

**THE GREAT
ALIEN BAKE-OFF**

PANCAKES FROM SPACE AND
SASQUATCH CRACKERS

CANNIBAL ROUND-UP FLESH-EATING FIENDS IN THE HEADLINES

IDENTICAL BUT DIFFERENT THE SEARCH FOR TWIN TELEPATHY

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OR FISH-TAILED
FEMINISTS?



FORTEAN TIMES 332

THE KUBRICK CONSPIRACIES • MODERN MERMAIDS • THE GREAT ALIEN BAKE-OFF • GHOSTS OF THAILAND • WARLORDS OF MACLANTIS • CANNIBAL NEWS

OCTOBER 2015

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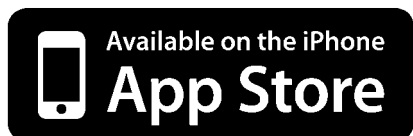
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strange days

In search of the Nazi ghost train, flesh-eating fiends, Mormon seer stone, France's phantom gassers, Warminster mural, rogue Masonic police, Thai ghosts, blue devil spider, Emdrive updates, herring gull hooligans – and much more.

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Cinema and conspiracy theory are no strangers, but it is unusual for such theorising to attach itself to the figure of a director – so why has Stanley Kubrick become the focus of theories involving everything from fake Moon landings to the Illuminati? **DEAN BALLINGER** argues that the answer can be found in the director's obsession with creative control.

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Bread is a foodstuff rich in human history and symbolism, but it has also played a surprising role in all kinds of entity encounters over the centuries. **JOSHUA CUTCHIN** opens his otherworldly oven and shares a selection of fairy loaves, alien pancakes and Sasquatch crackers.

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FORTEAN TIMES is produced for Dennis Publishing by Wild Talents Ltd. Postal address: Fortean Times, PO BOX 71602, London E17 0QD.

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

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Fax (+1) 757-428-6253 email cs@imsnews.com

Other overseas subscriptions: +44 (0)1795 592 909

Fax: +44 (0)1795 414 555

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www.forteanimes.com



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PUBLISHED BY DENNIS PUBLISHING,
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 London W1T 4JD, UK
 Tel: 020 7907 6000

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PRINTED BY POLESTAR BICESTER

DISTRIBUTION

Distributed in UK, Ireland and worldwide

by Seymour Distribution Ltd.

2 East Poultry Avenue, London EC1A 9PT

Tel: 020 7429 4000 / Fax: 020 7429 4001

Queries on overseas availability should be emailed to info@seymour.co.uk

Speciality store distribution by Worldwide Magazine Distribution Ltd, Tel: 0121 788 3112 Fax: 0121 788 1272

STANDARD SUBSCRIPTION RATES

12 issues: UK £39.98; EU £47.50

Fortean Times (USPS 023-226) is published every four weeks by Dennis Publishing Ltd, 30 Cleveland Street, London, W1P 4JD, United Kingdom.

The US annual subscription price is \$89.99.

Airfreight and mailing in the USA is by Agent named Air Business, C/O Worldnet Shipping USA Inc., 149-35 177th Street, Jamaica, New York, 11434.

Periodical postage paid at Jamaica, NY 11431, USA.

US Postmaster: Send address changes to: Fortean Times, 3330 Pacific Avenue, Suite 500, Virginia Beach, VA, 23451-2983, USA.

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

DENNIS PUBLISHING LIMITED
GROUP FINANCE DIRECTOR
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CHIEF EXECUTIVE
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COMPANY FOUNDER
 FELIX DENNIS

ABC Member of the Audit Bureau of Circulations.

Circulation 17,024 (Jan-Dec 2011)

Printed in the UK. ISSN: 0308 5899

© Fortean Times: SEPTEMBER 2015

editorial

Fortean food

Given the centrality of food to so many aspects of human life – from straightforward physical sustenance and mediators of social meanings and taboos through to symbolic and religious offerings or the rituals of the Eucharist – it shouldn't really come as a surprise to find that it can also be a crucial component in encounters with non-human entities.

Joshua Cutchin's new book, entitled *A Trojan Feast*, brings us a detailed and wide-ranging study of this hitherto neglected subject. It follows in the footsteps of previous anomalists such as Jacques Vallee or the late Hilary Evans in finding persuasive links between what are often viewed as distinct branches of fortean enquiry – ufology and cryptozoology – and the realm of folklore.

Shared motifs run through encounters with alien visitors, Sasquatch and the inhabitants of fairyland – themes of missing time and altered consciousness, notions of taboo, fears of abduction or entrapment – and, as Cutchin demonstrates, these are often articulated through transactions involving food and drink. In the extract we present in this issue, the focus is on one of the most universal and richly symbolic of all foodstuffs – bread, the staff of life, and other associated grain-based products, from rice cakes to pancakes.

All this reminded us of one of our favourite FT stories: the Rowley Regis encounter of 1979, otherwise fondly remembered as the “mince-pie Martians” case. To say that this entity encounter was an unusual one would be an understatement, but it's particularly interesting to note that in this instance the alien entities took rather than gave food (reminding us, of course, of the offerings of food and drink once left for the fairy folk). In brief, on 4 January 1979, West Midlands housewife Mrs Jean Hingley was visited by a trio of silver-clad, three-and-a-half foot tall winged entities that descended from the sky in an orange sphere. They flew into the house, causing the dog to faint, and floated Mrs Hingley into the lounge, where they gathered round the Christmas tree, which they shook repeatedly with cries of “Nice? Nice?” The strange beings claimed, when asked, to come from “the sky”, recognised a picture of Jesus on the wall and also seemed to know something of Tommy Steele and the Queen, whom they discussed in gruff-sounding voices. They bounced up and down on Mrs Hingley's sofa, until she told them off. The perfect hostess, she offered her visitors some mince pies. Apparently becoming alarmed when Mrs Hingley lit a cigarette, the bizarre beings departed hurriedly, taking their mince

pies with them. For our initial news report, see FT28:18 and for the whole breathtakingly strange story, Albert Budden, “The Mince-Pie Martians: the Rowley Regis Case”, FT50:40-44.

MODERN MAD GASSERS

Readers who have been enjoying Theo Paijmans's unearthing of numerous early cases of phantom anaesthetists and chloroform burglars predated the appearance of the

infamous ‘Mad Gasser of Mattoon’ in 1944 will no doubt share our interest in the current resurgence of the phenomenon in France (p9). Quite why these mysterious gas attacks should be concentrated in that country – apart from the rich pickings afforded by the likes of Jenson Button renting swanky villas on the Riviera – is unclear, but as we were going to press another variant on the theme made the news in Paris. Here, two Chinese women and a man were arrested on suspicion of blowing a drug

dubbed “the Devil's Breath” into people's faces and robbing them. Apparently, the nefarious trio would first ask their victims about the whereabouts of a mysterious “Dr Wang” (!) before “getting them to breathe in a mixture of plants” (supposedly containing the drug scopolamine) that turned them into “zombies” lacking the will to resist as they handed over their valuables to the crooks. *D. Telegraph*, 1 Sept 2015. More on this story in a future issue (see FT79:48 for earlier Colombian cases earlier cases involving a similar preparation known as *burundanga*); meanwhile, we leave you in the company of modern mermaids, Scottish Atlanteans, twin telepaths and Stanley Kubrick...

ERRATUM

FT331:65: The DVD *Out of The Dark* was listed as a *Metrodome* release; it is actually released by eOne.



"SO WHY DO THEY CALL YOU THE 'LITTLE' MERMAID?"

Why fortean?
 Everything you always wanted to know about *Fortean Times* but were too paranoid to ask!
SEE PAGE 78

ESCAPE

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strangedays

Lost Nazi hoard located?

Treasure hunters search for a ghost train full of gold beneath a Polish castle



JANEK SKARZYŃSKI / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: Książ castle, the tunnels beneath which may be the resting place of the “Nazi gold train” according to treasure hunters.

There has long been a legend of a Nazi ‘ghost’ train packed with treasure hidden from the advancing Red Army in a sealed tunnel. The train had allegedly been loaded up in the eastern German city of Breslau, now called Wrocław and part of Poland. The tunnel was said to be near Książ Castle (previously Schloss Fürstenstein) in the mountains of Lower Silesia – the German headquarters during the war.

In early August, two men, a German and a Pole, filed a legal claim with local authorities in Poland’s southwestern district of Wałbrzych, asserting they had located the train, the details of which they would disclose after receiving acknowledgment, in writing, of their right to a finder’s fee of 10 per cent of the hoard’s value (in accordance with Polish law). They reportedly found the train 210ft (64m) below ground, using ground-penetrating radar. It was said to be armoured, 495ft (150m) long, with gun platforms

Some claim the tunnels hid research on a Nazi atom bomb

– and to contain 300 tons of gold, other “precious metals”, and possibly masterpieces stolen from Polish noble families and museums. Some even suggested it contains the famous Amber Room looted from Catherine the Great’s palace in 1941. There again, it might be empty, or even dangerous; it might be mined, or contain poison gas.

One possible location is Walim, some 12 miles (19km) west of Wałbrzych, because the hills there are home to the tunnels of Project Reise (‘Giant’), begun in 1941. Project Reise involved digging miles of tunnels in a series of complexes across the Wałbrzych region. Thousands

of slave labourers died hewing the rock for reasons that remain obscure. Some say the tunnels were for a secret command centre, others claim they were for weapon factories, or even hid research on a Nazi atom bomb. Three of the seven main Reise sites are now open to the public, but much of the complex remains unexplored.

Following the initial publicity of the legal claim, ‘the Silesian Research Group’ announced that its members had located the train over two years ago, using ground-penetrating radar, and that their maps and data had been pilfered, presumably by the men who had filed the claim. One unnamed group member said: “We know that in May 1945 gold and other valuables from the city of Wrocław were being transported to Wałbrzych when they disappeared between the towns of Lubiechow and Swiebodzice. During the war, there used to be an SS barracks here which was heavily guarded.

And just behind the railway bridge was the entrance to the tunnel” – which was 2.37km (2,592 yards) from Książ Castle, according to the group. Finding it, however, would take excavation, for which permission would be required.

Naturally, there are fears that this latest gold rush will turn out to be the triumph of hope over reality. Andrzej Gaik, who gives guided tours through the old Castle of the Princes of Wałbrzych, went on a fruitless treasure hunt for the ‘Golden train’ some years ago, and now thinks it doesn’t exist. However, on 26 August, Wałbrzych’s deputy mayor said that a “historically significant military train” had indeed been found. Two days later, Piotr Zuchowski, Poland’s deputy culture minister, said the authorities had seen radar images of the train, the location of which had been divulged to the “two treasure hunters” on his deathbed by one of the men who hid it, who provided a sketch map and said the train was booby-trapped. The minister said the images appeared to show the train was equipped with gun turrets. Another two days later, Magdalena Woch, director of culture at Książ Castle, said: “There is a story that in 1945 there were three trains which came into the town and have never been found. The gold may not be in the train that has been found but in one of these better-secured military trains.”

As we go to press, the Polish government has promised the deployment of specialist reconnaissance troops, but actual digging is unlikely to begin until next spring, following a detailed ground survey. Clearly, this ripping yarn will run and run. *dailymail.co.uk*, 19 Aug; *Times*, 21 Aug; *dailymail.co.uk*, 22 Aug, 2 Sept; *Sunday Telegraph*, the *dailybeast.com*, 23 Aug; *warhistoryonline*, 26 Aug; *Jerusalem Post*, 28 Aug; [AP] *D.Telegraph*, 29+31 Aug, 2 Sept 2015.



TEMPLAR COPS BUSTED
California's rogue Masonic Police Department gets its collar felt
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HOUSING CRISIS
How haunted homes are falling prey to developers
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CANNIBAL ROUND-UP
'Grannibal Lector' and other crazed flesh-eaters
PAGE 24

The Conspirasphere

If a killer asteroid doesn't get us, perhaps the pseudo-cosmologists will.
NOEL ROONEY ponders two competing schools of anti-conspiracy thought.

Two things struck me when I saw the press release from NASA – the one telling us not to worry about rumours on the Internet that an asteroid was heading for Earth in September – appearing as a story in so many mainstream news outlets. First, the high profile of the story said something interesting about the status of conspiracy theory, and how it may be changing; second, it implies a dichotomy in the thinking of the anti-conspiracy community that in some ways mirrors the distinction I have suggested between schools of conspiracy theorising (**FT331:5**).

The first point, of course, also says something about the Internet. While for many observers (this writer included, at least some of the time) the Internet is somewhere between a democracy of fools (a term first used – I think – by Damian Thompson in his book *Counterknowledge* in 2008) and a kaleidoscope of the absurd (I'll admit to that one), it is increasingly the default source of information, and more importantly verification, for huge numbers of people. What that says about us, I'll leave to someone more qualified (what in, I'm not entirely sure) to explore.

For NASA to produce and disseminate a refutation (albeit a little tongue-in-cheek) of what on the face of it is simply a wacky piece of pseudo-cosmology makes me wonder if the Establishment is beginning to take conspiracy-minded individuals and groups more seriously, or at least taking their influence on the Internet-using public more seriously. I don't know if large numbers of people were digging holes and filling them with tinned food and rifles on the strength of the asteroid story going

viral; but for a prestigious organisation to broadcast their views in response to the obliteration meme, they must assume the story is important enough, in some way or another, for an official response.

The two types of anti-conspiracy thought that I found myself pondering were on the one hand the feeling that conspiracy, and conspiracy-related stories, are simply silly, and should be stamped out purely for that reason (one might term this the Lynne Truss school of anti-conspiracy); and on the other the more serious reaction that fears conspiracy theory will lead to the breakdown of

civilisation as we know it (think Francis Wheen, or Sunstein and Vermeule). I see these views as mirroring the hermeneutic and automatic dissident schools of conspiracy, respectively. That's a simplistic and schematic taxonomy, I know, but this is a very short column.

It also struck me that NASA's refutation, which likely meant little or nothing to the vast majority of the media-consuming public, had actually worked to confirm the original rumour

for many in the conspiracy community. This is part of the recursive mindset that inhabits so many alternative websites and books: if the Establishment says what I'm saying is untrue, well that just proves I'm really onto something, otherwise they wouldn't be falling over themselves to deny it, would they?

You could feel sorry for NASA; or you could ask yourself (and perhaps NASA) why they went to such lengths for so little reward. This is a celestial gambit with no winning outcomes. www.independent.co.uk/news/science/nasa-no-the-world-isnt-going-to-be-destroyed-by-an-asteroid-in-september-10464953.html



EXTRA! EXTRA!

FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

Polar bear hijacks train's coal cargo

Retford Times, 25 Sept 2014.

Hungry pupils will be fed from trees

Metro, 23 Sept 2014.

'COW FLEES SLAUGHTERHOUSE, GORES JOGGER, HEADS TO OKTOBERFEST'

NBC News, — Sept 2014.

'Zombies' ruining our museums, says Sir Roy

D.Mail, 4 Oct 2014.

Pope, prelates get crash course in sex

Toronto Star, 8 Oct 2014.



Hampstead & Highgate Gazette, — Sept 2014

BANGKOK GHOSTS

THE INFLUENCE OF THE SPIRIT WORLD IS FELT IN BELIEF, BUSINESS AND POPULAR ENTERTAINMENT IN THAILAND'S CAPITAL AND BEYOND



wife seemingly still alive. Nak was so devoted to him that she had remained as a ghost, but became a malevolent spirit when her husband discovered the truth and ran away. "On the eve of a lottery, this temple is open all night," reads the sign on a shrine dedicated to Nak in Bangkok where locals make offerings to the ghost asking for cures, good luck and exemption from military service. Fortune-tellers ply their trade outside the shrine and devotees also release fish, turtles and frogs into a nearby canal to earn 'merit'. According to the merchants selling the animals, the release of an eel will bring professional success and a frog can reduce sins. [AFP] 2 Feb 2015.

- Sinsakorn Aroon, a 60-year-old official, said he saw a ghostly phenomenon inside Bangkok's Government House at around 6pm on 10 September 2014. Mr Sinsakorn, who is in charge of the audio system in the press conference room, said he was preparing to leave when he spotted a woman sweeping the floor near the reception room. He told her he was leaving and asked her to lock the door behind her – but then suddenly felt cold and wondered why someone was

On a popular episode of "Humans defy ghosts" – a weekly Thai TV programme that delves into the supernatural – a two-year-old girl who survived three days next to the dead body of her mother was asked a series of questions by one of the show's panellists. "Who prepared your milk?" Kapol Thongplab enquired. "Who played with you? Who opened the door?" "Mummy," the little girl replied, as genuinely convinced as her adult interlocutors that her mother's ghost continued to sustain her in those harrowing days. In Thailand, a show like this is more than just entertainment.

For many of Thailand's soothsayers, astrologers and its huge monastic network, belief in superstitions is undoubtedly lucrative. Exorcisms, protective spells and trinkets are all readily available at a price, while books and films about haunting spirits are hugely popular. Businesses often pay monks to make annual visits to chase away evil spirits. Thais believe a violent or unexpected death is more likely than a peaceful death to result in the creation of an angry ghost when a soul departs.

Few ghosts are more famous than 'Nak', a woman who Thais believe lived in Bangkok in the 19th century and died during childbirth while her husband was away fighting a war (for more on Nak and other Thai ghosts, see FT227:28-36). There are many versions of the story, but in general they all describe how the husband returned to find his

Locals make offerings to the ghost, asking for cures and good luck



TOP: A statue of the famous ghost 'Nak' at her shrine sheltered in a Buddhist temple in Bangkok. ABOVE: A Buddhist master performing rituals on women outside the Bangkok temple.

BOTH PHOTOS: CHRISTOPHE ARCHAMBAULT/ AFP/ GETTY IMAGES

cleaning at that hour. “The repair workers were already done and the building’s housekeepers had already gone home,” he said. The figure then walked into a set of doors and disappeared right in front of him. “If she were human, I would have heard the door move,” he said. “I was frozen on the spot. I could only hear traditional Thai music, even though I didn’t hear that sound earlier. Once I came to my senses, I ran off and shut the door.”

Mr Sinsakorn said he had heard tales about Government House ghosts from other officials, including a painter who claimed a female ghost told him in his dream to use “dark colours” when he painted inside the building, and an official who said workers noticed a scent of mysterious “ancient perfume” during the recent renovation. “I think I saw the ghost because she wants to instruct me to keep the building clean,” Mr Sinsakorn said. “I plan to make merits for her soul.”

This latest apparition manifested despite the fact that a feng shui master had recently been hired to oversee the realignment of plants and furniture inside Government House. Military junta chairman and Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha had also prayed to spirits at several different altars in the complex on his official first day of work just days before Mr Sinsakorn’s ghostly encounter. A number of Government House officials believed the ghost had appeared because the ceremonies needed to appease the supernatural entities watching over the area had not been properly conducted. The spirit world is everywhere in Thailand where animism and folk beliefs are deeply infused with Buddhism. Most buildings boast a ‘spirit house’ – a shrine placed in an auspicious corner of a property where offerings can be made to appease ghosts lest they turn malevolent. *thaivisa.com*, 12 Sept 2014.

- For several nights running, construction worker Nopchakorn Sangkong, 33, experienced a strange phenomenon he described as “seeing white



smoke at his feet” and hearing a voice beckoning him toward an abandoned house nearby. Finally, on 12 November 2014 he entered the house – Soi Lat Phrao 74, in Bangkok – and found a skeleton on the second floor, prompting him to call the police. The remains were believed to be those of Wasinee Haemopas, 71, who owned the house and had probably died

there of natural causes about three years earlier. She lived alone and never interacted with her neighbours. *bangkok.cocanuts.co*, via *thaivisa.com*, 12 Nov 2014.

- Inhabitants of Baan Tai village in Thailand’s Krabi province suddenly started fainting in July 2015. Some later died. Local people blamed

ghosts. Homeowner Rayong Boonroong, 70, said that she had fainted and became fearful for her life, especially after a relative dreamed the God of the Underground was out harvesting fresh souls from the living. To discourage the wraiths from entering their homes, residents started hanging red T-shirts and signs to scare off the gullible ghosts. “This household has no faint-hearted people!” read one of the signs. “Only strong persons live here!”

The ghosts were believed to be targeting residents born on Wednesdays – just like Rayong. “This helps me feel more secure,” she said of the spirit-repelling shirt. Darunee Wangsop, 26, erected a scarecrow wearing a red T-shirt atop a motorcycle in front of her home. “It looks like someone is guarding us all the time,” she explained. The previous year, villagers in Buriram province had used T-shirts to protect themselves from a tall, headless man who claimed several souls while they slept. *Phuket News (Thailand)*, 4 Aug 2015.

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CHRISTOPHE ARCHAMBAULT / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

PORNCHAI KITTIWONGSAKUL / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

SIDELINES...

RUSSIAN CROP CIRCLES

During the night of 21 July, a crop glyph – five circles, ranging from 60ft to 100ft (18-30m) in diameter – appeared in a buckwheat field just outside Tolyatti in Russia's Samara region. Not a single plant stem had been broken. A local paranormal research group said a similar glyph had appeared on exactly the same day 10 years earlier. At least two other Russian crop glyphs were spotted in June – in the Adygea Republic and the Krasnodar region, both near the Black Sea. *rt.com/news, 24 July 2015.*

FROGS STOP PLAY

An amateur football match in Switzerland between Embrach and Raterschen had to be called off on 17 April, and declared a tie at 2-2, after thousands of frogs invaded the pitch. "It has occurred now and again," said Embrach vice-president, Sandro Caviola, "but something like this we have never experienced before." *Morning Star, 22 April 2015.*

TV HAZARD

A man in Shanghai is suing the actress Zhao Wei for staring at him "too intensely" through his TV set and causing him "spiritual damage". The lawsuit refers to the show *Tiger Mom*, which started in May and is about a couple's differing approach to raising their daughter. Zhao Wei is one of China's biggest and richest movie stars. *BBC News, 11 June 2015.*



MARTIN ROSS

Smith's 'seer stone'

Church offers new revelations about Mormonism's past

At a news conference in Salt Lake City on 4 August, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (aka the Mormons) publicised the handwritten "printer's manuscript" of the Book of Mormon and photos of the "seer stone", a dark brown, egg-size polished rock that church founder Joseph Smith (1805-44) claimed to have used to produce the faith's sacred scripture. Both items are included in the just-released *Revelations and Translations: Volume 3*, the 11th publication in the Joseph Smith Papers Project, as part of an effort to be "more transparent" about Mormonism's past. The photographs show different views of the dark brown stone with lighter brown swirls. They also show a weathered leather pouch where the stone was stored, believed to have been made by Emma, one of Joseph Smith's wives.

Smith said that on 22 September 1823 the Angel Moroni showed him the burial place of a set of gold plates on a hill in present-day Wayne County, New York State. Exactly four years later, he was allowed to take the plates and was directed to translate them into English. They recorded the history of ancient American civilisations (2200 BC to AD 421) and Christ's visit to the American continent shortly after His resurrection. The Mormon prophet said he was able to "translate" the "reformed Egyptian" language, using spiritual tools, including his "seer stone". He dictated the narrative



LEFT: Joseph Smith meets the Angel Moroni in 1823.

BELOW: Smith's seer stone revealed at last.

tensions simmered between those two wings of Mormonism, but during the past couple of decades historians have built scholarly bridges between the Community of Christ and the much larger, Utah-based Church.

In a recent essay, the LDS Church explained how Smith, according to some accounts, used the seer stone. He peered into a hat to block out exterior light, and "read aloud the English words that appeared on the instrument." The essay states: "As a young man during the 1820s, Joseph Smith, like others in his day,

used a seer stone to look for lost objects and buried treasure. As Joseph grew to understand his prophetic calling, he learned that he could use this stone

for the higher purpose of translating scripture."

Smith also used two bound stones – known as the Urim and Thummim – as "interpreters". "Some accounts indicate that Joseph studied the characters on the plates," the essay added. "Most of the accounts speak of Joseph's use of the Urim and Thummim (either the interpreters or the seer stone)." When Smith had finished, he returned the gold plates to Moroni. The church's official magazine, *The Ensign*, had an article about the seer stone in 1974, but hardly anyone had seen an actual photo of it until now. *[AP] Salt Lake Tribune, 4 Aug; Guardian, 5 Aug 2015.*

to various scribes, including schoolteacher Oliver Cowdery, who took down the LDS leader's words in longhand. Cowdery then painstakingly copied the original manuscript for the printer to set in type.

The Book of Mormon was published in March 1830. More than 70 per cent of that original document has suffered water damage; the LDS Church History Library in Salt Lake City has most of what's left. The "printer's copy", however, remained with Smith's followers who stayed in the Midwest rather than trekking to Utah, and, in 1903, it was purchased by the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (RLDS), now called the Community of Christ, with headquarters in Independence, Missouri. Through the years,



Gallic gassers strike

The latest in a rash of mysterious robberies on the Riviera

On 3 August, Formula 1 driver Jenson Button and his wife (pictured at right) were burgled in a rented holiday villa in Saint-Tropez on the French Riviera. The 35-year-old motor racing star and his wife Jessica, 30, a model – along with three other guests in the house – were rendered unconscious by the gang, who stole jewellery worth £300,000 including Jessica's treasured diamond engagement ring, from the same room where Button and his wife were sleeping.

According to Button's spokesman, police believe two men (picked up on CCTV) may have pumped anaesthetising gas through the air conditioning vents before entering the villa. However, the police refused to comment directly on the gas hypothesis, which echoes reports of previous attacks against wealthy individuals and celebrities. Former Arsenal footballer Patrick Vieira said he and his family were knocked out by gas during a 2006 raid on their home in Cannes. And in 2002, British television stars Trinny Woodall and Susannah Constantine said they were gassed while attending the Cannes Film Festival. Other accounts, particularly from France, have appeared in the media over the past 15 years or so, describing people waking up groggy to discover they slept through a raid. However, using gas to target a house or flat is "highly unusual", according to Michael Fraser, a former burglar turned home security consultant, who claimed it was much more commonly used against caravans and motor homes. "It is especially common in France, pumping gas into a motor home," he said. "It's such a confined space that it's highly effective. It seems to be often targeted at British tourists."

Gordon Doig, from Edinburgh, was on holiday in Orange near the Cote D'Azur when his motor



home was robbed in the night. Waking up later than usual, he felt groggy. "They took everything bar the mobile phone," he said. "The dog didn't even bark." He is convinced he and his wife were gassed. Tim Best from Gloucester says he was robbed on a 2003 caravan holiday in Avignon. "I can remember people's voices and people laughing but not being able to wake up," he said. "We slept in close proximity so you would have noticed if someone had stepped over you, but we didn't notice anything. When we did wake the next morning, we were lethargic and unusually tired... money, credit cards, laptops and our tools were stolen."

When jewels and valuables worth more than £20,000 were stolen from Daniel Hechter's Riviera villa in 2008, the security guards said they had been gassed. Like Button, the French fashion designer slept through the robbery. It was the same scenario in 2013, when £150,000 worth of goods were seized from the villa of spy novelist Gérard de Villiers. He was not present, but his estranged wife, Christine, slept through the robbery.

The British Home Office was sufficiently concerned about reports last summer that it issued a warning to holidaymakers, though there is precious little hard evidence of gas-heists. A number of doubts spring to mind: What gas is used, and in what quantities? How do they ensure it will be

effective in the right parts of the targeted house? No one has ever appeared in court charged with using gas in a burglary and there are no official statistics to back up the anecdotal reports.

In response to the Home Office warning, the Royal College of Anaesthetists (RCA) released a statement saying it was highly sceptical about robbers using anaesthetic gas.

"It is the view of the College that it would not be possible to render someone unconscious by blowing ether, chloroform, or any of the currently used volatile anaesthetic agents, through the window of a motorhome without their knowledge, even if they were sleeping at the time," the statement said. They were even more dismissive about using it on an entire villa. "They would need massive amounts of gas," said a spokesman. "We can't rule out that some sort of agent was used, but the volume of gas and the logistics involved in delivering it make it highly unlikely that this was anaesthetic. You have to remember, we're talking about rendering four adults unconscious in a large villa. When you combine that with the fact that these gases are expensive and difficult to get hold of, we are very sceptical."

On the other hand, two years ago, private investigator Patrick Boffa, based on the Côte d'Azur, investigated two cases in Ramatuelle, barely five miles from the villa rented by Button, in which the victims were reportedly gassed. He claimed the French authorities were playing down the risk. "They're trying to minimise it so they don't scare away wealthy visitors, especially the Russians who'll stop coming if they think they can be targeted." *BBC News*, 5+7 Aug; *D.Telegraph*, 7 Aug 2015. For phantom anaesthetists see **FT329:28-29**, **330:28-29**; for the *Mad Gasser of Mattoon*, see **FT216:36-39**.

SIDELINES...

SCARY MANIMAL

An 8-foot (2.4m) tall "yeti", showing "some signs of wear", was sold at auction in Yeovil, Somerset, for £1,350. Its plaque stated it was discovered "120 years ago in a crevasse into which he had fallen" on the borders of Azerbaijan; in fact it was made in the 19th century for a local chemist who thought it would be good for business in his shop, but it had the opposite effect, as customers were scared to go in. *BBC News*, 23 July 2015.

SUMMER SACRIFICE

A sheep was slaughtered in Devon's remote Teign Valley in a suspected satanic ritual to mark the Summer Solstice. The rare whiteface Dartmoor ewe, discovered on Midsummer morning (21 June), had its jugular vein cut and an ear and back leg hacked off. The animal had been dragged around to leave a spiral of blood. During a full moon in April, the owner had found the severed leg of a lamb. *D.Telegraph*, 26 June 2015.

SAINTLY STICK

On 25 July, the walking stick of St Teresa of Avila (1515-82) arrived at the Carmelite Abbey in Loughrea, Co Galway, Ireland, as part of a worldwide tour to mark the quincentenary of her birth. One of the leading Christian mystics, St Teresa founded the Discalced (shoeless) Carmelites in 1562. She was canonised in 1622 and declared a Doctor of the Church in 1970. *Irish Times*, 24 July 2015.



SIDELINES...

...FOR ART'S SAKE

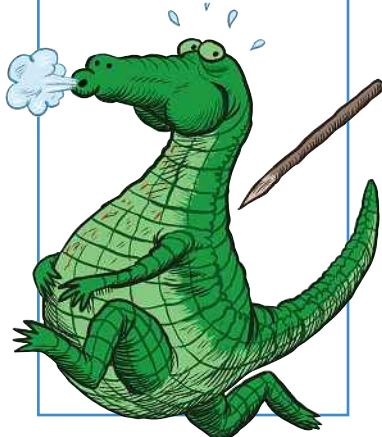
In May the mayor of Tehran, Mohammad Baqer Ghalibaf, directed that the advertisements on the Iranian capital's 1,500 billboards be replaced by fine art reproductions. Instead of South Korean dishwashers, residents were confronted by paintings by Rembrandt, Rothko, Munch, Singer Sargent and others, as well as safely-dead Iranian artists. *Irish Times, 11 May 2015.*

LONG LOST

An Egyptian coin bearing the head of the Greek god Zeus-Ammon on the obverse and an eagle on the reverse was dug up in a garden in Wissett, Suffolk. It was about 240 years old when the Romans invaded Britain, by which time Egypt was a Roman province. How had it ended up in Suffolk? *Eastern Daily Press, 30 April 2015.*

FISHERMAN'S REVENGE

Mubarak Batambuze, 56, a fisherman in Uganda, hunted down and speared to death a giant crocodile after it ate his pregnant wife. Demeteriya Nabwire had gone in search for firewood on the shores of Lake Kyoga early on the morning of 4 January. Her slippers, toes, fingers and a mobile phone were found at the spot where she was devoured. The same crocodile – 25ft (7.6m) long and weighing over 2,200lb (1,000kg) – is believed to have eaten six women and children in 2014. *New Vision (Uganda), 7 Jan 2015.*



Rogue masonic cops

Fake 'Templar' Police Department shut down in California



ABOVE LEFT: (L-R) David Henry, Tonette Hayes and Brandon Kiel. ABOVE RIGHT: A Masonic Fraternal Police Department Badge.

Last May, three people were charged in California with impersonating law enforcement officers after claiming to operate a police department with jurisdiction in 33 states (and Mexico City). Brandon Kiel (31), David Henry (46) and Tonette Hayes (59) said they belonged to a group called the Masonic Fraternal Police Department (MFPD). Kiel is (or was) a junior aide to California's Attorney General Kamala Harris. Uniforms, weapons ID cards and enforcement-like vehicles were found in premises linked to the group. They were arrested on 30 April and released later that day. "When asked what is the difference between the Masonic Fraternal Police Department and other Police Departments the answer is simple for us. We were here first!" the group's website page reads. "We are born into this Organization, our bloodlines go deeper than an application. This is more than a job it is an obligation."

According to their website, the MFPD was created by the Knights Templar in 1100 BC – most remarkable, given that the crusader order was created over 2,200 years later, around AD 1119. Authorities began investigating the MFPD after police chiefs in southern California received a letter in late January that

They claim the department was created by the Knights Templar

announced Kiel would be serving as "chief deputy director" of the group. The letter claimed there were 5,686 lodges and that the department "will be able to acquire intel that is not accessible to non-fraternal entities". Hayes is a pastor as well as a licensed a

security guard, and has a firearm permit. She previously owned Masonic Security Service, and she and Henry ran the Beverly Hills-based MIB Investigative Agency, though its state license was suspended. Henry is also a licensed security guard and has a firearm permit. According to *Variety*, he won an Emmy in 2002 for his work as a producer on a Fox11 story.

Los Angeles County sheriff's spokeswoman Nicole Nishida said that there were no indications that the MFPD had carried out any law enforcement activities – except perhaps in Cloud Cuckoo Land. *[AP] BBC News, Eve. Standard, 7 May 2015.*



ABOVE: Henry, Kiel and other members of the MFPD in full Masonic regalia.

‘Monkeys’ on guard

Cuddly toys are Albania’s defence against the evil eye



GENT SHKULLAKU / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

The weather-beaten forms of cuddly toys hanging from buildings are a common sight in Albania. Suspended from the eaves of houses, they sway gently in the wind. The bodies are distorted, storm-drenched and smut-stained. Rabbits are hung by their ears, chubbier animals suspended by wire garrottes from half-finished buildings. In Albanian they’re called *majmune*, meaning “monkeys”, the word used for any soft toy. Travel blogger Marianne van Twillert photographed a variety of examples and reported seeing “dolls, puppets, teddy bears and... even one of the Teletubbies”,

often accompanied by the red Albanian flag. Elizabeth Gowing reviewed a random sample of houses in three Albanian suburbs and found a visible *majmune* suspended from approximately one in eight buildings. Homeowners reluctantly admit they are installed as protection against the evil eye. “It stops the evil eye seeing our money,” said one man outside his bustling furniture workshop.

No one seemed to know where the idea for protective toys came from. Garlic, too, is commonly used to ward off misfortune, here, as elsewhere. At one house Ms Gowing visits, there’s a plait of



PHOTOS: MARIANNE VAN TWILLERT

it hanging on the outside of the building, tangled up with three soft toys and a ram’s skull with horns, a protective talisman that goes back “to our forebears” according to the householder Gjylsime. The garlic is probably also an ancient tradition – but according to her and everyone else interviewed, using soft toys against the eye started only in the 1990s “with democracy” – they never featured in the socialist utopia of Enver Hoxha. These monkeys, then, are the household gods of capitalism. *BBC News*, 2 Aug 2015; *Living in Montenegro blog* (montenegro-for.me/2013/05/riral-albania/)

SIDELINES...

GINGER NUT

Mark Colborne, 37, felt “belittled” because of his ginger hair and stockpiled the ingredients to make cyanide so that he could spray the deadly poison at non-Aryans to publicise his racist beliefs and put “a major dent in England”. He also planned to shoot Princes Charles and William so that red-haired Harry could be king. The fascist agoraphobic, who lived with his mother in Southampton, was shopped by his half-brother. *D.Telegraph*, *D.Mail*, 13 May; *Eve. Standard*, 14 May 2015.

HAIRCUTS FROM HELL

Spikey hairstyles have been banned as satanic in Iran. “Devil-worshipping hairstyles are now forbidden,” said Mosafa Govahi, head of Iran’s barbers’ union. Solarium treatments and the plucking of eyebrows are also banned. *D.Telegraph*, 5 May 2015.

A TOUCH EXCESSIVE

A self-employed German woman living in the Black Forest received a demand for €4,632,124,357,000,001 in unpaid pension contributions. The letter said that an attempt to take the money from her bank account by direct debit had failed, “for reasons which are unclear”. *D.Telegraph*, 10 April 2015.

TUMBLING TURTLE

Fu Yitang, 63, was watching a storm pass over his house in Liaocheng City in Shandong, China, when a yellow-bellied slider turtle plummeted into his garden. It was still alive. “It makes no sense,” said the puzzled pensioner. *Metro*, 16 June 2015.

BITING SATIRE

Thousands of people were expected at a festival to mark the start of the mosquito season in Russia. Festivities in Berezniki included the “tastiest girl” contest – where females battled to get the most bites – and a parade of the skinniest legs. What’s not to like? *Metro*, 16 June 2015.



SIDELINES...

THIS TIT IS LOADED

A 26-year-old woman from Perth in Australia was charged with assaulting a policewoman while being searched at a shopping centre. As she was rearranging her clothes, she grabbed her breast and squirted milk at the officer, hitting her on the forehead, arms, and clothing. *MX News (Sydney)*, 26 Mar 2015.

DANGER MAN

The Mr Men characters, created by Roger Hargreaves, were joined in January by a new character: Mr Ebola. Hundreds of posters appeared on pedestrian crossings in Leeds, Manchester and Nottingham showing the blue figure with a furrowed brow. The perpetrator was unknown. *Metro*, 21 Jan 2015.

MEATY FRACAS

Thomas Bacon, 19, allegedly attacked another person in Madison, New Jersey, on 12 May for eating the last piece of sausage. Bacon was charged with simple assault and released pending a court appearance. *(New York)*, 29 May 2015.

TROUBLESHOOTER

Lucas Hinch, 37, fed up with his Dell desktop computer after months of malfunctioning, carried it into an alley and shot it eight times. Hinch, who faced a fine for illegally discharging a weapon within Colorado Springs city limits, said he had reached 'critical mass' and had no regrets. Police confiscated his legally owned pistol. *D.Mail*, 23 April 2015.

BAD HABIT

Christopher Miller robbed the Stride Rite shoe store in Toms River, New Jersey, in 1999 and spent 15 years in jail for the crime. The day after he was released in March 2014, he returned to the same store and robbed it again. The same clerk was behind the counter. He made off with \$389 and fled on foot with the employee's cell-phones. On 5 June 2015, Miller was sentenced to a further 16 years inside. *[AP]* 12 Mar, 6 June 2015.



CHRIS MCGRATH / GETTY IMAGES

The return of Godzilla

Pedestrians on a Tokyo street pass beneath a 12-metre tall Godzilla head built on the 8th floor terrace of the Hotel Gracery Shinjuku. The Godzilla replica is the main attraction of a new commercial complex containing a movie theatre, hotel and restaurants situated in the Kabukicho red light district of Shinjuku.

