



THE CRUELLEST CUT

CAN SEVERED HEADS SURVIVE THE GUILLOTINE?

THE MANDELA EFFECT THE MISREMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST
CONDIGN COVER-UP TRUTH BEHIND UFO REPORT REVEALED
AHEAD OF THE CURVE WHY FLAT EARTHISM IS BOOMING

MALEVOLENT MISTS • ORKNEY MERMAIDS • PORCINE PRODIGY • BRISTOL BIGFOOT

THE WORLD'S WEIRDEST NEWS

THE WORLD OF STRANGE PHENOMENA WWW.FORTEANTIMES.COM ForteanTimes

FT368 JULY 2017 £4.50

RISE OF THE ROBOTS

HOW SCIENCE FICTION'S SYNTHETIC BEINGS ARE CHANGING OUR HUMAN FUTURE

KILLING FOR GOD

THE UNHOLY ENLIGHTENMENT OF NORA HOLLIS

WILD MAN BLUES

WHY SPAIN'S WOLFBOY IS TIRED OF LIFE





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MADMIKEHUGHES.COM

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THANKS TO ARRAN BROWN



FORTEAN TIMES 368

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

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EDITORIAL



CAPUCINE DESLOUIS

DON'T LOSE YOUR HEAD...

WE, ROBOT

It can't be much fun lopping off peoples' heads for a living, can it? Executioners, one imagines, must sometimes have lost their taste for such bloody work, and surely even the most fanatical jihadi must have days when decapitating another infidel seems like a bit of a drag. Thank goodness, then, for Dr Joseph-Ignace Guillotin, whose egalitarian spirit and Gallic good sense led him to propose a single form of capital punishment for aristocrats (formerly despatched with swords or axes) and commoners (ignobly hanged) alike: a simple decapitation machine that took the bother out of beheading. As Jan Bondeson explains (pp36-43), the very efficiency of the device named (against his wishes) after Dr Guillotin seemed to give birth to new fears: what if the severed head of a guillotined person lived on following its separation from the body?

What nightmarish thoughts and visions consumed it in its final moments? It was a question that haunted both physicians and artists through the 19th century, none more than the eccentric Belgian painter Antone Wiertz.

Countless labour-saving devices, usually more benign than the guillotine, have been transforming our world since the Industrial Revolution, performing many tasks once done by humans; but the new revolution in robotics will certainly accelerate the pace of change. As David Hambling's article suggests (pp30-35), the rise of the robots (not just those of the killer variety) is going to pose huge socio-economic and ethical challenges, as well as legal and philosophical questions, for humankind in the near future as autonomous machines oust us from our workplaces, care for us in our homes and even come to resemble us in appearance and behaviour.

PUBLICITY TO DIE FOR

Publicising your latest book, as any author knows, can be a tricky business: unless you've got the marketing resources of a major publisher behind you, how do you get your putative masterpiece out there to

the massive audience you know your work deserves? Things have perhaps become a bit easier in the age of the Internet and social media, Kickstarter and Patreon, but the market remains crowded with literary efforts good, bad and indifferent, all jostling for the attention of potential readers. Spare a thought, then, for Nora Hollis, who having penned and printed her bizarre religious tract *The Living God of the Bible is Satan,*

the Evil One in 1923 (price

15 cents) despaired of its vital message reaching its intended audience. On the first anniversary of the pamphlet's publication, Nora was desperately thinking up new ways to publicise her work; after contemplating suicide, she decided that shooting her landlady dead was perhaps a more effective PR stunt.

Turn to page 44, where Robert Damon Schneck tells the whole strange, sad story. Perhaps with a good crowd-funding campaign and an effective use of Facebook and Twitter, Nora would

never have been driven to homicide...

Speaking of publicity gone wrong, we'd like to apologise for any distress caused by the back cover of our May issue (FT366). It carried a full-page ad for *Scream* magazine, a title devoted to horror in its many forms and undoubtedly of interest to many FT readers, which perhaps went a little too far in its depiction of "Blood, guts, gore & more", featuring a blood-covered zombie chowing down on his meal of human flesh. A number of readers with children got in touch to complain that the image was too upsetting for youngsters, a sentiment with which we concur. Unfortunately, due to a lapse in communication with our publisher, we did not see the ad in question until the issue came back from the printer – when we too got a bit of a shock. We have passed on your comments and have been assured that in future any potentially controversial adverts will be run past the editorial team prior to an issue going to press.



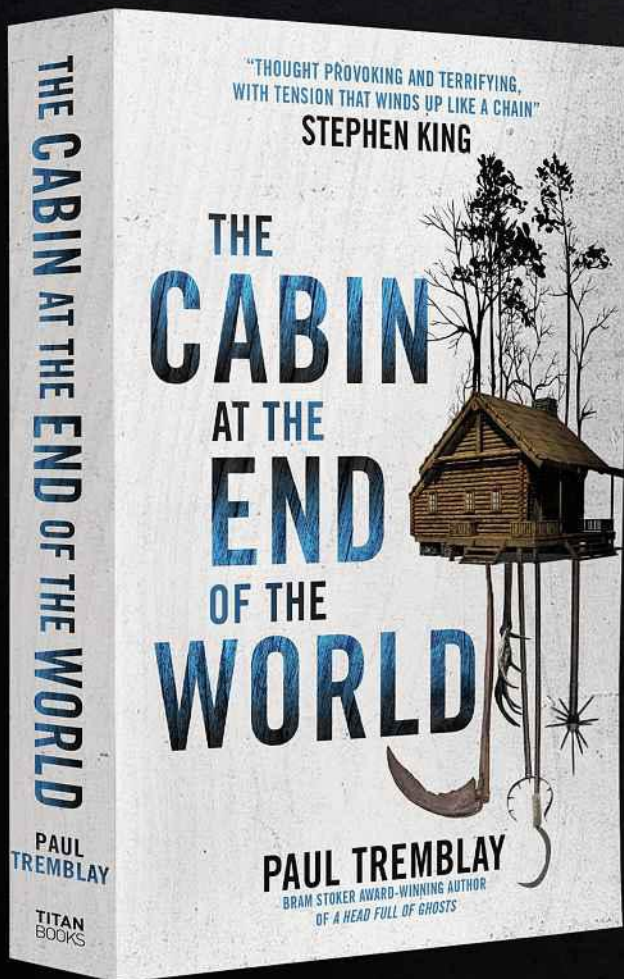
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DISCOVER PAUL TREMBLAY WITH TITAN BOOKS



