fort Vauban on Grand-Île in the Chausey Archipelago, and that of his partner in 5ft (1.5m) of water. Their belongings were on top of the fort. *Sunday Sun, 23 Aug 2015.*

David Shingler, 54, took a large bottle of potassium cyanide from the firm where he worked as a surface scientist and swallowed it while sitting in his car in Oulton, Staffordshire, on 26 May. The chemicals were so dangerous that firefighters had to be called to the mortuary to protect staff after they received his corpse. No post mortem exam was carried out, as doctors said it would be too dangerous to their own and the public's health. *D.Telegraph, 7 Aug 2015.*

Robin Meakings, 59, from Surrey, and Jeremy Prescott, 51, from Telford, Shropshire, both died on 5 July, hit by separate lightning strikes minutes apart while walking in the Brecon Beacons in

Powys. Meakings was on Cribyn Peak, near Pen y Fan, while Prescott was on Corn Du, 1.2 miles (2km) away. At the inquest, coroner Andrew Barkley said such deaths were "very rare", but two so close together were "remarkable". Two other climbers were also struck by lightning on Cribyn Peak, but survived.

Independent, D.Telegraph, 6 July; BBC News, 3 Sept 2015.

A groom was killed eight days after his wedding by a blood clot caused when he broke his ankle walking back from his stag night. Ben Aucott, 40, collapsed at his parents' home on 9 August. It seems the clot had moved up his leg and blocked his heart. The graphic designer had been on crutches when he married partner Sam. The couple, from Earl Shilton, Leicestershire, had a young daughter. *D.Telegraph, 15 Aug 2015.*

An outdoor enthusiast who enjoyed bad weather drowned in a freak accident on 30 March after a huge gust of wind puffed up her overcoat and carried her into the swollen River Irwell. Valerie Weston, 58, a retired teacher, was tending to her pot plants in her garden and tying up her canoe in a fierce Atlantic storm at 10.45pm when it is believed she was lifted off her feet by winds of up to 70mph (113km/h). The gale blew her into the river at the bottom of her garden in the Lancashire village of Irwell Vale. Her body was found 10 miles (16km) downstream 36 hours later. She had suffered injuries consistent with being dragged through a rocky, fast-flowing waterway. The coat was never found. *D.Telegraph, 17 Sept 2015.*

A London art dealer is in jail in Pozzuoli near Naples, accused of killing her 93-year-old mother by stuffing a rosary down her throat in an attempt to 'cleanse' her of evil spirits. Italian-born Francesca Martire, 61, who ran a successful design, furniture and lighting dealership in Alfie's Antique Market, St John's Wood, London, was undergoing psychiatric assessment following the alleged murder of her mother, Maria Luigia Magazzile, in their home town of Taranto, southern Italy, on 27 May. Mrs Martire, who had lived in Britain since 1986, told the police that she believed her mother's flat was infested with evil spirits and that by shoving the rosary in her mouth she was performing a sort of exorcism. A friend of 30 years who saw her three days before the incident said she appeared to be "away with the fairies". He added: "She was not herself, she was miles away, it was very odd... People said she had been acting strangely for years." *D.Telegraph, D.Mail, 14 Aug 2015.*

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BOOK OF STRANGE
DEATHS VOL 2

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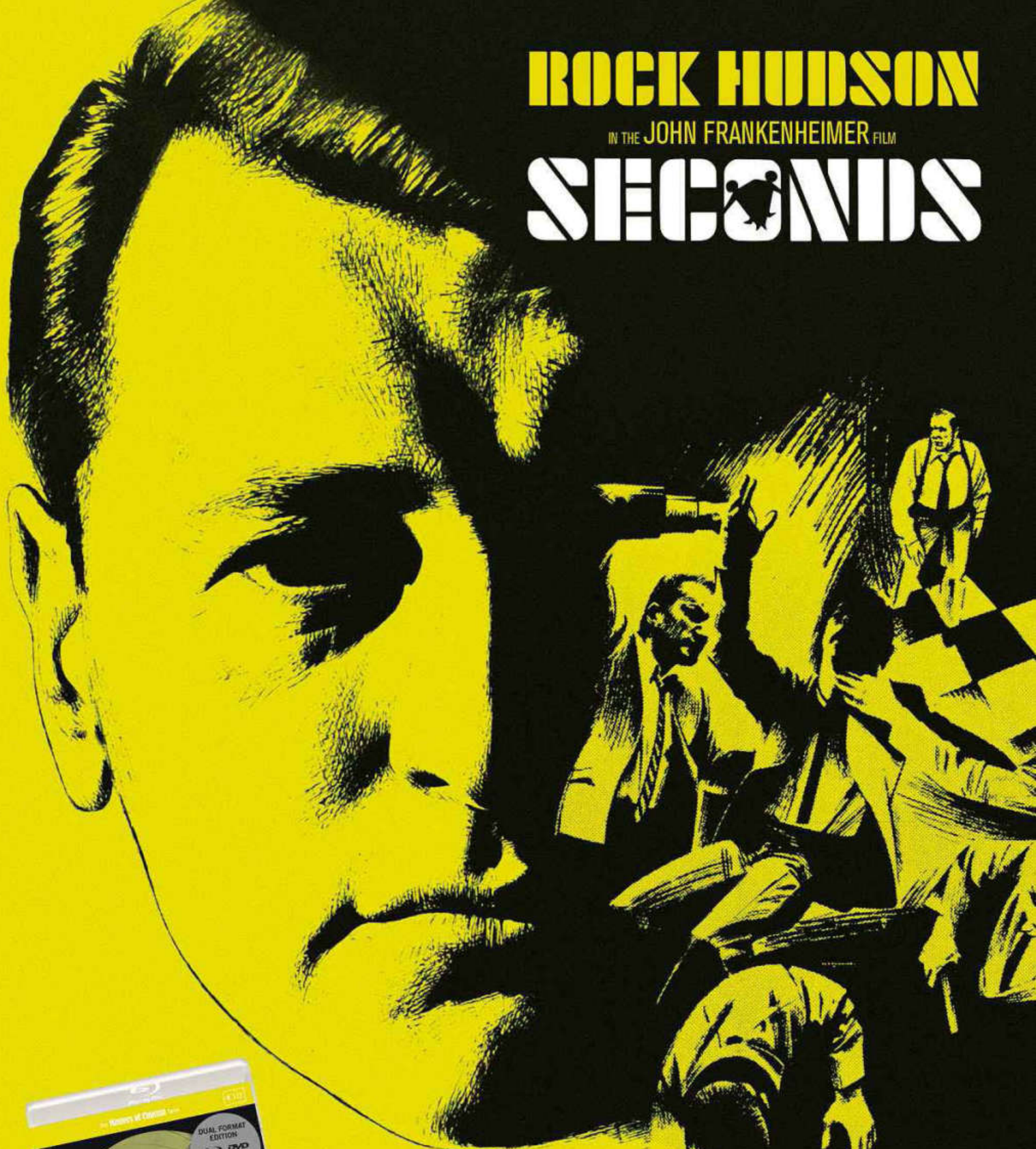
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