PHOTO BY CHRIS MCGRATH/GETTY IMAGES

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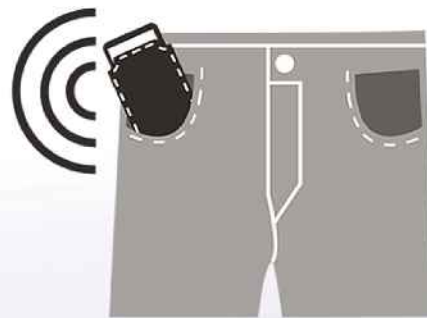


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EMDRIVE ANOMALIES

It may violate the laws of physics, but does that matter if engineer Roger Shawyer's propellantless space drive actually works? **DAVID HAMBLING** provides the latest news.

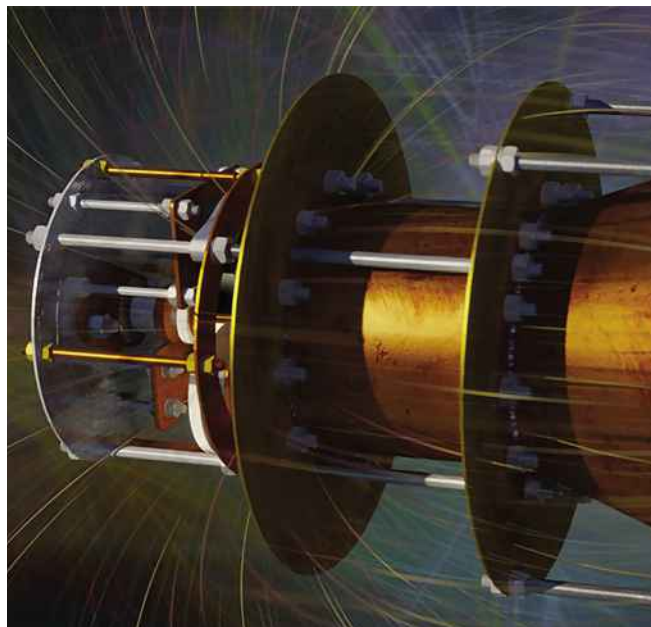
First they ignore you, then they laugh at you, then they attack you, then you win," said Mahatma Gandhi. Allegedly – the quote has never been conclusively proven. The quip might apply to that most unlikely of technologies, a propellantless space drive invented by British engineer Roger Shawyer. First described in these pages back in 2005 [FT201:14], the EmDrive is a sealed cavity in the shape of a truncated cone filled with resonant microwaves shuttling back and forth. Classical physics says that no closed system can produce thrust – it would violate the law of conservation of momentum – but whatever the theory, the real issue is whether the EmDrive actually works.

Or at least, it would be if science worked like that. In practice, the weight of established physics presses down on anyone wishing to make this sort of claim, and the EmDrive was initially ignored just as the myriad of alleged perpetual-motion contraptions are ignored. If someone tells you there is a nest of fire-breathing, flying dragons at the bottom of his garden, you would not trouble to check it out either.

However, as recounted last year [FT320:12], Shawyer's continued claims inspired a Chinese team led by Juan Yang at Xi'an Northwest Polytechnic University to replicate his apparatus. They found that the EmDrive produced thrust, and published results from 2008 onwards which were steadfastly ignored in the West. Then a maverick team at NASA – the so-called Eagleworks, based at Johnson Space Center in Houston – built their own version. That apparently worked too.

The NASA result was received with scorn and ridicule. Although they simply labelled their results as 'anomalous thrust' and did not attempt to explain how it worked, they were criticised for ignoring the laws of physics. Many uninformed suggestions were made as to what errors they might have made in their measurement.

NASA management were



NASA DECLINED TO COMMENT ON THE HERETICAL RESEARCH

understandably cool about the results. It might be the greatest discovery of the age, but it still looked impossible, and they declined to make any comment at all on the heretical EmDrive research until the growing amount of news coverage inspired them to make this formal statement to Space.com: "While conceptual research into novel propulsion methods by a team at NASA's Johnson Space Center in Houston has created headlines, this is a small effort that has not yet shown any tangible results."

Since then, there seems to have been a media blackout from NASA. The Eagleworks continues work on the EmDrive, and according to leaks earlier this year their results continued to be positive, but funding for the project will reportedly end in September. NASA, an organisation that has to fight hard for its budget, would attract a storm of abuse if they allowed the Eagleworks to publish anything positive. If the Eagleworks build a robust EmDrive that produces

enough thrust to be useful, it might just survive; mildly positive results that would be instantly picked to pieces as evidence of NASA craziness with public money would not be worthwhile.

The UK Space Agency says that "Funding from the UK Space Agency is made available in fair competition in line with our technology priorities, and EmDrive may be eligible to apply for such funding." Shawyer says that in practice they have never shown much enthusiasm.

In the meantime another player has emerged. Martin Tajmar, Professor and Chair for Space Systems at the Dresden University of Technology, is something of an expert on testing exotic space drives. He presented his results on the EmDrive at the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics in July. He clearly didn't start as a believer in the EmDrive, but his position may have shifted. The first test was simply to point the drive in different directions and see if it made any difference.

"Remarkably, we can indeed see a fairly large difference between thrust directions. The difference between upwards and downwards measurements was 229 microNewtons and therefore close to our expectation of 2x98 MicroNewtons."

The EmDrive was also tested in a vacuum chamber to ensure that air currents or ionisation was not producing thrust – an effect that fooled experimenters playing with 'Lifters' a few years ago. "Surprisingly we could still observe thrusts that are indeed reversing with thruster orientation," Tajmar noted. The experiments could not rule out every single possible source of error, and Tajmar is cautious in his conclusion:

"Our test campaign can not confirm or refute the claims of the EmDrive but intends to independently assess possible side-effects in the measurement methods used so far. Nevertheless, we do observe thrusts close to the magnitude of the actual predictions after eliminating many possible error sources that should warrant further investigation into the phenomena."

Like the Eagleworks results – which one British tabloid interpreted as a Star Trek-style Warp Drive – Tajmar's were distorted by the media. But they do represent another hurdle passed, the set of possible errors whittled down, another replication of the effect by an independent researcher.

One of the big criticisms of the EmDrive is the lack of peer-reviewed research, but Shawyer himself has now published a peer-reviewed paper in *Ars Astronautica* detailing his concepts for an EmDrive-powered spaceplane and deep-space probe. The spaceplane is based on the existing X-37 airframe and could provide cheap, ecologically friendly access to orbit, making Virgin Galactic look like a horse-drawn buggy. The space probe could reach a star four light years away in 10 years – roughly the same time it took for Deep Horizons to reach Pluto. Peer review pushes these concepts a step away from fantasy and towards fact.

NASA and the UK may find the whole idea too radical, and the Chinese work is now veiled in secrecy, but industry rumours suggest there are more labs around the world exploring the EmDrive effect. The eras of ignoring the EmDrive and laughing at it are over. The fight is on between those who want to dismiss the EmDrive and those who want further research to find out if the astonishing claims are true.

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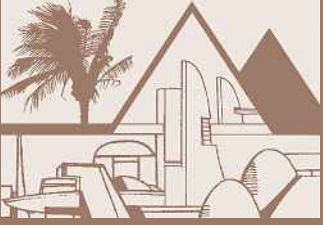
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ARCHAEOLOGY

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OLD GOLD

New research is casting an unexpected sheen on gold in prehistoric times in both Ireland and the UK. It had long been assumed that in Ireland gold in Early Bronze Age artefacts came from nearby mineral-rich mountainous areas, but this has been sharply corrected by advanced chemical, isotopic, analysis. This shows that the gold came from southwestern Britain, while evidence of Irish gold has not been found at all. "This is the oldest gold known to archaeology," says Christopher Standish, lead author of the new study and a research fellow at the University of Southampton. "It is unlikely that knowledge of how to extract gold didn't exist in Ireland... It is more probable that an 'exotic' origin was cherished as a key property of gold and was an important reason behind why it was imported for production."

Standish has also conducted his research in Cornwall, which forms the most southwesterly tip of England, where there seems to have been a veritable prehistoric gold rush. Geological estimates now indicate that up to 200kg (440lb) of gold were extracted in the Early Bronze Age from Cornwall and West Devon's rivers, and the new research suggests that substantial amounts were exported to Ireland, with



smaller amounts probably going to France. The Early Bronze Age Stonehenge culture almost certainly likewise obtained its gold from the same sources, as may the chieftains of north-west Wales, who were known to be fond of wearing solid gold capes.

Standish suggests that the Cornish gold production was largely a by-product of an even more important industry – tin extraction. "The available evidence strongly suggests that in Bronze Age Cornwall and West Devon, tin wasn't obtained

through mining, but was instead extracted from the areas' rivers, probably through panning or sophisticated damming and sluicing systems," said Dr Standish. "But, as well as finding tin in the sand and gravels of the streams and rivers, they also found gold." Further, fine woolly sheepskins may well have been used to catch the tiny grains of both tin and gold, in a technique similar to that which, in ancient Greek mythology, probably gave rise to the motif of the Golden Fleece.

Much of the gold was beaten into thin sheets that were then shaped into various pendants and other objects – in particular, crescent-shaped 'breast plates', which were probably associated with solar worship and worn by priests (or shamans). Despite the calculation that 200kg of gold were exported from Cornwall and western Devon, all the artefacts yet found that used it do not match up to that weight. It seems more than likely the great majority of gold artefacts originally manufactured during that era were repeatedly melted down over subsequent ages for other purposes. Then as now, gold, whether prized for its symbolic or monetary value, seems never to have lost its lustre. *Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society, April; Independent, 4 June; LiveScience, 8 June 2015.*

INTERFOTO / ALAMY

LEAVING A MARK

While conducting a survey ahead of the construction of a tunnel between the German island of Fehmarn and the Danish island of Lolland, Danish archaeologists have found a 5,500-year-old ceramic beaker

vessel bearing the fingerprint of the person who made it. It was found in a former fjord east of Rødby Havn, on the south coast of Lolland. During conservation work at the Danish National Museum, experts noticed a fingerprint on the interior surface, which must have been left there by the potter. Like a touch across time. *Discovery News, 26 June 2015.*

GOLDEN LIKE THE SUN

Before leaving the topic of ancient gold, we should report that an Early Bronze Age sun-disc (so assumed) from Monkton Farleigh in Wiltshire, England, is being exhibited for public view for the first time at the Wiltshire Museum. It is one of only six such objects to have been found. It is dated to c.2,400 BC, soon after the sarsen stones were erected at Stonehenge. The object was initially unearthed in 1947 in a burial mound at Monkton Farleigh, just



over 20 miles (32km) from Stonehenge. With it were found a pottery beaker, flint arrowheads and fragments of the skeleton of an adult male. It has been held by the landowner since its discovery and has

WILTSHIRE MUSEUM



CLASSICAL CORNER



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191: MAGICAL MYSTERY TOUR

only now been given to the museum after careful cleaning by the Wiltshire Council Conservation Service. The sun-disc is a thin embossed sheet of gold with a central cross surrounded by a circle. Between the cross and the circle are fine dots that glint in sunlight. It appears that the disc was intended to be worn on clothing or a headdress. It was kept safe since its discovery by Dr Denis Whitehead, and the first time that it had been seen by archæologists was in 2013. *Popular Archæology*, 19 June 2015.

SLEEPING BEAUTY

A team of British archæologists led by Louise Schofield, a former British Museum curator, have been conducting a six-week excavation of the ancient city of Aksum in Ethiopia. They have been making rich finds dating from the first and second centuries AD. In particular, they have uncovered the grave of a woman Schofield calls "Sleeping Beauty". "She was curled up on her side, with her chin resting on her hand, wearing a beautiful bronze ring," Schofield explains. "She was buried gazing into an extraordinary Roman bronze mirror. She had next to her a beautiful and incredibly ornate bronze cosmetics spoon with a lump of kohl eyeliner."

The woman was wearing an intricate beaded necklace and a beaded belt. The quality of the jewellery suggests that she had high status. Among other artefacts with her were Roman glass vessels, two perfectly preserved drinking beakers and a clay jug, its contents yet to be analysed. Although "Sleeping Beauty" was covered only with soil, her grave was cut into a rock overhang, which accounts for the remarkable preservation. *Guardian*, 7 June 2015.



(*FT*-ers of a certain age will join me in dedicating this column to the memory of David Nixon)

"There isn't anything that can't be, even though also it is not clear how anything can be" – Fort, *Books*, p897

An Egyptian papyrus (in the British Museum) dating to the Early Dynasty raves thus over the conjuror Tchatcha-em-anekh: "He knoweth how to bind on a head which hath been cut off, he knoweth how to make a lion follow him as if led by a rope."

His first trick prefigures that modern illusionist's standby of sawing the girl assistant in half; the second – reading between the lions – implies early hypnotism.

A later Pharaoh could have done with him in the competition between local illusionists and their Hebrew challenger: "Aaron cast down his rod and it became a serpent. The magicians of Egypt also in like manner cast down their rods and they became serpents, but Aaron's rod swallowed up theirs" (Exodus 7. 10-12)

The mysterious Robert Heller (of various aliases, c. 1826-1878), himself a stage magician, claimed to have seen this trick performed in the open air at Cairo by Dervishes. His explanation: the rods were actually serpents hypnotised into rigidity; when thrown down, they recovered and crawled away – worthy competition for Indian snake-charmers...

Another Egyptian element may be the mural (c. 2500 BC) showing two men bending over four inverted bowls, taken by some (not all) Egyptologists to be a forerunner of Roman conjurors' star turn, the *Acetabula et Calculi*, or Cup-and-Balls. In the basic version, the performer contrives the balls to go through the cups' solid bottoms, jump from cup to cup, disappear and re-appear elsewhere, metamorphosed by way of finale into fruits, vegetables, or baby chicks.

Harry Houdini himself pronounced that nobody could properly call themselves a magician until they'd mastered this trick. It is also widely regarded as ancient ancestor of that villainous variant The Shell Game (aka Thimbleleg or The Old Army Game) – Find The Lady, Anyone..? (cf. A 'Professor' Hoffman, *Modern Magic*, 1878; Tim Osbourne, *Cup and Balls Magic*, 1937)

Seneca (*Letters to Lucilius*, no45) alludes to this routine, admitting: "It is the very trickery



that pleases me," with the postscript: "But show me how the trick is done, and I have lost my interest therein."

Many would agree. Not so Lucian, a century later, when exposing the frauds of Alexander of Abonoteichus, who was captivating top Roman officials and much of the populace (except Epicureans and Christians – strange bedfellows); cf. Steve Moore's excellent article, **FT276:46-51**. Lucian

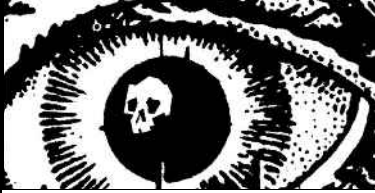
(*Alexander the False Prophet*, chs19-21)

explains at length how the rascal contrived to answer questions sent up to him in sealed envelopes. Three ways to pull off this stunt, described in too-long-to-quote detail for his addressee Celsus, himself author of a treatise against magicians. The First ("a well-known method") involves inserting a heated needle to melt the sub-seal wax, read the message, and re-seal. The second utilises plaster to harden the scroll, making it easy to open. The third, involving a mix of marbledust and glue, produces the same result.

Lucian adds: "There are many other devices for doing this." Opening sealed letters is one of the many tricks fulminated against by Christian theologian Hippolytus (170-235) in his *Refutation of All the Heresies* (bk4 chs28-42, perhaps drawn from Celsus himself – English translation online). Again, immense detail precludes quotation. A series of diatribes in classic televangelist style excoriates (e.g.) tricks with eggs, fiery apparitions, ghostly messages emanating from cauldrons, inscribed livers, and speaking skulls. Hippolytus's detail and passion imply their wide popularity and numbers thus duped.

Byzantine polymath Michael Psellus (11th-century) itemises (*Philosophica Minora*, bk1 ch32 paras65-90) 16 "respectable" conjuring tricks. They include simulating a black audience member, bisecting and turning an egg purple, changing water into wine (obviously tailored to Christian audiences, perhaps blasphemous to some), smashing iron, and detecting whether or not girls were virgins – presumably Not In Front Of Your Wife Or Servants...

"Cleggerdmain: A conjuring act in which the performer appears to be sitting on a non-existent fence" – Brian Allgar, *New Statesman* Competition winner, 14-20 Dec 2012, p56.



GHOSTWATCH

ALAN MURDIE wonders what can be done to save crumbling haunts from the developers



ABOVE AND BELOW: Birkwood Castle in its glory days, and as an abandoned hospital. A large section of the building has now collapsed, as seen in the bottom photo.

UNWELCOME DEVELOPMENTS

In April 2014 a group of wealthy Scottish property developers posed outside the derelict Birkwood Castle at Lesmahagow in Lanarkshire and announced their plans for converting the building and its grounds into a luxury hotel, boutique and up-market housing. Over the next six months, promoters of the scheme openly played up the haunted reputation of the 155-year-old mansion as a publicity gimmick for advertising their plans. But now a large segment of the building lies in ruins following its sudden collapse on 21 July, with the aggrieved ghosts of Birkwood Castle getting the blame.

The dismal pile of rubble and what remains of Birkwood Castle are a melancholy sight indeed, making the headline carried by the *Glasgow Herald* on 28 October 2014, 'Haunted hotel plan stands more than a ghost of a chance' now seem like one of the grimmer jokes of the Fates. Formerly used as a hospital for mentally disabled children until 2002, the gothic-style mansion, set in 86 acres of parkland, was precisely the kind of derelict building around which one would expect legends and ghost stories to cluster. Suggestions that angry spirits have literally brought the house down – with a sudden noise like 'an explosion', according to neighbours – prompted headlines such as 'Wrecked by ghosts' (*The Sun*, 8 August 2015) and 'Did ghosts cause this castle to collapse?' (*Daily Mail*, 8 August 2015).

The person responsible for voicing the theory of development-wrecking ghosts at Birkwood appears to be Tom Robertson, a member of a local ghost hunting group. Mr Robertson speculated spirits "might be taking a hand in matters in causing a wall to collapse" because "they were being evicted from their home". Recent years had seen claims of ghosts of former child patients returning, including a boy called Michael haunting the grand spiral staircase where he supposedly fell to his death, along with



the eerie sound of a young girl's voice heard crying and singing within empty rooms. Visitors and former staff reported smelling phantom cigar smoke, electrical disturbances and mysterious footsteps. It was even claimed the figure of a doctor (un-named) who suffered a fatal heart attack at the hospital was appearing at windows, a rare example of a medical man coming back as a phantom. In 2013, ghost hunters Glasgow Paranormal Investigations made an episode of the series *Haunted Planet* in the building, with the film crew saying it was one of the most active locations in which they had recorded – although this is a standard line routinely recited at almost every haunted location whenever a spot of filming takes place these days. Presciently, the rash and rather cavalier exploitation of the haunted reputation of Birkwood Castle and other sites by developers and publicity agents was noted in 2014 by Eric



Olsen, editor of *Haunted America* website, who wrote: "Surely, none of these owners are naive enough to think there won't be paranormal ramifications from their developments."

The theory that renovation work may stir up manifestations in old buildings is one that has been seriously discussed in the past (see *Renovation Hauntings* by Peter McCue **FT268:30-35**). I have even heard the hypothesis aired that living residents simply *thinking* about structural change may galvanise the mechanism behind a haunting, producing noises and apparitions. However, without any evidence as to the cause of the sudden collapse of Birkwood Castle, such ideas are unlikely to cause any more than a scintilla of a shiver in anyone contemplating changes to a historic property; there is plenty of local testimony that Birkwood Castle was in a bad state of repair and the collapse was thus foreseeable. *Daily Herald*, 24 July 2015; 'One of Scotland's most haunted buildings to become a boutique hotel' *Sunday Herald*, 17 April 2014; *Daily Mail*, 18 April 2014; 'Iconic Haunted Sites becoming luxury hotels as paranormal tourism spreads' *Haunted America* website, 21 April 2014; <http://www.americas-most-haunted.com/paranormal/high-end-paranormal-tourism-is-about/#.Vdn2pYeFPIU>.

However, the idea that wrathful ghosts may be coming back to wreck a building to thwart property developers is certainly a striking one, hitherto largely confined to romantic fiction and folklore, particularly in Celtic lands (in Ireland there have often been stories of misfortunes and obstacles dogging road schemes running near ancient sites and fairy trees). There have been a few alleged cases of ghost-damaged buildings recorded in the last 100 years, principally by fires in poltergeist outbreaks (for example Pitmilly House, Scotland, in 1944) but aside from ghostly arson, there is really nothing that compares to the supreme destruction claimed at Birkwood Castle.

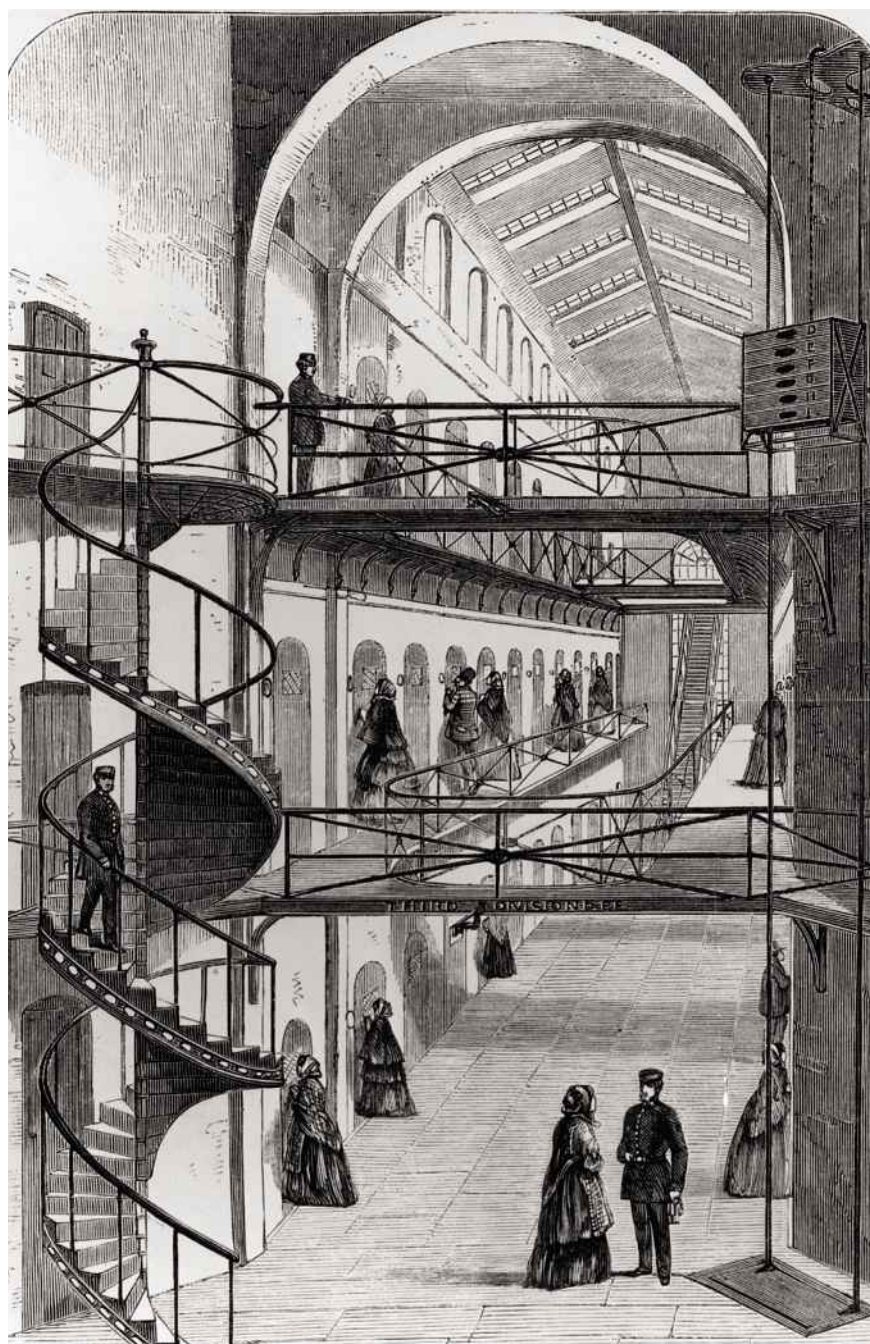
For example, the ghostly Black Dog of Torrington, Devon, allegedly knocked down a wall in the 1920s. The ghost of an ostler nicknamed 'Spider', who supposedly suffocated up the chimney of the Bear Inn at Stock, Essex, in about 1914, was blamed for putting a huge crack in the stonework after attempts to retrieve his sooty bones in the early 1960s (see stories regaled by James Wentworth Day in *A Ghost Hunter's Game Book*, 1958, *Essex Ghosts*, 1974, and *East Anglian Magazine*, January 1962). A persistent female apparition that haunted Abbots Langley Rectory in Hertfordshire in the 1940s was held liable for making the fireplace fall out at intervals, thwarting all efforts at repair (see *A Gazetteer of British Ghosts*, 1971, by Peter Underwood). The Black Monk of Pontefract (active 1966-68) made cracks in the kitchen ceiling still visible a decade later (see *Poltergeist! A Study of Destructive Haunting*, 1981, by Colin Wilson).

Of course, whether such stories arise from an inordinate love of lying, a desire to please audiences, or are attributed to a paranormal cause (actual or believed) is a matter not easy

to determine. But the idea that incorporeal phantoms might be demolishing stone structures is certainly a very ancient belief, the classic example being the vengeful spirit of St Thomas a Becket blamed for knocking down parts of the Tower of London in 1241, decades after his assassination on the orders of Henry II.

As an alternative to ghosts, one might attribute the destruction to what Charles Fort called "wild talents" (the title of his last book), mysterious physical forces emanating from the living. Fort toyed with the idea of objects responding to emotions and anger in the community after a poltergeist case at Hornsey in 1921 in which lumps of coal exploded. Noting a spate of similar reports across Britain

and France over the next year, he observed: "In this period there was much disaffection among British coal miners. There was a suspicion that miners were mixing dynamite into coal. But, whether we think that the miners had anything to do with these explosions, or not, suspicions against them, in England, were checked by the circumstances that no case of the finding of dynamite in coal was reported, and that there were no explosions of coal in the rough processes of shipments [...] The coal in all these cases was coal from British coal mines. The newspapers that told of these explosions told of the bitterness and vengefulness of British coal miners, enraged by hardships and reduced wages, uncommon in even their harsh experiences [...] There's a shout



ABOVE: The House of Detention, Clerkenwell, London, one of many important buildings lost to development.

RISCHITZ / GETTY IMAGES



ABOVE: Abbas Hall, site of a Grey Lady haunting in the 1950s. BELOW: Battersea Old House, London.

of vengefulness, in Hyde Park, London – far away, in Gloucestershire, an ancient mansion bursts into flames.” (Fort, *Wild Talents*, 1931, ch.15).

Aside from speculation, the Birkwood Castle story perhaps provides a contemporary illustration of how ghost sightings, experiences and stories may reflect the collective concerns, fears and prejudices present within communities (See *Appearances of the Dead*, 1982 by RC Finucane). The irate ghosts of Birkwood may be perceived as a symbol expressing the wider feelings of a community opposed to change and development or the exploitation of its traditions and beliefs for commercial ends. It is notable that there has been little sympathy for the developers expressed by locals around Birkwood Castle, and opposition to development is often being expressed among many communities around Britain wherever treasured landmarks, old mansions, valued green fields and ancient inns and pubs are being sacrificed as part of the UK’s speculative housing bubble.

Sadly, in the last decade and a half, some marvellous haunted locations have either been lost to developers or turned over to private hands. I remember arriving at the historic House of Detention in Clerkenwell with a *History Channel* film crew in 2000 just as developers were moving in, following a swift repossession and transfer of the old jail and museum to private concerns. Another loss was Battersea Old House in London, maintained for many years by the formidable Mrs Stirling, a devout spiritualist who penned *Ghosts Vivisected* (1958). All manner of wistful spectres were said to manifest, and even sit in their antique favourite chairs, but Battersea Old House was, alas, converted into functional and characterless flats in 2011.

Some notable haunted educational establishments have been sold off for housing, such the historic Belstead House which stood at the end of the appropriately named Sprite’s Lane near Ipswich, with its dark and haunted Judge’s Room in which I spent a memorable lone investigation on 3 March 2007. I neither saw nor felt any ghosts, but my vigil was rewarded with the numinous experience of watching the moonlight fading

away, dimming with the creeping shadow of a total lunar eclipse engulfing the entire globe of the Moon that very same night. Alas, no bloodstained ghost walked as the Moon turned a ruddy, copper hue.

At Battle in Sussex, another sad loss for the diversity of education was the closure of Pyke House residential college. Close to the site of the Battle of Hastings and the ‘Battle Triangle’ where three identical apparitions of a smiling girl have been reported (see article by Andrew Green **FT67:47**, Feb 1993) parts of Pyke House dated back to the 15th century. It was not only haunted, but also the place hosting the UK’s first official evening classes in ghost hunting and parapsychology in 1971, which continued into the 21st century.

Haunted and mysterious landscapes are also under threat. Occasionally a campaign to prevent their destruction succeeds, at least temporarily, as around Abbotsford, the home of Sir Walter Scott, where in 2003 the campaign ‘Save Scott’s Countryside’ challenged attempts to spread bland housing all across an area of great beauty and environmental sensitivity in the central part of the Tweed Valley.

Such threats are increasingly evoking strong feelings in communities, with concern for the ancient dead being raised by objectors. Just recently, the website *Spooky Isles* has led the way in encouraging people to protest directly to developers Countryside Properties

of Brentwood concerning plans to drive a road and develop the Bronze Age and (possibly Iron Age) cemetery at Fornham All Saints in Suffolk (See **FT325:18-19**). The campaign has been spurred on by the discovery of a suppressed 2013 archaeological report that mentions numerous finds suggesting multi-period occupation, hundreds of flint objects, fire pits, a Bronze Age cremation urn, human remains and mysterious palisaded enclosure.

Not far away, at Abbas Hall on the Suffolk/Essex border, protests are also being renewed about the revival of plans to build a housing estate in an area immortalised on canvas by the artist Thomas Gainsborough. (*East Anglian Daily Times*, 15 May 2015). This scheme is close to the site of Abbas Hall, a notoriously haunted site of the 1950s that received national attention on account of its Grey Lady (see ‘Alarm at Abbas’ in *Some Unseen Power*, 1985, by Philip Paul). In the 1970s stories circulated of the ghosts of vengeful monks shaking and beating the cars of courting couples who rashly parked in the area on a certain night in October.

Meanwhile, it will be interesting to see how insurers react to the collapse of Birkwood Castle. Following this I predict it will not be long before claims of personal injuries inflicted by ghosts will be appearing elsewhere, in addition to claims for property damage.

Such claims are not beyond the bounds of possibility. In 1958 a George Hesketh sued for personal injuries suffered in the course of running away from ghosts at Bush House, a derelict mansion in Pembrokeshire, after he and his son had gone there to lay floors. The two men retreated into a local authority school next door and Mr Hesketh’s claim for a fractured skull arose as a result of him falling down an unlit staircase inside. Damages of £1,376 formed an agreed settlement after the judge Lord Justice Salmon acknowledged that the two men had “heard or thought they heard supernatural noises and saw or thought they saw a ghost”. (*Daily Express*, 28 March 1958). Certainly, if one case is established to the standard required by law, it may well have all manner of interesting implications, not just for property developers but for other personal injury claims, as well as potentially prompting revision of the Occupier’s Liability Act 1957, the Defective Premises Act 1972 and other legislation.



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MEDICAL BAG

Recent cases reveal a bizarre selection of misplaced objects in the human body, from a sucker dart in the nose to a mobile phone in the abdomen...



FAR LEFT: Steve Easton with the plastic sucker dart that had been stuck up his left nostril for 44 years.
ABOVE AND LEFT: This inch-long larval worm was lured out of its hiding place in a 17-year-old boy's eye with a sprig of basil.

DART STUCK UP NOSE FOR 44 YEARS

Steve Easton, 51, of Camberley, Surrey, often had a runny or blocked nose, or a headache, and put it down to hay fever, but his nasal passages are now clear for the first time since he was a small boy, having sneezed out the cause – a mildly decomposed sucker from a toy dart stuck up his left nostril for 44 years. He had no idea it was there until in late March he was sitting at home playing a game on the Internet when the dart tip, the same size as a 1p coin, fired from his nose. He was unable to work out what it was until he phoned his mother Pat, now 77, who knew instantly. He was amazed to learn that his parents had taken him to hospital when he was seven because they thought he had inhaled the dart tip. They had found him playing with his dart gun, and noticed one of the rubber tips was missing. “Steve said he’d swallowed it and there was just one of these darts without a tip,” said his mother. “I took him to the hospital and

they X-rayed him and checked everything and they couldn’t find it. In the end they said perhaps it was a mistake. I knew it wasn’t and it’s always worried me and now it has suddenly shot out. It was weird.”

Meanwhile in California, doctors removed a macadamia nut lodged in the nostril of a 37-year-old man for 13 years. *Sun*, 1 April; *telegraph.co.uk*, *BBC News*, 12 May; *D.Mail*, 13 May 2015.

MISPLACED MOBILE

A doctor allegedly left his mobile phone in a woman’s abdomen after delivering her baby by caesarean section. A sub at the *Sun* couldn’t resist the headline: “It’s For Uterus”. Hanan Mahmoud Abdul Karim, 36, had the successful procedure at a private hospital in Amman, Jordan, on 24 April before going home with her son, who was born weighing 10.5lb (4.8kg). Later, however, her family noticed her stomach vibrating and she began suffering terrible pain, according to her mother, Majeda Abdul

He was sitting at home when the dart fired from his nose

Hamid, who claims she took her daughter back to hospital, “but nothing was done for her”.

The story goes that Ms Karim was then rushed to the casualty department of Al Bashir public hospital, where X-rays revealed there was a foreign object in her abdomen. Her mother claims surgeons quickly operated to remove the phone. The case was brought up in the Jordanian parliament, where there were calls for the government to resign as a result of the scandal. Health Ministry spokesman Hatem Al Azrae dismissed Ms Karim’s story as “baseless and fabricated”, but added that the ministry was looking into it.

Surgeons regularly leave foreign objects inside patients,

as FT’s medical files attest. It happens “once in every 5,500 to 7,000 surgeries”, according to a *Washington Post* report in 2014. In 2012 Michael O’Sullivan, 49, received a new liver at Addenbrooke’s Hospital in Cambridge, but was sent home with an A4-sized surgical mat still inside him. It was only discovered after he complained of suffering from a lot of pain following surgery. It was three weeks before a CT scan revealed “something unusual”, which surgeons found to be the silicone mat. *Gulf News*, via *D.Mail*, 14 May; *Sun*, *bgr.com*, 15 May 2015.

420 KIDNEY STONES

A Chinese man called He Dong, 55, underwent a two-hour operation to remove 420 kidney stones at a hospital in Dongyang, in the eastern Chinese province of Zhejiang. Doctors at the hospital suggested that his tofu-heavy diet, and a lack of water, were to blame. “Soy products, especially gypsum tofu, are very high in calcium, the excess of which cannot be excreted from

A^Z ALIEN ZOO

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

the body without a sufficient intake of water,” said Dr Wei Yubin. Mr He visited the doctor in May complaining of abdominal pain, and a subsequent CT scan revealed his left kidney was packed full of stones. His tally of 420 stones is a long way off the world record. In 2009, a doctor in India removed 172,155 stones from a patient’s left kidney during a three-hour surgery. *BBC News*, 8 June; *Metro*, 9 June 2015.

LURED OUT WITH BASIL

A 17-year old boy from Pozuzo, Peru, had been suffering a painful red swelling round an eye for four weeks when he went to the National Children’s Hospital in Lima. An MRI scan located an inch-long larval worm. This posed a particularly severe risk because it caused swelling near an area from which infections can spread to the brain. The alluring scent of a sprig of basil was used to lure the critter from its bizarre hideout. Once its head poked out, doctors used tweezers to remove it. They believed it was a larva of *Dermatobia hominis* (human botfly). The unnamed boy suffered no long-term damage. *dailymail.co.uk*, 4 June; *D.Mirror*, 5 June 2015.

HEAVY METAL DIET

Complaining of stomach ache, Rajpal Singh went to hospital, where an endoscopy revealed 140 coins, 150 needles and several nuts, bolts and batteries inside him – as well as screws, nails and magnets. Singh, 34, a farmer from Bathinda in the western Indian state of Punjab, had begun eating metal objects three years earlier. “I used to gulp down coins and metals with fruit juice or milk,” he said. “Due to problems, I slipped into depression and got hooked onto this weird habit. Doctors have told me those sharp objects would have punctured my intestine and I would have eventually died. I feel much more relaxed now. I am never going to do this again.” Dr Gandeep Goyal said: “There are still sharp needles and coins in his stomach. We plan to operate again and remove the remaining objects.” *D.Mail*, *MX News (Sydney)*, 23 April 2015.



KEN GERHARD

KEN'S ALASKAN ANOMALIES

On 24 July 2015, a major new television series began on the History Channel entitled ‘Missing in Alaska’, one of whose co-presenters is well-known American cryptozoologist Ken Gerhard. Although its principal focus is investigating the many mysterious disappearances of people in Alaska over the years, Ken will also be covering a wide range of this enormous but often little-explored state’s cryptids. Some, such as its bigfoot, thunderbirds, and the giant fishes allegedly inhabiting Lake Iliamna, are relatively familiar in international cryptozoological circles, but others have remained much more obscure – until now. These latter include an otterman called the kushtaka, the amarok (huge bear-like wolf), ircenrraat (gnome-like proto-pygmy), cet’neni or tecetin (tailed man-beasts), and an Inuit mer-being referred to as the qalupalik. *FT* readers will definitely be following Ken’s diligent pursuit of these and other fascinating mystery beasts with interest. *Ken Gerhard, pers. comm.*, 12+14 July; <http://www.history.com/shows/missing-in-alaska> 12 July 2015.

A CHANGE OF HEAD FOR ANUBIS

Updating an earlier Alien Zoo report [FT273:21], the long-familiar jackals of Egypt have been shown to be not so familiar after all, because it turns out that they are not jackals but wolves – the only wolves found anywhere on the African continent. In late July 2015, Dr Klaus-Peter Koepfli and a team of co-researchers verified in a *Current Biology* paper that the Egyptian jackal was definitely a wolf, having analysed “extensive genomic data including mitochondrial genome sequences, sequences from 20 autosomal loci (17 introns and three exon segments), microsatellite loci, X- and Y-linked zinc-finger protein gene (ZFX and ZFY) sequences, and whole-genome nuclear sequences in African and Eurasian golden jackals and gray wolves”.

Their results revealed that although they are exceedingly similar externally, what is now

termed the African wolf (instead of the Egyptian jackal) had split from the golden jackal *Canis aureus* more than a million years ago. Consequently, it deserved formal recognition as a separate species, so the research team has proposed the official scientific name *Canis anthus* (‘golden dog’ or ‘golden wolf’) for this ‘hidden in plain sight’ species. I’ll be very interested to see how long it takes now before archaeologists and mythology students stop referring to the ancient Egyptian deity Anubis as jackal-headed (his long-established traditional description) and start referring to him as wolf-headed instead. [http://www.cell.com/current-biology/pdfExtended/S0960-9822\(15\)00787-3](http://www.cell.com/current-biology/pdfExtended/S0960-9822(15)00787-3) 30 July 2015.