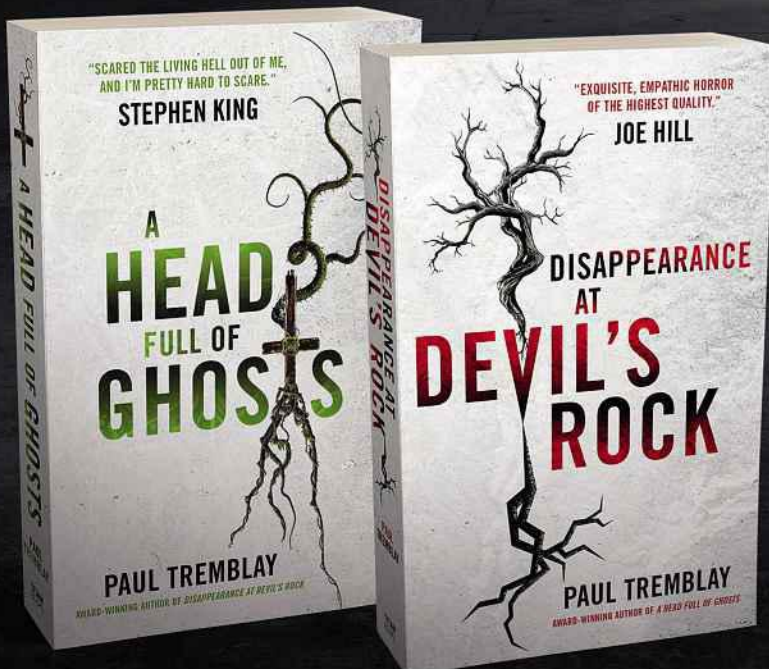
“A TREMENDOUS BOOK – THOUGHT PROVOKING AND TERRIFYING, WITH TENSION THAT WINDS UP LIKE A CHAIN... TREMBLAY’S PERSONAL BEST. IT’S THAT GOOD.”

STEPHEN KING

“A FEAST FOR THE READER. A HORRIFYING, SCARY AS HELL TEARJERKER, SO UNUSUAL, SO SPECIAL.”

CAROLINE KEPNES,
AUTHOR OF *YOU*

OUT JUNE!



“EXQUISITE, EMPATHIC HORROR OF THE HIGHEST QUALITY.”

JOE HILL
ON *DISAPPEARANCE AT DEVIL'S ROCK*

“A JOY TO UNPICK, AND ITS FINAL STING IS GUARANTEED TO KEEP YOU UP AT NIGHT.”

SFX
ON *A HEAD FULL OF GHOSTS*



A DIGEST OF THE WORLDWIDE WEIRD

STRANGE DAYS

WHERE THE WILD THINGS ARE

Hitchcockian kangaroos in New South Wales and a West Country manimal



ABOVE: The kangaroo gathering photographed by Liz Ames, who said the scene was “very Hitchcock-esque for sure”.

ROO LOOKING AT ME?

Just before sunset one day last January, Liz Ames and her husband Nick Canlan, both 43, from Sydney, were driving in the South West Rocks on the coast of New South Wales on their way to meet pals for a night out. Nick decided to take a shortcut to the pub and got completely lost in an unknown neighbourhood.

“We had absolutely no idea where we were, so we kept driving around hoping to find a way onto the main road,” said Liz. “We ended up in this random street that turned out to be a complete dead end, so we knew we needed to turn around. As we reached the end of the road, we couldn’t believe our eyes. In someone’s front yard, there were 12 kangaroos that had all just flocked to this one house. They were just congregating there

“They were just congregating there together on the front lawn”

together on the front lawn. It was really bizarre. They were just staring at us. I don’t know why they preferred this one house, but there weren’t any other kangaroos in sight anywhere else on the street. If you look closely there are a few mothers with their joeys either inside their pouch or beside them. It was definitely a ‘mothers’ group’ of kangaroos that I think would be ready to pounce on anyone that might have come too close.” *D.Mail, Sun, 4 Feb 2018.*

BRISTOL BIGFOOT

A passenger on a train from Exeter to Bristol on a Friday last November claims he saw a massive Bigfoot-like creature in a field. He left Exeter late in the morning, and there were few people on the train as it approached Bristol Temple Meads station. “In my carriage was probably 10 to 12 people – most of them with their heads in either mobile phones or morning newspapers,” he told the British Bigfoot Sightings group (which he had located online). “About 10 miles [16km] from Bristol in the fields to my right I saw something large. It was a black figure, kind of hunched over. At a guess I would’ve said it was 70 to 100 metres [230-330ft] away from the train. I was watching the way the ‘thing’ was walking,

almost towards the side of the field. It was edged right up to the hedgerow as if to walk alongside the hedge itself, almost like it was using the hedge for cover. Whatever it was seemed to take massive strides, and ‘it’ was covering the ground very quickly. As I spun my head to the left to see if anybody else on the train had seen what I was looking at, I was surprised to see that nobody was really looking out from the seats in my direction, or any direction other than down.

“I would imagine five to 10 seconds was all I saw it for, but it stood out as strange. To start off with, I didn’t think it was a Bigfoot or anything like that, until I watched how it walked and the way it hugged the hedgerow. I thought it was just somebody walking through a field... Then, about two minutes later, I saw a couple walking a collie dog in a field, roughly the same distance away. They were to the side of the hedge line. I was gobsmacked to see that I could hardly make them out – I couldn’t really see what they were wearing apart from the brightly coloured coats. And it dawned on me that they were probably of average size, although what I had seen five minutes earlier was clearly not... I’m 100 per cent sure what I saw was the English Bigfoot – and what makes me so confident is the way it walked, with slightly bent legs, long strides but a graceful fluid walking motion.”

Ten miles before Temple Meads station would place the sighting to the south of the railway line between Nailsea and Yatton. The countryside here is low-lying wetland, between the M5 motorway and the wooded hillside escarpment that runs up to Bristol Airport. We are told that sightings continue to be reported to British Bigfoot researchers, from the dense woods of Suffolk to the remote mountains of Scotland. *Bristol Post, via devonlive.com, 10 May 2018.*



MALEVOLENT MISTS

Foggy phantoms from Borley to Byron Street

PAGE 14



STRANGE CONTINENT

Captain Boomer creates a whale of a tale

PAGE 18



WILD MAN BLUES

The former wolf-boy who is tired of humanity

PAGE 22

THE CONSPIRASPHERE

It's unsurprising that the Conspirasphere can test the limits of free speech; **NOEL ROONEY** examines the issues around the cyber-silencing of the Sandy Hook conspiracy theorist.