CARL MEETS THE BLUE DEVIL

Explorer-author Carl Portman has travelled the world seeking unusual spiders and other arachnids. As he only recently made public, while visiting Black Rock in Belize during April 2014 he encountered something that may be very special indeed. He was told about a certain cave situated high up in the mountainside that locals claimed was home to a magical kind of very large blue spider known as the blue devil. Although it sounded more likely to be folklore than fact, Carl decided to visit the cave, just in case, and after an arduous near-vertical climb accompanied by his wife Susan and a native guide called Carlos, he finally reached the cave’s opening. During a lengthy trek through its gloomy interior, they came upon quite a range of animals, including frogs, lizards, cave lice, tailless whip scorpions (amblpygids), bats, and spiders too – but not of the blue devil variety. Reluctantly, they eventually decided to trek back to the entrance, but before they reached it, and to everyone’s amazement, Carlos spotted one of these elusive, magical creatures – a blue devil!

The size of Carl’s hand and indeed a brilliant, vibrant blue, it was possibly a species of wolf spider, and Carl swiftly snapped a few photographs of this spectacular arachnid before it vanished back into the stygian depths. Despite being very knowledgeable and experienced regarding spiders, Carl had no idea of the blue devil’s species, and according to Carlos they are found nowhere but in this cave. Could it therefore be a dramatic new species? Only if a specimen is collected and subjected to scientific scrutiny can its taxonomic identity be determined, and Carl definitely hopes to return to study it. Meanwhile, the blue devil of Belize remains a hidden, thought-provoking mystery. (Carl Portman, *Animals and Men*, May 2015; Carl Portman, pers. comm., 20+21 July 2015.)



KARL PORTMAN

CANNIBAL ROUNDUP

From Russia's 'Grannibal Lecter' to the Central African Republic's 'Mad Dog' and more...

• In late July, police in St Petersburg found a plastic bag in a pond, containing a headless torso with only one arm and one leg. These were the remains of Valentina Ulanova, 79. Her carer, Tamara Samsonova, 68, was arrested on 28 July after security video footage emerged of her taking several large plastic bags out of the apartment block in the middle of the night. She said she had drugged Ulanova, 79, and hacked her into pieces while still alive, in a row over unwashed cups. Dubbed "the granny ripper" – or "Grannibal Lecter" by the *Sun* – Samsonova admitted beheading and chopping up 11 people, including her husband, and police suspect her of another 10 murders over the past two decades. The former hotel worker was also accused of eating parts of her victims. She claimed to be especially partial to lungs and admired the cannibal Andrei Chikatilo, who killed at least 52 people between 1978 and 1990. After her arrest, Samsonova was pictured blowing kisses to reporters in court. "I'm haunted by a maniac upstairs who forced me to kill," she told reporters through the bars of her courtroom cage. A diary found in her flat, written in English and German as well as Russian, detailed several killings, including men known to have rented a room from her in 2000 and 2003. She was found to have a history of mental illness and had been hospitalised three times. *Sun*, 6+11 Aug; [CNN] 7 Aug; *D.Express*, 18 Aug 2015.

• Alexander Bychkov killed and butchered nine homeless alcoholic men with a knife and hammer in a 28-month spree around Belinsky in Russia's Penza Oblast region. After being arrested in 2012 for shoplifting, he began telling police about the bodies. He confessed to murdering one man and cutting him up after a drinking session. "I only took his heart," he said. "Two days later I cooked and ate it." He also allegedly ate his victims' livers. One of his victims was said to be



LEFT: Tamara Samsonova; partial to a bit of lung. BELOW LEFT: Alexander Bychkov preferred hearts and livers. BELOW RIGHT: The Ali brothers, noted for their unusual curry recipes.

sentenced to nine years in a labour camp in Aksarka, central Russia. *D.Mirror*, 4 Dec; *MX News (Sydney)*, 5 Dec 2013.

• Two Pakistani brothers – Mohammad Arif Ali (35) and Mohammad Farman Ali (30) – were arrested in 2011 on charges of digging up about 100 graves and stealing the bodies, which they later allegedly consumed. Because Pakistan has no specific laws against cannibalism, the arrest resulted in no more than a two-year prison sentence and a fine. While incarcerated, they spent most of their sentence in King Edward Medical University in Lahore, being examined by the school's neurophysiology department. Residents from their native village of Khwawar Kalan, near the town of Darya Khan in Punjab's Bhakkar district, held a raucous protest when the brothers were released in May 2013. After reports of a stench of rotting flesh coming from their house, police raided it on 14 April 2015 and found a young boy's skull. They admitted digging up the body of the two-year-old child and making it into curry. In June they were sentenced to a further 12 years in jail at an anti-terrorism court in Sargodha in Punjab. (As well as desecrating the child's grave, the men were convicted of spreading fear and damaging property, offences under Pakistan's anti-terrorism law.) *Irish Times*, 14 April; *LiveScience.com*, (Brisbane) *Courier-Mail*, 16 April; *BBC News*, 11 June 2014.

• A cannibal who ate another man's flesh in the Central African Republic on 7 January 2014 has said he did it to avenge the death of his family. Ouandja Magloire told the BBC that his pregnant wife, his sister-in-law and her child were all killed by Muslim militiamen. He was part



his mother's ex-boyfriend. Police found a diary detailing the killings as well as violent films, books and newspaper clippings about mass killers. Bychkov, 24, was jailed for life. *D.Mirror*; *Sun*, 23 Mar 2013.

• A man who killed and ate his common-law wife told police: "I got used to eating human flesh when I worked at the morgue."



The former mortuary worker stabbed the woman twice in the neck after a row while out walking, then hid her body in the woods. He said he returned to the spot several times to take body parts to eat. A court in Russia's northern Yamalo-Nenets region convicted the unnamed man of murder after psychologists declared him sane. He was

92: BLOODY STEAK

The myth

Necrophages given to macho posturing often like to show how butch they are by ordering their steak lightly cooked, so that when they cut into it, it oozes blood. That's the red stuff that sloshes about their plates, and drips onto their garish neckties: blood.



The "truth"

Whether you're buying it raw or eating it rare, your meat does not contain blood – or not much, anyway. Almost all the blood was drained out of the corpse at the slaughterhouse, long before it reached the butcher's shop, supermarket, or unmarked van in the car park of a disused pub where you bought it. That pink juice is merely water mixed with a red-pigmented protein named myoglobin. Animals from which "red meat" is made naturally contain a lot of both ingredients, whereas "white meat" species don't. (Some animals, like poultry, have a mixture of both muscle types). The function of myoglobin is to store oxygen in muscle cells. Its colour changes when the meat is cooked, looking "bloodier" when the meat has only reached comparatively low temperatures, and browner after cooking at high temperatures. And, of course, the more you cook the meat, the less water will be left in it to carry the myoglobin onto the plate. Rare meat may be redder, and juicier – but bloody steaks don't exist.

Sources

<https://www.exploratorium.edu/cooking/meat/INT-what-meat-color.html>; <http://www.britannica.com/science/myoglobin>; http://msue.anr.msu.edu/news/the_color_of_meat_depends_on_myoglobin_part_1

Disclaimer

This column never claims expertise on the matters it covers – and, being vegetarian, it does so even less than usual this time. If we've got anything wrong, please get your knife and fork out and tuck in over on FT's letters page.

Mythchaser

Was there ever a time when it was legally and socially acceptable (and routinely done) to empty your chamber pot out of the window? It's a defining image of the yucky Middle Ages – but in an era which often had stricter hygiene laws than we have today, can it really have been true?



of a Christian mob that dragged a Muslim man from a minibus in the country's capital, Bangui, stabbed him to death and then set his body on fire. Footage of the attack taken on a mobile phone shows Magloire eating part of the victim's leg, after which he was known as 'Mad Dog'. The next day he returned, having saved some of the dead man's flesh. He put it between two halves of a baguette and ate it, with a side dish of okra. The country's late 'Emperor', Jean Bedel Bokassa, was alleged to have practised cannibalism during his rule between 1966 and 1979. It was said he kept human limbs in fridges and served parts of them to visiting French dignitaries. *Sunday Telegraph*, 12 Jan; *BBC News*, 13 Jan; *D.Telegraph, MX News (Sydney)*, 14 Jan 2014.



• A 71-year-old Frenchwoman was arrested in the northern French town of Longwy on 22 May 2014. She had killed her 80-year-old husband with a kitchen mortar she used for grinding spices and then "cooked his heart, nose and genital organs in a pot, but we don't know if she ate them," said a judicial source. (*Queensland Sunday Mail*, 22 June 2014.

• Gregory Hale, 37, an ex-slaughterhouse worker from Coffee County, Tennessee, met Lisa Hyder, 36, on 6 June 2014, and took her to his home where

he chopped her up, putting her hands and feet in buckets. He was arrested two days later after asking a friend to help him dispose of Hyder's remains. He admitted he had eaten parts of her body. A 'friend' said Hale was a self-styled Satanist who was fired from the slaughterhouse when he was found conducting a ritual with animal parts. *D.Mirror*, 12 June 2014.

• Joseph Oberhansley, 33, of Jeffersonville, Indiana, was arrested in July 2014 for driving erratically and held in custody until his former fiancée Tammy Jo Blanton, 46, paid his £680 bond. When she failed to turn up for work a few weeks later, police found her mutilated body under a tarpaulin in the bath. There was a "plate with what appeared to be skull bone and blood" on it, a pan and blood-soaked tongs. Police said Oberhansley confessed to removing her brain, lungs and heart, and eating them, some cooked and some raw (we are not told which were raw). However, after the charges were read out in court, Oberhansley said: "That's not my name. Obviously you've got the wrong guy." He claimed his name was Zeus Brown. In fact he had a manslaughter conviction from 2000 when he tried to kill his then-girlfriend Sabrina Elder, 17, days after she had given birth to their child. *D.Mirror*, 17 Sept 2014.



TOP: Brain-eater Joseph Oberhansley. ABOVE: Self-styled Satanist Gregory Hale.

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FORTEAN FOLLOW-UPS

More herring gull hooliganism and a potential explanation for Kazakhstan's sleeping sickness

MORE GULLS BEHAVING BADLY [FT331:18]



At 4.30pm on 28 July, a man swimming in the sea at Fenit in Co. Kerry, Ireland, was attacked by a gull 75 yards (69m) from shore. He beat it off and tried to attract the attention of lifeguards, but it returned for a second go and drew blood from his hand. He was advised to go for tetanus shots, which he received at Kerry General Hospital. Brendan O'Connor, water safety officer with Kerry County Council, said in his 40 years of beach and coastal activities this is the first such attack ever reported by lifeguards in Kerry, which has 425 miles (684km) of coastline, one of the longest in Ireland. The gull in question wasn't a herring gull, but a great black-backed gull, which can have a wingspan of up to 6ft (1.8m). "This is the first time I have ever heard of such an attack by a gull on a swimmer," said Mr O'Connor.

Micheál O'Coileain, the environmental officer with the council, said the fact that there are no landfill sites now in Kerry, or indeed in the whole region, may be a factor in the gulls' strange behaviour including their movement further and further inland.

In France, where aggressive gulls are moving onto the Loire river system in the centre of the country and are being blamed for the disappearance of domestic animals in Nice in the south, sterilisation is being considered, according to recent reports in *La Nouvelle République*. The town of Trouville-sur-Mer in Normandy has experimented with drones to help curb the number of gull attacks. These hover close to nests and douse eggs with paraffin to stop them hatching. The drones are reinforced to fend off attacks and prevent gulls getting caught in the



blades. Officials in Whitehaven, Cumbria, are keen to imitate their French counterparts. *Irishcentral*, 5 Aug; *Sun*, 14 Aug 2015.

Seagulls left a young man with a black eye when they swooped down and attacked him for his bacon sandwich in Truro, Cornwall. He tried to fight them off as they pecked his face, leaving him fearing for his sight. The victim, known only as Richard, went to hospital after the attack, fearing infection. *D.Mirror*, 28 July 2015.

Dene Robertson, 46, was in his kitchen in Dover, Kent, when he heard Charlie, his Jack Russell, give out a yelp from the back garden. Going outside, he saw a seagull with its claws in the two-year-old animal's neck, trying to lift it into the air. "It was trying to pick him up," he said, "but luckily he is quite solid." His other dog, a three-month-old springer spaniel and cocker spaniel cross, was recently attacked by a flock of gulls. *D.Telegraph*, 4 Aug 2015.

FLIGHT MH370 [FT313:4, 327:22]



Flight MH370 took off from Kuala Lumpur on 8 March 2014, bound for Beijing. The Boeing 777, with 239 souls on board, vanished without trace and was set to join the pantheon of classic mysteries. Then, 508 days later, on 29 July, a 6ft (1.8m) barnacle-encrusted metal object, identified as a piece of a Boeing 777, was spotted on the east coast of La Réunion, a volcanic outcrop in the Indian Ocean. No other Boeing 777s apart from MH370 have gone missing over an ocean. The object was a flaperon, part of a wing that helps control lifting and rolling, bearing the serial number BB657. Following the publicity, it turned out that it had been spotted on the beach back in May, but no one grasped its significance. Its

location was within the predicted debris field of the presumed crash site in the Indian Ocean, more than 2,000 miles to the west. Perhaps hundreds of objects from the plane had washed up on Réunion, with no one paying any attention. Flotsam and jetsam on La Réunion is routinely collected and burnt. *D.Telegraph*, 31 July, 6+10 Aug; *Sunday Telegraph*, 2 Aug 2015.

PIRATE LOOT... POSSIBLY [FT328:4]



UNESCO experts have dismissed claims that Barry Clifford and his team of explorers have discovered Captain Kidd's ship

off Madagascar. The 110lb (50kg) ingot recovered from the sea was not silver but 95 per cent lead, and was identified as a ballast piece. "The mission showed that several historic wrecks indeed lie in the bays of Sainte-Marie island," the UNESCO statement said. "However, what had been identified as the *Adventure Galley* of the pirate Captain Kidd has been found by the experts... to be a broken part of the Sainte-Marie port constructions." Authorities in Madagascar should "only permit interventions by a competent team led by a qualified underwater archaeologist," said Michel L'Hour, head of the UNESCO technical team. Clifford's team reacted strongly to the critical report, saying it stood by its claims. *[AFP] BBC News*, 14 July 2015.

THE BIG SLEEP [FT316:8-9, 324:24, 327:22]

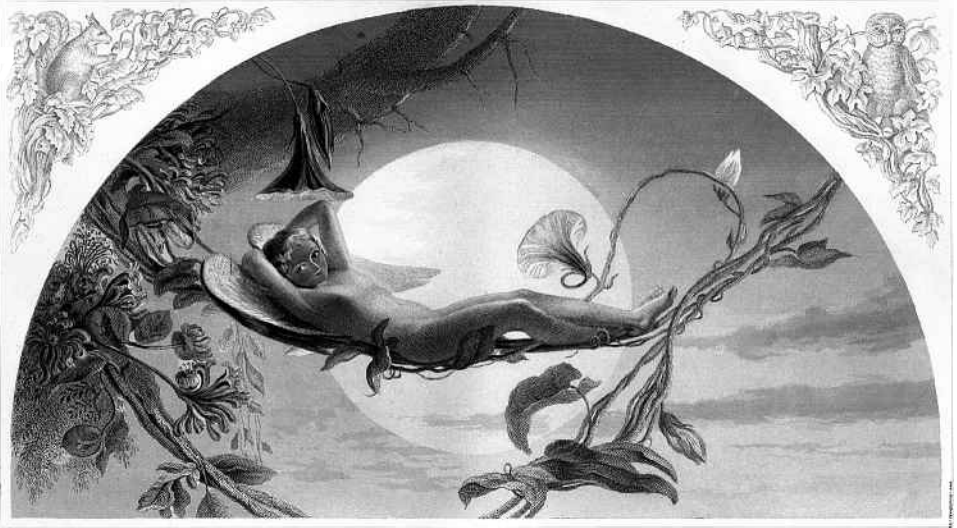


Kazakhstan's Deputy Prime Minister, Berdibek Saparbayev, has claimed that the mysterious sleeping disorder that for two

years has affected hundreds of residents in the village of Kalachi has now been explained. Those affected by the illness suffer dizziness, weakness, loss of coordination, stupor or total unconsciousness for up to six days. In all, 120 people have fallen ill since March 2013, and given that some people have succumbed more than once, 152 cases of the disease have been reported (probably more by now). Those affected “get headaches, become confused, and suffer emotional instability and memory disorders, which can last up to several weeks,” said Professor Leonid Rikhvanov from the Department of Geo-ecology and Geo-chemistry at Tomsk Polytechnic University in Russia. “In some cases, hallucinations occur, particularly in children. Some repeatedly fall asleep.”

According to the newspaper *Komsomolskaya Pravda* last year, “The sick person appears to be conscious and can even walk. But all the same he then falls into a deep sleep and snores, and when he wake him up... he remembers absolutely nothing.” Even pets were affected. Kalachi resident Yelena Zhavoronkova said that her cat Marquis suddenly “went stupid” and began meowing and attacking walls, furniture and the family dog”.

Rikhvanov believed the root cause could be radon gas seeping from the abandoned Soviet uranium mine in nearby Krasnogorsk, while Saparbayev blamed carbon monoxide and various hydrocarbons for reducing the level of oxygen in the air; but why are some people affected and not others, and would oxygen depletion result in such exotic symptoms? As a pulmonologist from Duke University told *Wired* magazine, it's unlikely that any gas would be in concentrations high enough to cause illness in open spaces. The Gang of Fort suspects that Saparbayev's announcement is intended to close down further investigation and suppress speculation. No matter what the cause, the government is relocating the whole Kalachi population. *Guardian*, 18+27 July; *Newser*, 20 July 2015.



FAIRIES, FOLKLORE AND FORTEANA

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

INVENTING BROWNEY

A challenge: could you invent a supernatural being and actually get people to believe in it? Well, here's an example of someone who managed this rare feat. In 1824, one Samuel Drew wrote about a bugaboo that he termed 'Browney'. Now this was not Brownie, the northern British domestic spook: note the different spelling. This was a Cornish fairy who specialised in bees. Drew knew three things about Browney. First, the ancient Cornish sacrificed to him at a prehistoric stone. Second, Browney was called upon to settle swarms leaving the hive.

And, third, Browney looked like a shaggy bear with short legs. Drew himself admits that the first point was pure speculation: it was the result, in any case, of confusion with an Orkney bogey. But what about the bees? Well, there was a custom in Cornwall (and though Drew did not know it) elsewhere in southern England, of summoning bees by calling them 'brownies' and banging on a tin. Drew described this ritual and airily noted that the Cornish beekeeper believed that 'browney' meant 'bee', whereas Drew had decided that it referred to an ancient Cornish honey god.

The Cornish beekeeper was, as it happens, correct and Drew was wrong: check your dialect dictionaries. And the shaggy 'bear' with short legs? Incredibly this was taken from life. As a young man Drew had been a lookout

on a poaching expedition when he had seen a paranormal animal he described as, you've guessed it, a shaggy bear-like creature with short legs. Drew decided that this was Brownie, who he'd read about in various traditional books and this evidently became the Cornish 'Browney' in Drew's all too plastic mind. The

lesson? Mix together some gratuitous antiquarianism, a misunderstood beekeeper's ritual, and marry a bizarre witness account to a still more bizarre witness opinion and you have a new entity. Few people ever read Drew, but many did read the great southwestern folklorist Robert Hunt. Hunt, who should have known better, picked up the bee-calming Cornish Browney in 1865,

from Drew, though Hunt gave no reference. And from the authoritative Hunt, Browney made his way into a hundred books and, more recently, has surfed across a thousand Internet sites. In fact, honey-loving Browney is now firmly established in the pantheon of British fairies: discussed, for instance, by Katharine Briggs. You can buy on Ebay, meanwhile, a nine-centimetre (3.5in) jar with a shaggy bee-like fairy within. “The Browney”, the seller's description states, “is a Cornish guardian of the bees. It is said that when the housewife would beat a can and call 'Browney! Browney!' they'd become invisible to round up any swarming bees”. Make no mistake: invented Browney is here to stay...

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

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ABOVE: Warminster's new UFO mural. BELOW: Darren Millar, Welsh Assembly Member for Clywd West

IT'S A THING

2015 is the 50th anniversary of 'The Thing', the name given to the aerial phenomenon seen and photographed above the previously unremarkable Wiltshire town (FT331: 40-47). Despite decades of UFO sightings, 'alien' contacts and the saucer-shaman Arthur Shuttlewood preaching to the devoted on Cradle Hill, the town has never really capitalised on what could potentially be a year-round tourist honey pot. But a lightbulb moment appears to have happened when a specially commissioned mural appeared on the wall of Warminster's police station. Depicting key elements of the Warminster myth, the mural will glow in the dark. Ufologist Kevin Goodman, co-author with Steve Dewey of two books on the Warminster phenomena, said: "Personally, it came as a complete surprise, and I welcome the fact that at long last, certain sections of Warminster's community have embraced the phenomenon that made the town famous in the 1960s and 1970s. I'm so pleased that this unique art has gained a lot of media interest." It can only be a matter of time before an enterprising local hostelry starts to offer two day 'missing time' breaks for those who wish to really immerse themselves in the Warminster 'Thing'. *Wiltshire Times*, 3 June 2015: <http://tinyurl.com/q8wodcu>

MUCH ADD ABOUT NO THING?

One of Britain's other iconic UFO legends, the Rendlesham Forest incident (RFI), is once again in the news, with predictable controversy. In July, the retired USAF deputy Base Commander Col Charles Halt returned to Suffolk to speak at a UFO conference. Halt's talk disappointed

many as he did not make any spectacular revelations about the 35-year-old case. Instead, he used the opportunity to launch an attack on one of the other RFI witnesses, Larry Warren, author of *Left at East Gate*, who was a 19-year-old US airman when the 'sightings' occurred (see FT204:35). Halt and Warren have never seen eye to eye about what really happened on those Christmas nights in 1980 and the organisers had banned Warren from Halt's talk, perhaps because they knew what was to come. What one member of the audience described as a 'slanderfest' descended into farce when a video of his talk appeared on YouTube, but was swiftly pulled for alleged 'breach of copyright'. The RFI is riddled with such feuds and Internet wars as the performers in the circus compete for the attention of the media and the true believers. As blogger Gilly Maddison notes, Halt as the former officer, comes across as distant, cold and official, whilst Larry is seen as friendly, approachable and with a killer story to boot. Belief in what happened at Rendlesham, to the ufological masses, appears to be closely tied to uncritical belief in the credibility of its ex-military witnesses, even if none of them can agree even on a basic chronology. As Gilly's blog notes: "...even if he [Warren] stood up tomorrow and said he lied about any aspect of it - I suspect people would not care because it is Larry the man who people are drawn to, not Larry the RFI participant". Once again the bottom line is that although stories like the RFI fail to provide anything like convincing proof that aliens have visited us, the *idea* that

they do can have far reaching effects on the lives of those caught up in the UFO syndrome. *Daily Mirror*, 13 July: www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/rendlesham-forest-ufo-sighting-new-6061129; www.anythingexcepthousework.co.uk/rendlesham-forest-incident-the-colonel-returns/

A FUNNY THING HAPPENED ON THE WAY TO THE ASSEMBLY

Being a politician means that you must be prepared to ask your government some very strange questions on behalf of your constituents. So when a request was submitted to the Welsh Government from Darren Millar, Conservative Assembly Member for Clywd West, eyebrows were probably not raised too high. Millar asked three questions of Economy, Science and Transport Minister Edwina Hart in order to elicit information regarding possible meetings that may have taken place between Welsh Government officers and the Ministry of Defence. Whatever response Millar might have expected, it certainly wasn't this: "jang viDa je due luq. ach ghotvam'e' QI'yaH devolve qaS." Whether Millar could speak Welsh or not was immaterial because his response was written in the fictional alien language Klingon, created for the TV series *Star Trek*. Some wag in the Welsh Government decided that Millar needed an instant response and Millar had this translated as "The minister will reply in due course. However, this is a non-devolved matter." In what might be termed even more of a waste of taxpayers' money, a mini spat ensued, Millar claiming he had "always suspected that Labour ministers came from another planet... This response confirms it." A source within the Welsh Government quickly responded, saying that Millar should stop "spending time and wasting resources asking about UFOs" and should be "fighting for the very real concerns of his constituents". Yet the questions had been tabled on behalf of his constituents, as democracy allows, begging the question of who decides exactly what a "real concern" is. While Millar awaits his substantive response he might not want to get too hopeful, as the Welsh Government has told the media the only

"extra-terrestrial life seen near Cardiff recently seems to be Darren Millar." With political dialogue of this high order we can be assured that when 'they' eventually arrive here world domination will present little problem. www.rt.com/uk/272980-wales-ufo-tory-minister/



JOY SHALLCROSS

SECURITY ALERT

Recently I received an unusual message from someone involved with a case that I'd helped investigate during the 1990s. He'd told his daughter about it, but could find no information on the case online, even on well-known UFO sites, so he asked if I could help him prove that this lack of digital notoriety did not mean that the incident had never occurred.

This is a good opportunity to correct that omission and allows me to invite reader participation on a case that was never *definitively* explained. With a revival of *The X Files* coming soon, this is your chance to play Mulder and Scully: send your theories to FT and I will provide a free book to whoever gives the most helpful suggestions.

The story started on 8 March 1991 when a staff member from a large shopping centre on the outskirts of Warrington, Cheshire, contacted me. This was the Birchwood Mall, nestling in the intersection of the M6 and M62 motorways and adjacent to the Liverpool-Manchester railway line. A new town development built on a wartime armaments complex, it sprouted hundreds of new houses and bungalows in 1980 and the mall was constructed to serve them. This area had already seen another famous UFO case – the 1978 Risley entity sighting, in which severe electrical effects had devastating effects on the health of the witness (see **FT305:29**).

I had lived in the community for some years, which is why the mall contacted me to “look at a strange light form in the sky that we have on video from one of our CCTV cameras at the shopping centre”. Along with colleagues Peter Hough and Roy Sandbach I did just that.

Birchwood Mall operated a number of cameras from a control centre, screening various locations. At 1.23 am on 25 February 1991 one camera pointing eastwards across a small open area between buildings picked up a small floating object. The guard monitoring the cameras used remote control to track its movements, zooming in and panning out. There were no windows to look outside at the location and he never left his post during the seven minutes that the UFO was tracked.

This was a UFO in the truest sense – a bright ball of light just a few inches in diameter that moved in ‘controlled’ patterns around the area. The camera operator attempted to get close-up views, but it was never certain that the ‘shape’ that emerged was real, given the distortive effects of proximity to the camera. However, on these close-ups it resembled a soap bubble with a bright outer ring and more diffuse centre.

Most of the time the UFO remained close to ground level. It did climb a wall to near-rooftop height and passed in front of objects such as waste bins and a wall, but it never passed *behind* anything. It was moving independently of the camera and disappeared when above a tree between the shopping complex and the railway station. The whole thing was watched through the raw camera feed so we knew that this was not a video anomaly. The footage was



LEFT: A frame from the CCTV footage.

Is this case solved, or are we overlooking an answer?

retained for our analysis. The system had been in situ since the mall opened and some staff had worked there for years. None of them, viewing the tape in the following days, claimed to have seen anything like it before.

Despite visiting the location, talking to those involved and securing the footage for analysis there were problems. The system recorded at high speed, allowing days of coverage to be stored should footage be subsequently needed by police. Moreover, the recording took samples of images from each of the cameras in a continuous cycle, creating a final run that was confusing to view without specialist equipment. However, the mall owners were as keen as we were to try to solve this mystery and proved helpful.

At this point we thought that the proximity of Risley Moss nature reserve was possibly relevant – indeed, a fox brazenly strolls past the camera in later scenes – but as it turned out the case was harder to resolve than we'd hoped. Some kind of optical effect theory was considered, because in close-ups it was possible to see ‘through’ the ‘soap bubble’, meaning that the shape probably was an artefact. But the UFO itself seemed real, because in one sequence it can be viewed entering shot from the right hand edge of frame, gradually emerging just as a solid object would do. From the start we decided to invite scientists to assist us, notably a sceptical young doctor, now a professor at a British university but then a physicist at Salford University. He and several colleagues from other colleges who had some interest in paranormal anomalies met with our UFO investigation team at Manchester University to try to progress the case using specialist equipment and expertise. We were all genuinely puzzled by the footage, though we presumed there would be an answer within the realms of science. Various experiments were carried out to look at possible theories, such as getting children to blow soap bubbles

that were illuminated by a flashlight as they drifted by. Cameras recorded this, but did not produce the ring structure seen in the footage, supporting the view that this shape was probably not an accurate image of what the object would look like close up. From here, the theory emerged that an insect might have become trapped inside the camera lens system and be moving about out of focus to produce the ‘bubble’ effect. However, we soon eliminated that option because the

camera was opened up, cleaned and resealed every six months and any trapped insect could not have survived the months since the last such operation. Despite this, the scientists concluded that while there was no clear explanation, it was most likely connected with the optical set-up and “something causing aberrations very close to, or inside, the lens system of the camera”.

We also involved a meteorologist working at Swansea University to look at the other possibility – an identified aerial phenomenon (UAP) such as ball lightning. But events then took a surprise turn and made that idea far less likely. At 12.35 am on 26 April 1991 a completely different camera, pointing north and covering a more open area of the complex well away from the initial sighting, picked up a similar UFO. Being prepared by our investigation, the guard tracked it carefully and obtained minutes of footage as it moved along a road. This time it disappeared over the roof of the mall, again as a large bubble.

Happily, the guard conducted an experiment that we'd asked Mall staff to attempt if the UFO should return. The cameras had an Infrared spotbeam to illuminate darkened areas when nefarious activity might be going on in a darkened corner. We suspected the soap bubble effect was being caused by this beam and asked the operator to switch it off whilst pointing at the UFO. They did so on the second sighting and the UFOs shape disappeared when the spot beam was extinguished but returned when put back on again. So, whilst there was obviously *something* visible out there, its bubble-like appearance was being stimulated by the illumination of the spot beam and it was really smaller and more diffuse.

We kept in contact with Birchwood Mall for three years and no guards reported the UFO again. However, about five years later, when I was on a live TV show, I mentioned the case in passing and later received a call from a man saying that he had worked at the centre before 1991 and had seen something similar. He supported our working theory (which I will reveal next month). Meanwhile, perhaps readers would like to try and figure this case out. This investigation exemplifies what UFO research should be about – treating a report as an anomaly that potentially can be resolved and trying to find that solution by all means possible. But is this case completely solved or are we overlooking another potential answer? Over to you...

BLASTS FROM THE PAST

FORTEAN TIMES BRINGS YOU THE NEWS THAT TIME FORGOT

59 THE NIGHT DOCTORS

THEO PAIJMANS explores a disturbing intersection of 19th century racism and medical research

In 1872, several American newspapers recorded a curious superstition among certain African American communities in and around the city of Washington, DC, involving the existence of what they called ‘night doctors’. According to these beliefs, the night doctors wandered the streets in pairs between midnight and daybreak in search of victims to be abducted for the dissecting room. They took their victims with the help of adhesive plasters, lying in wait for suitable ‘subjects’ in dark alleys, “from which they stealthily but quickly emerge whenever a coloured person of suitable proportions passes. Advancing with muffled step behind the unsuspecting victims, one of these terrible ‘night doctors’ reaches his hand over the shoulder of the coloured man or woman, and dexterously claps the adhesive plaster over his or her mouth, in order to prevent any outcry, while his confederate quickly ties the arms with a cord, with which he is prepared. Unable to give an alarm or make anything like successful resistance, the poor victims are placed in a covered carriage waiting nearby, and carried to the dissecting room where he or she is chloroformed into insensibility, and then bled to death by the heartless students.”

The horrors did not stop there; since, after the body was dissected, the fatty parts of the body were “tryed in caldrons for the purpose of obtaining the oil, which, according to the popular belief among the coloured people, afterward appears at the drug stores in the form of castor oil.” According to the newspapers, these beliefs were held so firmly by the African American community that only with the greatest hesitation, even fear and trembling, would people go out at night, only to “take to their heels whenever they notice anything suspicious in the movements of the passers-



Sometimes a corpse wasn't quite dead to begin with, as in the gruesome case that was dubbed ‘An Ohio Horror’ by the newspaper that reported on it...

by”. Reports even asserted that of late: “The number of coloured people who have disappeared is much larger than usual, and they are convinced that the doctors of Washington are not only supplying the dissecting rooms of the city with subjects, but are furnishing ‘castor oil’, manufactured from coloured adipose matter to the large cities throughout the country... Those who indulge in this singular superstition relative to ‘night doctors’ imagine that young and obese subjects are preferred, on account of the oil which they yield, and that hump-backs are especially desirable, on account of their peculiar physical conformation, which renders their dissection of particular interest to medical students. Indeed, it is reported that as high as \$150 each for first class hump-backed subjects is offered by the ‘night doctors’. We know not how this strange hallucination originated, but imagine it must have come down by tradition from ‘the good old times’ before the war.”¹

This ‘superstition’ was an

example of how 19th century American slave owners exploited such folkloric fears to control the slave population. One has but to think of the sinister garb of the Klansman and the Ghost Riders or Night Riders (see FT323:34-43). It was, as Gladys-Marie Fry notes in her book *Night Riders In Black Folk History*: “a system of psychological control”.² When the stories of the night doctors began to surface in early 19th century America, one newspaper offered a plausible solution as to their origin: “Where did this belief originate? Perhaps in darker Africa, in days when ancestors of the race in this country were changed from Africans to Americans through the medium of the slave ship, manacle and lash. The more reasonable explanation is to be had in studying the effects upon the coloured people in this country of the crime which gave a new word to the dictionary – ‘burking’ – stealing corpses for purposes of dissection”.³

Seen in this light, the fears

about Night Doctors were not unfounded. The practice of dissection was widespread in 19th century America, and the graves of African Americans were the main source of corpses. It was, after all, less risky to dissect a black cadaver than a white one. As early as March 1827, *Freedom's Journal*, an African American newspaper, instructed its readers as to “how to create a cheap mortsafe, a complex contraption of rods and plates that protected the coffin... This contraption ensured that ‘the longest night will not afford time to empty the grave’.”⁴

And sometimes a corpse wasn't quite dead to begin with, as in the gruesome case that was dubbed ‘An Ohio Horror’ by the newspaper that reported on it in 1884: “Wherever there is a medical college the coloured people are in mortal fear of the ‘night doctors’. Most people have laughed at the suggestion that a coloured man is liable to suffer a mysterious disappearance through the need of ‘subjects’ in the dissecting-room, but if the Ohio story is true the coloured people do well to keep as far away from the medical college as possible.

“It appears that the Ohio Medical College was short of subjects and called on the usual purveyors, coloured men. The latter promised to have three subjects that night. Sure enough, the bodies were brought to the dissecting-room on time. They were the bodies of a coloured family named Taylor, and were still warm when placed on the tables. They showed evidence of violent death. It is the common opinion, and it is supported by good evidence, that these coloured persons were murdered by the body-snatchers... In St Louis some years ago, an excitement was created by the dissection of a body under circumstances much less horrible, and it ran so high as to endanger

the existence of the college building. A negro was employed to scrub the dissecting-room and was sent up without being told of the character of the room. When he saw the subjects on the tables he dashed out of the room in great fear, stumbled and fell headlong down the stairs, breaking his neck. Instead of notifying the coroner, a class of subjects quietly carried the body up again and devoted it to the advancement of science. It was with the utmost difficulty that the building was saved from the mob that formed when the facts became known..."⁵

In 1879 the fear of the 'night doctors' was so strong that it became dangerous if a late-night passer-by were to be mistaken for one of these ghouls, as events in Little Rock, Arkansas, demonstrated: "At rather a late hour I was going along Second Street with a friend. My friend was drunk. I had not been drinking anything. Meeting an old negro man, my companion caught hold of him and good humouredly told him to go on. I requested him not to detain the man. Just then several parties rushed up, when I told my friend to run, which he did. I walked on, not suspecting that I would be molested, when suddenly something struck the back of my head... I was cut in several places, and I have been informed that after I had been knocked down I was dragged under a shed and left for dead. A woman did the cutting, and I understand that when she left me she exclaimed that she had killed one doctor's kidnapper. Another statement is that a party of intoxicated men entered the house of a coloured man and pretended as though they were going to put plaster over his mouth. At this juncture a rush by several coloured people was made upon the party, and during the

melee which ensued one man was knocked down and it was thought fatally stabbed... So strong is the belief fixed in the minds of coloured people in certain sections of the city, that the streets immediately become deserted, and all business suspended and doors closed as soon as a physician appears."⁶

In 1885 in Washington, surgeons were driven off during an operation on a young African American named William Harris: "The case of Harris became hopeless after the physicians were driven away. There he lay, with his bowels exposed and severed. He sank rapidly, and before the police could drive out the howling mob he was dead. The operation is a critical one at best, but the doctors believe they could have made a successful case but for the interference. There have been demonstrations against night doctors in Washington before, but nothing quite so serious as this."⁷

During a hearing in the Police Court regarding the unfortunate demise of Harris, it emerged that the recently introduced long Ulster coats were thought to be used by their wearers – 'slab doctors', as the African American populace called them – to hide kidnapped children victims.⁸

An 1889 scare in South Carolina was reported as far away as Boston. It involved a night doctor with the character traits of a phantom anaesthetist (see FT329:28-29, 330:28-29): "The Negroes of Clarendon, Williamsburg and Sumter counties have for several weeks past been in a state of fear and trembling. They claim that there is a white man, a doctor, who at will can make himself invisible, and who then approaches some unsuspecting darkey, and, having rendered him or her insensible with

chloroform, proceeds to fill up a bucket with the victim's blood, for the purpose of making medicine..."⁹

The newspapers reported regularly on the fears of night doctors amongst the African American communities right up until the end of the 19th century. Tellingly, one newspaper remarked that the belief was especially prevalent among "a certain grade of negroes in Washington, particularly those who drifted there after the war from the extreme south"¹⁰ – in other words, among those who in all probability would have carried with them tales or personal experiences of persecution by the Klan or the Night Riders. The night doctor belongs in this line of scares, originating at the crossroads of white slave-owners, virulent racism, psychological warfare and suppression. It could manifest itself in various forms. The night doctors travelled in pairs, but could also act alone. One description pictured a night doctor as "a supernatural being, formed like a man, having long, hook-like fingers and a poisonous breath, and that wherever he turns and breathes upon a house where a child lies sick the child is doomed to death before another night. It is not ominous to one to hear the night doctor, as this being of superstition is called, and always after the death of a child the negroes get together and ask who of them heard the night doctor pass by. Some one is sure to assert that he or she heard the low, moaning, rushing sound made by the night doctor's quick flight. But it is regarded as a surely fatal sign if any one sees the night doctor."¹¹

Yet the night doctors are more than a scare stemming from dim folkloric roots. Something evil lies at its heart as well and that is to be found

in the relationship between the white medical profession and African American communities. This relationship has been tarnished by some horrible practices; think of the Tuskegee experiment that lasted from 1932 till 1972. There are many more and far older examples. There was, for instance, doctor J Marion Sims (1813-1883) who used enslaved African American women as experimental subjects, "most of whom he bought and kept on his property for this purpose. Some were operated on up to 30 times" without anaesthesia.¹² In her groundbreaking study *Medical Apartheid*,¹³ Harriet A Washington lists the experiences of escaped slave John 'Fed' Brown, who recalled in 1855 how a doctor produced painful blisters on his body to observe "how deep my black skin went".¹⁴ But even before that, in 1817, physician Elias S Bennett published notes on his crude experimental and botched surgery on an African American slave girl suffering from a tumour.¹⁵ The night doctors, then, also serve as a warning that there were times where African Americans could not place their trust in white surgeons and doctors.

As to the current legacy of the night doctors, Dawn Danella points out in *Night Doctors: Exhuming The Truth*: "There are some that say that the 'night doctors' are a myth belonging solely to black folklore, a story used to frighten and manipulate. There is no doubt that is indeed what the lore achieved but the night doctors... did indeed live in more than just whispered stories. The night doctors were a real force that made a lasting impression on history and the repercussions of their horror story can still be felt in African American communities today."¹⁶

NOTES

- 1 'The Night Doctors – A Curious Superstition Among Some of the Colored People – How they Think Castor Oil is Made', *Evening Star*, Washington, DC, 15 Jan 1872; *Cleveland Morning Daily Herald*, Ohio, 19 Jan 1872; *Indianapolis News*, Indiana, 22 Jan 1872; *Janesville Daily Gazette*, Wisconsin, 23 Jan 1872.
- 2 Gladys-Marie Fry, *Night Riders In Black Folk History*, University Of North Carolina Press, 1975.
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Doctor', *Wisconsin State Register*, 8 Aug 1891.

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1885.

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emory.edu

15 Stephen Kenny, "How Black Slaves Were Routinely Sold As 'Specimens' To Ambitious White Doctors", *The Conversation*, <http://theconversation.com/how-black-slaves-were-routinely-sold-as-specimens-to-ambitious-white-doctors-43074>

16 <http://digitalcommons.eric.edu/obom/3>

The Kubrick Conspiracies

Cinema and conspiracy theory are no strangers, but it is unusual for such theorising to attach itself to the figure of a director – so why has Stanley Kubrick become the focus of theories involving everything from fake Moon landings to the Illuminati? **DEAN BALLINGER** argues that the answer can be found in the director's obsession with creative control.

The late, great Anglo-American director Stanley Kubrick (1928-1999) has been the subject of some interesting cult attention over the last couple of decades. Kubrick's famed reclusiveness provided the opportunity for London con-man Alan Conway to publically impersonate Kubrick throughout the early 1990s (a scenario that served as the basis for the 2006 film *Colour Me Kubrick*, starring John Malkovich as Conway). The fastidious research Kubrick undertook for all of his later projects (such as photographing hundreds of suburban London doorways in search of the 'perfect location' in which to place a prostitute in his final film *Eyes Wide Shut*) was the subject of Jon Ronson's 2008 TV documentary *Stanley Kubrick's Boxes*. More recently, in 2012, an entire documentary – *Room 237* – has been made about fans' obsessive interpretations of Kubrick's 1980 horror opus *The Shining*, a film that, despite a lukewarm reception on its initial release (Stephen King has outwardly expressed his displeasure at Kubrick's adaptation of his work on numerous occasions), has grown in critical and cult popularity to the extent that it has arguably surpassed *Dr Strangelove*, 2001 and *A Clockwork Orange* as Kubrick's signature work in the wider realms of popular culture. Perhaps the most unusual manifestation of all this attention has been Kubrick's notably fortan afterlife as the focal point for a number of conspiracy theories which have flourished in the online conspirasphere in recent years.



Hollywood sequels: 1970s disaster maestro Irwin Allen directed the Apollo 13 mission, indubitably). Conspiracy theorists being what they are, this basic theme has been developed into elaborate narratives that argue Kubrick secretly encoded symbolic allusions to the hoax in his subsequent films. For instance, the main proselytiser of these theories, the American Jay Weidner, is featured in *Room 237* expostulating on his theories that *The Shining* is something of a thinly disguised confessional for Kubrick's involvement in one of the greatest cover-ups of all time. Evidence includes the Apollo 11 themed woolly jumper worn by the

child protagonist Danny in one part of the film, and the cans of 'Tang' soft drink that are clearly visible in the many scenes set in the food locker of the Overlook Hotel where the story takes place – Tang being one of the select brands of earthly consumables sent into space as sustenance for the astronauts.¹

The second claim is that Kubrick was privy to the inner workings of the Illuminati, and portrayed a typical Illuminati ritual – rich New Yorkers meeting at a rural manse and dressing up in masks and robes before partaking of a group orgy – as the centrepiece for his final film in 1999, *Eyes Wide Shut*. This assertion is a staple of the innumerable, and often interminable, 'Illuminati symbolism encoded in pop culture' webpages and sites (see FT239:32-38; 258:32-39). For example, one of the most well-established of these sites, *The Vigilant Citizen*, features a multi-part series analysing *Eyes Wide Shut* as Kubrick's expose of the Illuminati elite. This exemplary exercise in conspiracist baroque

The claim is that Kubrick was privy to the inner workings of the Illuminati and their rituals

TWO CLAIMS

Elucidations of the 'Kubrick conspiracies' revolve around two core claims. The first is that the 1969 Moon landings were indeed a hoax (see FT94:34-39; 97:22-27; 168:32-39), and were staged by Kubrick using special effects techniques developed for the production of his science fiction masterpiece 2001: A Space Odyssey, released in 1968 (as is usual with Moon hoax conspiracies, the other seven Moon missions post Apollo 11 don't feature much in such discussions. Presumably they were shot by lesser talents in the standard fashion of





ABOVE LEFT: Stanley Kubrick the ultimate auteur, in control of every element of his later films; the focus of conspiracy theories on the figure of a director is unusual.
 ABOVE RIGHT: John Malkovich as Alan Conway, the conman who bizarrely pretended to be Kubrick during the early 1990s, in the film *Colour Me Kubrick*.

includes gems such as the 'Rainbow' motif evident throughout the film (for instance, in the opening party sequence, protagonist Bill Harford is tempted by a couple of women with an invitation to go 'over the rainbow' with them, while the costume shop he later visits to rent his ritual disguise is called Rainbow Costume Hire) being an allusion to the MK Ultra mind control programming used to create Illuminati sex slaves. Meanwhile, the Indian music that forms the aural backdrop to the ritual orgy is an obvious reference to Crowleyan sex magick (as such magic is derived from 'diabolical', non-Christian spiritual traditions such as Yoga and Tantra).² This claim naturally leads to sinister musings that Kubrick's demise from heart failure was, of course, caused by Illuminati operatives as payback for the director's temerity in depicting the secret society on screen.

CONSPIRACY AND CONTROL

What makes the 'Kubrick conspiracies' particularly interesting within the context of conspiracy culture is their central focus on Kubrick the director. The dominant relationship between cinema and conspiracy theory has traditionally been one based around notions of genre. Films with storylines based on conspiratorial themes and scenarios have long constituted distinct sub-categories of the thriller and drama genres. Notable examples of 'paranoid thrillers' include *The Manchurian Candidate* (1962), *The Parallax View* (1974) and *Arlington Road* (1999); while *All The President's Men* (1976) and *JFK* (1991) are historical dramas predicated around conspiratorial situations (insert 'alternative' or 'pseudo' history to describe *JFK* as appropriate). A more genuinely conspiracist-driven relationship between conspiracy theory and film has developed over

the last couple of decades in connection with the rise of the 'Illuminati' as the dominant paradigm of millennial conspiracy theory. As typified by such luminaries as David Icke and Alex Jones, one of the central tenets of this mindset is the belief that most media content – especially of the popular entertainment variety – is actually operating as a vehicle of conspiratorial mind control, largely by subliminally conditioning viewers through the presentation of esoteric symbolism. A typical piece of exegesis in this vein goes something like this: *Transformers 2* (2009) features a setpiece at the Pyramids of Giza. Pyramids are also Illuminati symbols, like the 'eye in the triangle' logo on American paper currency. Therefore, *Transformers 2* is really a nefarious exercise in Illuminati brainwashing under the 'innocent' guise of a Hollywood blockbuster.

As this description suggests, most of this Illuminati-based conspiracy theorising is



ABOVE: A masked reveller from Kubrick's final film, *Eyes Wide Shut*. Conspiracy seekers see these scenes as evidence of the director's inside knowledge of the Illuminati



ABOVE: Danny (and that carpet) in a scene from *The Shining*; surely that Apollo motif on his sweater is a hint that Kubrick faked the Moon landings...

fixated on intensive interpretation of the visual aspects of films, such as *mise en scene*, editing, and the gestures of actors. Little discussion is generally given to the wider production contexts that are important in the realisation of films, such as the significance of the director as (arguably) the key creative decision-maker in the whole film-making process. The Kubrick conspiracies are exceptional in that, while still focused on analysis of the visual aspects of his films, conspiracy theorists have made the figure of Kubrick himself a central part of their ideas. To illustrate by reference to the above example, while Michael Bay, director of the *Transformers* franchise, is quite possibly an agent of some grand conspiracy to destroy Western culture through the production of wretchedly awful big-budget hokum, he personally isn't getting singled out for attention by conspiracy theorists in the same manner as Kubrick (if he is even mentioned at all).

So what is it about Stanley Kubrick, film-maker, that makes him a figure of such evident fascination for conspiracy theorists? I suggest that the basis of this appeal lies in the resonances between Kubrick's creative methods and artistic vision and some core premises at the heart of conspiracy theorists' conceptualisations of how conspiracies operate.

The first point of connection relates to Kubrick's reputation as a control freak. After an unsatisfying stint working as a Hollywood director for hire on *Spartacus* (1960), Kubrick sought creative autonomy by not only directing but co-producing and co-writing his films, enabling him to develop a reputation as an obsessive perfectionist. Alongside intensive pre-production preparation of the kind typified by the photographs of London

Kubrick developed a reputation as an obsessive perfectionist and control freak

porches, Kubrick is also cited as a record-holder in categories such as most takes of a single scene (allegedly 127 for a sequence in *The Shining* involving Shelley Duvall – purportedly where Wendy Torrance fends off husband Jack on the hotel's main staircase) and longest shoot time (15 months for primary photography on *Eyes Wide Shut*). Kubrick's total dedication to his art was further manifested in attention paid to the nature of publicity materials, such as the size of newspaper advertisements in leading dailies, and the specifics of theatrical projection: a classic Kubrick anecdote relates how he rang up the owner of a NY theatre before the release of *A Clockwork Orange* and advised them on repainting the interior of the cinema in black to avoid adverse reflections being cast on the screen by the white lacquer. On finding that the black paint used was gloss – still too reflective – Kubrick arranged for the interior to be redone in a more suitable matt finish.³

The sense of total control over the film-making process that emanates from Kubrick's oeuvre (at least his post-*Spartacus* work) is resonant with conspiracy theorists' implicit beliefs in the omnipotent capabilities of the conspirators involved. Most conspiracy theories presume that the conspirators had virtually unlimited access to every resource

required to undertake the conspiratorial activity in question (e.g. manpower, money, technology); and that the conspirators have considered and controlled its every possible aspect down to the tiniest detail, so that nothing is left to chance (and, concurrently, that the average person will interpret as chance events what the conspirators have so skilfully planned).

For example, the dominant conspiracy narrative regarding the 9/11 terror attacks – that they were a false flag operation staged by some nefarious cabal within the US political and intelligence establishments – is predicated on the assumption that the conspirators were able to command highly skilled technicians and advanced technology to surreptitiously plant demolition charges in the structure of the World Trade Center buildings (buildings that were not only heavily used, but also situated in one of the world's densest urban environments) in advance preparation for the plane crashes. This presupposed that the hijackings would take place with absolute accuracy, so as to leave most people with no doubt that the planes were the sole cause of the Twin Towers' collapse.

In this respect, Kubrick's meticulous planning and artistic vision can be seen to constitute a shared *modus operandi* with that of conspirators, making it a small step for conspiracy theorists to imagine Kubrick as a literal conspirator himself. Of course, Kubrick could have faked the Moon landings with the detailed aerospace research he undertook for *2001* (using NASA consultants as production designers) and the special effects techniques pioneered for that film (such as front projection). Of course, the ritual in *Eyes Wide Shut* is authentically portrayed – this is a director whose insistence



EXPRESS / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: Conspiracy theorists aren't noted for their sense of humour, but Kubrick certainly had one, as he revealed to unforgettable effect in *Dr Strangelove*.

on authenticity was such that, in *Barry Lyndon* (1975), he used Zeiss lenses of the sort used in astronomical instruments to film scenes lit only by candlelight in order to convey a more genuine visual sense of 18th century life. Of course, Kubrick put hidden symbolism in *The Shining* – as if a perfectionist like him would have idly flicked through the racks down in the costume department and randomly pulled out the Apollo-themed jumper for Danny's ensemble.

The end results of Kubrick's artistic command are films whose meticulously designed *mise en scene*, editing, and soundtracks suggest that they are imbued with layers of meaning well beyond what might be evident on casual viewings. All of Kubrick's work, especially from 2001 onwards, reflects his ability to take standard generic frameworks and use them to explore profound metaphysical and philosophical themes. In terms of the films under discussion here, 2001 takes two standard themes of sci-fi – man vs machine, and humanity's first meeting with alien intelligence – and makes them the basis for a metaphysical parable about the cosmic evolution of mankind; *The Shining* transforms stock horror tropes – a haunted house, a disturbed man – into an allegory on themes such as the psychology of creativity and free will and predestination (the final image which implies that Jack Torrance is the reincarnation of an earlier Overlook guest); while *Eyes Wide Shut* transforms what could ostensibly be a straightforward drama about fidelity into an oneiric, Freudian odyssey of desire, class, and power.

As the very existence of the *Room 237* documentary illustrates, the distanced and ironic tone of Kubrick's works actively invites viewers to engage in speculation and interpretation as to their deeper meanings. Since obsessive speculation and excessive interpretation are defining attributes of conspiracy theory, it is understandable that the likes of Weidner see Kubrick's films as a kind of open invitation to exercise their conspiracy theorist chops.

The distanced tone of his works invites viewers to engage in speculation and interpretation

PUBLIC IMAGE

The other main strand feeding the Kubrick conspiracies is his public image. The popular impression of Kubrick is that of a mysterious and inscrutable figure who lived as a paranoid hermit on his Hertfordshire estate, and whose approach to film-making was that of an Aspergers-type obsessive. Interviews with associates belie this image, painting a picture of Kubrick as an animal-loving family man whose reclusiveness was more about preserving his integrity than any Howard Hughes-style madness: for instance, Kubrick kept up to date with Hollywood happenings through regular phone calls to director friends like Steven Spielberg and John Boorman. In this respect it should also be noted that, for all his meticulous preparation, Kubrick was well open to improvisation (classic examples being Jack Nicholson's famous "Here's Johnny!" interjection in *The Shining* and R Lee Ermey's drill sergeant invective in *Full Metal Jacket*), and usually tempered the 'heavy' themes of his films with doses of black comedy (*Dr Strangelove*, anyone?). By contrast, a sense of humour is something noticeably lacking in most conspiracy theorists. However, for the most part Kubrick's ostensibly enigmatic persona is one upon which all kinds of rumours and interpretations can readily be projected, the intense gaze and hermetic beard that constitute his distinguishing features in production stills being evocative of some archetypal visage of a conspiratorial mastermind.

Given that there are plenty of filmmakers comparable to Kubrick in terms of creative

control, thematic complexity and oblique persona, it seems strange that conspiracy theories have not developed around more auteurs. One who comes immediately to mind is David Lynch. While the standard reading of Lynch's films are as exercises in arthouse surrealism, works like the *Twin Peaks* TV series and feature film (1990-1992), *Lost Highway* (1997), and *Mulholland Drive* (2001) are soaked in occult themes and imagery, notably benign and malevolent entities from other realms shaping human affairs and possession of individuals by such entities. As these themes are central to the Illuminati paradigm, it might be assumed that Lynchian conspiracies would abound in the conspirasphere. Perhaps, given that the cinematic tastes of most conspiracy theorists appear to revolve around the likes of *Transformers 2*, Kubrick is as 'arty' as they get. **FT**

NOTES

1 Weidner's theories are detailed in depth in his 2011 essay 'How Stanley Kubrick Faked the Apollo Moon Landings', posted on the American alternative culture website *Reality Sandwich*: http://realitysandwich.com/23226/kubrick_apollo/.

2 VC (2013), 'The Hidden (And Not So Hidden) Messages in Stanley Kubrick's *Eyes Wide Shut*', Pts 1-3, www.vigilantcitizen.com.

3 Amy Nicholson, 'Eyes Wide Shut at 15', *Vanity Fair* website, 14 July 2014: www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2014/07/eyes-wide-shut-tom-cruise-nicole-kidman; related in an interview with Julian Senior, Kubrick's long-standing publicity director, featured in Michel Ciment's *Kubrick: The Definitive Edition* (Faber & Faber, 2001), p225.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



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researches conspiracy theory and teaches media studies at the University of Waikato in Hamilton, New Zealand. He'd like conspiracy theorists to stop being

biased against costume dramas and get to work on *Barry Lyndon*, thanks.



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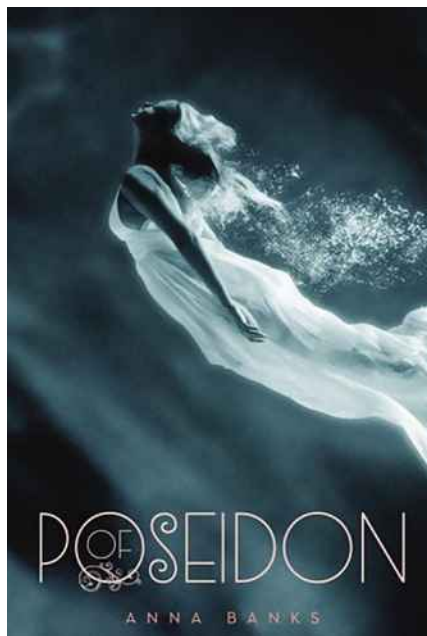
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RECLAIMING THE MERMAID

SOPHIA KINGSHILL asks whether the figure of the fish-tailed siren can be rescued from the traditional roles of victim or vamp to claim a more nuanced role in the modern world.

The enduring popularity of mermaids as a cultural phenomenon means that their story spans eras, continents and art forms. The earliest surviving images date from over three thousand years ago; since then, mermaids have been carved in temples and churches, decorated fountains and palaces, and been used as inn signs, figureheads and tattoos. Sightings of fishy humanoids were reported by the first sailors in the Mediterranean and by pioneers to the New World, and are still rumoured around busy modern coasts. Mermaids can be emblems of maritime trade, of the sea's beauty and terror, or of feminine seduction, and legends of water-spirits, both romantic and frightening, are told worldwide.

A mermaid's meaning depends on who's interpreting her. To a mariner, traditionally, she's an omen of storm; poets have employed her as a symbol of fickle womanhood, her sinuous tail meaning she's slippery by nature; a showman might advertise a



stuffed specimen as a marvel, to bring in the crowds. Representations change over time, too. Whereas in antiquity, a hybrid woman-fish was an image of a goddess or at least an attendant on the deities of the sea, later iconography made her signify sin and temptation, a metaphor reworked by Pre-Raphaelite artists to whom a Siren was a sexy model.

In December 2013, I saw a mermaid in Madrid. She was about four foot long from her waving curls to her tail-fin, scrawled on a wall in red spray paint. Instead of a mirror she had a heart in her hand, next to the feminist symbol of a circle and cross; beneath her was the slogan *Abajo el patriarcado!* – ‘Down with patriarchy!’ Alongside, another message read: *No dejes a tu vida, sea escenario!* – ‘Don’t give up on your life, take centre stage!’

My Spanish Siren was neither vamp nor victim, but a self-aware female, angry and confident.

SIREN SONGS

In 2012, an Internet article identified mermaid novels as the “hottest new trend” of Young Adult fiction, but concluded that they were unlikely to oust vampires or schoolboy magicians from the bestseller lists “because they are, to put it bluntly, girls’ books”. Of the authors mentioned in the article, one is a man, 16 are women.

A few of the books cited are actually about sea boys, but the article’s title refers to mermaids alone. This is standard usage, in spite of the fact that mermen have as ancient a presence, in legend and in art, as mermaids. Although witnesses report seeing bearded as well as breasted creatures in the waves, and if merfolk have a gender at all (given their lack of equipment), there’s nothing to say that their chromosomes



TOP: Mermaids have invaded young adult fiction, usually in books written by women. **LEFT:** A thoroughly modern mermaid in Madrid demands the end of patriarchy and a central role for her sex.

should be more X than Y, the people of the sea are just about unique among creatures real or fabulous, in that the female term covers both sexes: as a collective noun, we're far likelier to talk about 'mermaids' than 'merfolk'. Mermaids, moreover, get more publicity than their he-counterparts. A Google search for 'merman' yields around 800,000 results, 'mermaid' well over 20 million. Males are, for once, the second sex. That doesn't automatically empower the mermaid: quite the reverse. For most of her history, she's been depicted, described, and voiced by male artists, seafarers, theologians and storytellers, and whether as object of desire or figure of fear, a half-naked woman is, or has been, obviously intended to delight or disquiet a largely male audience.

Now the pendulum's swung the other way, and mermaids are inspiring women not just in Young Adult Fish Lit, but across the media. Artist Wangechi Mutu mounted a London exhibition of paintings, sculpture and video in 2014 under the title 'Nguva na Nyoka' (Sirens and Serpents). The nguva or dugong is an aquatic mammal that is the equivalent of the Siren in Kenyan coastal legend; Mutu uses images of the nguva to explore questions of feminism, ecology and metamorphosis, and contrasts its intense and sometimes savage powers with "the sanitised mermaid of popular European culture".

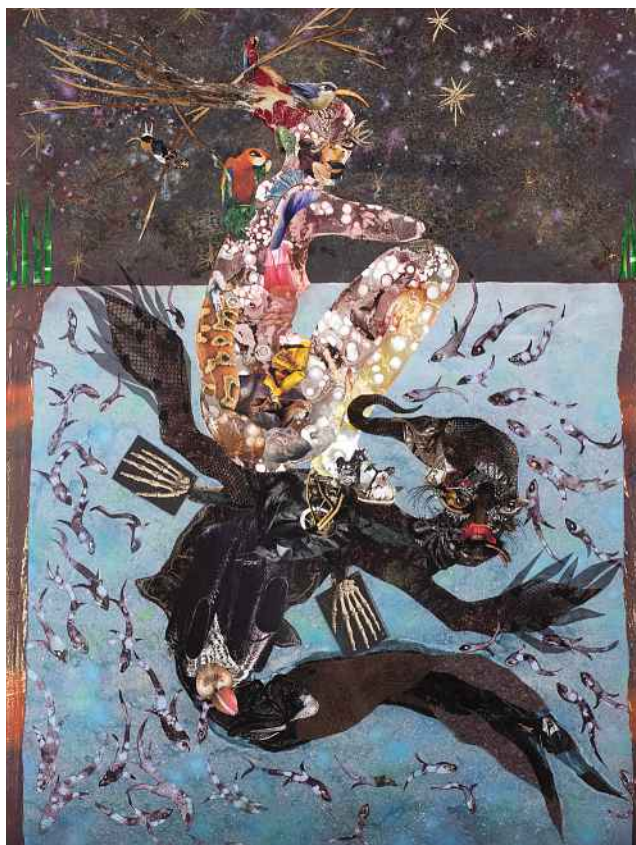
Singer Mariah Carey recorded her 1999 album *Rainbow* in Capri, and in an interview she recalled her pleasure when she saw the Scoglio delle Sirene, 'Sirens' Rock':

"The Sirens would sit there and lure in the men. They gave them this rock because women were considered less important than men, and that's their revenge: they sexually entice men with their voices to come to this rock... I just fell in love with that".

The idea that the Sirens' magnetism helped them get even with men has obvious relevance to the career of a pop diva like Carey, whose appearance and sexuality are exploited to market her singing.

The mermaid as spokeswoman for equality, typified by the Madrid graffiti I saw in 2013, goes back at least to the 1970s when the name *Siren* was used for a feminist magazine in Chicago. A pattern has been established of women reclaiming the mermaid, reacting against male-dominated traditions defining her as submissive or seductive.

There are earlier examples of the belligerent mermaid, without any particular sex bias. Warsaw's city crest, which evolved from a bird-legged, scaly monster (a classical Siren, in fact) to become, by the 18th century, a recognisable mermaid with a woman's body and a fish's tail, has remained militant throughout, carrying a shield and brandishing a sword. Between 1811 and 1915, under the Fourth Partition of Poland, the *Syrenka*, as



LEFT: 'Beneath Lies the Power' by Wangechi Mutu. BELOW: Mariah Carey has admitted to a fascination with the power of the sirens' song over men.

she's known, was officially banned, but was displayed in many places as an assertion of the city's identity, and in the Second World War she was adopted as the badge of the Polish II Corps.

Pablo Picasso, visiting a Warsaw apartment block under construction in 1948, drew the *Syrenka* on an interior wall, giving her the Communist hammer to hold instead of a sword. This image survives only in photographs, since the mural wasn't universally admired. The first person offered the flat in question refused it, on the grounds that he had small children and the mermaid had bare breasts, while the next (childless) candidates were equally horrified: "It was huge, my God was it huge. Her bosom was like two balloons, the eyes were triangular, at the end of her long, oddly long arm she held a hammer; and she had a short, tapering tail at the back".

After a couple of years, the flat's tenants quietly had their private Picasso whitewashed, but the

Syrenka has continued to appear as a political symbol, employed by supporters of Solidarity in the 1980s, and more recently by the Warsaw Gay Movement.

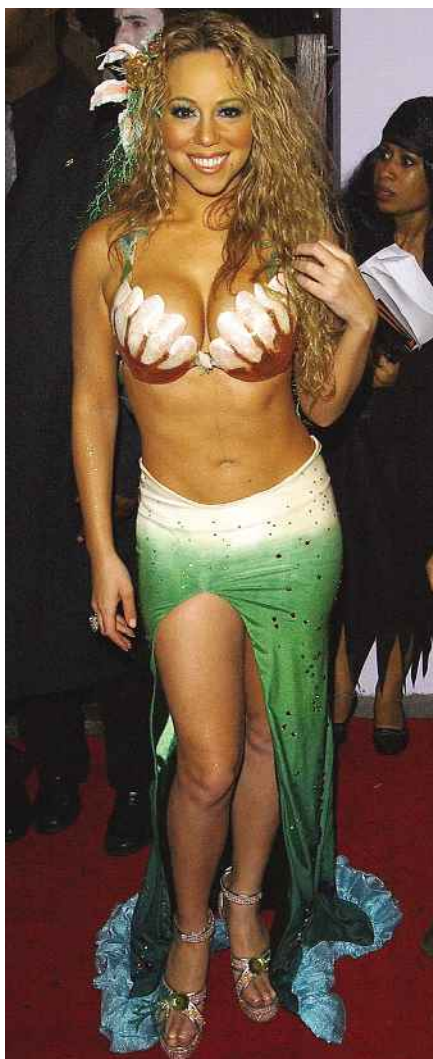
LITTLE MERMAIDS

The common modern perception of the mermaid, however, is of a whimsical and child-friendly fantasy. This image is based to a great extent on the ubiquitous kitsch spawned by the Disney cartoon: but the Little Mermaid herself is not so wholesome, on closer inspection.

Ariel, as she's christened in the film, is drawn with a girlish figure and a pertly pretty face. Her hair is neither seaweed-green nor princess-golden, but a vibrant red, and she hides her breasts in a bikini top, modest for the family market. Ariel's inquisitive nature leads her to take an interest in the human world, and while people-watching, she falls in love with the young Prince Eric. When his ship sinks in a storm she saves his life, but swims away before he can see her. She bargains with the sea-witch Ursula for a spell allowing her to exchange her tail temporarily for a pair of legs, in return giving up her voice, which Ursula magically traps in a shell.

Unless she receives a kiss of true love, the mermaid is told, she must remain in the witch's power forever. The wicked Ursula then transforms herself into an attractive woman, and sings in Ariel's voice to bewitch Eric. True identities are eventually discovered, the witch is killed, and Ariel, having regained her voice and become fully human with the help of her father the sea-king, marries her prince.

The Danish original is an altogether darker affair, with a stern message about redemption



through suffering. Early in Andersen's 'Little Mermaid', as in the film, its teenage heroine (here nameless) rescues the prince from a shipwreck.

Then, however, it is not love alone that impels her to beg for a human shape, but the desire for an immortal afterlife. Her grandmother tells her that this can be achieved if a man marries her: at the moment the priest joins their hands, she will be granted a share of her husband's soul.

In order to win her prince and thus her chance of eternal life, the mermaid visits a witch. She is warned that having her tail split into two legs will mean continuous agony – every step she takes will feel as if she is treading on a blade sharp enough to make her bleed – and, moreover, that becoming human is a one-way journey. She will never be a mermaid again.

In payment for her spell, the witch demands the mermaid's voice, which she takes not with a reversible charm, but by cutting out her tongue. Dumb, and in terrible pain, the mermaid reaches the palace, where she is kept as a kind of pet, allowed to sleep on a cushion outside her prince's door. The prince is fond of her, but his love is bestowed on a princess he believes to be the girl who saved him from drowning. He marries the princess, and the mermaid acts as bridesmaid at the wedding.

Her sisters, meanwhile, longing to bring her back to them, have acquired a magic knife from the witch. This, they tell the mermaid, must be plunged into the prince's heart, and his blood will turn her feet back into a fish-tail. She can't bring herself to kill him.



Instead she throws the knife into the sea, then dives in herself, and feels her body melt into foam, a mermaid's death.

Nevertheless she does not die, but is transformed into a spirit of the air, who can gain a soul by three centuries of good deeds. One of her ethereal companions tells her that for every good child she visits, the 300 years will be shortened by one year, but at the sight of a naughty child

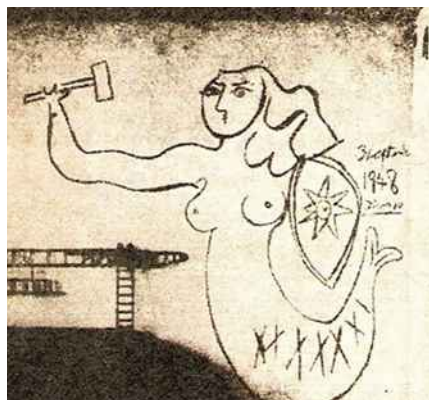
she will cry, and every tear shed will add a day to her probation.

The religious trappings do have a certain authority behind them. Mediaeval theologians had speculated as to whether mermaids and other 'monsters' possessed souls, and some concluded that a mermaid did not, but wished she did. The idea that she could gain one by marrying a human being was proposed by authors earlier than Andersen, and the Little Mermaid's metamorphosis into an airy form is based on philosophical concepts of the four elements – earth, air, fire and water.

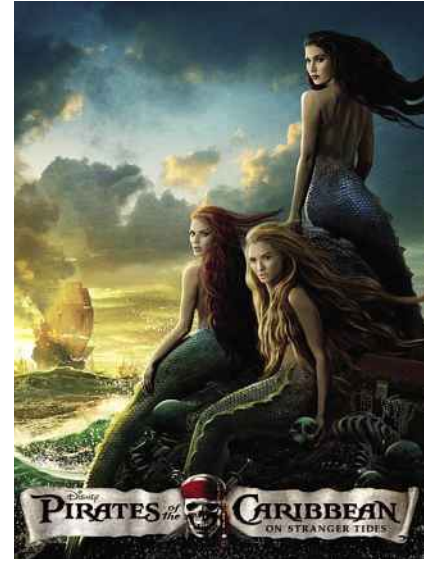
The physical and emotional torments that the mermaid undergoes are Andersen's own invention, and however unpleasant to read, they are what gives the story its power both as tragic romance and as parable of a female rite of passage. Writing for children in the early 19th century, Andersen could not say straight out that in order to be a man's wife, the mermaid would have to be able to have sex, and therefore must have sex organs. Instead, he has the wise grandmother point out that humans consider tails ugly, hence the need for legs. Then, whether intentionally or not, he invests the splitting of the mermaid's tail with all the pain and secret mess of puberty and loss of virginity, her feet standing in for what in a woman is hidden and below. Wordless, in pain, though no one sees you bleeding, unrequitedly in love, longing for a better world than this one: what adolescent can't identify?

Sadistic and didactic, the tale makes uneasy reading, and one can readily understand Disney's changes to make the plot palatable, but it was widely loved long before the studio got their hands on it. Operas and ballets have been based on it, Shirley Temple starred in it on television, and comic-book, manga and anime versions have been produced. Illustrations have tended to emphasise the mermaid's virginal purity and

MOST FAMOUS OF ALL VISUAL INTERPRETATIONS IS THE STATUE THAT HAS BECOME A



TOP AND CENTRE: The mermaid on Warsaw's city crest has long been a militant figure, bearing a sword and carrying a shield; she was drawn by Picasso on a mural in a Warsaw apartment, now lost. **ABOVE:** Edvard Eriksen's sculpture in Copenhagen, inspired by Hans Christian Andersen's tale, remains the world's most iconic mermaid; she has been vandalised in protests and, as in the picture at right, oo-opted into political action in her own right; here she is protesting against climate change.



ABOVE LEFT: Disney's animated film *The Little Mermaid*, derived from Andersen's story, has spawned spin-offs of many kinds, including this musical show at Tokyo's DisneySea attraction. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Disney unveiled some very different mermaids in *Pirates of the Caribbean* – literal man-eaters equipped with razor-sharp teeth. **BELOW:** Homer's mythological sirens were not mermaids. Here they are depicted by William Etty in his painting *The Sirens and Ulysses* (1837).

wistful charm, although one sketch by Lorenz Frølich hides her breasts but gives her a suggestively cleft bum above her fishtail.

Most famous of all visual interpretations must be the statue which has become a national symbol of Copenhagen. After seeing a ballet based on Andersen's tale, Carl Jacobsen, head of Carlsberg Breweries and a great patron of the arts, commissioned Edvard Eriksen's sculpture, which was unveiled in 1913. Eriksen wanted to give his Little Mermaid legs, but Jacobsen held out for a tail, and a compromise was reached: the Copenhagen mermaid has clearly defined thighs, knees and calves, terminating in two large graceful fins. The sculptor may have realised how vital it was for Andersen's heroine to be a forked animal – although locals have explained the legs as allowing their Mermaid to ride a bicycle, like the rest of the Danes. In fact the double-tailed mermaid is not a novelty, but a very old motif.

Despite being visited and admired by countless tourists, the Copenhagen Little Mermaid, like her fairytale original, has suffered. In 1964, her head was sawn off, although it was quickly replaced using a cast from the original model. An arm was removed in 1984, she was decapitated again in 1998, and in 2003 she was blown right off her base by an explosive charge, while more superficial damage has been achieved with paint.

At least some of this vandalism has been motivated by protest. In one of the latest episodes, 'March 8' – the date of International Women's Day – was painted on the Mermaid, and she was given a dildo to hold. You could say she's an obvious target for feminist re-interpretation. Andersen's Little Mermaid is a willing sacrifice, both to the insensitive prince, and more importantly to the Church, which denies her a soul except at the cost of anguish.

MERMAIDS OF THE CARIBBEAN

Older than either the radical or the meek mermaid is the rapacious variety, of which the fearsome creatures who appear in *Pirates*



of the Caribbean are recent avatars. The film does feature one 'good' mermaid who falls in love with a human being, but the rest of the breed are carnivorous and merciless. At their first appearance, a couple of nymphs raise heads and arms from the sea to beguile a boatful of sailors with their sweet voices and youthful faces; then the picture pulls back, to reveal more and more converging on the boat like minnows to bait, and finally we see shoals of them leaping around their terrified prey.

On dry land they appear as luscious women, legs and all (what's between is never on display, and their breasts are obscured by long hair), but underwater they are seen to have tails, and fanged mouths like vampires. Although they use their sex to entice, they only want men as food.

Much of this, including their appetite to consume men in the literal sense, is long-standing legend. Homer's Sirens – who are not mermaids at all, but who significantly inform the tradition – strew their surroundings with human bones. Themes of homicide and lust intertwine from an early date: a work of the third or second century BC, purporting to record the adventures of Alexander the Great in India, mentions women living immersed in a river, who were beautiful – "Their complexion was snow-white, like nymphs their hair spread over their backs" – but who suffocated Alexander's soldiers during or after the act of love.

A 13th-century encyclopedia (in 16th-century translation from Latin) describes the

Siren as temptress and cannibal:

A beast of the sea wonderfully shapen as a maid from the navell upward, and a fish from the navell downward, and this wonderful beast is gladde and merrie in tempest, and sadde and heavie in fayre weather. With sweetness of song this beast maketh shipmen to sleepe, and when shee seeth that they be asleepe, she goeth into the ship, and ravisheth which she may take with her, and bringeth him into a drye place, and maketh him first lye by her, and doe the deede of lechery, and if he will not or may not, then she slaieth him and eateth his flesh.

Pirates of the Caribbean presents an authentic characterisation, and an unusually forthright one for the cinema. More commonly, films have expressed a mermaid's predatory nature in terms of seduction: in *Miranda* (1948), Glynis Johns's character creates emotional havoc among her string of suitors before returning to the sea, and in *Splash!* (1984), Madison (Daryl Hannah) ultimately takes her lover (Tom Hanks) under the waves with her. Although this is presented as a happy ending, it's made clear that he can never come back to the world of humans.

It's always a risk to meet a mermaid. **FT**



Extracted and adapted from *Mermaids* by Sophia Kingshill, published by Little Toller Books (www.littletoller.co.uk) priced £15.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



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THE GREAT ALIEN BAKE-OFF

Bread is a foodstuff rich in human history and symbolism, but it has also played a surprising role in all kinds of entity encounters over the centuries. **JOSHUA CUTCHIN** opens his otherworldly oven and shares a selection of fairy loaves, alien pancakes and sasquatch crackers.

If thou tastest a crust of bread, thou tastest all the stars and all the heavens. – Robert Browning

On 6 July 1990, Anna Dmitrievna Yerygina was herding goats down a lonesome road in Zvarykino, Belgorod, Russia, when a mysterious woman appeared out of thin air. Dressed in a light-grey loose-fitting outfit with a hood, she seemed ordinary, if a bit on the tall and lean side.

The woman approached Yerygina to greet her, then asked if goats' milk was tasty. Yerygina said it was, but expressed her preference for that of cows. The woman listened, then without segue abruptly invited her on a brief excursion that would last no longer than three hours. Though initially concerned for her herd and family during any absence, Yerygina's worries evaporated when the woman touched her shoulder and said: "Do not be afraid." She felt a peculiar calm fall over her and was escorted toward a large oval craft in a nearby field. A man awaited them, ready to help the two ladies aboard.