DAINGEROUS MINDS

Mike Adams (aka the Health Ranger) has an attitude to free speech that is surprisingly close to that of Noam Chomsky; it's hard to imagine they agree about much else, but when Adams says that free speech includes speech you don't agree with, he is echoing the sentiments of the lovable lefty linguist. Adams is perhaps best known for promoting an ascetically wholesome approach to eating (and a range of own-brand products to supplement it) and an automatic 'false flag' response to most official or governmental activities or pronouncements.

In a recent article he interviewed, and opined on, a figure whose speech he does not – entirely at any rate – agree with: Jim Fetzer, whom Adams dubs “the most dangerous mind in America”, partly at least because almost all of Fetzer's oeuvre has been erased from public view over the last year or so. That's to say, his videos have been wiped off YouTube, and Amazon and Google refuse to stock his books; in Adams's view, clearly a Deep State diktat carried out by the tacky triumvirate that, along with Facebook (who are also less than welcoming of Fetzer's opinions), acts as the gatekeeper of rectitude over what is now the online mainstream.

So what is it about Fetzer (or at least that part of him north of the eyebrows) that is so dangerous? He is best known for espousing the theory that the Sandy Hook school shooting did not happen; it was a manufactured atrocity, a piece of macabre modern American theatre designed to undermine the (arguably) constitutional right of all American citizens to bear arms. He has a similar view of the Las Vegas shooting tragedy (a view Adams is at pains to distance himself from), but it is Sandy Hook that defines him. His reading of the event is, at least in part, evidenced by the supposed photographic resemblance between one member of the SWAT team that responded to the incident, and the father of one of the

young victims. We are in the land of deep state crisis actor Disneyworld here, where no tragedy is so sensitive it cannot be bowdlerised into bureaucratic burlesque; no visual coincidence so arbitrary it cannot be skewed into relevance. I could bang on here about the fundamental limitations of photographic resemblance (think Paul McCartney's ears and Miles Mathis) but those are dots you can join without my help; more to the point is why Adams thinks there is such a threat to the Establishment from a man who sees awful human tragedy and more or less automatically thinks: *cui bono?* In a way it's simple reverse logic; if Fetzer's work is erased, it must *a priori* be seen as a threat. After all, if it was not dangerous, the gatekeepers wouldn't have bothered with it, would they? But there is a more basic fallacy at work here, one that starts from another point where Adams and Chomsky might find some agreement: all free thought, and speech, is in some sense a threat to the Establishment.

There is a germ of logic to this point of view, in the abstract. However, its inherent weakness is revealed when it leads someone of obvious intelligence to ask false questions by leaning on it as an axiom; this is true for both Fetzer and Adams in his article on Fetzer. Perhaps a simpler and more pertinent reason for banning Fetzer's books and videos is that the real victims of this real event, and those who sympathise with them, are sufficiently outraged by Fetzer and his ilk to put pressure on Google et al to stop him making their real lives even more miserable. Maybe, in some perfect and perfectly educated world (where, perhaps, people might be more benignly employed), Fetzer has a right to his thoughts, and his expression of them; but at the very least one has to acknowledge that this is not a victimless thought crime. www.conspiracy.news/2018-05-06-the-most-dangerous-mind-in-america-interviewed-about-false-flags-and-extreme-censorship.

EXTRA EXTRA!



FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES FROM AROUND THE WORLD



Telegraph & Argus (Keighley), 30 Nov 2017.



Welwyn & Hatfield Times, — 2015.



Stockport Express, 2 Dec 2014.



SIDELINES...

LIZARD BIRTH

A woman allegedly gave birth to a lizard in Rivers state, Nigeria, on 19 March after being pregnant for two years. Two social media users shared the details on Facebook, claiming that the bizarre birth happened in Omoku market in broad daylight. The unidentified woman was pictured on the ground, while passers-by poured water on her to aid the childbirth. *naija.ng*, 20 Mar 2018.

NOT DEAD AFTER ALL

The Robinsons of Hope under Dinmore, Herefordshire, had not seen their pet oriental tabby cat Willow for more than a week when they found a thoroughly squashed cat on a busy road nearby. Assuming it was Willow, they buried the corpse and held a memorial service. Sons Josh, seven, and Buddy, four, were so upset they had a day off school. Then dad Jonny discovered Willow alive in the coal shed. *Metro*, 27 Mar 2018.

APPY EVER AFTER

A couple named Daniel and Danielle, both born at North Devon Hospital on 24 Jan 1979, were married after meeting through dating app Plenty of Fish, which they both joined on the same day. Their daughter Daisy was born on their first wedding anniversary. Daniel Dawson is a lorry driver from Barnstaple. *D.Mirror*, 26 Jan 2018.

JOB SATISFACTION

Three firefighters – aged 19, 21 and 22 – loved their job so much they started a string of blazes just for the joy of putting them out. The trio were said to have been involved in more than 30 arson attacks, causing nearly £2 million of damage. They were being held in the German city of Neuss. *Sun*, 8 Feb 2018.



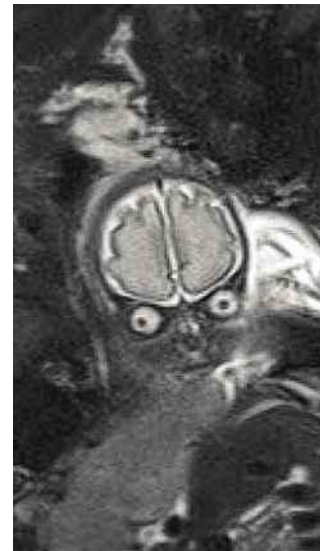
MARTIN ROSS

WORLDWIDE WEIRD

Prodigies and oddities from Australia to Argentina...



OLDEST MESSAGE IN A BOTTLE © KYMILLMAN.COM



MERCURY PRESS & MEDIA VIA CATERS NEWS

ABOVE LEFT: The 19th century gin bottle found by Tonya Illman. ABOVE RIGHT: Laura Thomas and Matthew Tansley's 'Martian' baby.