Yerygina sat in the dimly lit interior and, the next thing she knew, she was in an entirely different room with several other individuals dressed in the same grey coveralls. In spite of the lack of windows or other clues, she had the intuition that she must be on another world, a sentiment expressed to her hosts. Asked how that felt, Yerygina replied that everything seemed wonderful there, a heaven in contrast to her joyless life on Earth. The entities seemed to radiate a sort of spiritual warmth and hospitality. One of them offered Yerygina some bread, which she described as very



ONE OF THE ENTITIES
OFFERED YERYGINA
SOME BREAD, WHICH
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tasty, as well as a strange liquid. When she finished the meal her memory went blank – she recovered consciousness back in the field by her goats, the strange woman at her side. The woman said goodbye to her with a smile, promising they would meet again. Yerygina went on to have several more experiences, her curious encounters reported in both the *Zarya* (Belarus) and *Leninskaya Smena* (Belgorod Oblast) newspapers.¹

FAIRY LOAVES

Like other examples of food and drink exchanged between eyewitnesses and non-human entities – what I term 'entity food' – bread often precedes a trance or lapse in memory. Although occasionally encountered in contactee narratives, this is most commonly found in fairy folklore.

The children of Sandy MacDonald saw fairies in 1912 near Ardnamurchan, a remote peninsula in the Scottish Highlands. The two boys were playing by the water when two tiny figures in green miraculously appeared. The entities invited the boys to their nearby boat, where a tiny woman and her rat-sized dog could be seen in the cabin. The lads declined, and were instead treated to "a few loaves of faery bread, each about the size of a walnut" (it is interesting that the boys were by the sea, since fossilised sea urchins are sometimes referred to as "fairy loaves," and roughly correspond to the size of the bread described).²

After they ate, one of fairies said: "We are departing now... We will not be coming back here any more, but others of our race will be coming." The boys were snapped out of their



trance by their sister, who arrived shortly thereafter, and neither seemed further affected from eating the loaves.³

The rare appearances of bread in Sasquatch abductions are presumably the result of theft; in a 1602 French case related by Norwegian cryptozoologist Erik Knatterud, one Anthoinette Culet claimed to have been abducted by an “ugly but amorous” hairy beast that “stole and brought her baskets of bread, fruit, cheese, linen and thread”. That same night the beast wandered into the village, where it was shot dead, the post-mortem declaring it to be a bear, albeit one that “almost looked like a human” with “a navel like humans [sic]”.⁴

Entity-offered bread is often described as delicious or sweet. Scottish lore held that any beautiful, healthy mother who allowed a fairy babe to suckle at her breast would receive delicious food tasting of “wheaten-bread, mixed with wine and honey.”⁵ In 1645, Anne Jeffries fell ill, afterwards possessing clairvoyance and the ability to visit the fairies; they would leave her food, which, when shared with her employer, was described as “the most delicious bread that ever I did eat, either before or since.” (See FT198:38-41)⁶

Modern accounts explicitly mentioning bread are much harder to come by than those from fairy lore, though they are not unheard of. Lina Ivanova Kravets had a lengthy encounter with a trio of 11ft (3m) tall, three-eyed “extraterrestrials” in Shtanivka, Ukraine, in August 1953. They claimed to be on a mission to rescue a missing scout team. The host and her unlikely guests discussed several issues of great importance, including spirituality and life on the visitors’ planet. Before her encounter ended, Kravets was given a piece of “bread” the size of a small coin. Breaking it open she spied something dark and odourless inside, and decided to return the gift without partaking. The tiny size of the bread evokes the aforementioned 1912 MacDonald case.⁷



On 31 December 1989, *Moskovskaya Pravda* ran an article describing the account of “Mrs L”, a 40-something mother of two living in Protvino, Russia. On 13 September of that year, Mrs L was returning home from the grocery store when two tall women in tight silvery suits jumped out from behind some boulders and paralysed her. The women, who had light blonde hair, grey-green skin, and hats with antennæ, took the witness to a small disc-shaped craft by the side of the road. They invited their captive for a ride, which they insisted would not last long; after some prodding, Mrs L hesitantly accepted. Inside were three chairs, one of which was occupied by a man with his back to her. Mrs L offered some of the bread she had just purchased, but the women declined, instead offering their guest a bit of “their” bread. Without thinking, she reflexively popped it into her mouth and swallowed; she later described the taste as that of a lightly sweet rye bread. The craft ascended, flying over Protvino before dropping Mrs L off at her apartment. The space people told her they would meet again, much to Mrs L’s chagrin.⁸

JOE SIMONTON’S PANCAKES

Without a doubt the most famous entity food report of all time is the case of Joe Simonton, a chicken farmer from Eagle River, Wisconsin.

It was around 11am on 18 April 1961 when Simonton noticed a strange sound similar to radials on wet pavement coming from outside his farmhouse. Looking outside, he noticed a peculiar silver machine descending into his yard, around 30ft (9m) in diameter and “shaped like two inverted bowls.” Simonton stepped closer and a hatch opened on the craft, revealing three dark-skinned “Italians” inside. Each was about 5ft (1.5m) tall, dressed in dark outfits with knitted headgear.

One of the occupants held a shiny jug aloft, and the good-natured Simonton took the vessel inside to fill it with water. Upon returning to the craft he caught a glimpse of its interior, which to his eyes appeared



made of wrought iron. Simonton’s attention was then drawn to one of the men who was “frying food on a flameless grill of some sort.” Noticing his curiosity, the man offered Simonton four flat, porous pancakes, each about 3in (8cm) in diameter. The entities sealed the craft and departed, the entire exchange lasting around five minutes.⁹

Simonton’s credibility was viewed by the local community, and every investigator of the case, as beyond reproach, both for his reputation as an honest farmer and his lack of a motive in concocting such a ridiculous tale. This credibility was only strengthened by the pancakes, which were still in his possession. One was given to a local judge, one to J Allen Hynek (UFO investigator for the Air Force’s Project Blue Book), one to the National Investigation Committee on Aerial Phenomena, and one Simonton kept for himself – he claimed they tasted like cardboard.¹⁰

A thorough analysis was performed on one of the pancakes by the US Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, and the food was found to be made of terrestrial, if tasteless, ingredients, including hydrogenated oil and buckwheat flour. There are conflicting reports as to the exact type of grain used, and rumours circulate about “unknown grains” in the pancake; in any event, the results of the analysis were underwhelming. The official United States Air Force explanation was that Simonton was honest but had mistakenly conflated the reality of his breakfast with his dreams.

Jacques Vallée wrote about Simonton’s encounter at great length in his book *Passport to Magonia*, immediately seeing parallels between the experience and interactions with fairy folk. This is a worthy line of inquiry, and closer scrutiny yields more similarities and questions: for example, is there a link between inedible fairy food devoid of glamour and the blandness of Simonton’s pancakes? Taking a slightly different approach, is there some connection between the missing flavour of the pancakes and the *foyson* extracted from food by fairies? (See panel opposite.)

In her *Encyclopedia of Fairies in World Folklore and Mythology*, Theresa Bane describes the *oennerbanske*, a race of dwarfs native to the Netherlands’ Friesland Islands prone to stealing young girls and children. The *oennerbanske* have a gentler side, however, as they are also known for helping in building construction and “assisting the farmers in the field by bringing them fresh water to drink and pancakes to eat.”¹¹

OTHER GRAINS

Other grains have been reported by entity food witnesses in addition to bread. Rice, a food staple for many cultures, appears in several reports, such as the tale of a boy who was spirited away on 30 September 1907, in Aichi prefecture, Japan. The child was setting out white rice cakes as religious offerings for an upcoming festival when he mysteriously disappeared for several hours. After some time his family heard a loud thump in their house and visited the

ABOVE LEFT: Enrique Mercado Orué claims he was taken aboard an ET spacecraft where he ate four unusually sustaining crackers. ABOVE RIGHT: Joe Simonton examines one of the four pancakes he was given by aliens.

THE NATURE OF FAIRY FOOD



ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS / GETTY IMAGES

What is the food given by fairies? Though it often has the appearance of baked goods, wine, or milk, legend alludes to the use of *glamour*, or illusion, used by fairies to make themselves appear different from how they truly look, and similar spells are cast upon what they offer as food. Alasdair MacGregor wrote in *The Peat-Fire Flame: Folk-tales and Traditions of the Highlands and Islands* of a woman who abstained from food in fairyland, and afterwards “came to examine the food... [and] she found it to consist ‘only of the refuse of the earth.’”¹

Such concepts can be traced back to early legend. The Scandinavian hero Väinämöinen (pictured at right), upon rejecting beer in the Underworld, “gaz’d awhile upon the tankard; Lo! Within it frogs were spawning, worms about its sides were laying.”² In the story of St Collen, the seventh-century Welsh saint visited the King of Fairies, and declared, “I do not eat the leaves of a tree!” when he saw the ‘food’ for what it truly was.³ Witches, conflated with fairies by the Church, ascribed similar attributes to the Devil’s



food – one of the famous Pendle witches reported in 1612 that “although they did eat [at their Masses], they were never the fuller nor better for the same.”⁴

This theme reappears in modern accounts. Abdul Mutalib disappeared in January 1982 from his guard post at a recruit training centre near Kuala Lumpur. A search was mounted to no avail, and locals whispered of the *buni*, elemental beings who, in their minds, were responsible for several such disappearances. Abductees who returned spoke of “a distant place” and “delicious food” – although

when they vomited, only worms and grasses came up.⁵

If the food offered by fairies is illusory, what do they themselves actually consume? Varying reports point to “barley meal, poisonous mushrooms, goat milk, red deer meat, silver weed roots, heather stalks, toadstools, and weeds”.⁶ Ufologist Jacques Vallée often identified meat and pure water as the primary food source of the fairies, citing the writings of anthropologist WY Evans-Wentz.

Most literature, however, posits that they feed on the essence, also called the *toradh* or *foyson*, of food.⁷ Parallels to the *foyson* concept can be found with the Arabic *djinn*, which “eat human food, stealing its energy.”⁸ Food without its *foyson* is unfit for human consumption. Evans-Wentz, in his seminal *The Fairy-Faith in Celtic Countries*, was told that food left for fairy offerings was “not allowed to be eaten afterwards by man or beast, not even pigs... The underlying idea seems to be that the fairies extract the spiritual essence from food offered to them, leaving behind the grosser

elements.”⁹ The book also details housecats who drank milk left out for *piskies* and became sick. The folklore bears similarities to a 1970 case in Chile, where a small creature was seen gliding through a family’s livestock pasture. The next day, 10 of their llamas were found exsanguinated. The family attempted to cook one of the animals, but the meat tasted foul; even the vultures who ate the remaining carcasses were seen to vomit, and the family had no choice but to burn all that remained.¹⁰

Subsiding on *foyson* allows fairies to consume living animals without apparent harm. One Welsh farmer watched the *Verry Volk* slaughter his ox, then resurrect it, minus a piece of leg bone they had misplaced. The next day the animal appeared healthy, save for a slight limp.¹¹

It is easy, and perhaps sensible, to write off the concept of *foyson* as a way to explain why most offerings left for fairies remain physically untouched.

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roof to investigate, only to find their son unconscious with white rice cake covering his mouth. When he came to, the boy claimed to have met a stranger who “walked over the tree tops” and took him into peoples’ homes, eating all the cakes that had been set out. The boy became a dullard afterward, a variation on the motif of eating in fairyland and returning irreparably changed. Another Japanese tale, this one from 1814, involved a boy taken to a strange land for several days and also fed cakes, but this time to no apparent ill effect.¹²

In his out-of-print book *UFO Contact from Undersea*, the late Lt Col Wendelle Stevens interviewed one “David Delmundo” who was allegedly abducted off the coast of Puerto Rico in 1972. Delmundo (a pseudonym) had been taken by a short, grey-skinned being with wraparound eyes to a secret base beneath the seafloor where he was fed a “white, creamy substance similar to cornmeal”. He described the taste as neither sweet nor salty yet still “very good and satisfying,” leaving him with the sensation of being nourished.¹³ This sense of satisfaction is a recurring theme in cases where witnesses consume grain products. Enrique Mercado Orué, author of *28 Horas a Bordo de un OVNI (28 Hours on Board a UFO)*, claimed that on 26 August 1976, in Mexico City he was taken aboard an ET craft by beautiful humanlike inhabitants. The entities, of varying size and clad in form-fitting metallic outfits, escorted Orué to a guest room where his hunger was sated with four “crackers” and a small glass of something resembling wine. He was told that this meal would sustain him for four days.¹⁴

DEATH AND REBIRTH

Bread has long been associated with fertility and rebirth. Wheat dies and is reborn time



WHEAT DIES AND IS REBORN, AND HAS BEEN TIED TO THEMES OF RENEWAL SINCE ANCIENT EGYPT

and again, and has been tied to themes of renewal since ancient Egypt. For millennia, bakers in countless cultures have fashioned bread in the shape of Moons, Suns, and genitalia, representing reproduction and rebirth. This duality is well represented in the Bible: the Old Testament associates bread

with the fertility of the Earth, mentioning it more than 20 times, while the New Testament (over 30 references) embraces bread as a focal point of the Eucharist, offering eternal life. In short, bread symbolises the cyclical nature of existence in all its many forms.¹⁵ Bread’s power also extended to protection against evil. In Holland, stale bread in a cradle wards off disease; in Morocco it cures stuttering; in Egypt, indigestion. Bread and salt have long been central to Eurasian hospitality rites.¹⁶ As noted earlier, a bit of stale bread could safeguard against fairies and yet at the same time, along with milk, it was the most common offering made to appease the Good Folk.

Bread has also, at least tangentially, been used as a means of explaining perceived paranormal phenomena. Ergot, a type of fungus known to grow on rye and other grains, can produce convulsive symptoms if consumed; some have posited that cultures suffering an outbreak of ergotism could mistake the disease for bewitchment. A similar theory gaining traction among historians is that ergot-tainted bread may have caused the lycanthropic hallucinations that lead to the extensive werewolf trials of 16th and 17th century Europe.

It was perhaps a misnomer to cite the Joe Simonton case as the most famous entity food account. Without a doubt, more people are familiar with the manna that rained from Heaven to feed the Israelites, sustaining them as they traversed the desert en route to the Promised Land. Scholars have banged their collective heads against the wall for centuries seeking a scientific explanation for exactly what sustained the Jewish people those four decades, but to no avail. Theories range from airborne bits of lichen to quail dung (!) to tamarisk trees, the candidate currently with the most academic cachet.



TOP: Manna falls from Heaven in a 1571 woodcut. ABOVE: Rice cakes, or mochi, are offered to Aka-Oni (‘Red Devil’) during the Oni Oi annual festival in Japan.

RIGHT: The wheatfields of Ukraine.

When attacked by insects, the tamarisk tree actually weeps a sugary sap that hardens and falls to the ground in edible pieces.¹⁷ Of course, none of these explain how a generation could subsist on such an odd, meagre diet alone.

Researcher Peter Gilman suggested in 1967 that manna could have been “angel hair,” the cobweb-like (or gelatinous, depending on the account) material occasionally found after UFO sightings, particularly at landing sites. There are two primary problems with this theory, however: one, angel hair tends to evaporate quickly, and, as such, its make-up has never been studied for any nutritional value; and two, such a theory simply explains away one mystery with another.¹⁸

Notions of bread as a gift from Heaven go much deeper than the Old Testament tale of manna. The serendipitous crossbreeding between different species of wheat some 10,000 years ago marked a major turning point for civilisation, allowing mankind to make the transition from a hunter-gatherer existence to an agrarian society, where large settlements were able to grow and flourish. In the apocryphal Book of Enoch, this development is attributed to the Nephilim, who taught mankind how to cultivate plants, a role similar to that played by the Kachinas in Hopi legends and the god Quetzalcoatl in Mesoamerican myth.

Just how lucky was this convenient hybridisation? “Since the emergence of bread wheat about 10,000 years ago, the unlikely yet successful crossing of two distinct species of wheat grains has never happened again,” writes Rita Louise. “Scientists continue to claim that nature was able to produce a series of fortunate genetic anomalies that ultimately transformed humanity, yet are still unable to explain how they occurred”.¹⁹ It is well known that 1989-1991 saw a surge in UFO and entity reports from the former



USSR, although it is unclear whether this represents an actual ramping-up of such events or if censorship was simply more lenient in the dying days of the Soviet Union. Regardless, consider the fact that a substantial number of modern entity food cases explicitly featuring bread – be it given to or taken from witnesses – are from Slavic countries, with a major window of incidents in this 1989-1991 timeframe. This fact is perhaps ironic when one considers that the region, in particular Ukraine, has long been regarded as the “bread basket of Europe.”

Bread’s association with rebirth may offer some insight into its appearance during this period. Ancient Slavs engaged in a ritual they called “baking the child,” where a young boy or girl was placed inside a warm stove in a symbolic parallel to the transformative baking process. Tamra Andrews writes in *Nectar & Ambrosia: An Encyclopedia of Food in World Mythology* that baking the child was “a healing ritual; the child metaphorically returned to the mother’s womb to be born again healthy, transformed, and reformed by the heating fire. The Slavs performed this ritual to heal through fire, to change the unacceptable to the acceptable, just as the baking process turned raw food into cooked.”²⁰

A hideous literal version of this ritual appears in folktales of the witch Baba Yaga and in the tale of Hansel and Gretel.

Could the cluster of reports featuring bread in the collapsing Soviet Union somehow be an expression of the mother country’s transition and rebirth back into Russia? If we entertain the suggestion that a witness’s psychology may have some bearing upon the experience – a notion supported by reports of telepathy with humanoids and UFOs responding to thought – that may well be the case. **FI**



Extracted and adapted from *A Trojan Feast: The Food and Drink Offerings of Aliens, Faeries and Sasquatch*, published by Anomalist Books (www.anomalistbooks.com) at \$15.95.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



JOSHUA CUTCHIN is a native of North Carolina with a long interest in fortiana. He holds a Masters in Music Literature and a Masters in Journalism from the University of Georgia, and currently works as a public affairs specialist. In addition to his media work, Cutchin is also a published composer and maintains an active performing schedule as a jazz and rock tuba player, having appeared on eight albums and live concert DVDs. *A Trojan Feast* is his first book.

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WARLORDS OF MACCLANTIS

SD TUCKER looks back at one of Scotland's earliest nationalist politicians, Lewis Spence, and his quest to find Atlantis hidden not beneath the waves, but within the blood of his countrymen.

And so, Scotland has spoken, with an amazing 56 out of 59 Scottish MPs now flying the flag of the SNP. It has been a long road for nationalists north of the border to get to this point, though, with the SNP's effective predecessor, the National Party of Scotland, having been formed as long ago as 1928.¹ The NPS's first-ever candidate for Westminster during a by-election in 1929, Lewis Spence, would doubtless be ecstatic that his vision for a self-governing Scottish nation had at last come so close to fruition. Perhaps soon the stage will also finally be set for the implementation of the other part of Spence's long-term plan for his country, too – namely, the resurrection amongst its people of the noble spirit embodied by the inhabitants of the sunken kingdom of Atlantis.

There is little space today for occult interests amongst SNP politicians.² With Lewis Spence, though, the situation was somewhat different; for, as well as penning such mundane-sounding tracts as *Freedom for Scotland: The Case for Scottish Self-Government*, he was also the author of rather more esoteric tomes like *The Problem of Atlantis*, *Atlantis in America* and *The Occult Sciences in Atlantis*.³

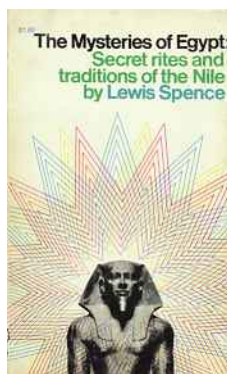
Like all good statesmen, Spence had a hinterland, somehow finding the time away from the campaign-trail to pen popular works about world-folklore and ancient civilisations like *The Magic and Mysteries of Mexico* and *The Mysteries of Egypt: The Secret Rites and Traditions of the Nile*; but it was the hidden mysteries of Britain and its people, particularly the Celts, which were closest to Spence's heart. Born in 1874 in Broughty Ferry, Spence qualified as a dentist at Edinburgh University before changing tack and becoming an editor on *The Scotsman* newspaper in 1899. Maybe he found this employment to be a bit too much like pulling teeth, however, as beginning around 1905 and continuing more-or-less until his death in



1955, he started supplementing his living with his books about ancient mysteries and the supernatural. He also wrote poems, pamphlets, stories and plays. It was in the 1920s that he first began to write about Atlantis, and it was when speculating about the 'history' of this non-existent place that his abiding interests in both occultism and Scottish nationalism began particularly to fuse.

THE ATHENS OF THE NORTH

Curiously, the modern myth of Atlantis had begun with a book written by another politician: the US Congressman Ignatius Donnelly's best-selling 1882 *Atlantis: The Antediluvian World*, which claimed that Plato's fabled island was a real place and the origin of nearly all world culture and mythology. Donnelly's book was taken seriously by many who read it, with even Britain's PM, WE Gladstone, making the extraordinary suggestion (unromantically vetoed by the



LEFT: Lewis Spence, proud Scottish nationalist and champion of the Atlantean race. **BELOW:** William Comyns Beaumont's Atlantean theories included the notion that Athens was in fact the small Scottish town of Dumbarton.

Treasury) that the Royal Navy send a task-force out to scour the Atlantic for evidence the Congressman was right.⁴

Donnelly had spawned a monster, and it was not long before people were trying to identify the 'true' location of the vanished continent in places all over the world, including Scotland. The most elaborate attempt was that of William Comyns Beaumont, a one-time hack on the *Daily Mail* who carried that organ's alleged 'Little Englander' mindset to its logical conclusion in his truly bizarre books *The Riddle of Prehistoric Britain* and *Britain the Key to World History*,⁵ in which he claimed not only that the British Isles were really Atlantis, and that giants with access to super-advanced weaponry and flying-machines used to live here, but also that

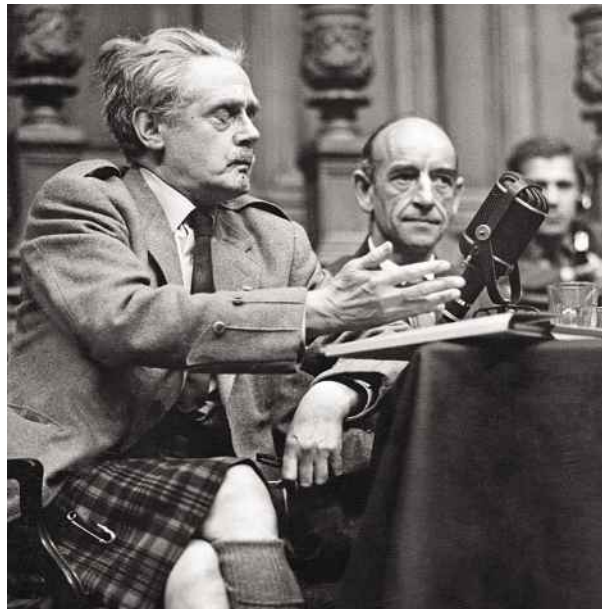
every single significant event of ancient history had actually occurred somewhere between Land's End and John o' Groats, rather than in the Middle East or the Mediterranean, as mainstream historians falsely claimed. Scotland was particularly blessed in this regard, it seems, seeing as Jerusalem was really Edinburgh, Mount Olympus was actually Ben Nevis, the Egyptian Pharaohs were all Scotsmen and, most remarkably of all, Athens was in fact the small town of Dumbarton. Anticipating that sceptics might object to this final claim by pointing out that all the great old buildings of Classical Athens would appear today to be located in, well, Athens, Beaumont had a simple answer ready. The Roman Emperor Hadrian, whose hatred for the Scots was demonstrated by that big wall he had constructed to keep them out of England, had simply stolen the Parthenon and the rest from their true home in Dumbarton and had them re-erected in Greece through pure spite.⁶ The next time the Greek Government demand the Elgin Marbles back, I think someone should

take their representatives aside and politely inform them of these facts.

Lewis Spence, then, was not alone in giving credence to the myth of Atlantis. Spence's ideas differed from some of his rivals, however. Rather than claiming that Britain was Atlantis, he instead maintained that Britain's people – particularly the Scots – were the true *heirs* to Atlantis. Spence said the people of the ancient world knew this full well, calling Britain “an island veiled and esoteric”, known to all other races as “the very home and environment of mystery, a sacred territory, to enter which was to encroach upon a region of enchantment, the dwelling of the gods”.⁷ Modern-day visitors flying in to Glasgow International Airport must feel something similar. Spence's reasons for Britain being a kind of Avalon boil down to this: ancient Atlantis was home to a JG Frazer-style vegetation-cult or mystery-religion centring around a Divine King known to us as ‘Arthur’, who would undergo a symbolic death and resurrection each year in order to reassert the power of fertility in the world, thus enabling spring and its crops to re-emerge from the depths of winter. However, over time, Atlantean culture had decayed and its inhabitants brought destruction upon themselves, possibly through abusing the occult arts. Fortunately, a number of ‘good’ Atlanteans, of a type now known to us as Cro-Magnon Man, had escaped the deluge and sought sanctuary in Europe and North Africa, re-establishing their worship of Arthur everywhere they settled, albeit under different names. Gradually, though, the Cro-Magnon Atlanteans mated and merged with other cultures and races, losing access to their ancient wisdom. In only one group of people – the Celts – did the Atlantean blood and religion survive in anything approaching its pure form of old, thus accounting for Britain's traditional reputation for holiness and magic.

BAD BLOOD

Visitors to modern-day Scotland may have noticed that sacred vegetation-cults (save that of the thistle) are conspicuous by their absence. Spence had an explanation. The pure Celtic blood and mindset of the Atlantean Scots, he said, had been systematically polluted down the centuries through interaction with, and colonisation by, what he called “Anglo-Saxon Teutonism” – i.e. Englishmen. This was bad news, as in Spence's view the Cro-Magnon Atlanteans had never settled in the Germanic and Scandinavian countries from which the Anglo-Saxon ancestors of the English hailed – which meant, essentially, that the ‘Sacred Isle’ of Britain had been conquered by non-Atlantean barbarians. In the years since, the Scots had become effectively deracinated under the influence



LEFT: Poet and anglophobe Hugh MacDiarmid, fellow founder of the National Party of Scotland.

CLAIRVOYANT SKILLS WERE SADLY DISAPPEARING IN SCOTLAND

of their English overlords, leading to the virtual disappearance of Celtic (that is to say, Atlantean) culture and religion amongst them. As Spence laid out in pamphlets such as his 1922 *The English Peril in Scotland*, this was an historical crime that had to be reversed.

The surprising thing is that if you ignore Spence's peculiar Atlantean obsession, it becomes apparent that various other early Scottish nationalists were saying something very similar, but in non-occult terms. Take, for example, the poet Hugh MacDiarmid, a fellow founder member of the National Party of Scotland and no believer in Atlantis.⁸ With commendable honesty, in his *Who's Who* entry, under the heading of ‘Hobbies’, MacDiarmid listed “Anglophobia”,⁹ and when we see some of the things he wrote in his 1936 book *Scottish Eccentrics*, an unusual attempt to use the lives of remarkable (if often slightly nutty) Scots to condemn “how successfully the bulk of the Scottish people have been assimilated to English standards since the Union”, we can see why it was he so hated the dreaded Sassenachs. Under English rule, he said: “The general concept of the typical Scot has undergone a very remarkable change... We are [now] regarded for the most part as a very dour, hard-headed, hard-working, tenacious

people, devoted to the practical things of life and making little or no contribution to the more dazzling or debatable spheres of human genius.” Modern-day Scotsmen actively collaborated in this state of affairs, said MacDiarmid, because: “So far as they are concerned, the long centuries of Scotland's national life have long ago been brought to nothing... Their ‘race memory’ only goes back to the day before yesterday... To them the nature of their literature, the history of their country, is as unintelligible as the theories of Einstein... The uncanny Scot... has been everywhere transformed into... the ‘Canny Scot’ of modern acceptance.”¹⁰

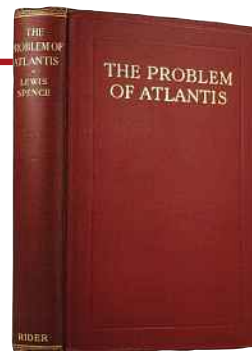
Spence could also express his racial ideas in either occult or purely political terms, depending upon what the

situation required. In his 1951 book *Second Sight*, for instance, Spence claimed that clairvoyant skills were sadly disappearing in Scotland, with the ancient holy-men who had once practised them having long-ago been downgraded to the level of mere fortune-tellers by an “invading faith” brought north by outsiders.¹¹ In *The Problem of Atlantis*

he went even further, claiming implausibly that “Atlanteans have been proved by the labours of archaeologists to have been of a physical type superior to any at present existing [and] to have possessed that greater cranial capacity which is the undoubted mark of distinguished mental ability.” By ‘Atlanteans’, however, Spence really meant Scots: “If a patriotic

Scotsman may be pardoned the boast, I may say that I devoutly believe that Scotland's admitted superiority in the mental and spiritual spheres springs almost entirely from the preponderant degree of Cro-Magnon blood which certainly runs in the veins of her people.”¹² Thus the Scottish Enlightenment, presumably.

When writing for a purely nationalist audience, as in his pamphlet *Freedom for Scotland*, however, “The salient feature of racial difference between the English and Scottish races” became not Scots' vestigial Atlantean blood, but their “preponderantly large Pictish stock, from which the majority of its inhabitants are descended.” Perhaps this was why certain measures discouraging interbreeding had urgently to be implemented, in order to “protect the Scottish race from being overwhelmed by the swarming millions of England”.¹³ It wasn't



just the English who posed a threat, either; in 1936, Spence made some alarmist comments to the effect that “an enormous number of foreign Jewish students [were] invading Edinburgh” and its university, fleeing the Nazis. Spence said there were 18,000; but the *Jewish Chronicle* conclusively demonstrated there were no more than 60.¹⁴ The racial conspiracy theories of other early Scottish nationalists, though, were even weirder. Harry Miller, for example, leader of the Scottish Socialists, wrote to Hugh MacDiarmid in 1941, claiming London was taking advantage of the war to systematically enact “a deliberate transference of population” between England and Scotland. Scottish lasses, he said, were being sent to Coventry (in a literal sense), with “English wenches” transported up to Scotland to take their place, either stealing the Scotswomen’s former jobs or their former lovers’ sperm in the guise of prostitutes. The presumable end result of these fiendish ploys would be an awful lot of ‘mixed-race’ babies being born, thus diluting the Scottish race even further.¹⁵

THE BARMY TARTAN ARMY

This may sound like I’m working up to saying ‘Lewis Spence was a Nazi’, but I’m not – because he wasn’t. Indeed, he so disliked Hitler that in the 1940s he went to press with two millenarian tracts called *The Occult Causes of the Present War* and *Will Europe Follow Atlantis?* in which he sensationally claimed that the Führer and his troops were, quite literally, the tools of Satan. Spence’s basic thesis was that the German people – who, being non-Atlantean, were “a race [inherently] suggestible to the powers of evil”¹⁶ – had nonetheless made much the same mistake as the inhabitants of Atlantis and misused the occult sciences. The parallel between the sad fate of the Atlantean Scots under Teutonic English rule with the even more disturbing potential fate of Britain under Teutonic Nazi rule was compelling to Spence; once more, barbarian invaders from Europe were going to conquer the sacred island of the Celts and force its already debased culture down to an even lower level.



LEFT: Ronald MacDonald Douglas, who dreamed of leading an IRA-style Scottish army from the Highlands.

How could the Scottish race be saved? One idea was to imitate the Irish and their own successful programme of national cultural renewal through the promotion of folklore (see FT329:46-48). Books like Spence’s *Scottish Ghosts and Goblins* were thus not mere entertainment, but had a hidden nationalist purpose, too. The clearest example of this impulse in action came from one of the most extreme Scottish nationalists of all, Ronald MacDonald Douglas, the kilt-wearing founder of his own (largely imaginary) secret IRA-style Scottish army, which he fantasised about hiding somewhere in the Highlands. This paramilitary version of Harry Lauder evidently thought the pen to be as mighty as the sword, however, as in 1936 he published an obscure volume called *The Irish Book: A Miscellany of Facts and Fancies, Folklore and Fragments, Poems and Prose, to do with Ireland and Her People*. This may not sound particularly pro-Scottish, but the purpose of Douglas’s book was to use folklore and poetry to convince Scots that they were not truly British at all, but actually Irish, the two Celtic

nations being a “related but severed people” – with the English being those who had severed them. His book, Douglas said, was “a literary claymore” with “the names of Eire and Alba [Ireland and Scotland] closely entwined in the metal of its hilt” and “engraved in Gaelic with the words ‘Repeal the Union’.” Strong words to describe a fairy-book!¹⁷

The outbreak of WWII soon meant that such a programme of mystical cultural renewal simply *had* to succeed, though, as the future not only of Dundee but of the entire world now depended on it. The only hope for humanity, said Spence, was for the British people to return to the old Atlantean worship of King Arthur and his Holy Grail. Once this had been done, God would truly be on our side, and would destroy our enemies in an instant: “The Hand that shaped this planet will not permit its deflection into the dark and terrible paths which lead to the abyss. Britain, the sea-borne Ark, bearing the symbols of truth and righteousness, will pass unscathed through the tempest to the haven of that victory which is peace.”¹⁸ By God’s will, a localised subsidence of the Earth’s crust would occur beneath Germany, leaving the evil nation to share the fate of Atlantis. The Third Reich would soon be flooded by “the relentless fury of the North Sea” with its industrial heartland “eternally lost in a waste of waters”, thus handily leaving a Free France “forever... cut off from her ancient foe” by some impassable watery equivalent of the Maginot Line.¹⁹ See? No need to renew Trident after all. **FT**

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



SD TUCKER is an FT regular whose books are *Paranormal Merseyside*, *Terror of the Tokoloshe* and (forthcoming) *The Hidden Folk*. Currently writing a book about forgotten science, his *Great British Eccentrics* is due out this September.

NOTES

My main source for general information about Spence was an essay by Juliette Wood, “Lewis Spence: Remembering the Celts”, in Lizanne Henderson (Ed.), *Fantastical Imaginations: The Supernatural in Scottish History and Culture*, 2009, Birlinn, pp196-211.

- 1 The NPS merged with its rival Scottish Party to form the present-day SNP in 1934.
- 2 With one notable exception – former SNP leader Alex Salmond was recently revealed to have played a cameo role as a ghost living inside a haunted statue in

the obscure 2001 Bollywood soap opera *The Castle*. See <http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/alex-salmond-really-play-ghost-5152736> for the truly bizarre clip.

- 3 Spence also remembered another sunken continent, publishing *The Problem of Lemuria* in 1932.
- 4 John Michell, *Eccentric Lives and Peculiar Notions*, 1984, Thames & Hudson, pp204-205.
- 5 He also wrote a third book, *After Atlantis: The Greatest Story Never Told*, whose title proved to be truly prophetic – it was never actually published.

- 6 Michell, 1984, pp136-143.
- 7 Cited in Michell, 1984, p163.
- 8 At least not as far as I know. He did claim to have a Rupert Sheldrake-style psychic dog which knew when he was coming home, though (see Colin Wilson, *The Occult*, 2006, Watkins, p125).
- 9 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hugh_MacDiarmid
- 10 All quotes taken from Hugh MacDiarmid, *Scottish Eccentrics*, 1936, Routledge (initially the jacket-blurb, then pp284-285, 287 and 303 respectively)
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Sight, 1951, Rider & Co; cited in Wood, p207.

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- 13 Lewis Spence, *Freedom for Scotland: The Case for Scottish Self-Government*, 1926, Scottish National Movement; cited in Gavin Boyd, *Fascist Scotland: Caledonia and the Far Right*, 2013, Birlinn, p142.
- 14 Boyd, 2013, p143.
- 15 Boyd, 2013, p161.
- 16 Lewis Spence, *The Occult Causes of the Present War*, 1940, Rider & Co; cited in Boyd, 2013, p154.

- 17 See Boyd, 2013, pp156-158, 139-141; a fantasist whose autobiographical essay *The Mad Nationalist* was appropriately titled, Douglas’s real name was Ronald Edmonstone, and he was not really a soldier but a former actor.
- 18 Spence, 1940; cited in Boyd, 2013, p154.
- 19 Spence, 1940; cited in Joscelyn Godwin, *Atlantis and the Cycles of Time: Prophecies, Tradition and Occult Revelations*, 2011, Inner Traditions, p189.

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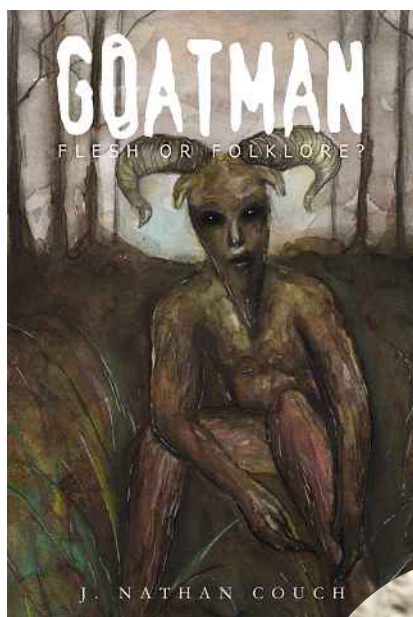
BUILDING A FORTEAN LIBRARY

3. HOW TO DO CRYPTOZOOLOGY

Cryptozoology has a problem: it deals with rumour, hearsay, legend and myth as if these things amounted to verifiable documentation of rare and elusive species. But that, said the 'father' of the subject, Bernard Heuvelmans, should be no bar to investigating what (if any) creatures may have inspired these stories. A fair point, although mainstream zoology has tended to take a dim view of a 'science' that depends on anecdote, and that despite many an expedition in its name signally fails to produce hard evidence such as spoor, bones, nesting-places, or even a series of properly focused photographs of even the largest of cryptids.

There's another way of going about cryptozoological research, of which J Nathan Couch's *Goatman: Flesh or Folklore* is an example, perhaps especially useful to those venturing near this field for the first time. As others, seeking other creatures, have before him, Couch first came across his subject by way of a campfire story. In about 1870, went the tale, a young newlywed couple decided to take the narrow, treacherous Hogsback Road, about 15 miles (24km) south of West Bend, Washington Country, Wisconsin, to their new home – at night. A wheel on their wagon broke, as they do, and the groom decided to walk off into the dark, back to town, for help. Hours crept by, until eventually the anxious bride heard someone approaching. But what human made such odd snuffling sounds? And then came a terrifying, goat-like bleating. Undeterred, as young women in such stories always are, she took a peek out of the wagon, and “a terrible form stood in the moonlight. It was a creature covered in coarse red hair standing on two legs like a man, but with the horned head and long muzzle of a goat.” Cue shriek of young bride. Finally she slept, although there was still no sign of her husband. She woke with the sunrise, and naturally went to see if he was anywhere about. “On the ground, she found large, cloven-hooved tracks that turned from the wagon and disappeared into the tree line... There, at the edge of the forest, the ground around a large oak tree was drenched in blood. She looked up to find the mutilated remains of the man she'd just married dangling from a gnarled limb.”