OLDEST-KNOWN BOTTLE MESSAGE

On 21 January, Tonya Illman was walking across sand dunes just north of Wedge Island, 112 miles (180km) north of Perth in Western Australia, when she noticed a 19th century Dutch gin bottle with raised lettering, sticking out of the sand. Thinking it would look good in her bookcase, she picked it up. It had no kind of cork or closure, and was a quarter full of damp sand. When the sand was poured out, it contained a rolled up piece of paper tied with string. It was a printed form in German with some very faint handwriting. The message was dated 12 June 1886, and said the bottle had been thrown overboard from the German sailing barque *Paula*, which the coordinates showed was then 590 miles (950km) from the coast of Western Australia. She was on her way from Cardiff to Makassar in Indonesia. The bottle was jettisoned in the south-eastern Indian Ocean, and probably washed up on the Australian coast within 12 months, where it was buried under the sand for the next 132 years. Sand dunes in the area are quite mobile during storm events and heavy rain, so the bottle could have been subject to cyclical periods of exposure, which could have led to the

cork drying out and becoming dislodged.

Between 1864 until 1933, thousands of bottles were thrown overboard from German ships, each containing a form on which the captain would write the date, the ship's coordinates and details about its route. It was part of an experiment by the German Naval Observatory to better understand global ocean currents. On the back, the message asked the finder to write when and where the bottle had been found and return it, either to the German Naval Observatory in Hamburg or the nearest German Consulate. When the *Paula's* meteorological journal was examined, there was an entry made by the captain on 12 June 1886, recording that a drift bottle had been thrown overboard. The date and the coordinates corresponded exactly with those on the bottle message. Of the thousands jettisoned, 662 other messages from the same German experiment have been found and returned before the latest discovery. The most recent was found in 1934. Until now, the Guinness world record for the oldest message in a bottle was 108 years, between it being sent and found. *BBC News*, *abc.net.au*, *Guardian online*, 6 Mar; *Metro*, 8 Mar 2018.

MARTIAN BABY

A couple were surprised when an MRI scan appeared to show their unborn son looking exactly like a Martian from Tim Burton's 1996 cult classic *Mars Attacks!* Laura Thomas, 26, and her partner Matthew Tansley, 28, spotted the uncanny resemblance between little Lucas Tansley at 30 weeks and one of the film's aliens. The mother-of-three had a number of scans during her pregnancy because she was at risk of pre-eclampsia. In one doctors found excess fluid on the baby's brain and decided to investigate with an MRI on 27 February 2017, which resulted in this image. Lucas was born in April last year in good health, something confirmed by a recent round of tests.

Laura from Bury, Greater Manchester, said: "When we saw the picture I thought to myself 'He doesn't look too happy' and burst out laughing. When he looked up at me from that scan all I could see were those eyes, it looked like he was possessed. His dad straight away said he looked like a Martian from *Mars Attacks!* You can see the resemblance straight away with the googly eyes and his brain on show which somehow made him look even angrier." I've only decided to share the picture



now because I've been waiting for the all clear. Now we know he's fine we just want to make everyone else laugh." *D.Mail, Sun, 13 April 2018.*

PORCINE PRODIGY

A piglet with a human-like face was spotted next to its mother after she gave birth to eight young in the rural area of Santo Domingo in Santiago del Estero Province in northern Argentina. However, it died a few hours later due to breathing difficulties. Pig and goat breeders Walter Oscar Velez and wife Roxana Noemi Villarreal, who also produce charcoal at their farm, said that they are at a loss for an explanation. It is the latest in a number of mutations in the country, which fuel an argument over the use of pesticides and genetically modified foods. Other recent prodigies include a goat born with two heads in the same province, a calf with two heads and six legs in the north-eastern province of Entre Rios, a goat with a human baby's face in the centre of the country and a real-life spider pig born with eight legs in El Galpon in north-eastern Argentina.

Pharmacologist and paediatric specialist Dr Medardo Avila Vazquez said: "Around 12 million Argentines live in regions where soybeans are cultivated, surrounded by the fields where glyphosate is sprayed. In the province of



Chaco, where soybeans are grown, we found the numbers of deformations quadrupled in a 10 year period, in the same timeframe the cultivation of soybean increased seven times." However, the link between pesticides and mutations is debatable. *express.co.uk, 9 Mar 2018.*

GOING UP IN THE WORLD

The picturesque Devon village of Willand is rising about 2cm (0.7in) per annum across about a square mile, an uplift that is puzzling geologists, who have described the village as "a pimple on the face of Devon". The anomaly was spotted by Geomatic Ventures Ltd (GVL), which has been compiling images from the EU's Sentinel-1 satellites between 2015 and 2017 to create the first map of land motion.

"We generally see this sort of uplift where there has been mining works and the pumps have been switched off, allowing the water to gradually seep back into the ground," said Dr Andy Sowter, chief technical officer of GVL. "Willand is in the middle of nowhere, and there were no mines, so we have no idea what is going on. For people living in the village it would be imperceptible and there is unlikely to be any structural damage... It's like we can see a dome; in the middle it is rising 2cm per year and 0.2cm at one side. The rate at which it is rising is increasing towards the centre and decreasing on the other side. The villages around Willand are not rising at the same level. But it is important because it straddles the M5 and a major railway line."

Could there be some large environmental discharge or huge leak? The map has also revealed a subsidence bowl more than 500m (1,640ft) across at Kennington Park, quite close to The Oval in London. This is thought to be due to the sinking of a shaft for the Northern Line extension last November. The peatlands of Caithness and Sutherland in the north of Scotland are subsiding in what is called Flow Country. As they subside, they release greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. *BBC News, 11 April; D.Mail, D.Telegraph, 13 April 2018.*

SIDELINES...

LETHAL SENTINEL

Ornamental carp in a pond in the 26-acre ravine garden of Trebah House in Cornwall were plagued by herons, so Major Tony Hibbert had a life-size bronze of a heron placed on a ledge above the pond. It seemed to protect the fish until the day he found the bronze had toppled head first into the pond, skewering the biggest carp with its beak. *Letter from Keith C Armstrong, D.Mail, 24 Jan 2018.*

SERPENT FLUSHER

The lavatory of a house in Doonan, Queensland, had been flushing by itself randomly for days when the residents opened it up and were stunned to discover a "mildly venomous" brown tree snake resting on top of the electronic flush mechanism inside the wall. Snake-catcher Luke Huntley was called to deal with the critter. *huffingtonpost.com, 30 Jan 2018.*

MUMMY SHOCK

A burglar discovered the mummified remains of a resident after forcing the door of a flat in the town of O Temple, northwest Spain. Neighbours saw him running away and called the police. *<i> 20 July 2017.*

DRAINING ORDEAL

After his cries for help were heard, David Miller, 48, was hauled to safety through a manhole in Romford, Essex. Miller, homeless in Barking for seven years, is epileptic. He apparently blacked out and fell into a rainwater drain. When he came to he was in dirty water in the dark, and couldn't walk due to two broken heels. He crawled a mile through the pipe and thought he had been trapped for three days – but it was about 24 hours. *D.Telegraph, 16 Feb; Sunday Sun, 18 Feb 2018.*

RED IN BED

Baywatch star Pamela Anderson has described how a female fan broke into her Los Angeles house in 2001 and managed to stay secretly in a guest room for three days before Anderson discovered her in bed wearing her famous red *Baywatch* swimsuit. The deranged stalker had written a letter saying: "I'm not a lesbian. I just want to touch you." *Sun, Metro, 2 Mar 2018.*



TOP: The unfortunate Argentinian piglet, part of a spate of mutations. ABOVE: The Devon village of Willand, a geological puzzle.



SIDELINES...

TERMINAL TULIPS

Juliet Cridlow photographed her cat Kiki next to a bunch of tulips in a vase. Next morning, 24 March, she found the six-year-old tortoiseshell cat collapsed on the floor in Gorleston, Norfolk. She rushed to the vet, who said the cat's kidneys had been seriously damaged. With little hope of recovery, she decided to have Kiki put down. She had probably nibbled the tulips. The bulbs of the flowers contain toxins called lactones, which can spread to the leaves or petals and are extremely poisonous to cats. *D.Mail, 31 Mar 2018.*

LOADED SWEDEN

A man begging to raise money for a bus fare was arrested for suspected money laundering when police found that he was carrying six million krona (£540,000) in banknotes. Police in Uppsala, Sweden, approached the man, who had been threatening passers-by when they refused him money. His begging was pointless, as Uppsala's buses do not accept cash. *Times, 14 Feb 2018.*

FIRST TOY

A model carriage unearthed in Sogmatir, Turkey, is believed to be the oldest toy ever found. The terracotta chair on wheels dates back 5,000 years. It beats a 4,000-year-old baby's rattle found in Turkey in 2014. *Metro, 4 Oct 2017.*

COCKATOO MYSTERY

About 100 cockatoos were found dead by wildlife officers near Tatong township in Victoria, Australia, on 25 January, and another 50 were estimated to have died in the subsequent 20 days. The cause of death was undetermined. *(Sydney) D.Telegraph, 16 Feb 2018.*

ELK DOWNS CHOPPER

A helicopter crashed in Utah on 12 February when an elk that its crew was trying to catch leapt into its tail rotor. The researchers had attempted to drop a net on the elk in order to give it a tracking collar as the chopper hovered about 10ft (3m) off the ground. They were unhurt, but the elk died. *The Press (Christchurch, NZ), 15 Feb 2018.*

PRIVATES ON PARADE

Sensational surgery and member misadventures



BOTH PICTURES: JOHNS HOPKINS HOSPITAL

ABOVE: The Johns Hopkins transplant team (with a dummy). BELOW: A diagram showing the pioneering transplant procedure.

• In March, a specialist team at the Johns Hospital in Baltimore performed the world's first penis and scrotum transplant. The unnamed patient was a young US military sergeant whose pelvic area was shattered by an IED in Afghanistan (he also lost both legs above the knee). In a 14-hour operation costing £285,000, he received a transplanted piece of tissue measuring 10in by 11in (25x28cm) and weighing 5lb (2.3kg). We are told that three successful transplants of the penis alone have been performed, two in South Africa and one in Massachusetts in 2016 – but the Gang of Fort suspects that this overlooks many operations in Southeast Asia. *D.Mail, D.Telegraph, Sun, 24 April 2018.*

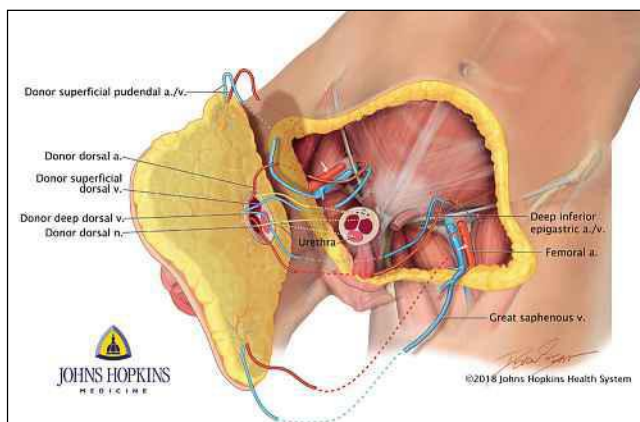
An A&E patient turned up with his genitals stuck in a ring spanner

• Chinese doctors removed a one-meter-long cable from a man's penis after he inserted it to relieve itchiness caused by prostatitis. The unnamed pensioner inserted the phone-charging cable to relieve the itch, but it became tangled in the bladder and a knot started to cause bleeding when he tried to pull the cable out. He was rushed to Dalian Hospital in northeast China on 30 March for medical attention. Urologist Dr

Gao Zhanfeng found the knot in the bladder after a scan, and removed the 5mm wide cable by cutting it up in sections using a laser. Fortunately, the man did not use anything metallic, the doctor said, otherwise it would have punctured his bladder. *Philippine Daily Inquirer, 9 April 2018.*

• A man of 67, who lives alone in Douglas, Lanarkshire, called 999 in a panic after getting seven curtain rings stuck on his toger. He is thought to have fallen asleep after putting on the steel bands and taking Viagra during a boozy night in. He woke up in his armchair and realised they were stuck. Firefighters tried to cut off the rings with hydraulic gear but as his erect member turned purple paramedics took him to hospital, where sedatives and lubricants were used to free the mortified pensioner. *Sun, 6 Jan 2018.*

• A few weeks later, the Royal Gwent Hospital called the fire brigade to free an A&E patient who turned up with his genitals stuck in a ring spanner. A brigade spokeswoman later joked on Twitter that the call-out in Newport, South Wales, had taken "tightening nuts to a new level". The man was very vague about how the spanner





got stuck, saying it was “an accident”. *Sun*, 23 Feb 2018.