Couch notes that the story bears a



marked resemblance to the cluster of modern urban legends called Lover's Lane Legends: in particular “The Dead Boyfriend”, with a more tenuous link to one named “Hook Man”, both of which deal with the unforeseen consequences of parking a car in a lonely spot and getting up to hanky-panky. This suggests that the tale set in 1870-ish was a backdating, as a kind of authentication, of later legends centred on Hogsback Road – which, Couch learned, was used as a trysting spot by teenagers in the 1950s and 1960s. He also found another ‘origination’

legend, involving a man with a hook for a hand who lived in a falling-down house on Hogsback Road and would rip open the throats of “any teens he caught making out nearby” (sour grapes, or what?). So one can take this version of the legend as admonitory, a caution against premarital sex or perhaps just against teenage lads being lad-like. But, Couch observed, the backdated version didn't involve *illicit* sex – almost the opposite: so near, yet so far. But it does concern the perils of driving on a notoriously dangerous road at night. Which of course teenagers also like to do, and often rather too fast. As Couch encapsulates it: “It certainly seems as if the legend's emphasis has shifted from chastity belts to safety belts.”

Another origin tale, attached to the YMCA's Matawa Camp, east of West Bend, told of a “lonely old goat farmer” whose herd was wiped out by disease during the Great Depression of the 1930s. To prevent the disease spreading to his neighbours' properties, he dug a pit and began to burn the carcasses. “With each corpse he threw into the fire, his frustration and anger built. He tossed the final goat into the flames with such rage that he fell into the pit and was burned alive. Now his angry ghost haunts the camp...” As Couch travelled the US from Maryland to California in search of Goatman stories, he heard a somewhat more explicit version

of this tale: that the farmer in question had habitually ‘known’ his goats in the biblical sense, and was either doomed to be a half-goat ghost for his sins or had had a hybrid offspring that was less than friendly. (Well, you'd be cross too, wouldn't you, in the circumstances?)

In any case,

notwithstanding his pinning the label ‘urban legend’ to his local Washington County Goatman, Couch wanted to know more; and thus began his coast-to-coast quest. Some interesting patterns emerge from what he discovered.



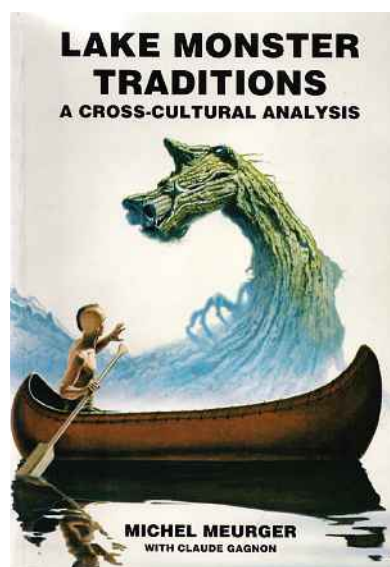
One oddity is that some who encounter Goatman report an oversized goat-creature that walks on two legs (as in the '1870' account); others report the creature's top half as goatish, the lower quarters as human; and others describe what we would think of as a faun or Pan-like creature – top human, bottom goat. Couch calls the latter 'satyrs', although the archaic Greek originals of those were part horse, not goat, and not hooved, but with horses' tails and ears and enormous wangers.

In due course the Romans conflated the satyrs with their own goatish fauns, who are equated with the Greek nature-god Pan; hence our modern confusion. Pan and his fellow fauns are notoriously priapic (cf. 'horny as a billygoat'). Couch suggests it's no coincidence that a goatish creature should manifest in places where people go furtively to fornicate.

But if Goatman doesn't always look quite like Pan and his friends, he doesn't smell like a goat either. One witness reported a stink as of sulphur. Others frequently remark on the creature's rank odour, but never say what he smells of. Which is odd, unless these witnesses are so radically urbanised that they've never had the bucolic pleasure of a billygoat's reek, which is both potent and unmistakable even at several yards. And that's not impossible: Couch remarks several times that Goatman's favourite places are suburban, suggesting not only a degree of insulation but of liminality too. Goatman is also, Couch observes, fond of appearing on or near bridges, a classically liminal space. All these things, Couch recognises, intimate that Goatman tales are folklore and legend; or have been shaped into such familiar patterns in the retelling.

In some versions of the tale, rather surprisingly (or maybe not), it's all the government's fault. Maryland's axe-wielding Goatman is the ghoulish outcome of a genetic/crossbreeding experiment at the US Department of Agriculture's Beltsville Agricultural Research Center; some say a scientist working there was in search of eternal youth, others say (in the tradition of *The Fly*) that he somehow became entangled with a goat himself and is suitably fractious about it. If that won't wash, an alternative Maryland origin tale makes Goatman a horror escaped from Glen Dale Hospital – now abandoned, of course, and often said to be a former lunatic asylum (although actually it was an isolation hospital specialising in tuberculosis cases). California's Billiwack Monster ("a nine-foot-tall humanoid with the head of a ram") supposedly emerges from the basement of the now-ruined Billiwack Dairy. It is the botched product of secret attempts by captured Nazi scientists to create a superman in the 1940s; Couch notes that this legend arose around the time Captain America (a successful genetic experiment, and famously anti-Nazi) was revived in the early 1960s. This reader notes thematic

SPEAKING
PERSONALLY,
YOU CAN HAVE
MY GUN, BUT
YOU'LL TAKE MY
BOOK
WHEN YOU PRY
MY COLD, DEAD
FINGERS OFF OF
THE BINDING.
Stephen King



similarities with the disused TNT factory at Point Pleasant, West Virginia, locus and focus of the Mothman. Should you trust everything from John Keel that you read? You'd maybe do better trusting the government.

Couch is no slouch: he recognises that Goatman suffers from inconsistent morphology, folkloric origin stories and clear links with similar kinds of folklore, and urban-legendary attributes such as glowing red eyes. He also recognises the intrinsic pleasure some people get out of elaborate hoaxes: he traces back several Goatman episodes to pranksters, who certainly weren't in it for the money. And he's fully aware of the concept of legend trips, and why people, especially teenagers, indulge in them. Thus shielded from naïve credulity, and having noticed that no Goatman narrative can be dated further back than the early 1960s, he goes hunting for an underlying real-world inspiration. And, serendipitously, finds it. We won't spoil anyone's pleasure by revealing what he discovers, but will say that while his solution is plausible, we don't quite buy the connections he

makes between his elected 'actual' origin and the Goatman tales. Even though his solution explains certain odd aspects of the Goatman (in particular its frequent link with eccentric hermits living in dilapidated shacks), it seems to me a stretch.

Couch's explanation doesn't quite satisfy him, either, in the sense that his thousands of miles of questing and hours in libraries and archives have thrown up a hard core of puzzling and sometimes very creepy encounter stories that don't fit into his rational paradigm. A true fortean, he leaves these accounts open to interpretation, while recognising that they represent genuine experiences, whatever their source.

Unlike cryptozoologists who make little forays into foreign lands and go among peoples whose language they do not speak, Couch has the advantage of investigating a culture he knows from birth, and bringing an awareness of parallel traditions and the odd ways of oral tradition to what he finds. It would be interesting to have his take on Bigfoot. Meanwhile, *Goatman: Flesh or Folklore* should become a template for how to investigate reports of cryptids, and every fortean should read it.

Couch's volume should be read in conjunction with Michel Meurger's trail-breaking *Lake Monster Traditions*, whose insights still delight nearly three decades after publication. An essential part of Merger's thesis is that weird creatures appear in places that (for whatever reasons) are already thought to be strange, forbidden, threatening, or haunted. In such places, and in stark parallel to the idea of the legend trip, the apparently objective manifestation confirms the subjective apprehension. Thus, he charts the history of 'monsters' in certain places, and observes that over time they morph from phantoms (one of which – one would like to know more – appeared as a flaming haystack, no less) into biological creatures and later into submarines of mysterious origin.

In other words, perceptions of anomalous 'stuff' in lakes follow the way our thinking about the world, and particularly the wild untamed world, changes over time – ufologists call it 'cultural tracking'. Says Meurger: "Cryptozoologists believe in a hidden Nature; sceptics reduce the question to a misinterpreted Nature." His approach looks less at the *what* of what people report, intriguing as that is, and more at the *how* and the *why* of what they see: and this seems the more fortean – and indeed subtler and more sophisticated – tactic. Another must for the fortean bookshelf. FT

J Nathan Couch, *Goatman: Flesh or Folklore?*, CreateSpace, 2014

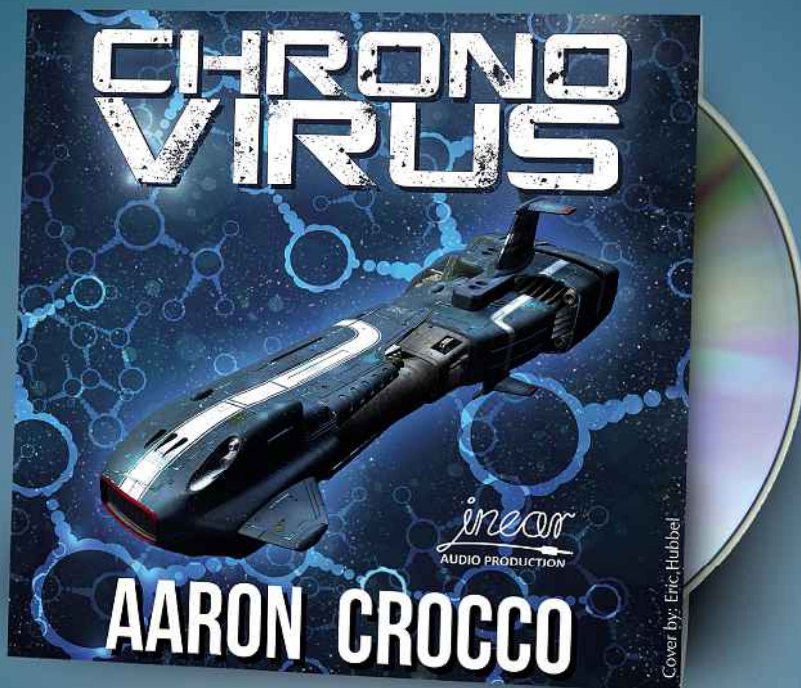
Michel Meurger (with Claude Gagnon), *Lake Monster Traditions*, Fortean Tomes, 1988

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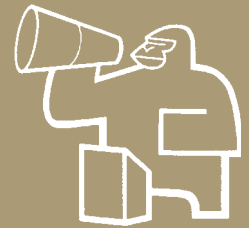
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forum



The laughing death

MARK GREENER suggests that the traces of past cannibalism might help us identify future threats to mankind



MARK GREENER is a medical writer as well as clinical editor and columnist for *Pharmacy Magazine* and writes regularly for a wide variety of magazines, including FT.

It sounds like a Doc Savage yarn. Doc and the Fabulous Five race to Papua New Guinea (PNG) to discover the source of the mysterious 'laughing death' among cannibals and save the industrialised world. Remarkably, the story is almost true. Studies of kuru – a brain disease that ravaged cannibals – offer insights into some of the current great enemies of humanity as well as helping account for the demise of certain ancient civilisations.

Whatever a diet of Umberto Lenzi films would have you believe, cannibalism is not necessarily 'primitive' and, extreme famine aside, is rarely just gastronomic. It can be sophisticated, indicate deep and profound respect, and act as a strong social glue. Cannibalism allows kith, kin or combatants to imbibe the deceased's vital essence, which, in turn, helps form, maintain and embed relationships between and within social groups.

For example, kinship in the Fore culture in the Eastern Highlands of PNG is fluid and social, rather than fixed and genetic. Adoptees and immigrants become kin regarded identically to biological relatives, provided they are loyal and meet their obligations. For centuries, eating dead kin as a mark of respect and mourning helped strengthen the Fore's social cohesion and transcend purely genetic relationships.

Then, 60 years ago, doctors realised that kuru was killing one in ten Fore, mainly women and children. Kuru began with headaches, aching limbs and joint pains. It also damaged parts of the brain that control emotion, sometimes causing inappropriate euphoria and laughter: one of the Fore's names for kuru was the 'laughing death'.

The cause remained a mystery until the early 1980s, when researchers



LEFT: A patient suffering from kuru is examined in a village in Papua New Guinea.

SOURCES

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isolated the 'proteinaceous infectious' (prion) agent that caused kuru. Your body twists many proteins into different shapes; some 'misfolded' shapes form deposits that damage the surrounding tissue and also 'seed' further aggregations of the same misshapen protein. So, the damage spreads.

The Fore did not eat kin who died from dysentery or leprosy, but they ate kuru victims. Kuru develops slowly, appearing between four and 20 years after eating infected human tissue. So, eating kuru's victims, and infected people without symptoms who died from other causes, seeded the prion in the next generation. Women and children were more involved in ritual cannibalism than men, and kuru always killed within three months to two years of symptoms emerging. That's why fewer men died from kuru and some Fore villages "were almost devoid of young adult women".

Then, in 1996, biologists realised that people 'caught' variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease (vCJD), another devastating brain prion disease, from cattle infected with bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE): mad cow disease. We now also know that modern 'corpse medicine' can spread CJD. For instance, people contracted CJD from grafts of the dura mater (a membrane that surrounds the brain and spinal cord) and cornea; blood transfusions; and pituitary or growth hormones extracted from corpses, now largely replaced by genetically engineered versions.

More recent evidence links spreading deposits of misfolded proteins to several common conditions, including type II diabetes, Parkinson's and

Alzheimer's diseases. Yet prions have been enemies of humanity for millennia. Human remains from non-burial contexts, such as those simply left on the floor, at several archaeological sites show disarticulation, marks and heat-changes consistent with food preparation. Researchers also found human myoglobin in fossilised human faeces collected from some sites linked on other evidence to cannibalism. Only skeletal and cardiac muscles produce myoglobin. So, if you have myoglobin in your faeces, you ate some heart or skeletal muscles. Myoglobin's chemical composition allows biochemists to identify the species eaten.

So, several strands of mutually reinforcing evidence suggest that cannibalism was commonplace, widespread and culturally diverse. We may never know from archaeology alone just how widespread or varied cannibalism was, but it may leave molecular footprints in the sands of time. Generally, we have two copies of each gene. Many elderly Fore who had eaten human flesh on several occasions but didn't develop symptoms had one copy of a particular gene. Kuru killed those with two copies before they could reproduce. The pattern of this gene worldwide suggests that we've encountered prions throughout our evolution, either transmitted by a prehistoric version of BSE or through cannibalism.

Prions might help explain the rapid demise of some cultures. Kuru swept through Fore territory in a few years, entering from the northwest around 1900 and arriving in the south by 1930. A prion disease could, in theory, destroy a culture in a few generations, especially if, as in the Fore, young people were more affected than older generations.

We're used to bacteria, parasites and viruses – such as the Black Death, malaria or Spanish flu – wiping out millions. Today, we need to worry about infectious misfolded proteins. However, as kuru illustrates, insights into the greatest enemies of humanity can come from unlikely sources. **FT**

Identical but different

GUY LYON PLAYFAIR explains why some twins are telepathic and some aren't, and why it matters



GUY LYON PLAYFAIR has been a member of the SPR since 1973. He investigated the Enfield Poltergeist with Maurice Gross, and recorded the experience in *This House is Haunted* (1980).

In my 2003 article *The Twin Thing* (FT171:34-40) I described how the history of twin telepathy research has been one of stops and starts, and how it was then possible to read all the accounts of properly conducted work on it in a single day. I also mentioned my being told (wrongly, as it turned out) by the lady on the front desk at the Department of Twin Research (DTR) at King's College, London, that they were "not interested in spooky stuff".

Since then, much water has flowed under Westminster Bridge, which links King's with St Thomas's Hospital across the Thames, where the DTR's premises are located. There, a large team of scientists, some of them twins, have been studying the genetic and/or environmental origins of a wide range of diseases and psychological conditions, with the help of the 12,000 volunteer twins on its books, and have published more than 600 papers on their findings since the unit was founded in 1993.

A June 2013 press release revealed that also being studied was something rarely even mentioned at this academic level, let alone taken seriously – telepathy. Since I was involved in this sudden transformation of a previously taboo subject into one deserving as much study as any other human ability, let me summarise briefly how it came about.

In 1997, I helped to set up what was probably the first live demonstration of twin communication at a distance for Carlton TV's *The Paranormal World of Paul McKenna*. It was not my idea, but producer Mike Johnstone's, to have one twin hooked up to a polygraph in a soundproof room, while the other, in the studio, was given some kind of surprise or shock. This, I knew, was what twins were best at picking up.

Elaine Dove certainly picked up "something from somewhere" as polygrapher Jeremy Barrett put it when the pens on his chart paper shot upwards, one of them nearly running off the paper. "It looks to me like shock or surprise," he added. Elaine's sister Evelyn had

been asked just to relax in front of a pyramid put together by the special effects team. As she was dreamily visualising her favourite holiday beach, the pyramid exploded with a loud bang and a shower of sparks, giving her a very surprising shock indeed. This looked to me very much like telepathy in action, so I decided the subject needed further study.

I ransacked the shelves of several libraries, starting with the special collection of twin literature at the Royal Society of Medicine, finding the word 'telepathy' in just two or three of the hundred-plus books there. I eventually found enough material for my talk at the 1998 conference of the Society for Psychical Research in York, an article in the *SPR Journal* (January 1999), and the first edition of my book *Twin Telepathy* in 2002.¹

One of the few who showed serious interest in my York talk was Adrian Parker from the University of Gothenburg, where he is now Professor of Psychology. He would love to do some twin research, he said, if he could

At least a third had a telepathy-like incident to report...



raise the money, but he knew that getting funding for anything remotely connected to a subject then widely considered in academic circles to be taboo was not easy.

I eventually managed to get him in touch with the King's unit, who were very helpful, granting him 'visiting scientist' status, which gave him access to their premises, and their twins. They also invited him to their annual garden party in 2009, where he and PhD student Göran Brusewitz were able to persuade 224 twins to fill in an 'Exceptional Experiences' questionnaire. This revealed that at least a third of them had some kind of telepathy-like incident to report. In this group, there were twice as many identical, or monozygotic (MZ) as fraternal ones (dizygotic – DZ). Subsequent surveys in 2014 and 2015 confirmed that telepathy, or at least a belief in it by a good many twins, was clearly far more widespread than scientists had seemed to want to know.²

By then, I had taken part in three more televised experiments in which one twin's reactions to a minor shock inflicted on the other at a distance were recorded on a polygraph. These were shown on the UK's Channel Four *Richard and Judy* programme in 2003 and on the American Discovery (2004) and National Geographic (2005) channels. Later, Parker and his Danish colleague Christian Jensen were able to arrange for two more, one for the Danish DR-1 channel and the other, which was filmed in King's, for ABC's *Twintuition* series.

Although these were all financed by television companies, who as always were interested in entertainment rather than science, the last two were reasonably well controlled. The Danish one was able to test my hypothesis that twins whose zygotes (eggs) divided a week or so after fertilisation were more likely to provide evidence for telepathy than those for whom division took place in the first few days. Studies of 44 MZ twins at the University of Indiana had found that the later the division, the closer the bond would be after birth. This confirmed that, as Orwell might have put it, some identical twins are more identical than others.³

Unfortunately, not all adult twins know when their split took place, though with the introduction of



ETIENNE GUILFILLAN

ultrasonic scanning it is now possible to know exactly when, and for the Danish experiment the scientists managed to find a pair of young women who knew they were 'late splitters' and also reported regular instances of what they considered to be telepathy. Sure enough, their polygraph charts showed some of the clearest coincidences between stimulus and response yet recorded. Parker and Jensen duly wrote up their experiments, which were published in the peer-reviewed scientific journal *Explore* (Nov/Dec 2012 and Jan/Feb 2013).

What, you may be asking, is so special about twins? They are not the only ones to have telepathic experiences. Where they differ is in the way they get the message. Non-twins usually get it in the form of an idea or image, but with twins it can also take the form of a strong emotion, or a *physical* reaction, which can be recorded on a polygraph. Some speak of 'just knowing' when the other is in trouble, and I have often come across the words 'half of me gone' to describe how it feels when the other dies. In such cases, there is no need for telepathy since to some extent they are the same person.

Yet is it worth spending time and money on a notoriously elusive phenomenon which some still claim does not exist? Here, for example, is Professor Richard Wiseman explaining it away in his book *Paranormalia* (2011): "Twin telepathy is due to the highly similar ways in which they think and behave, and not extra-sensory perception".

The evidence, especially that of the polygraph, suggests otherwise. Any

human faculty deserves thorough investigation, and telepathy, if fully examined, will force us to rethink much of physics and psychology as we know them. There is now plenty of evidence to suggest that *some* twins do communicate with each other at a distance under certain very specific circumstances, and can not only do so on demand, but under strictly controlled conditions in which their received impulses can be instrumentally recorded. This has now been done several times.

Reports of anomalous twin connections date back at least to the 18th century, so why has it taken so long for the coin to drop? One answer is that so few have done either their homework or their field research, preferring to dismiss the whole subject with a wave of their magic wands, as the example above indicates. Even an open-minded critic has to admit that all experiments mentioned here have involved very small samples, and to win general acceptance a large scale study is called for. There is as yet no sign of the level of funding this would involve.

Catherine Crowe gave another answer in *The Night-Side of Nature* (1848): "Any discovery tending to throw light on what most deeply concerns us, namely our own being, must be prepared to encounter a storm of angry persecution... Hence, these hasty, angry investigations of new facts, and the triumph with which failures are recorded; and hence the willful overlooking of the axiom that a thousand negatives can not overthrow the evidence of one affirmative


Are you a twin who has experienced telepathy or would like to take part in further research? If so, I'd be glad to hear from you at gplayfair@waitrose.com.

experiment".

Such a discovery has now been made, and such experiments have been performed and published. They were anticipated half a century ago when a pair of ophthalmologists from Philadelphia claimed to have shown that a stimulus given to one twin could be reflected in a simultaneous alteration to the other's brainwave pattern. Though published in the prestigious journal *Science*, it provoked quite a storm of angry protests from readers, who objected to just about everything to do with the suggestion that brains could communicate in this way.

An appeal to colleagues to repeat their findings went unheard, although another experiment published just two years later lent them some support, but since it appeared in a parapsychology journal, it was generally ignored, despite the uncompromising claim that "In a physically isolated subject, we have observed physiological reactions at the precise moment at which another person... was actively stimulated".⁴

In a letter to *Science* following the publication of the article mentioned above, a reader noted that if authors Duane and Behrendt had really established what they were claiming, "this finding is surely the most profound scientific discovery of the present century," and expressed surprise that "the authors do not appear to appreciate the revolutionary implications of their results."⁵ He was not satisfied, quite reasonably, that they had done this, so it proved not to be the discovery of the last century.

There is mounting evidence, however that we now have the means to make it the discovery of this one. 

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I am Spartacus!

PAUL SCREETON wonders where the famous cry of solidarity in Stanley Kubrick's film actually originated



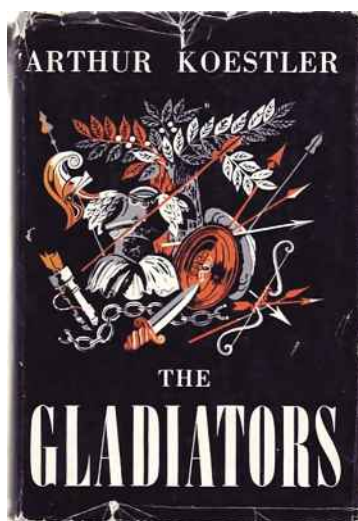
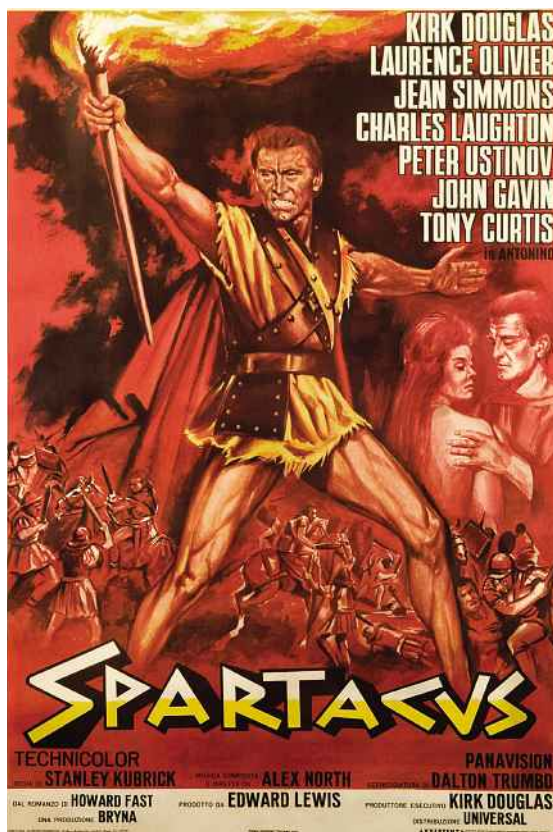
PAUL SCREETON is a veteran folklorist and forerunner. He founded *Folklore Frontiers* in 1985 and is the author of *I Fort the Law* (2011) and *Quest for the Hexham Heads* (2012).

When it was made in 1960, *Spartacus* was the most expensive film ever. It was also perceived as one of the most politically subversive, successfully breaking the infamous Hollywood blacklist.

The screenplay by controversial screenwriter Dalton Trumbo portrayed the rebel Thracian slave leader of the Third Servile War of 73-71BC as a piper of the disaffected. Although director Stanley Kubrick saw Spartacus as a pathfinder for liberation, the historical record shows that he was unable to control the excesses of his divided army of warmongers from committing rape upon young girls and married women, not to mention hungry, angry men killing for revenge and pleasure. In his excellent travelogue following in Spartacus's footsteps, Peter Stothard grimly observes: "Those that the slaves could not rape themselves, they raped with spears and spikes."¹

Writer Arthur Koestler had written a similar treatment to Stothard's, but his first novel, *The Gladiators*, sought parallels between the Spartacus revolt and the success of the Russian Revolution and the subsequent failure of the global Communist dream; it was a book less about Spartacus and more about Lenin and Stalin, in which Spartacus crucifies 30 men from a breakaway group, including the leader Crixus, before taking them down and banishing them instead.

Another case of dubious history and revisionism was Howard Fast's novel, on which the Trumbo screenplay was loosely based. Here, the thrust focused upon the slave army leader's dreams of a just society without cruelty or exploitation. When the final, inevitable battle came, historians of the time describe how Spartacus killed his horse, fought on the ground in the front line, was wounded, fought on one knee, and was slain, his body lying unidentified among the slaughtered mass. Using poetic licence, Koestler has Spartacus



ABOVE: Star Kirk Douglas is definitely Spartacus on this poster for Stanley Kubrick's 1960 film.

LEFT: Arthur Koestler treated the Spartacus story in a 1939 novel.

FACING PAGE: *The Death of Spartacus* (top) by Hermann Vogel, and (below) the crucifixion of Spartacus's followers in a painting by Fedor Alekseyevich Bronnikov.

fall from a blow between the eyes; his last sight being of his adversary Crassus's eyes with brows "slightly raised".

So where did the mass crucifixion in the Kubrick film come from? And what was the inspiration for the 'I am Spartacus' expression of loyalty? It is

not in Fast's novel, so did the left-wing screenwriter subvert the narrative? Or did Kubrick introduce it?

While puzzling over this conundrum, I happened to be visiting Carlisle and called into the JD Wetherspoon chain's Woodrow Wilson pub, the walls of which are lined with the books literary fashion forgot. A 'library angel' led me to one in particular and caused me to open it at a random page. What I found in the essays there by William Hazlitt was what may be the first example of the trope so umbilically attached to the Spartacus legend. Here it is.

There are some droll instances of the effect of proper names combined with circumstances. A young student had come up to London from Cambridge, and went in the evening and planted himself in the pit of the playhouse. He had not been seated long, when in one of the front boxes near him he discovered one of his college tutors, with whom he felt an immediate and strong desire to claim acquaintance, and accordingly called out, in a low and respectful voice, 'Dr Topping!' The appeal was, however, ineffectual. He then repeated in a louder tone, but still in an under key, so as not to excite the attention of anyone but his friend, 'Dr Topping! The Doctor took no notice. He then grew more impatient and repeated 'Dr Topping, Dr Topping!' two or three times pretty loud, to see whether the Doctor did not or would not hear him. Still the Doctor remained immovable. The Joke began at length to get round, and one or two persons, as he continued his invocation of the Doctor's name, joined with him; these were reinforced by others calling out, 'Dr Topping, Dr Topping!' on all sides, so that he could no longer avoid perceiving it, and at length the whole pit rose and roared, 'Dr Topping!' with loud and repeated cries, and the Doctor was forced to retire precipitately, frightened at the sound of his own name.²

At this juncture, I was unaware of Kubrick's voracious appetite for knowledge, but I did know that his personal assistant was also a novelist. So, I pondered: had Anthony Frewin spotted this particular text and suggested it be modified for the film? To add to this wild speculation was the fact that Tony – as he signed himself – subscribed to my publication *Folklore*

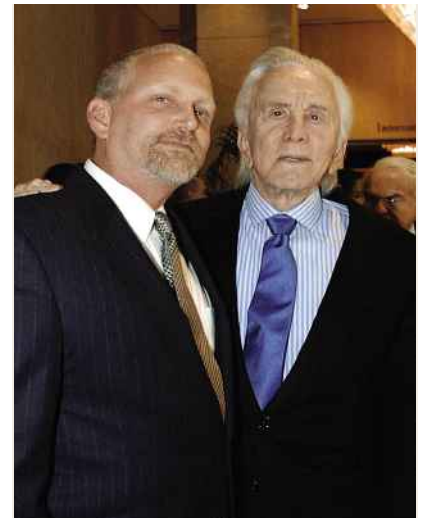


Frontiers. The resubscriptions would arrive promptly over the years, paid for by cheques from Harrier Films. My reverie about a possible link was dashed when I discovered that Tony would have been only 13 years old in the year *Spartacus* was filmed and would not meet Kubrick for a further six years.

I was saddened to hear of Kubrick's death in 1999, but that wasn't quite the end of the story. After the great man's demise the cheques ceased. So, was Frewin fronting an actual purchase for Kubrick? Did Stan the Man lie in a hot

bath drinking Krug, cigar in one hand and *Folklore Frontiers* in the other? I'd like to think so. It is certainly well known he left a vast archive in boxes.

But back in the present, the fictional expression of solidarity seems likely to live on in many ways, perhaps best expressed by the outpouring of support seen after the jihadist atrocity in Paris and the mass 'Je Suis Charlie' peaceful demonstration. We can also expect a *Spartacus* revival in 2016 when the veteran of the Hollywood Golden Age Kirk Douglas reaches his century. **FT**



LEE CELANO / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

LIKE FATHER, LIKE SON

Reviewing Peter Stothard's book, Natalie Haynes began with what she claimed to be a showbiz classic legend:

*Spartacus is a figure so embedded into our culture that, even now, he can command a group of disparate people to rise up in rebellion. Kirk Douglas had a son, the little-remembered Eric Douglas [1958-2004], who was an actor and stand-up comedian. He once came over to the UK to do some gigs and inadvertently created one of British comedy's finest legends. Eric wasn't having a great gig at a London club; he was going down the pan. His opening line, I seem to remember, focused on the fact that he lacked the cleft in his chin possessed by his father and brother. The audience was not in the least interested. Their indifference eventually overwhelmed him and he finally shouted: "Do you know who I am? I'm Kirk Douglas's son!" The room looked on in silence, then someone in the audience stood up and said: "No, I am Kirk Douglas's son." He was swiftly followed by several more. Within seconds the entire audience was on their feet, all claiming to be Kirk Douglas's son, in a pitch-perfect parody of the scene in *Spartacus*. That, by anyone's standards, is a tough gig.¹*

Reviewing the TV series *Spartacus: Blood and Sand*, critic AA Gill reprised and compounded this sad humiliation of what he described as "failed actor and successful drug addict" Eric Douglas, adding, "There are many ways to get crucified by an audience".²

REFERENCES

1. *Times*, 23 January 2009.
2. *Sunday Times*, 30 May 2010.

Life after death

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

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

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

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

However' an aeon to form the entire world's sand is totally wrong because beach pebbles are formed by the process of tidemark, they get bigger not smaller. Every dirty tide leaves a mark, a dirty stain over the previous hardened and scuffed stain, broken layers clearly seen if one

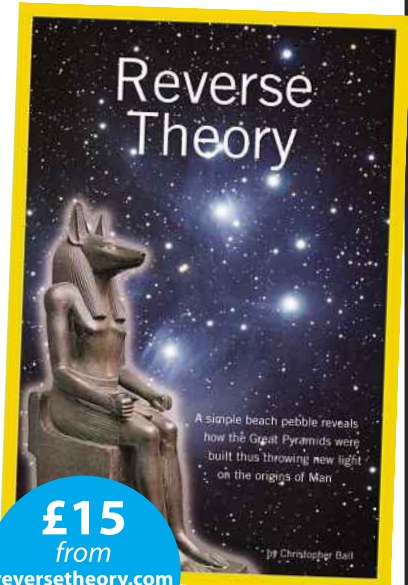
wishes to see them. A sea-basin is just like a dirty washbasin and the mechanics are fully explained in this powerful and detailed book.

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

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

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

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THE DEAD WALK THE EARTH II



LUKE DUFFY

The mainland is lost, conquered by the armies of walking dead that now roam the earth, consuming all in their path as they spread like a black plague through the wasteland that had once been civilisation. As the remains of the human race retreat to the islands, clinging to them like life rafts in an ocean of terror, the ravenous monsters, the evil shadows of humanity, become the dominant species on the planet.

Disease, famine, and death begin to spread through the cramped refugee camps, threatening the continued existence of the living and forcing the remnants of the government and armed forces to begin an offensive that would recapture the ground that they have lost to the infected hordes. The survivors of the team, finding themselves placed at the spearhead of the great counterstrike, are given a special mission that would help tip the scales against their rotting enemy. Now they must fight for the entire world.

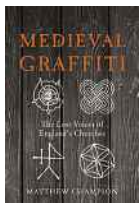
This month's books, films and games

reviews



Protecting not defacing?

Archaeologists have largely ignored the ancient graffiti in Britain's churches and castles, so a new and open-minded work is welcome – though with reservations



Medieval Graffiti The Lost Voices of England's Churches

by Matthew Champion

Ebury Press 2015

Pb, 272pp, illus, ind, £12.99, ISBN 9780091960414

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £11.69

The ancient graffiti of Britain's churches and castles gives glimpses into the lives of people barely known from any other cultural form, even folklore. The only other major study of England's ancient graffiti was published in 1967, since when the subject has flickered weakly in local archaeological journals. Now, finally, another dedicated researcher appreciates mediæval graffiti's mysteriousness and significance, but does he realise just how important it is, and – more urgently for us forteans – how sometimes strange?

After researching Knights Templar prisoner graffiti in France (FT:259), I found mediæval graffiti abounding in central and southern English counties. Most examples are pictographic and symbolic. The most interesting of the relatively rare texts often deal with the Black Death, the subject of one of the best chapters. Much graffiti known to me is not within Champion's purview, possibly due to his working out from north-eastern Norfolk, amassing what he could before being thwarted by a publication deadline. This is a key strength – and weakness – of this look at a field that still has much

to reveal.

Country magic and superstition were in the Norfolk air between the 13th and 17th centuries, leading to *apotropaic* signs – geometric symbolic graffiti meant (Champion supposes) to repel or entrap evil. He recognises “a level of folk belief that permeated the whole of mediæval society.” Scratching these ‘witchmarks’ were “everyday reactions to a common and well-recognised threat... a place full of dangers, both physical and spiritual”. These markings were “the front line in the defence of the soul.” The prevailing notion on the conjoined V marks that are among the most common, is they signify the Virgin Mary, even though the ‘M’ is inverted.

Champion wonders whether the symbol's meaning changed over time, but offers no alternative theory. What if some, or any, of the ‘witchmarks’ were made not *against* but *by* witches to fortify a charm or curse? If a devout Christian is making an ‘M’ that stands for ‘Mary’, why is the sign so often inverted? Curiously, this is not considered and the one-good-theory-fits-all approach prevails. The chapter on charms and curses provides a lot of good general background from the Middle Ages, but quotes only one graffito.

If the idea of England's easterly churches riddled with magical protection marks sounds like Witchfinder General with extra psychic warfare, it is an aspect that risks being overstated in *Medieval Graffiti*, where the theory extends to the widely depicted ‘hexafoil’ (Flower of Life or Daisy Wheel) and its curvilinear variants. “Its origins as a ritual protection mark,” Champion

“What if some ‘witchmarks’ were made not against but by witches to fortify a charm or curse?”

tells us, “are unclear”, and this is true – as far as the study of ancient marks goes. But I had hoped that a more adventurous interdisciplinary approach would discover the message of the symbol to close this knowledge gap. Champion would then have to mention a few of its major stages of progress from Mycenaean antiquity, to the Hellenic followers of Pythagoras, Judaic kabalists, Neo-Platonic and Pythagorean schools of mysticism, Gothic architecture, mediæval Sufism, English Catholic recusants, and European and North African folk art, to add weight to Patrick Reuterswärd's 1986 discovery of what eventually became a “forgotten symbol of God” in the sign of the hexafoil.

The large hexafoil arrays at Leighton Buzzard's All Saints church are parsed by a Latin inscription that affirms Reuterswärd's discovery. This hints, too, at a dangerous gnosticism at a time when the symbol was displayed with pride in Sufi shrines in eastern Europe and India, influenced by the Sufic absorption of Pythagorean cosmo-numeric-philosophy. Before the Late Mediæval resurgence of Hermeticism, the philosophy represented by the hexafoil is perhaps the only ‘underground’ mystic system to have genuinely influenced social elites.

While only acknowledging this background in English Romanesque fonts, where the hexafoil sometimes occurs, Champion realises that it is also a template tool by which a building structure can be raised purely by using geometry, with no measurements needed. However, he neglects to explore the fascinating symbiosis between this practical use and the philosophical system attributed to it, instead discrediting at length the mediæval mason origin theory of circular graffiti, which given the wider background is marginally significant.

Even less sound is lumping another geometric symbol, the Solomon's Knot, in with the hexfoil as a ‘demon trap’, the endless circuits enticing then imprisoning an evil spirit. Its scarcity in graffiti counts against its use purely as an apotropaic mark.

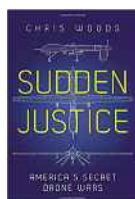
With historic roots running much deeper than the hexafoil, it was also a cross-cultural symbol, signalling specialist knowledge networks delineated by craft skills. Roman artisans used it as an emblem for their guild secrets involving the production of mosaics and glass, for example. Another graffito in Leighton Buzzard supports this idea. While singling-out the location, however, Champion neglects this example, understandably, as I still find them in oft-visited churches. It's a doubly-elusive art, visually and to research.

This is the work of a mediævalist rather than an art historian, and would have benefitted from a more international perspective; instead

Continued on page 62

Droning on...

A good history of a decade of drone wars (not secret!) with little historical context



Sudden Justice
America's Secret Drone Wars
Chris Woods

Oxford University Press USA 2015

Hb, 416pp, appx, gloss, bib, ind, \$27.95, ISBN 9780190202590

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £18.00

The subtitle suggests revelations about black operations, new technologies and covert wars away from the media. But drone wars are not secret: they have been splashed all over the headlines for the last 14 years or so.