- A foreign man in Pattaya, Thailand, recently suffered lacerations to his penis after his girlfriend, who wears braces, was performing fellatio on him. His member became entangled on the wire of the braces, causing a deep cut. The incident was revealed by Dr Nan Pitipong Srichaiyork who posted about it on the Facebook page of Thai Smile Dental Clinic in Jomtien, Pattaya. *Thaivisa.com*, 28 Mar 2018.

- In May 2016, a woman ripped out her ex-boyfriend’s left testicle with her teeth after he refused her demand for a *ménage à trois*. At Edinburgh Sheriff Court, Nunzia Del Viscio, 43, claimed she had been acting in self-defence, but was found guilty of assaulting Marcello Palma, 44. Del Viscio, Palma and two friends, all Italian nationals who worked at restaurants in the city, returned from a nightclub to Palma’s flat. The assault happened around 4am. Palma tried to staunch the flow of blood with a towel and called for an ambulance. His testicle was sewn back in his scrotum with 15 stitches. Del Viscio was handed a Restriction of Liberty Order to stay at home between 10pm and 6am for six months and told to pay £500 compensation. *BBC News*, 7 Dec; *D.Telegraph*, 8 Dec 2017.

- A prison officer was taken to hospital with “painful” injuries after an inmate bit his testicles. “He prised open the inmate’s teeth and managed to get away,” said a source. “There’s quite a bit of bruising.” *Sunday Sun*, 4 Mar 2018.

- A jealous girlfriend used her diamond engagement ring to cut her fiancé’s genitals after she caught him cheating. Rachael Biscoe, 44, had returned home to their flat in Poundbury, Dorset, to find Trevor Camp, 50, in bed, naked from the waist down and speaking on the phone to his secret Chinese lover. During a scuffle, Mr Camp felt pain in his groin and noticed he was bleeding. He needed surgery and later had to be re-admitted

to hospital after the wound became infected. *D.Telegraph*, *Sun*, 14 Feb 2018.

- A man’s testicle “exploded like a volcano” after he caught a rare disease on holiday. Despite sickness and a high temperature, a tour operator said he just had sunstroke. David Worsley, 59, caught African salmonella in Tunisia in 2014. The infection was confined to his genitals, which swelled to 10 times their normal size when he got home to Bolton. His left testicle burst as he had a bath. “It literally went bang,” he said. “When the doctor saw it later she said it was like a volcano exploding. But it was such a relief because the pain had been so bad.” *Sun*, 7 Jan 2018.

- A man who bit off part of his wife’s clitoris during sex was jailed for five years. Edwin Osiris assaulted his wife at their home in Spain in 2012. A Barcelona court heard he bit into her genitals and, despite her screams, tore out part of her clitoris and one of her labia and spat them on the floor. He fled soon after but was tracked down 22 days later. *MX News (Sydney)*, 4 Sept 2013.

- Police in Waco, Texas, pulled over a 1998 Toyota Land Rover for a traffic violation on 7 September 2015. Finding

methamphetamine under the driver’s seat, they arrested Gabriel Garcia, 30, the driver. They also arrested his passenger, Ashley Cecilia Castaneda, 31, who had more meth along with digital weighing scales in her purse. While being driven to jail, Castaneda told an officer she had a loaded Smith and Wesson .22-caliber semiautomatic handgun lodged inside her vagina, and feared it might go off. A female officer was summoned and retrieved the handgun, which had a round chambered and a full magazine of bullets. “This was an extremely dangerous situation for everyone involved,” said police Sgt. W Patrick Swanton. “Depending on a number of factors, that gun could have gone off by body movements or compression of the trigger.” *Waco Herald Tribune*, 8 Sept 2015.

- A tourist was arrested after overdosing on Viagra then running around naked at an airport. Steve Cho, 27, from the US, wandered through the departure hall of Phuket International Airport in Thailand before stripping naked, yelling incoherently and throwing his faeces at staff and members of the public. He was eventually seized by six security guards and airport staff before being arrested. (*Sydney*) *D.Telegraph*, 9 Jan 2018.



ABOVE: Steve Cho turned heads as he ran naked through Phuket Airport.

SIDELINES...

HEAD TO HEAD

A 73-year-old motorist was seriously injured in a car crash with a deer in Ashdown Forest, West Sussex, on 11 March. The decapitated head of the fully-grown animal smashed through the windshield of the Honda Jazz and struck the woman in the face. She was airlifted to hospital. *D.Telegraph*, 13 Mar 2018.

STOP BELLOWING

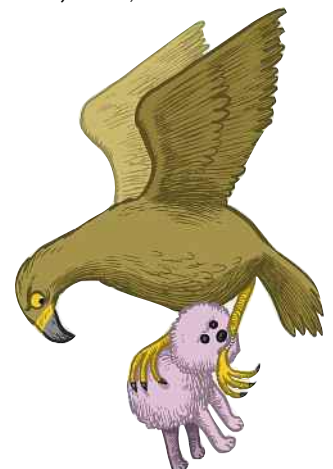
A trader at New Forest Market in Hampshire has been told to pipe down after complaints about the noise he makes, said to be as loud as a chainsaw. Lymington & Pennington town council has slapped a gagging order on the fourth generation fruit and veg stallholder – 53-year-old Wayne Bellows – who said it was “absolutely ridiculous”. *Guardian*, 16 April 2018.

BONKER BUSTED

A female high school science teacher and softball coach in Queensland has pleaded guilty to having sex with an underage student. Her name? Melissa Ann Bonkoski. (Queensland) *Sunday Mail*, 4 Mar 2018.

FLYING DOG

Felipe Rodríguez witnessed an eagle carry off his sister’s pet dog, a seven-year-old bichon fries called Zoey, from her back garden in Bowmanstown, Pennsylvania. Monica Newhard, the sister, posted a Facebook message, certain Zoey was gone forever – but driving down a snowy back road four miles (6.4km) away, Christina Hartman found Zoey, covered in icicles, bruised, limping, and with fur patches missing. Hartman saw the Facebook message and returned Zoey. *Times*, 6 Jan 2018.



MARTIN ROSS



SIDELINES...

SET FOR LIFE

A Canadian teenager struck the jackpot after buying her first lottery ticket to mark her 18th birthday. Charlie Lagarde from Quebec bought the scratch ticket along with a bottle of champagne on 14 March. She had the choice between taking a £580,000 lump sum or earning £580 a week for life. She opted for the weekly annuity, because it was not taxable. *BBC News, 28 Mar 2018.*

URBAN CROC

Police in St Petersburg searching a suspect's home for weapons found a large Nile crocodile living in a muddy pool in the basement. It had been there since 2005. Vets were seeking a new home for it. *Times, 20 Jan 2018.*

A KNIGHT TO REMEMBER

Police in Mainz freed two men aged 61 and 58 who were entangled with a mannequin and a large remote-controlled car. They were "locked together" with car and mannequin, the latter dressed in knight's costume, and were too drunk to explain what had happened. *<i> 21 Feb 2018.*

MISGUIDED SAVIOUR

A man killed a heron to rescue a duckling from its stomach after seeing the bird eat it. He managed to rescue the duckling alive, but was cautioned by police for the crime. The bizarre incident was revealed by North Wales Police's rural crime unit, which did not give any further details. Herons are protected, with fines or prison terms for killing one. *D.Post, Metro, 28 Mar 2018.*



FLAT EARTH BULLETIN

From the California skies to a Birmingham hotel...



ABOVE: 'Mad' Mike Hughes with one of his rockets. BELOW: Basketball star Kyrie Irving has shared his Flat Earth beliefs.

'MAD' MIKE'S FLIGHT

A self-taught rocket scientist blasted himself into the Californian sky using a steam-powered contraption he built in his garage as part of a project to prove the Earth is flat. 'Mad' Mike Hughes, a 61-year-old limo driver, propelled himself about 1,875ft (570m) into the air near Amboy on 24 March before a hard landing in the Mojave Desert. The rocket, which lifted off with no countdown, reached a speed of 350mph (563km/h) before it began to descend. The altitude was not sufficient for Hughes to ascertain whether the Earth is curved. He deployed a second parachute after he began falling too fast. He was visibly dazed as he was lifted from his seat and checked over by paramedics after a hard landing. "This thing wants to kill you 10 different ways," he said. "Am I glad I did it? Yeah, I guess. I'll feel it in the morning. I won't be able to get out of bed. At least I can go home and have dinner and see my cats tonight."

Hughes, who has spent around £14,000 pursuing his rocket dream since 2016, said he was "relieved" to have finally achieved his goal after several aborted attempts and ridicule from sceptics. He plans to build a "Rockoon" – a rocket that is carried into the atmosphere by a gas-filled balloon – to take him to an altitude of 68 miles (109km), high enough to photograph the planet from space. Will he prove the Earth

is flat? Only time will tell. He also plans to run for governor of California. *[AP] 25 Mar; D.Telegraph, 26 Mar 2018.*

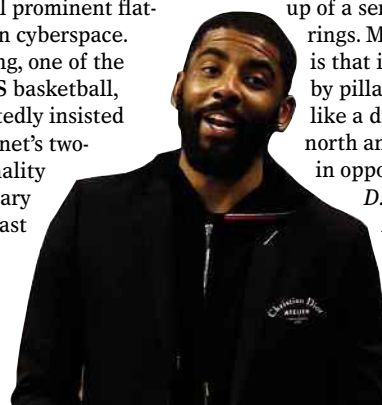
FLAT POWER

Fuelled by social media and a growing distrust of scientific authority, Flat Earthism is booming. Over three days, 27-29 April, more than 200 believers attended Britain's first Flat Earth Convention, held in the three-star Jurys Inn hotel in Birmingham. Merchandise on sale included "Flat Power" T-shirts, flat maps and novelty spirit levels. "My research destroyed Big Bang cosmology. It supports the idea that gravity doesn't exist and the only true force in nature is electromagnetism," said David Marsh, a manager at the NHS Supply Chain head office in Alfreton, Derbyshire. He has carried out his own year-long research in his back garden, tracking the movement of the Moon across the sky using a mobile phone app and a Nikon camera. His experiments have disproved, he says, the accepted laws of planetary motion. There are several prominent flat-Earthers in cyberspace. Kyrie Irving, one of the stars of US basketball, has repeatedly insisted on the planet's two-dimensionality in a February 2017 podcast that went around

the world (or at least would have done if the planet was basketball-shaped). One online rant claims Australia is a "hoax" by globalists.

While historically sailors might have feared falling off the edge of the world, modern flat-Earthers scorn such foolishness. "We know that continuous east-west travel is a reality," said convention speaker Darren Nesbitt. "No one has ever come to, or crossed, a physical boundary... One logical possibility for those who are truly free thinkers is that space-time wraps around and we get a Pac-man effect." That is, celestial bodies are able to teleport from one side of the planet to the other when they reach the horizon – just as the characters in the video game Pac-Man arrive on the right-hand side of the screen as they exit the left-hand side.

The shape of the Earth is another topic that is fiercely debated. Some propose that it could be a circle surrounded by ice walls; other believe that the planet has a domed roof; while some suggest it is made up of a series of interlinked rings. Mr Nesbitt's view is that it is supported by pillars and shaped like a diamond, with the north and south poles in opposite corners. *D.Telegraph, 30 April; (Sydney) D.Telegraph, 5 May 2018.*





NATURE'S MAD HATTERS

A bird rests on the head of a white-tailed deer in San Jose Villanueva, 25km (15 miles) southwest of San Salvador, on 21 May 2018.

Photo: MARVIN RECINOS / AFP / GETTY IMAGES.



One of five newborn African spurred tortoises (*Centrochelys sulcata*) perches atop the head of an adult male at Guadalajara Zoo in Jalisco State, Mexico, on 17 May 2018.

Photo: MARVIN RECINOS / AFP / GETTY IMAGES.

PAUL SIEVEKING unearths a healing canine statue and the fish sauce capital of the Roman world



ABOVE: The licking dog statue found in Gloucestershire. BELOW: Uncovered aqueduct remains in Cadiz.

LICKING DOG FIND

A fourth-century hoard of Roman bronze artefacts has been found in Gloucestershire by detecting enthusiast Pete Cresswell and his brother-in-law Andrew Boughton. A licking dog, the first of its kind to be found in Britain, is an example of a healing statue and could be linked to a Roman healing temple in Lydney. Experts said there was a possibility that there could be a previously undiscovered Roman temple elsewhere in the county. Maybe the artefacts were stashed by a metal worker who intended to retrieve them to melt them down for recasting. They appear to have been deliberately hidden, in a broken state, with the exception of the dog statue, which remains intact. [PA] *Guardian*, 28 Sept 2017.