The US military have been carrying out drone strikes since 2001 in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, the Yemen and Somalia. The aircraft involved are Predators and Reapers, operated remotely from Creech Air Force base in Nevada by the USAF and CIA. Casualty figures are widely reported on various websites, and while the exact mix of civilians and militants/insurgents/terrorists is disputed, there is broad agreement on the scale of operation and the thousands killed and injured.

This means that all Chris Woods can do in this book is fill in details. As an investigative journalist and BBC *Panorama* producer, he does an excellent job of recording the minutiae of drone warfare. He has spoken to a huge number of people, most of them with the US military, and gives a good account of the effort it takes to keep a drone in the air, the back offices filled with imagery intelligence analysts, as well as the military lawyers on hand to advise the operator who actually presses the button to launch Hellfire missiles.

Ironically enough, Woods's

biggest revelation is the low number of drone strikes in Somalia. Of 200 alleged by Iranian media, the vast majority were actually bombings by manned Somali Air Force aircraft. Only a handful were US drone strikes.

What Woods lacks, though, is the sense of context for the history and technology. It is not news that the US carries out airstrikes which it does not acknowledge. Operation Menu in 1969–70 killed tens of thousands in Cambodia. Compared to this, the whole drone war is small potatoes. Equally, the CIA's programme of covert, deniable operations over the Soviet Union, China and elsewhere has been well documented. You would have to be naïve indeed to be shocked or even surprised.

Before drones, cruise missiles were the hands-off weapon of choice and the shift is one of technology, not policy. Woods does not seem to be aware of drone operations in WWII, Korea and Vietnam and why the military were so hostile to them. More importantly, he does see how the changes in technology have enabled the drone revolution and continue to drive it forward.

Crucially, looking forward, Woods's concern is that others may emulate the US approach of drone strikes of questionable legality. He does not look at the advance of drone technology, which suggests the emergence of a generation of killing machines more lethal than the current models, and which will enable a far more effective policy of "death from above".

Sudden Justice is interesting as a history of the first decade of targeted killings. But such a live issue deserves a more forward-looking analysis to help us

Fortean Times Verdict

THOSE SECRET DRONE WARS? NOT MUCH OF A SECRET, IN TRUTH **5**

Continued from page 61

it ignores everything except Anglocentric references. The quasi-heraldic 'house' emblems, with their initials and numerals (a class of mysterious mercantile symbols), share a major European dimension in their most enigmatic 'Sign of Four' symbol (bound now with the question of Shakespeare's face, FT:331).

Given the vastness of mediæval writing about animals, astrology and magic, the writing surely need not be so waffly. Chunks of text grindingly reiterate the uncertainties about these rather than getting stuck into extra primary sources that would throw them into relief. The author is open-minded enough to realise how much there is left to know, though, and his numerous questions should galvanise a new army of graffiti detectives.

The author's strength is in the standard pipe-rolls-and-parish-register school of research that brings up specific names and places. However, he ignores alternative sources, and this text-reliant approach lacks roundedness. He stands on the shoulders of many researchers, so the lack of footnotes or even a bibliography is inexcusable. Pritchard's *English Mediæval Graffiti* has many more than the 40-odd images here, and is better presented and cited. At least most of Champion's are in colour.

Jerry Glover

Fortean Times Verdict

ACADEMICALLY, THE ROAD LESS TRAVELLED... BUT NO BIB INFO?

7

The Whispering Swarm

Michael Moorcock

Gollancz 2013

Hb, 480pp, £25.00, ISBN 9781473213326

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £20.00



The Whispering Swarm is Michael Moorcock's first major book in almost a decade – but is it a novel or autobiography? The narrator is a young Londoner called Michael Moorcock, who is writing stories and articles and editing magazines in the 1960s, eventually taking over the highly influential *New Worlds*.

Many of the science fiction and fantasy writers of the time are mentioned, some under their real names (Harry Harrison, Barry Bailey), others lightly disguised: JG Ballard is Jack Allard and Moorcock's first wife, writer Hilary Bailey, is Helena Denham.

But alongside the early career of the young Michael, told by the older Moorcock with a loving nostalgia for a London now largely lost, is an astonishing fantasy world just as real, just as believable: the Alsacia. Accessible through a gate in a square just off Fleet Street where Michael works, the Alsacia has the abbey of the Old Flete Carmelite Friars and an inn where the clientele include 18th- and 19th-century highwaymen and adventurers and early 17th-century Cavaliers; Michael is introduced to Captain Turpin, Colonel Cody and Prince Rupert. And he meets the feisty Moll Midnight, with violet eyes and red-gold curls. Over the coming years he helps hold up the Hackney Mail tram, is involved in several fights with Protectorate thugs – and takes part in a plot to rescue Charles I from the scaffold. And he falls in love with Molly.

The pain throughout this book is the tension between Michael's life with Helena and their young children, and his relationship with Molly in the Alsacia – or perhaps between Law and Chaos in this ultimate multiverse. All autobiographies are fictionalised; all fictions contain truth. Whether Molly and the Alsacia represent real people and events in Moorcock's early life or his inner, creative being, this beautifully written work is one of the most honest stories imaginable.

David V Barrett

Fortean Times Verdict

ASTONISHING, BELIEVABLE WORK OF BIOGRAPHICAL FICTION

10

Tales of The Marvellous and News of the Strange

Trans: Malcom C Lyons

Penguin Classics 2014

Hb, 447pp, £10.99, ISBN 9780141395036

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £9.89

What makes these 18 stories of fantasy and adventure – newly



translated by Malcom C Lyons, a life fellow at Pembroke College, Cambridge, from “a single, ragged manuscript in a

library in Istanbul” – remarkable is that they are over 1,000 years old; six of them were included in the more famous *Thousand and One Nights* around half a century later, but the remaining 12 are new to the Western world.

All life is here: romance and betrayal, faith and ambition, loyalty and comedy, endurance and reversals of fortune; the thrill of adventure and the shock of monsters and Fate.

We have wizards and *djinn*, sword-wielding statues and people transformed into animals, along with human protagonists who feel love, lust, hate, greed, envy, fear and wonder as we would.

Robert Irwin, author of the *Penguin Anthology of Classical Arabian Literature* and *The Middle East in the Middle Ages*, gives an excellent overview of their history, context and content in the detailed introduction.

The stories seem remarkably fresh, bound neither by Christian morality nor familiar folklore tropes. Their convoluted plots, stories within stories, Sinbad-like episodic adventures, and titles such as ‘The story of Six Men: the Hunchback, the One-eyed, the Blind, the Crippled, the Man whose lips had been cut off, and the Seller of glassware’ remind me of the late Steve Moore’s *Tales of Telguuth*.

Irwin suggest these tales should be classed as literature; they were clearly not of the genre that is told in the marketplace, but carefully crafted for the entertainment of the educated.

The collection opens a welcome window into the mediæval Arabic world, untainted by modern views.

While not explicitly fortean, the anthology is perfectly enchanting, being full of “Strange and Marvellous Things”.

Bob Rickard

Fortean Times Verdict

MAYBE NOT FORTEAN, BUT DEFINITELY FULL OF MARVELS

10

Breeding pre-history

Reintroducing extinct species is doable (if you’re not aiming for *Jurassic Park*), but which ones and how similar to the original?



How to Clone a Mammoth

The Science of De-Extinction

Beth Shapiro

Princeton University Press 2015

Hb, 220p, notes, ind, £16.95, ISBN 978069115705-4

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £15.25

The big thing in cutting-edge conservation is re-wilding – returning animals hunted to extinction to those environments they were once part of. Beavers have been returned to Scotland and Devon, wild boar to Sussex and wolves to Yellowstone Park, with more re-wildings planned. The next big thing, however, may be de-extinction – returning extinct creatures to life if not, perhaps, nature. All very *Jurassic Park*, but less ambitious: scientists are aiming for thylacines, mammoths and great auks rather than dinosaurs. Dinosaur blood from insects in amber (as in *Jurassic Park*) is too old to retrieve, and amber destroys DNA captured within it. However, museums have preserved specimens of more recent creatures from which reasonably intact DNA could be extracted to reconstruct their genome. This could then be inserted into the egg cells of closely-related species and brought to term in a surrogate mother.

The science for most of this is proven: it’s essentially work pioneered in stem cell research and cloning, so technically there is no obstacle to raising this kind of dead. However, there is a gap between it being technically and practically possible, and it is this gap that Beth Shapiro explores in

How to Clone a Mammoth.

The complexity of de-extinction goes back to the selection of the species to bring back: carnivore or herbivore? Big or small? Naturally extinct or killed by humans? One that has an ecosystem to which it can be returned or one that needs it to be re-created? Then there’s the question of whether the genome can be extracted intact from preserved specimens or enough bits found for one to be stitched together – and if so, is this close enough to the original? Mammoths look like good candidates; there is a decent chance of getting good DNA from intact specimens preserved in the permafrost of Siberia. Thylacines – assuming they are extinct – are less promising: their remains are mainly preserved in alcohol or as chemically treated taxidermy specimens, and neither method is great for DNA.

DNA needs to be kept free of contamination, which is not as easy as it sounds. You need to get your DNA into the egg cell of a related species, and get that cell dividing as if it were an egg. This is how we got Dolly the sheep, so we know it works – for sheep. Every species is different: this process works for some but not for others. Dolly was the only one of 277 embryos that made it through to birth and she died prematurely because of problems originating in the cloning. For the one de-extinction of an extinct animal to have produced a live result (that of the Burcardo or Spanish Ibex), good-quality cells from a

recently deceased donor were used – an individual’s cells had been banked when it was known that the organism was down to its last few specimens. The resulting creature lived less than 10 minutes because of problems similar to those that shortened Dolly’s life.

Shapiro makes it clear that whatever science we are capable of, de-extinction by cloning faces some major obstacles. She explores other paths, though. Could we breed our way back? By selectively breeding close relatives for features that make offspring most like the lost creature, could we come up with something almost identical? It takes time, but is possible; the Nazis did this to recreate Aurochs, the primæval cattle of the German Wald, resulting in a large, mean and unmanageable cow that closely resembles Aurochs. There’s been some success in returning ancient chicken breeds this way, but they are merely lookalikes.

Shapiro asks how authentic do de-extinct creatures need to be: would a hairy elephant satisfy those who want to return Mammoths or would it really need that similarity right down to the genetic level?

None of these questions is simple to answer, but Shapiro has done an excellent job in asking them.

Ian Simmons

Fortean Times Verdict

FINE GUIDE TO DE-EXTINCTION (BUT OF WHICH SPECIES?)

9

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Brewing up a storm

The Burned-Over District, a hotbed of new religious and spiritualist movements, was so much stranger than we thought



Upstate Cauldron Eccentric Spiritual Movements in Early New York State

Joscelyn Godwin

State University of New York Press 2015

Pb, 386pp, illus, notes, bib, ind, \$29.95, ISBN 9781438455945

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £19.35

Here in the United States, we're familiar with the areas that serve as our *loci* for bizarre and inexplicable events: Area 51, the Winchester Mystery House, Roswell and, increasingly, Congress. We thought we were familiar with the Burned-Over District, that part of central and western New York State that, beginning two decades before the Civil War, was a hotbed of raging religious fervour. (Its nickname came later, when an observer declared that the fiery evangelical movements had been so fierce that no spiritual fuel was left.)

The region served as cradle to new socio-religious movements including the Shakers, Millerism, Jehovah's Witnesses, the Mormons and modern spiritualism. But in *Upstate Cauldron*, Joscelyn Godwin reveals a landscape and a people whose philosophical horizons were broader, deeper and, well... goofier. Again and again, from 1776 to 1914, self-declared prophets on the edge of the American wilderness received tokens of their deliverance, and set out to create newer, truer New Testaments – or alternatively started from scratch with revelations delivered straight from ghosts, God, intellect or libido; 'free sex' – especially with the leaders – was a common theme. A few found hypnotism and 'magnetism' helpful, as well. It is fascinating that many

founders so often found willing investors and enthusiastic followers while sometimes preaching both earthly utopia and Armageddon.

Upstate Cauldron is both academically solid and wildly entertaining. Much of its story has been told before, but in rare, separate documents. Besides being a dogged researcher, Godwin has the true fortean's appreciation of what the believers thought were each invented religion's 'logic', its rewards and nuances. Followers' desires are shown to be universal; besides Theosophy, Godwin sometimes contrasts them with Platonism, Neo-Platanism and more. The author provides a sympathetic view while maintaining a delicately wry voice, and provides so much context that the Burned-Over District's creation becomes not only explicable but inevitable.

It's difficult for us today to appreciate early Americans' mindset. As Godwin points out, "Those with the gumption to set out for virgin territory and carve a livelihood out of its natural riches were unbound by authority or creation [...] They were building a civilisation from the ground up, and along with that endeavour came a freedom in the construction of their mental worlds." This wasn't just a macho frontier myth that colonists and their descendents told themselves. "We heirs to the Enlightenment [...] can only imagine the terror of spending eternity in physical and mental agony, whether through deficiency of faith or through God's all-powerful whim." And what about loved ones? "Were they already roasting in hell?"

Many of the self-styled prophets will be unfamiliar even to American forteans. Jemima Wilkinson, 'the Universal Friend', believed herself reborn – literally; her corpse was reanimated by an hermaphroditic being, courtesy

of visiting archangels. Handsome Lake, a Native American, was visited by Jesus. They compared notes, and Christ gave his work a thumbs-up. Long before Edgar Cayce, New York State seers were relating prophecy and other visions while asleep; those blessed with such talent sometimes damned the attention and sought medical help. Rachel Baker was apparently cured by dashes of cold water and doses of camphor. Also opium. Joseph Smith, Sr, had a seeing-stone (see page 8) that helped him translate lost languages and find buried treasures long before his son, Joseph, Jr, dug up, 'hefted' and read the golden plates that led to the creation of the Mormons. The Fox Sisters are only touched upon, but the founders of modern Spiritualism are placed within a sequence of wider social movements that included anti-slavery activism and the rising women's suffrage movement.

These are only a few in the gallery of remarkable and remarkably charismatic characters given the spotlight by the suitably named author, Godwin. *Upstate Cauldron* is a charming account of a strange period in America's past. Unfortunately, though its subjects sometimes appear whimsical, and even laughable, the book may also be viewed as cautionary. Many of the movements and their founding leaders had darker strains, and much of the Burned-Over District's impetus is still with us, wearing different garments, still ignorant of the Enlightenment.

But most of all, this book is just plain fun. Godwin has the poet's pen which, as Shakespeare observed, turns "the forms of things unknown" into "shapes and gives to airy nothing a local habitation and a name."

Jay Rath

Fortean Times Verdict

WHO KNEW FOUNDING A RELIGION
COULD BE SO MUCH FUN?

9

The Hoarders

Material Deviance in Modern
American Culture

Scott Herring

University of Chicago Press 2014

Pb, 185pp, illus, notes, ind, £17.50, ISBN 9780171715

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £15.75



Dante put hoarders in the fourth circle of Hell, but these were people who accumulated money rather than trash. During the 18th and 19th centuries, unrestrained collectors were regarded as entertaining eccentrics. Then in 1947, Homer Collyer was found dead amid more than 100 tons of stuff – a sort of deranged 'Wonder Cabinet' – in his run-down Harlem brownstone. Days later, the rotting body of his brother Langley was discovered nearby, buried alive by fallen newspapers.

Social workers and psychiatrists have regarded hoarding as a threat to social order and public health, a "psychopathology of object relations" – but Scott Herring asserts: "There is no natural relation to our objects". The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (2013) pathologised clutter addicts as victims of "hoarding disorder". One psychologist even asserted: "Something at chromosome 14 may be associated with hoarding". Herring turns his spotlight, not on the 'disorder', but on those who have defined it. His book "is not a defence of hoarding but an attempt to understand what made possible the condition of defending or condemning hoarding in the first place." Spotting the Collyers, Andy Warhol and Jackie Kennedy's cousins, Big and Little Edie Beale, the book examines how fears of urban disorder, poor housekeeping and the infirmities of old age can skew our perspective.

Anthropologist Mary Douglas defined dirt as "matter out of place". Herring tells us that "the hoarder's material deviance is best viewed as a moral panic over stuff".

Paul Sieveking

Fortean Times Verdict

THOUGHT-PROVOKING BUT
MARRIED BY ACADEMESE

7

ALSO RECEIVED

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

Unidentified

The UFO Phenomenon

Robert Salas

New Page Books 2015

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

Salas – a retired missile engineer and USAF officer – takes issue with the statement made by the USAF in 1969 that “No UFO investigated and evaluated by the Air Force was ever an indication of threat to our national security” and has confronted the problem of ‘official secrecy’ at every opportunity. Here, he sets out a very detailed case and, along the way, his own UFO experience in 1967 leads into his reasons for believing that a ‘UFO Cabal’ exists at the highest level of the Air Force. However, he also conflates what was personal and local into a conspiracy that spans governments of other countries. It is a very sober yet heartfelt narrative which mitigates against the temptation to dismiss it without due consideration.

Our Holographic World

The Shocking Truth about Time and Reality

Anthony Milne

Empiricus Books 2014

Pb, 355pp, notes, ind, £10.95, ISBN 9781857568271

Curiously subtitled ‘The Shocking Truth about Time and Reality’, this is yet another take on the argument that ‘reality’ – referred to in the blurb rather simplistically as ‘the Universe’ – seems more like a super hologram. That said, Milne writes clearly and makes some interesting correlations between the many different experiences of time as related in accounts of NDEs, OOBES, reincarnation, ESP, prophecy, déjà vu, dreams, etc. His own assessment of how different branches of science deal with them – whether any common ground can be found – is well thought-out, making it a useful survey and introduction for any newcomer to these subjects.

Fearless in Tibet

Matteo Pistono

Hay House, 2014

Pb, 351pp, ind, refs, glossary, notes, \$17.95, ISBN 9781401941468

Pistono’s previous book – an account of his decade-long journey through present day Tibet – was praised by the Dalai Lama for its descriptions of the social and religious life of modern Tibetans. Pistono says that it also brought him, by stages, to an awareness of the importance of Tertön Sogyal, regarded

by many as a visionary saint and one of the most influential mystics of the 19th century, who was also a teacher and companion to the 13th Dalai Lama.

This book presents, for the first time in English, a detailed study of the life and teachings of Tertön Sogyal. Of interest here – besides an extraordinarily robust mysticism that accommodates reincarnation, visions, prophecies and ‘spirit-entities’ that personify either emanations of Buddhas or of subjugated demons – is Pistono’s portrait of the Tertön’s yogic training, endurance and antique discoveries. In Tibetan tradition, the title tertön is bestowed upon those who discover termas, ‘treasures’ – which may be texts, ritual objects, relics or long-hidden teachings, etc – believed to have been concealed by the Padmasambhava – the Indian guru who promoted Buddhism in Tibet in the eighth century – until the time was right for their revelation. *Fearless in Tibet* also records the historic meeting of the two present-day ‘simultaneous’ incarnations of Tertön Sogyal, one of whom, Sogyal Rinpoche, provides the book’s introduction. Given all that weight and solemnity, Pistono’s writing gallops along and enlightens as it entertains.

Walking Among Us

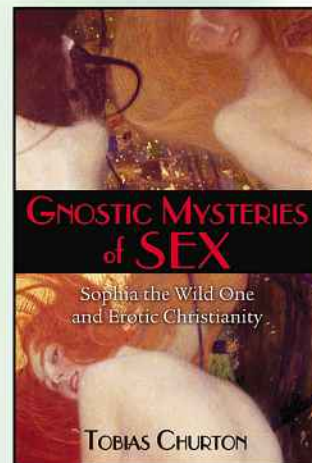
David M Jacobs

Red Wheel Weiser 2015

Pb, 287pp, notes, ind, \$21.95, ISBN 9781938875144

Anyone who has read Dr Jacobs’s previous books – particularly *Intruders* (1987), *Secret Life* (1992) and *The Threat* (1998) – knows his sincere commitment to the idea that earthlings are being abducted by aliens and subjected to medical investigation and genetic manipulation.

This book takes his thesis a step further, concluding: “The abduction evidence has forced me to evolve into a fearful investigator. I have uncovered the alien reality, as much as I dislike it.” In *Threat*, he detected changes in alien abduction patterns, suggesting here that by now untold numbers of human-alien ‘hybrids’ are walking among us. Apparently, one abductee was told: “Soon we will all be together. Soon everyone will be happy and everyone will know his place.” This chilling prediction about the alien plan to control humanity is exposed here, based on 13 interviews with abduction claimants. Those who will dismiss this as whacky will ignore it, but Jacobs is writing for believers ... and there are a lot of them out there.



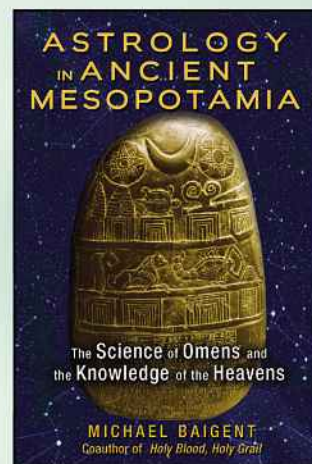
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The Messenger

Dir David Blair UK 2015
On UK release from 25 September

The publicity would have you believe *The Messenger* is a supernatural horror thriller along the same lines as *The Sixth Sense*. Aside from the shared conceit of central characters who can see dead people, the two films couldn't be more different. This isn't a cheapo British knock-off but a high-quality piece of cinema masquerading as a genre movie.

The central character is Jack (Robert Sheehan), a disturbed young man on the fringes of society who sees the ghosts of recently deceased people – specifically those who have suffered sudden or traumatic deaths and who want to use him as a messenger to contact the loved ones they left behind. He finds himself turning up at funerals trying to pass on words from beyond the grave to grieving relatives, and often getting a kicking for his troubles.

As Jack says scornfully to the spirit of a man called Mark (Jack Fox): “An accident maybe? Which means you weren't expecting it. You have unfinished business; stop me if I'm getting any of this wrong.” The trouble is, these ghosts won't leave him alone until he agrees to help. Mark is desperate to tell his

young widow Sarah (Tamsin Merchant) how much he loved her and that he didn't commit suicide but was murdered.

We see Jack struggle to come to terms with the 'gift' that is wrecking his life and, because of his kindness of heart, the compulsion he feels to help. His problems have driven him apart from his family; the only person in his life – the only living one, at any rate – is his sister Emma (Lily Cole) who feels guilty about the life of luxury she leads thanks to her high-profile lawyer husband Martin. Coincidentally, Martin happens to be representing Mark's widow Sarah throughout the police investigation, which is led by no-nonsense Glaswegian copper (is there any other kind?) DCI Keane.

As the film progresses you begin increasingly to wonder whether Jack's clearly disturbed mind is a product of his visions or the source of them. He takes endless walks in lonely places, engaging in imagined conversations with a psychiatrist (Joely Richardson), never achieving resolution. It is here that the film begins to turn away from the supernatural stuff and move towards psychological drama and, consequently, where it starts to get even better.

We begin to learn more about Jack's childhood: growing up without a father and with a largely

absent mother; in and out of care; treated as a weirdo by the locals. He drinks heavily, and sells his prescription medication to the junkie downstairs. It's made plain that the world does not want or value him, which is ironic since the netherworld clearly does. This contrast between the supernatural and the mundane is what makes the film work: I imagine it's what a Ken Loach ghost story would be like.

Director David Blair evidently has a very good eye, because the film looks absolutely stunning – not an easy trick to pull off when your film is largely shot under railway bridges and in grotty bedsits and back alleys. He is able to pick out the visual details which say more than two pages of dialogue could: Jack walking home carrying his takeaway polystyrene tray; a curled up strip of medical tablets, all popped out of the foil. The subject matter is perhaps more naturally suited to a TV drama than the big screen, so it's to Blair's credit that he's made of it a properly cinematic experience.

More than that, though, he knows how to draw performances from his actors and this, above all else, is why you should see the film. Robert Sheehan's performance as Jack is the best I've seen in a British film this year; in fact, it's the best performance I have seen in any film

this year. It's a part that requires the emotional vulnerability of someone like Ben Whishaw and the hard-nosed attitude of a Christopher Eccleston (these are two actors I admire tremendously, so when I say that on the strength of this performance Robert Sheehan is potentially right up there with them, I mean he is seriously good). It's because Sheehan is so good that you care about Jack, and that is crucial to a film like this in which the narrative and emotional weight is carried almost entirely by one character.

If I have one gripe it's that, as in so many films, the depiction of mental health care in this country seems out of sync with the reality. The mental health facilities in movies are always spotlessly clean, modern and clearly well-resourced, whereas anyone who has ever been unfortunate enough to have needed such care will tell you that the reality is quite different. But that's nitpicking. Thanks to skilful direction and one truly outstanding performance, *The Messenger* is a gripping, insightful and profoundly moving film.

Daniel King

Fortean Times Verdict

HIGH QUALITY BRITISH
PSYCHOLOGICAL THRILLER

8

Infini

Dir Shane Abbess, Australia 2015

On UK release from 18 Sept (DVD from 21 Sept)

Set in a dystopian future in which overpopulation has created a world where good living is expensive and the masses are poor, *Infini* revolves around Whit Carmichael (Daniel MacPherson), who wants a better life for himself, his wife and the baby she's carrying. To that end, he accepts a dangerous job using 'Slipstream' technology to travel to a distant off-world mining colony whose inhabitants have gone insane and murdered one another. Although offering instant travel across light years, Slipstream is risky and involves a time differential where one hour of Earth time equals seven days in space. When Whit fails to return at the appointed time, an eight-man rescue squad is sent to find out what happened; on arriving at the *Infini* colony they start to succumb to an alien organism that is slowly taking over humans.

The film has its strengths: Carl Robertson's cinematography is solid (lens flares that JJ Abrams would envy), George Liddel's production design is good (though nothing we haven't seen before), and the ensemble cast seems to relish every minute playing characters on the verge of insanity. But is it enough? Probably not; *Alien 3* syndrome kicks in as a group of characters, all similarly dressed and barely developed, start to die one by one and we don't really care. The Slipstream idea, which ultimately ends up being a plot device to hold the characters in one place awaiting their retrieval seven days later, is an interesting one, well presented visually but never fully exploited. And the set-up of a super-rich elite and a mass population of paupers – given that this is a science fiction movie – could surely have been better explored as a comment on our own austere times. Tack on the ambiguous ending which leaves us with more questions than answers and we have a film that, no matter how much you want to enjoy it, consistently falls just short of delivering.

Mark McConnell

Fortean Times Verdict

DYSTOPIAN NIGHTMARE
TREADS FAMILIAR GROUND

5

THE REVEREND'S REVIEW

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

VIDEODROME

Dir David Cronenberg, Canada 1983
Arrow Video, £29.99 (Dual Format)

Videodrome was first released in 1983. I was eight and a half and old enough to know the word 'video' had become a pop culture signifier of the future. Along with satellite TV and home computers, it signalled the dawn of a new communications era. Some people welcomed it, while others saw the beginnings of moral collapse. The Video Nasties panic of the early 1980s, for example, hinged on technology as much as morality. Consumers suddenly had the power to watch and rewatch things in secret, and they could even... heaven forfend... pause! It was into this cultural climate that horror titan David Cronenberg unleashed his own take on the tech revolution: *Videodrome*, which somehow manages to capture both the excitement of the home video age and the twitchy dread it stirred.

James Woods is Max Renn, a jaded cable TV boss who's bored with the soft porn offerings his channel puts out. He's looking for something edgy and

new, and finds it when he stumbles across a mysterious pirate broadcast called *Videodrome*, in which people are tortured and killed in a room made of red clay. It's like the boiled-down essence of much of today's reality TV. Yet the more Max watches it, the more confused he is about the real world. Biology and mechanics start switching places. TVs and Betamax tapes breath and pulsate with veins, while Max's stomach mutates into a vulva-like slit turning him into a human VCR. Sounds hokey? It's not. It's a stunning, disturbing parable of how the media shapes us into who we are – or rather who we think we are.

Critics enjoyed *Videodrome* but it tanked at the box office. Mainstream folk hated the sick surrealism and others accused it of incoherent pretension, yet the film found its real life in its most fitting context: home video. Thirty years on and it's a deserved movie classic with a chilling prophetic edge. The Marshall McLuhan-like Dr Brian Oblivion (a character who only appears on television, and only on a television) frequently spouts spookily



prescient stuff: "Television is reality... and reality is less than television". Sensing the film's importance, Arrow Video show stellar care with this Blu-Ray, jam-packed with fascinating extras and in a crisp transfer. There's even a second disc of the director's early films which, at nearly three hours, could easily have been a standalone release. Essential. (For a more in-depth review of this release, visit the Reverend's YouTube channel 'The Flicks That Church Forgot': www.youtube.com/watch?v=zlcYAM7SmBY)

Fortean Times Verdict

CRONENBERG EMBRACES THE
NEW FLESH OF THE VIDEO AGE

9



The Day the Earth Caught Fire

Dir Val Guest, UK 1961
BFI, £9.99 DVD, £12.99 (Blu-ray)

If you've never seen *The Day the Earth Caught Fire* – or if you have, long ago – this DVD is an absolute must.

Simultaneous nuclear tests by America and Russia cause a change in the tilt of the Earth's axis, resulting in extreme weather and, as the story develops, the possible end of mankind. The extent of the disaster from its cause is perhaps overdone; director and co-writer Val Guest (*Expresso Bongo*, *Quatermass 2* and much else) sent a copy of the screenplay – which later won a BAFTA – to the then science editor of the *Express*, Chapman Pincher, who said it was a “riveting story but bloody balls”.

Much of the action is set in the newsroom of the *Daily Express*, all the more realistic for it being modelled in detail on the genuine article and for the editor being played by Arthur Christiansen, who had once filled the role in real life; the news editor is played by journalist Bernard Braden, who later fronted the consumer programme *Braden's Week*, on which a certain Esther Rantzen was a researcher...

The story crackles with energy, both in the newsroom, as journalists battle with deadlines and reluctant sources, and on the streets of London, as the weather becomes more and more unpredictable: heat waves, thick ground fog, floods, hurricanes, fires, the Thames drying up – all superbly done with a mixture of paintings, models and stock footage, long before the days of CGI. The tension builds inexorably.

Of the three lead characters, only one went on to greater things. The science editor Bill McGuire is brilliantly played by Leo McKern, long before his days as Rumpole, and even before his iconic Number 2 in *The Prisoner*. But although Edward Judd, as the hard-drinking, divorced, failing journalist Peter Stenning, continued in acting for some years, he's now remembered mainly for a very short public information road safety film, “Think once. Think twice. Think bike!” Stenning's love interest, Jeannie, who leaks the story of the Earth's tilt to him, is played by the delightfully gamine

Janet Munro (later married to original *Avengers* actor Ian Hendry), a prolific actress who died 11 years later, aged just 38.

The film is a time-warp; 1961 is more than half a century ago! It's monochrome, with the opening and closing scenes tinted with a disturbing yellow light. It takes a while to acclimatise to the acting style and accents, perhaps especially Janet Munro's perfectly modulated voice, and the easy sexism of Stenning and others may shock today's sensibilities – although Jeannie is more than a match for it, a far stronger female role than in most films of the time.

What else is different? Well, in 1961 the *Daily Express* was still a real newspaper. All the papers are broadsheets, and stories are written on heavy desk typewriters. But some things haven't changed much: journalists are cynical, politicians are unbelievable, then as now. As the crisis comes to a climax, the prime minister broadcasts blandly on the radio: “I ask you now to face the future calmly and constructively, remembering that here in Britain at least, the weather is something we are used to coping with.” In contrast, Leo McKern's Bill McGuire lambasts “the stupid, crazy, irresponsible bastards” who caused the disaster.

Unusually there is very little incidental music in the film; the quality of the acting and the ever-worsening weather provide sufficient dramatic tension. But music would also have conflicted with the documentary style of filming, which includes footage of a real CND march as well as people queuing for water in London parks.

The DVD is bulging with extras, including a 34-minute appraisal of the film by several critics and a nine-minute interview with Leo McKern in what must have been one of his last appearances before his death in 2002. More disturbing are three official films about nuclear weapons and war – from 1952, 1956 and 1962 – which are far more frank about their consequences than would happen today. There's also a chunky booklet with several fascinating essays.

David V Barrett

Fortean Times Verdict
ONE OF THE BEST DISASTER MOVIES EVER MADE **10**

SHORTS

THE HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES

Arrow Video, £12.99 (Blu-ray)



There's a sadness in watching Hammer films now, knowing that their two brightest stars, Cushing and Lee, have finally blinked out. How fortunate then, that they still speak, laugh and scream in so many living rooms. Here, the two icons are both on the side of good for a change, battling the spectral hound that roams the moors. Hammer ramps up the Gothic elements, throwing in a little extra horror for good measure: I'm pretty sure there were no tarantulas in Doyle's original story. When the dog finally turns up, it's a disappointment, as the interviewees on the extras freely admit. The dog's trainer was none other than Barbara Woodhouse, which makes the Reverend wonder why they didn't just let her leap out of the shadows instead: viewers over 40 might remember how scary she was. **Rev PL 8/10**

QUATERMASS

Network, £14.99 (DVD), £19.99 (Blu-ray)



John Mills twiddles his farmer's sideburns as he searches the south of England for his granddaughter, while trying to figure out why space stations are imploding and the youth have gone all hippy, marching expectantly to stone circles like Ringstone Round. Along the way, he fights urban gangs, hangs out in an underground trash village made up of pensioners from *EastEnders*, and witnesses near Armageddon at

Wembley Stadium. Production company Euston Films were certainly not short on ambition when they made this four-part TV series for Thames Television. The results might not be as solid as the previous *Quatermass* outings, but boy, is it good, bleak fun. **Rev PL 8/10**

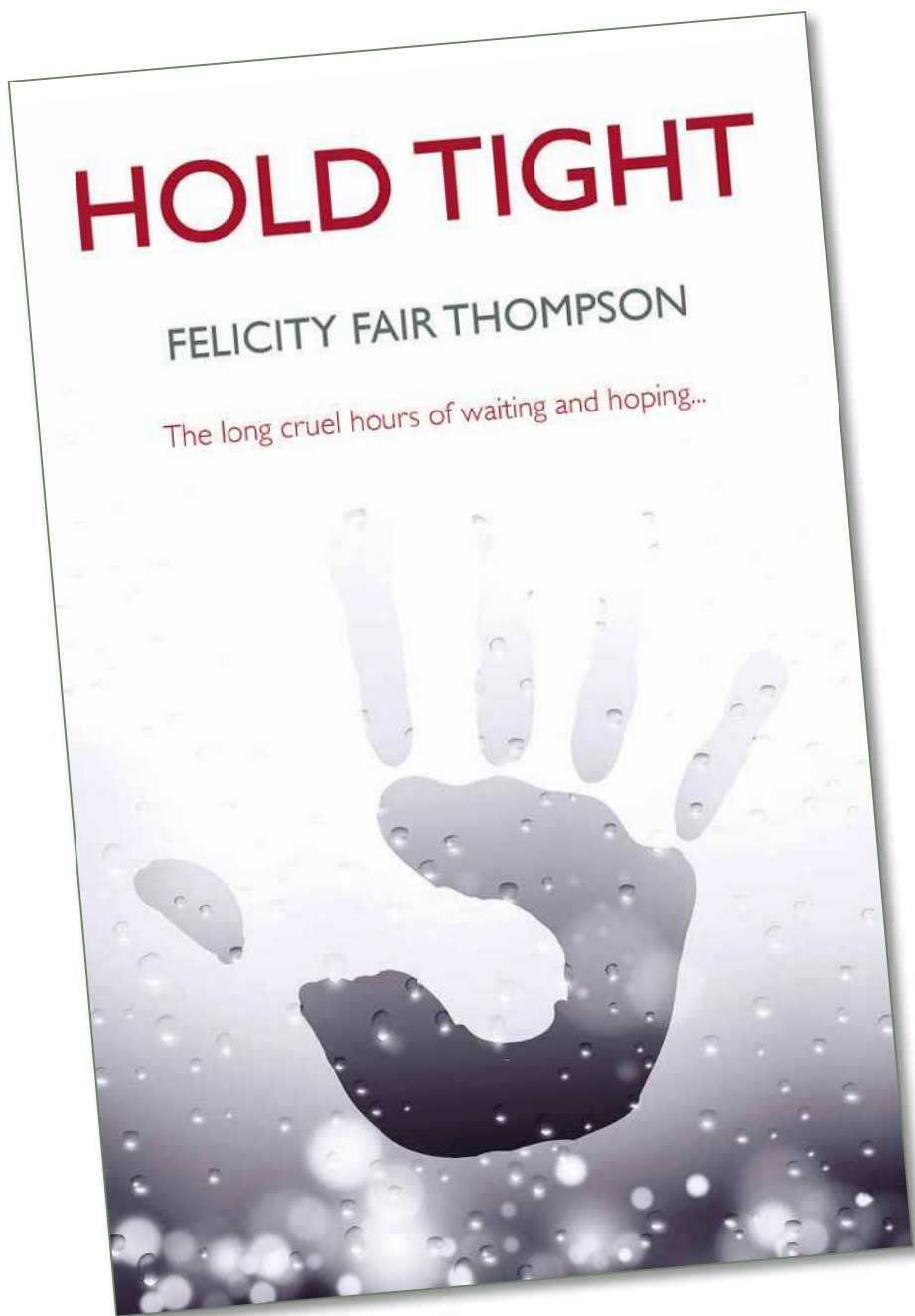
STATIONS OF THE CROSS

Arrow Films, £10.99 (DVD), £12.99 (Blu-ray)



Maria (Lea van Acken) is a young girl being brought up in the Society of St Paul who struggles to maintain the exacting standards demanded of her by her faith and her aggressively devout mother (Franziska Weisz). This ‘Society’ is a thinly disguised version of the Society of St Pius X, a group that rejects the modernisations of Vatican II and now exists outside of the Catholic Church. It is, to put it mildly, conservative in outlook. Maria and her friends are indoctrinated to believe that they are religious warriors, that the modern world is evil, that their way is not just the best way but the only way, that sacrifices are a necessity and that ascending to Heaven is the ultimate goal of life. Director Dietrich Brüggermann is inviting us to consider the parallels with the radicalisation of some young Muslims: the problem is not religion per se, but extremism. There are plenty of religious characters in the film and the vast majority of them are decent, humane people; the rest are extremists who have perverted religious devotion into a death cult. As it moves slowly towards its inevitable conclusion, the film is divided into 14 tableaux to mirror the 14 Stations of the Cross, Jesus's journey to his place of crucifixion. I use the word tableaux advisedly because each segment consists of one take with no edits and virtually no camera movement. As a piece of film-making, it is remarkable and the demands placed on the cast must have been enormous. An uneasy watch that provokes a sense of despairing anger at the human cost of all this dogma. **Daniel King 7/10**

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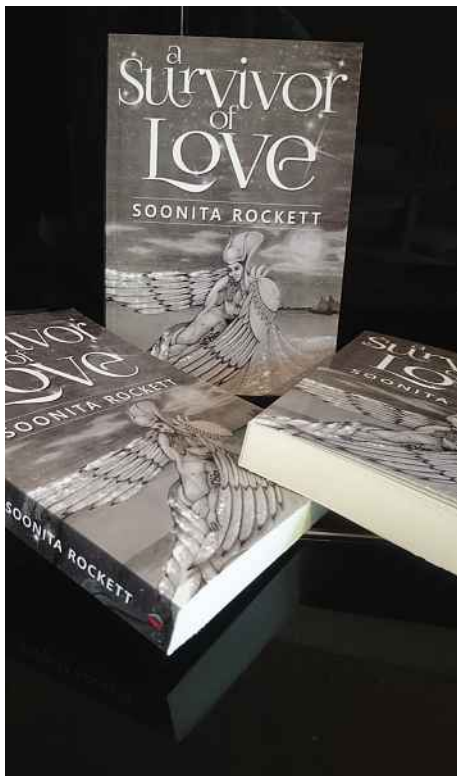
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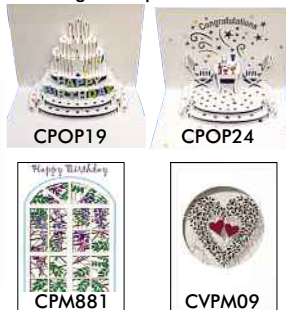


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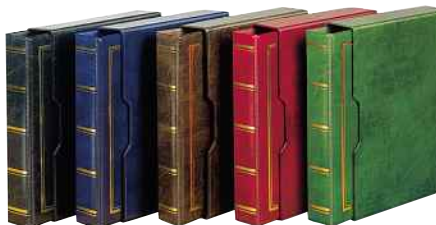
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Dear FT...

letters



Spectral dog-haters

Regarding the claimed Scottish bridge 'haunting' allegedly fatal to dogs [FT331:22], Scotland has traditions of both haunted bridges and ghosts showing a dislike of dogs. Elliot O' Donnell in his *Ghosts With A Purpose* (1952) states: "Bridges in Scotland would seem to be not infrequently haunted", including one at Aultgrande, Cromarty Firth, where humans sense someone trying to push them into the water, particularly on Christmas Eve (p103). O'Donnell also states (p145): "In Tiree, Mull and Iona the ghostly inhabitants of caves are credited with a great antipathy to dogs. It is said that they lure them into caves, in order to frighten them to death."

Alan Murdie

Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk

Mystery epidemics

I was very interested to read 'Sleepy Hollow', your report on the village of Kalachi in Kazakhstan [FT329:10-11]. Kalachi is not the first place to suffer from a mysterious recurring illness that seems to have no rational cause. In the 1950s the authorities of the Bulgarian Ministry of Public Health and Social Welfare became aware of a mysterious disease called Balkan nephropathy. In the country's north-west foothills of the Balkan Mountains, small villages were suffering from a statistically alarming outbreak of renal failure.

When *The Ghost Disease* by Michael Howell and Peter Ford was published by Penguin Books in 1986, there was still no known cause. Diet, living conditions and family medical histories revealed only that it was confined to the area. If you grew up and moved elsewhere you died from the nephropathy; if your parents moved out of the area before you were born, you were healthy even though they might die. The most notable symptom was an ochre colouring of the skin, particularly the hands and soles of the feet.



Simulacra corner

Amanda Day noticed this elephant lurking by the Thames at Twickenham. 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.

Blood transfusions helped allay the symptoms but did not cure the disease. In 2014 *New Scientist* magazine reported that no cause or cure for the disease has been found.

In 1965 the English town of Epping suffered an outbreak of jaundice that puzzled health officials but was eventually tracked down to contaminated flour. Then there is the disease kuru, which was found to be caused, not by sorcery as the Fore people of the New Guinea highlands thought, but by the practice of ritual cannibalism and the eating of the brains of people suffering from the disease. It turned out to be a form of Creutzfeld-Jacob disease.

It would be interesting to read about any other instances of mysterious diseases confined to particular areas and with no known cause.

Margaret Pitcher

Warramanga, Australian Capital Territory

Lightning records

Re Louis Proud's "Human lightning rods" [FT330:30-35], the record for lightning survival is actually an astonishing 20 hits in 16 hours, by a group of five

mountaineers in July 1995. Hugo Glover, Ruaridh Pringle, and three Japanese climbers named Go, Hiro and Ozaki were trapped in a crevice on the slopes of the Petit Dru in the Alps when they were hit by the worst storm in the area for 27 years. Lightning attracted to the crevice struck them in their tent over and over again.

"Everything turned blinding white, and then the niche was full of screaming - some of which I realised came from me," Pringle wrote later for *Reader's Digest*. "Then the niche detonated once more, and an exploding sensation tore up from the soles of my feet, seeming to exit my back. I was screaming again. My right leg felt like it was being crushed. Others were also screaming. Pain faded to numbness; groans to brittle titters, and then the niche exploded in light once more, and the screaming

resumed. I began counting electrocutions to distract myself. After five, the bivouac stank of burning, and the scorched, rubber musk of humans who expected to die at any second. On the sixth, the charge ripping through my body was so strong that I passed out."

The last three hits came as they were abseiling across towards a hut shelter, but they finally made it. Seven more parties had to be rescued by helicopter, a man was killed by lightning at the Chamonix cable car station, and three more died in the mountains nearby. But Roy Sullivan's record had been well and truly shattered.

About 80 per cent of people struck by lightning survive. The most famous case was Lee Trevino, struck along with two fellow professional golfers, who quipped later: "Always carry a one iron. Even God can't hit a one iron."

The record for the largest number of people killed by one bolt is 21 in 1975, at Umtali in what is now Zimbabwe, although larger losses of life have resulted from lightning causing plane crashes and explosions. The most famous deaths were two Thai women killed in Hyde Park in London by a bolt that struck their underwired bras.

Trevor Hart

Woodbridge, Suffolk



THE SURREAL MCCOY

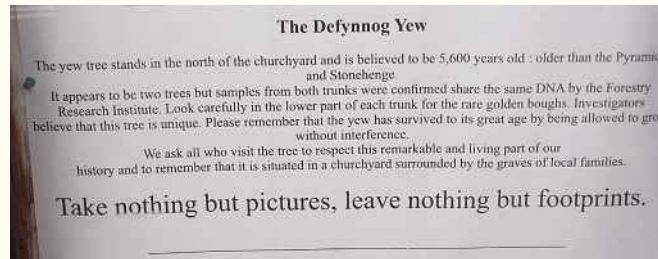
Venerable yews

It was interesting to read Steve Marshall's impressively long article on 'The Immortal Yew' [FT330:36-43]. Unfortunately, much of the information given is out of date. I find his sarcastic tone, as in his statement on Ankerwycke that there was no reason for King John to visit the Ankerwycke yew for sealing the Magna Carta, as "he was there for politics, not dendrotourism" flippant and ill-informed. Most historians now agree that the Ankerwycke site was the most logical for the agreement, at the religious sanctuary of the old Priory between Staines and Windsor. This would have been acceptable to both parties as a neutral meeting place.

Marshall states that "a glorious history has been invented for the Ankerwycke". Certainly the history is glorious, but not invented. "Runnymede," according to the definitive *Concise Oxford English Dictionary of Place Names*, "derives its name from the old English 'council island' or 'assembly'." The Ankerwycke yew stands on an island in the Thames. It needed to be on sufficiently high ground, unlike the area of the present Runnymede, which would have been boggy and open to floods. The Thames has, over the years, changed course and part of its previous channel is still visible. At the time of King John, before 1250, the island in the Thames upon which grows the ancient yew, next to the old Priory, was part of Runnymede.

Jeremy Harte, much quoted in Marshall's article, was certainly sceptical about the ages of the yew in the 1990s, but over the years has reviewed his ideas and today says: "They are much older than we first thought".

Marshall says it is "extraordinarily difficult" to date yews accurately, which it is. Hollow yews present many difficulties in ageing, and as Fred Hageneder rightly points out, yews can go through a period of dormancy (i.e. not producing annual rings). Dendrochronology and carbon-



dating can sometimes be useful, although they cannot accurately date hollow yews. Forestry expert Reg Wheeler, late of Alice Holt Forestry Research Station, diligently checked ring counts of several hundred old yews and came to the conclusion that some would have to be 2,000 years old. Alan Mitchell, world-renowned ancient tree expert [see his article, "Tricks of the Trees" FT70:55 - Editor], also came to the conclusion after re-measuring many old yews in Hampshire and Surrey, that some of these could indeed be 3,000 years old.

Other tree experts such as Tabbush and White agree and have produced graphs showing the ages can exceed 3,000 years. Allen Meredith's exponential curve for calculating the age of yews, far from being inaccurate as claimed by Marshall, largely conforms to those of other tree experts and as quoted in *The Tree Register Handbook*, which is supported by Kew Gardens, "Allen Meredith, whose estimates for the ages of churchyard yews are as well informed as anyone's, has suggested as much as 5,000 years for those at Fortingall in Perthshire, Discoed in Wales and Llangernwy in Conwy."

There seems to be a general consensus of expert opinion that yews can live for over 2,000 years. Paul Tabbush and John White of Alice Holt Forestry Research published their findings in the *Quarterly Journal of Forestry* in 1997. Dr Peter A Thomas, researcher in Plant Ecology, University of Keele, Professor Michail V Pridnya (Socha, Russia) who presented 'Studies of *Taxus baccata* in the Caucasus Region', and Tim Hills of the Ancient Yew Group in "The overlap of ages in

the groups Ancient, Veteran and Notable" says: "We at least leave open the possibility that some of our oldest yews might have been growing in the Bronze Age".

All agree on the great age of yews. Age graphs of the yew by Toby Hindson, Andy Moir, Tabbush and White can be found in *The British Ecological Society Journal of Ecology* in 2003. Dr David L Protheroe in "Calculation of theoretical age of yews" scientifically worked out ages of yews, demonstrating some were over 2,000 years old. Tabbush and White have even gone as far as 5,000 years. Fred Hageneder in *Yew, a History* (2007) shows a graph by Toby Hindson and Tabbush and White showing ages of over 3,000 years. Dendrochronologist Andy Moir records a yew of 14ft (4.3m) in girth in the north of England as being approximately 1,500 years old. In terms of the 30ft (9m) girth yews, the 14ft girth yew is just a youngster. Many old yews have not increased their girth in over 200 years, such as Acton Beauchamp (Worcestershire), Totteridge (Hertfordshire), Farningham (Kent), and dozens of others.

It is, however, important to understand that the girth of the yew is not the most important consideration when assessing age, as old yews can lose girth. The Aldworth yew over 350 years ago was 27ft (8m) in girth up until 1976, when it was severely damaged by a storm. The tree has been regularly measured, each decade over the past 300 years. It is now only 13ft (4m) in girth but still lives on. There are many other examples of yews with reduced girths. Old yews heal themselves and carry on.

It has long been known that

many churchyard sites occupy pre-Christian burial grounds. The Church has no problem with this. St Augustine, in 597-601, converted many pagan sites to Christianity and in some instances the trees were already there. Bronze Age and Iron Age people were well aware of the cardinal points, and generally speaking, Celtic people planted their yews on burial sites on the Sun's path, east and west of the mound. The reason many yews were planted on the south, next to the porch, is because it was the Saxons, in the Christian era, who planted yews on the south side of the centre of the burial mound, where churches generally are today.

Early laws (AD 400) forbade people to worship at trees, stones and water sources. However, although stones on sacred burial sites were moved or broken up and wells filled in or covered up, the public had such regard for the trees that the authorities did not pursue their destruction and later laws actually gave protection to the old yews in the churchyards. The earliest law for provision of protection of trees on sacred sites is the letter from Pope Gregory the Great in AD 597/601, instructing Abbot Mellitus to tell Augustine "not to destroy the Fana [sacred grove or sacred tree], only the idols placed in them, so that the people will still come to these familiar sites."

Sometime later, under the laws of Hywel Dda (*Leges Walliae* 262) in AD 950, yews dedicated to Teilo and Dubricious were protected. In fact under another law of Hywel Dda in the same document, people were punished if they violated the sacred trees. Saint's yews were considered to be of a higher value than all other trees and there were appropriate fines for injuring such a tree. In 1307, it was proclaimed *Ne Rector prosternet arbores in Cemeteris* ("The rector is not allowed to destroy the trees in the churchyard") (Statute 35 of Edward I's laws, 1307.)

These early laws protecting trees, especially yews, have

never been revoked, which begs the question as to why there are problems today in protecting churchyard yews. The laws also make nonsense of the certifies that have recently flooded Welsh churches, dating yews to a mere 500 or 800 years of age. As shown in my book *The God Tree* (2012), there are more ancient yews in Wales than in any other country in the world and there is a growing awareness of this fact amongst the Welsh, who are unhappy with the fact that knowledge of the age of yews is being undermined.

Archaeologists have discovered evidence of Bronze Age burials and Roman artefacts in churchyards and there are quite a few examples of these pre-Christian sites appropriated by the Church that have ancient yews still growing on them. These include Corhampton, which has a Roman sarcophagus, Gresford (a Roman altar), Uppington (Roman altar found under the yew), Darley Dale (Roman burial urn found), Llanilid (a Roman stone), and Claverly (Roman site with Roman remains). Fortingall has a Neolithic cup and ring marked stone that was discovered 8ft (2.8m) down, below the old yew; and the Defynnog stone carries Celtic carving, Roman writing and a Neolithic cup mark. Alton Priory, Long Sutton, Tangle, Meopham and Sandhurst are all sites where megalithic Sarsen stones have been discovered. Warbleton is on a Neolithic burial mound. Meidrim is a pre-Christian burial site, while Pennant Melangell and Rhulen churchyard are both on Bronze Age burial mounds.

Marshall's article raises an important question about how we should deal with ancient and historical sites. Are we to deny people access to these places, in case they do damage? Toby Hindson, a member of the Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids and the Ancient Yew Group, is worried that trophy hunters might damage the Defynnog yew. So far, as the Parish Council agrees, there has been no damage done, and all of the tree's golden

boughs are perfectly intact and growing, despite a much greater number of people visiting the site. (I last visited on 30 July 2015.) It is good to see that there is a growing interest in ancient trees such as the ancient Fortingall yew, which has been treated with similar respect.

Hindson has dated the Linton yew to 4,000 years and yet he questions the 5,000 years I gave to the old yew at Defynnog, as if such an idea were preposterous. Defynnog Parish Council in its pamphlet on the Defynnog yew says "Toby Hindson expresses reservations about the alleged age of the tree". Other professionals have not. Nonetheless, Hindson regards the Defynnog yew to be of very ancient and international significance and states that "the best evidence we have, official and unofficial, implies that the largest girth yew of the two halves that make up the Defynnog yew might have begun growing during the Iron Age, so it may quite possibly be over 2,000 years old." Hindson obviously has no problem with pre-Christian yews on church sites.

Before separating into two parts, the Defynnog yew would certainly not have measured 100ft (30m) in girth as suggested by Hindson, and probably not even 50ft – but part of the tree having broken away, the smaller part has done what yews do and completed its trunk by growing new wood and bark around the broken area.

In the quiet and sleepy village of Defynnog, it is not at all surprising that the yew on the north side of the church went unnoticed in recent centuries by the outside world. Wales is full of hidden and forgotten places. Now with the church newly painted in lime white and a proud notice about the ancient yew at its gate, Defynnog has taken on new life, claimed world attention and looks set to become as famous as its male counterpart, the Fortingall yew. Long live the yew!

Janis Fry
By email

Dadd and Capgras

I was interested in David V Barrett's article on "poor mad Richard Dadd" [FT330:20-21]. It is, of course, correct to suppose that Dadd was suffering from "a form of schizophrenia" even though this disease was not described until the turn of the century. He had earlier believed that the Egyptian God Osiris has instructed him to kill the Pope, but why did he stab his own father to death, and why did his insanity abate after his confinement in an asylum?

These facts have led me to believe that Dadd was suffering from Capgras Syndrome [FT123:14, 133:16, 145:17], again half a century before it was officially described by a French physician. The essence of the condition is that you believe that someone familiar to you has been abducted and replaced by an exact double (a *doppelgänger* syndrome). Prior to murdering his father, Richard Dadd described him to an innkeeper as "the man who calls himself my father".

Nick Warren
Pinner, Middlesex

German werewolves

The "Morbach Monster" [FT329:30-36] was not the first encounter of US troops with German werewolves. Seabury Quinn's short story "Bon Voyage, Michele" (printed in *Weird Tales* in 1944) tells of American troops in the Rhineland occupation army after World War I being saved from evil German werewolves by a beautiful White Russian weredog. Werewolves in the American popular imagination go a long way back! I'm not including the Nazi werewolf guerrilla movement after World War II, which was more odd than effective.

Bob Emery
Albany, New York

The flitting hob

Bob Fischer's 'Hobnobbing with the Hobs' [FT330:58] recounts the tale of the hob that followed the farmer who tried to move away from him. This folkloric motif is apparently found all over Europe, and we Norwegians know about it

from a well-known children's song:

*Og mannen ville fra nissen flytte
men reisen ble ham til ingen nytte,
for høyt på vognlasset nissen lo:
Jeg tror vi flytter i dag, vi to,
jeg tror vi flytter i dag, vi to.*

This is a literal word-for-word translation:
"And the man would from the nisse move,
but the journey became him to no avail,
for high on the cartload the nisse laughed:

I think we're moving today, we two,
I think we're moving today, we two."

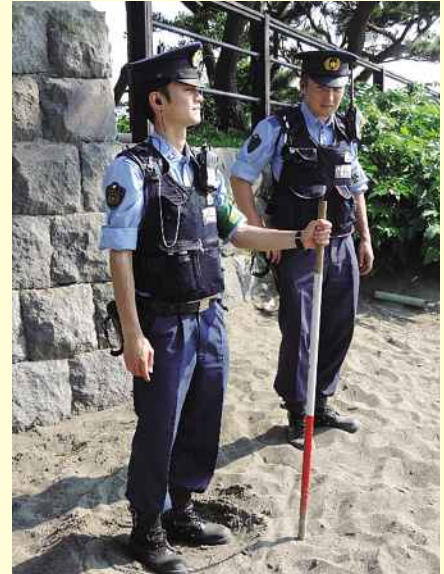
The *nisse* is the same entity as the Swedish *tomte* and (obviously) Fischer's 'hob' – one of the Little People who is attached to a farm and can be both benevolent and malevolent. The word *flytte* means 'move' and corresponds to the 'flitting' in Fischer's story.

The provenance of the song is unknown, but the words and music are sufficiently modern that I would guess they are no older than the 19th century. It is – or used to be – universally known to Norwegians, and the phrase *nissen på lasset* (the hob on the cartload) is a stock comment on situations where someone unsuccessfully tries to get away from something undesirable:

– I hear Smith got a new job?
– Yes, he gets much better pay but still spends more than he earns.
– Uh huh, the hob on the cartload, eh?

The *nisse* is commonly pictured as a little man with a long beard, similar (but not identical) to Rien Portvliet's gnomes [FT322:40]. This is a universal stereotype – all Norwegians will tell you that a *nisse* has a red woollen hat and a long white beard.

All the odder, some years ago – probably in the 1980s – I heard a man on the radio claiming he had met a real *nisse*. But, significantly, this *nisse* had been totally different: he had no hair or clothes. I think he described him as a 'hairless monkey' or something like that. This always sends a shudder through me when I think of it. If he had been hallucinating or



ABOVE LEFT & CENTRE: The 'ghostly boots' photo and the spot where it was taken. ABOVE RIGHT: Boys in blue at the Emperor's Summer Palace.

Real boots

Regarding the "ghostly boots" behind the little girl [FT328:25], the location of the photograph is not Zushi as stated, but a little down the coast at Hayama. This is right next to the Summer Palace of the Emperor of Japan and, as you might expect, has

a sizable police presence. The 'ghost' is clearly one of Kanagawa's boys in blue who has wandered into shot.

I include a photo of the location, which shows that there is an incline down to the beach allowing for an unexpected approach from that direction. Also, as the cops' beat includes the beach, they are issued

with special boots for the sand. These boots and their blue shirts can be seen in the photo.

What is largely unknown in the West, however, is that the ghosts of deceased policemen exclusively guard the Japanese Emperor's Summer Palace.

Don Cake
by email

dreaming, you would expect him to see the stereotypical bearded *nisse*. Whatever he saw, it must have been something completely different – but why then call it a *nisse*? I can't get my head around it.

Nils Erik Grande
Oslo, Norway

King Of Scotland

SD Tucker's consideration of Idi Amin [FT330:52-54] credits that villain's claiming the title of 'King of Scotland' to his feeling "fond of his old Scottish commanding officers", but there is real-life conspiracy here. An article in Uganda newspaper *The Monitor* on 25 Feb 2007 by Guweddeko Fred tells us that "On December 31, 1974 Amin issued a document addressed to all world leaders, declaring the launch of the Scottish independence struggle at the Imperial Hotel in Kampala. In the document dated December 30, 1974, Amin called on the world leaders to support the Scottish cause."

Amin's long pronouncement

begins "Following the formation of a Scottish Provisional Government which aims at achieving complete independence for the people of Scotland, their leaders have approached me to bring their case before Your Excellencies and to the United Nations Committee on Decolonisation to consider their independence." (<http://tinyurl.com/pyc6d8x>)

The identity of the visiting shadowy right wing self-elected spokesmen for Scotland is uncertain, but probably some were among the five APG [Army of the Provisional Government] men convicted of several political bombings in 1970s Scotland. The group had spent several hours briefing Amin on Scotland's history, hoping for funds for an armed uprising. Did they get



any cash? Maybe, they certainly captured his interest, and his resulting buffoonish posturing.

"The leaders of the Scottish Provisional Government assured me they consider me, General Idi Amin, as their leader and they have made me Chairman of Uganda Scottish Community."

As if.

Ewan McVicar
Linlithgow, West Lothian

Keep incarnating

The comments of Rob Bray [FT329:68] concerning earlier correspondence on reincarnation [FT322:70] got me thinking. Although not a settled "reincarnationist" as such, I've also entertained the idea that, if there is any reality to the concept, it may be a process that is not locked into linear time, and hence it may be possible – for example – for a person incarnated 20 years hence, who dies 100 years from now, to then reincarnate in 20 BC. But then another thought struck me. If our relationship to time is so

flexible, why assume that any one earthly life represents only one reincarnation? Could I reincarnate again as myself? Would I then be able to make different choices and order my life differently to the way in which I have? This would, perhaps, suggest multiple realities, or maybe a reality that, whilst not in linear time, is not so much cyclical as spiral. And does it even stop there? Could someone else incarnate into my current body, and then either experience the life I am living now, or take it in a completely different direction? Maybe even do so repeatedly?

At this point my brain began to hurt...

As an unrelated aside, it recently came to my attention that the works of Charles Fort are available online at Fortean Texts <<http://www.sacred-texts.com/fort/index.htm>>. It struck me as itself rather fortetean to find these works on a website that has the heading of "sacred texts". Fort as prophet, perhaps?

Simon Curzon
By email

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

Son's precursor

The experience described of the *vardøger* in Nils Erik Grande's "Harbinger Ghosts" [FT327:30-33] is not confined to Norway and Norwegians, nor to animals. I have had this experience on a number of occasions, usually in relation to my son returning home. When we lived in London I would step outside the room expecting to see him on the staircase, certain that I heard him open the front door, close it and start to climb the stairs, and no one was there until he did appear a short while later. I still sometimes experience it in our home in Sussex, and he claims he has heard 'me' also. I was unaware of it as a known phenomenon until I read Rupert Sheldrake's book *Dogs that Know When Their Owners Are Coming Home* (1999) and immediately recognised it. I realise that sounds in apartments are sometimes difficult to distinguish, but the *Vardøger* experience was also often accompanied by a distinct sense of the uncanny.

Margaret Jonas

East Grinstead, West Sussex

The *vardøger* of Norway seem to me rather like the *toili* or faery funerals around Milford Haven. A forewarning of some event mutated into a sensory perception that the receiver can come to terms with. It may be relevant to point out that Pembrokeshire probably had quite an influx of Viking genes around the ninth century.

Patrick F James

Swallowcliffe, Wiltshire

Invisible visitor

In 1996 I bought a house in China Grove, North Carolina. I was married at the time and also owned several dogs. We began to notice the sound of a vehicle driving up our long (1,000ft/300m) gravel driveway, and then the sound of tyres driving over the steel threshold as it pulled inside the garage (always through the second door of the two-door garage). Sometimes we would hear a car door open, then close. The dogs would run out barking and we would go out to see who it was – but no one would be there.

It wasn't until I read Nils Eric Grande's feature on "Harbinger ghosts" that I realised others experienced a similar phenomenon. However, there are some clear differences between our experiences and the *vardøger/fylgja*. Crucially, our sound sequence never presaged anyone, even though it occurred frequently, sometimes daily. It occurred when one or the other of us was not home. When my husband and I separated and he moved out in September 1999, the phenomenon ceased. I never heard it again.

Kim Lane

China Grove, North Carolina



Sinister echoes

Until recently, my brother was in the 9th/12th Lancers in the British Army, based at the Bergen-Hohne Station in Germany. It is on the edge of NATO's enormous Bergen-Hohne Training Area, established in the 1930s by Hitler's Wehrmacht. It feels remote, despite being near the town of Bergen, and is about 2km (just over a mile) from the site of Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. On liberation, the barracks, which had once housed Wehrmacht soldiers, became home to thousands of displaced persons, but since 1950 has been used by the Army. Unsurprisingly, the barracks are legendary amongst soldiers for being haunted.

In December 2010, my brother was the only person in his block over Christmas. On his first night alone, he noticed that the motion-activated lights had come on in the corridor. He poked his head outside his room but didn't see anyone. He thought that whoever had set them off might be hiding in the showers, but their motion-activated lights hadn't come on and they were in darkness. But someone had to be in there, because one after another, the showers turned on. Back in his room, he could hear stamping feet and the sound of something being dragged across the floor of the attic above. Was one of the few other soldiers on site playing a prank on him?

About five or six months later, he was living in another block. He kept his heavy daysack on a shelf above his bed, and one night he witnessed it fly about two or three metres with great force across the room, as if it had been thrown by an

invisible hand. This was no prank.

He wasn't alone in experiencing strange phenomena. About a year or two later, a friend of his who was, again, by himself over Christmas, heard screaming, plates smash and doors slam. He went to the kitchen but it was just as he had left it – no one was there, and no plates were broken.

The Med Barracks are nearby, and there are soldiers' tales that the basement was filled in because inhumane experiments had been carried out there. It is off-limits, gated and locked. There is no electricity, but lights are still seen in the windows, and chilling cries have been heard from it.

My brother said the area had an oppressive, unnerving atmosphere: it would seem that the echoes of unimaginable human cruelty still linger.

Helen Barrell

Birmingham

Northumberland

wraith

My father did national service in the Army. After two years in the Royal Artillery, he did three and a half years in the Territorials (the 268 Medium Regiment). In the summer of 1955 – he believes it was August – he was on exercise at Otterburn Ranges in Northumberland. He and a colleague were driver/wireless operators in a Land Rover. They were acting as a "rear link" (something to do with relaying radio messages between different positions). Anyway, they were driving down the side of a valley where there was a stone bridge going over a small but fast-flowing river. As they approached the bridge, they both independently saw what appeared to be an old woman carrying a bag with a shawl over her head standing at the roadside, almost as if she were waiting for a bus – not that there was any marked stop there. She was totally grey, almost as if she were monochrome.

After they passed her and looked back, there was no sign of her. They both confirmed that they had seen her and went back to investigate. They initially thought she was a corporeal person who might have fallen into the river. It was just open moorland with a solitary tree nearby. The ground where they saw her standing was quite sandy. They left footprints, but could not see any others; and there was no sign of anyone having fallen into the river. They did report it when they got back in case it was a real person who had fallen into the river. Nothing more was ever heard about it. By that time, they both suspected that they had seen something out of the ordinary. My father pointed out on a map where he thinks they saw the old woman. It was a minor road that goes south to the A696 in the village of Otterburn.

Gary Stocker

By email

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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.

Special Correspondents

AUSTRALIA Graham Cordon (SA), Tony Healy (ACT), John Palazzi (NSW), Len Watson (Qld).
CANADA Brian Chapman (BC), Graham Conway (BC), **CYBERSPACE** Richard Alexander, John F Callahan, Hugh Henry, Steve Scanlon, Janet Wilson. **ENGLAND** Gail-Nina Anderson, Louise Bath, James Beckett, Claire Blamey, Peter Christie, Mat Coward, Kate Eccles, Paul Farthing, George Featherston, Paul Gallagher, Alan Gardiner, Keith George, Anne Hardwick, Richard Lowke, Alexis Lykiard, Diana Lyons, Dave Malin, Nick Maloret, Valerie Martin, Tom Ruffles, Meryl Santis, Paul Screeton, Gary Stocker, Roman Suchyj, Frank Thomas, Paul Thomas, Nick Warren, Owen Whiteoak, Bobby Zodiac. **FRANCE** Michel Meurger. **GERMANY** Ulrich Magin.
HOLLAND Robin Pascoe. **IRELAND** Andy Conlon, Pat Corcoran, Andrew Munro. **ISRAEL** Zvi Ron. **NEW ZEALAND** Peter Hassall. **ROMANIA** Iosif Boczor. **SCOTLAND** Roger Musson.
SWEDEN Sven Rosén. **THAILAND** Chris Williams. **USA** Loren Coleman (ME), Jim Conlan (CT), Myron Hoyt (ME), Greg May (FL), Dolores Phelps (TX), Jim Riecken (NY), Joseph Trainor (MA), Jeffrey Vallance (CA), Gary Yates (UT). **WALES** Janet & Colin Bord.

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PHENOMENOMIX

Mme BLAVATSKY
PART 2

HUNT EMERSON and KEVIN JACKSON

THE FIRST FORTY YEARS OF HPB'S LIFE ARE LARGELY A MYSTERY - HER OWN YARNS ARE OUR ONLY REAL RECORD...

SHE WAS BORN IN 1831 TO A GERMAN FAMILY - THE VON HAHNS - WHO LIVED IN THE UKRAINE!

AS A GIRL SHE WAS A GREAT BEAUTY...



BUT SHE WAS A NERVOUS CHILD, AND SAW DARK EYES STARING FROM THE SHADOWS...



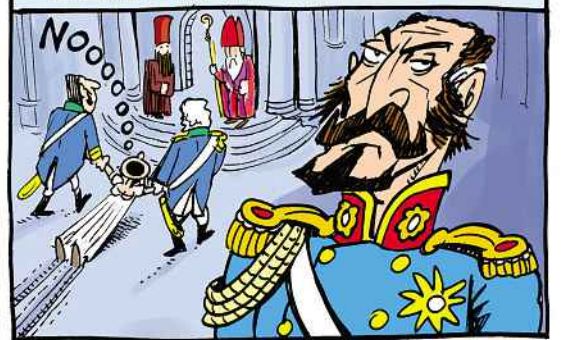
SHE ALSO HAD THE POWER OF ASTRAL TRAVELLING...



AND SHE HAD VISIONS OF A "MYSTERIOUS INDIAN MAN" - ONE OF THE WORLD'S "SECRET MASTERS"!



AT THE AGE OF JUST 16, HER FAMILY MARRIED HER OFF TO AN "ANCIENT MAN" (ACTUALLY ONLY IN HIS FORTIES) - GENERAL BLAVATSKY...



SHE STOOD IT FOR 3 MONTHS, THEN RAN AWAY! SHE ALWAYS CLAIMED THAT HER FIRST STOP WAS TIBET, WHERE SHE STUDIED THE OCCULT...



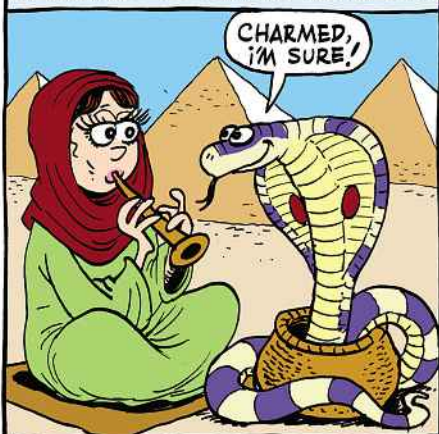
SHE ALSO CLAIMED TO HAVE BEEN TO CONSTANTINOPLE, WHERE SHE WAS A RIDER IN A CIRCUS...



TO PARIS, WHERE SHE MET THE SCOTTISH MEDIUM DANIEL HOME, AND SAW HIM LEVITATE OUT OF A FOURTH FLOOR WINDOW...



... TO CAIRO, WHERE SHE LEARNED TO CHARM SNAKES...



... AND BECAME APPRENTICED TO AN EGYPTIAN ALCHEMIST, WHO COULD TURN OBJECTS INTO PURE GOLD...



AND FINALLY TO ENGLAND, WHERE SHE MET A FLESH-AND-BLOOD VERSION OF THE "MYSTERIOUS INDIAN" OF HER GIRLHOOD VISIONS!

GOOD MORNING! THE NAME IS MORYA - BUT YOU CAN CALL ME MASTER...



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FORTEAN TIMES 333

ON SALE 15 OCT 2015

STRANGE DEATHS

UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL



Peter Wadhams, Professor of Ocean Physics at Cambridge University, has suggested that three scientists investigating the melting of Arctic ice may have been assassinated within the space of a few months in early 2013. They are Seymour Laxon (49) and Katherine Giles (35), both climate change scientists at University College London, and Tim Boyd (54) of the Scottish Association for Marine Science. Prof Laxon fell down a flight of stairs at a New Year's Eve party in Essex and Dr Giles died in a collision with a tipper truck in Victoria, London, while cycling to work on 8 April. Dr Boyd is thought to have been struck by lightning and killed instantly while walking his dogs near his home in Port Appin, Argyll, western Scotland, on 25 January 2013. Prof Wadhams said that the deaths "were accidents as far as anybody was able to tell but the fact they were clustered like that looked so weird." He said that in the weeks after Prof Laxon's death he believed he was himself targeted by an unmarked lorry that tried to force him off the M25 motorway. He reported the incident to the police. Asked who might be responsible, he replied: "I can only think of the oil lobby but I don't think the oil lobby goes around killing people," adding that he feared being labelled a "loony". *Times*, 25 July; *Sunday Telegraph*, 26 July 2015.

Devon Staples, 22, and his friends were celebrating the Fourth of July in Calais, Maine, a small city on the Canadian border. They were drinking and setting off fireworks in a friend's back yard. Staples placed a reloadable fireworks mortar tube on his head and told his friends he was going to light it. His friends urged him against it, but he went ahead and was killed instantly. Staples, 22, worked as a costume performer at Disney World, portraying characters including Gaston from *Beauty and the Beast*. "Devon was not the kind of person who would do something stupid," said his brother Cody, 25. "He was the kind of person who would pretend to do something stupid to make people laugh." It was the first fireworks fatality in Maine since the 1949 law banning fireworks was repealed on 1 January 2012. [AP] 5 July; *D.Telegraph*, 7 July 2015.

An estate agent who capsized on a canoeing trip on 4 January drowned as he was driving home two hours later because of the effect of water in his lungs. Alan Gough, 57, from Walsall, West Midlands, died from a rare phenomenon known as "secondary drowning" after his canoe overturned on Ullswater in the Lake District. He had managed to swim the 50 yards back to shore after the minor accident and seemed to have only suffered a nosebleed; but he had swallowed some water and collapsed at the wheel while driving home with his friend, John Robinson. Mr Gough's car careered off the road at 30mph (48km/h) and crashed into a drystone wall at the foot of the Kirkstone Pass in Cumbria. He was pronounced dead at the scene.

Secondary drowning accounts for only between one and two per cent of drownings.

It occurs when fluid accumulates in the lungs, damaging the membranes and hindering the transfer of oxygen to the bloodstream. More common in children than in adults, it can take 72 hours to occur, with symptoms including coughing, extreme fatigue or chest pain. *D.Telegraph*, *D.Mail*, 5 June 2015.

A technician was killed by a robot at a Volkswagen plant at Baunatal, near Kassel in Germany, on 29 June. A 22-year-old external contractor was installing the robot together with a colleague when the robot struck him in the chest and pressed him against a metal plate. He later died of his injuries. VW said the robot had not suffered a technical defect and blamed human error. Robots in western production plants are kept behind safety cages to prevent accidental contact with humans, but in this case the contractor was standing inside the safety cage. A Volkswagen spokesman stressed that the robot was not one of the new generation of lightweight collaborative robots that work side-by-side with workers on the production line and forgo safety cages.

There was another death-by-robot on 12 August, when sharp welding sticks jutting out of a robotic arm pierced the abdomen of a worker, killing him at an auto ancillary production factory in Gurgaon, near New Delhi in India. Ramji Lal, 24, had apparently moved too close to the machine while adjusting a metal sheet that had come unstuck. Robots have caused at least 26 workplace deaths in the US alone in the past 30 years. The first was in 1979, at a Ford production line in Flat Rock, Michigan, when a robot arm killed Robert Williams, 25. *Financial Times*, 1 July; *D.Mail*, Sun, 3 July; *Times of India*, 13 Aug 2015.

A seven-month-old baby girl was at Cambodia's Mekong River with her family when her aunt Chea Sophia caught a fish. Sophia dangled the fish in front of the little girl, who laughed as the fish wriggled about; but it then slipped from Sophia's hand, flopped into the baby's mouth and lodged itself in her throat. Unable to remove it, the horrified aunt rushed the baby to hospital, but was too late to save her. *Inquisitr.com*, 22 June 2015.

Linda Clarene Jackson, 59, beat her boyfriend David Ruiz to death with canned food at her home in Lake Los Angeles, southern California, on 16 June. She was charged with striking him on the head with a can of peas, a can of carrots and a can of chicken broth. If convicted, she faces life in state prison. [AP] 18 June; *Latimes.com*, 19 June 2015.

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DEATHS VOL 2

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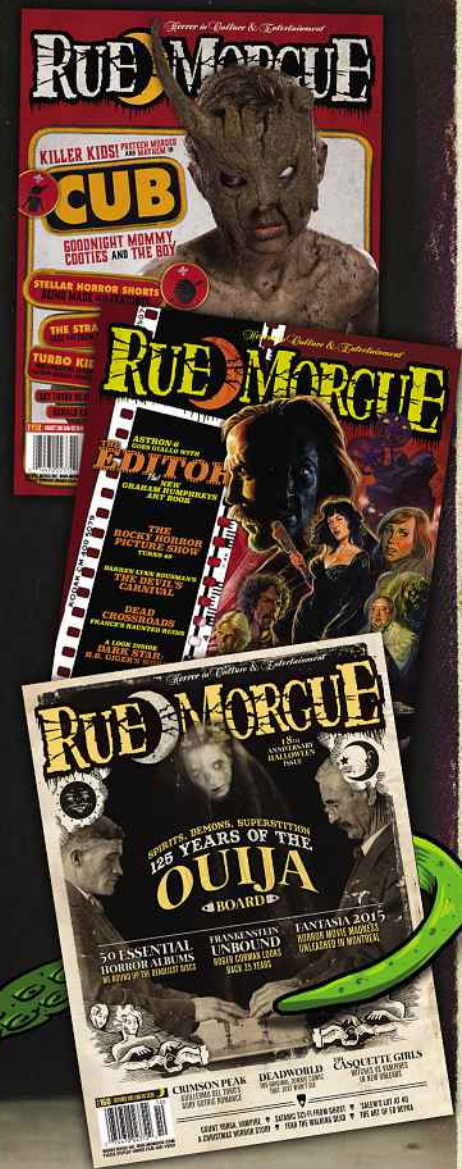
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