STORM REVEALS AQUEDUCT

The remains of a Roman aqueduct from the first century AD have been uncovered in Cádiz in the wake of Storm Emma at the beginning of March 2018. Hundreds of vehicles, yachts and seaside properties were damaged when the storm hit the coast of southern Andalucía, even whipping up a tornado in Puerto de Santa María. But once the winds died down, the removal of several feet of sand from Cádiz's Cortadura beach revealed fragments of the aqueduct and the remains of a road dating from the 16th-17th century that was destroyed by a tsunami in 1755.

Stretching almost 50 miles (80km) inland to the freshwater springs of Tempul, Cádiz's Roman aqueduct was one of the most important feats of engineering in Hispania and is said to have been the fifth-largest construction of its kind in the Roman empire.



The final stretch is believed to have run across the sea to Cádiz, described by Roman geographers as an island, though it is now joined to mainland Spain by the slender Cortadura beach. *D.Telegraph*, 7 Mar 2018.

ANOTHER BRITISH TSUNAMI?

The 1755 tsunami referred to above was caused by the Lisbon earthquake, which killed up to 100,000 in Portugal and led to 10ft (3m) waves hitting Cornwall on 1 November, and affecting the Thames in London. As Britain lies so far from major fault lines, tsunamis hitting the coast are very rare – the east coast of Scotland was struck by a 70ft (21m) high tsunami around 6100 BC, caused by the massive underwater Storegga slide off Norway. There were minor tsunamis affecting the south coast on 20 July 1929 and 29 June 2011 – and possible tsunamis on 16 April 1580, 30 Jan 1607, and 5 June 1858.

Another may have hit on 28 September 1014. William of Malmesbury stated that on that date "a tidal wave... grew to an astonishing size such that the memory of man cannot parallel, so as to submerge villages many miles inland and overwhelm and drown their inhabitants" (*Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*). The event

was even mentioned in Welsh bardic chronicles.

The veracity of this account and the cause were never established, but scientists researching tsunami risks believe an asteroid dropping in the Atlantic – also recorded in contemporary accounts – could have triggered devastation. Tsunamis are usually caused by earthquakes at sea. Oceanographer Phill Teasdale told the British Science Festival last September that "tsunami deposits" dating back to the period had been found at Fleet Lagoon in Dorset and Marazion in Cornwall. These contain foram – microscopic sea creatures naturally found in the deep mud off the coast, which had been swept inland. He said: "Tentative data and calculation takes me to an estimated date of AD 1018, which is four years off the time of impact. If we can investigate this a bit more, we can talk about the geographical spread of the impact. Analysing the depth of the tsunami deposit can tell us whether that postulated asteroid impact in the Atlantic was a reality." *D.Mail*, 9 Sept 2017.

RANCID SAUCE SOURCE

Underwater Roman ruins covering 50 acres (20ha) have been discovered off northeast Tunisia at Nabeul, apparently confirming a theory that the city of Neapolis was partly submerged by a tsunami on 21 July 365 – the one that damaged Alexandria and Crete, as recorded by the historian Ammianus Marcellinus. Mounir Fantar, head of a Tunisian-Italian archaeological mission that made the find after an eight-year search, said they had found streets, monuments and about 100 tanks used to produce garum, the fermented fish-based condiment that was a favourite of ancient Rome. "This discovery has allowed us to establish that Neapolis was a major centre for the manufacture of garum and salt fish, probably the largest centre in the Roman world," said Mr Fantar. (*Queensland Courier-Mail*, 2 Sept 2017.

PONY RACING

Forget Ben-Hur; a horse bone unearthed at Britain's only Roman circus suggests that chariots may have been pulled by Shetland ponies, suggesting a gymkhana described by Betjeman or drawn by Thelwell. The find was made in Colchester, Essex, where the Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) has been excavating since 2004. The circus, near Butt Road car park, had a two-furlong track and stands for 8,000 people. Experts have been examining the hoof, which appears to be that of a large Shetland pony that they believe was used for chariot racing. CAT director Philip Crummy said: "There has been a long-running debate about the size of the horses used to race the chariots and this discovery suggests they would have been quite small." *D.Telegraph*, 20 June 2017.



CLASSICAL CORNER

FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

226: A MAN FOR ALL TREASONS (Sorry, Robert Bolt)

Sources: Andocides, *Against Alcibiades*; Aristophanes & other comic playwrights' fragments; Cornelius Nepos; Plutarch; Thucydides; Xenophon. Modern biographies by E Bloedow (1973); W Ellis (1989); D Gribble (1999); A Griffiths (1898). Plus, two superlative novels: Peter Green, *Achilles: His Armour* (1955); Mary Renault, *The Last of the Wine* (1956).

"They love him, they hate him, they cannot live without him" – Aristophanes, *Frogs*, v432

"At his best, no one was better; at his worst, no one was more evil" – Nepos, ch1

This was Alcibiades (450-404 BC), one of the most intriguing of Fort's "thrice-accursed Greeks". Descended from the once-dominant aristocratic Alcmaeonid family, he was its last scion to achieve notoriety, something he cultivated from boyhood with his refusal, whilst playing dice on a road, to get out of a cart-driver's way, throwing himself headlong in front of the on-comer, forcing him to a halt – first known example of the game of 'chicken'.

At school, he disrupted music lessons by refusing to learn the flute, denouncing it as a disgraceful instrument, a judgement repeated by Aristotle (*Politics*, bk5 ch242), echoed by either Duke Ellington's or Benny Goodman's (disputed attribution) verdict on the clarinet: "An ill woodwind that nobody blows good." Thanks to this, the flute was dropped from Athenian education. He knocked down a literature teacher who did not have a text of the *Iliad* to hand, thus scoring a decisive Homer Run; made his violent mark in PE class as well, biting his wrestling opponent in the arm to prevent a fall. When the latter expostulated, "Alcibiades, you fight like a woman!" the latter retorted, "No, like a lion!" – Case of might or mane?

Fully to appreciate his many much-quoted verbal sallies, we need to remember he was famous for his lisp, a gift to Aristophanes and fellow-comedians, but which he may have exaggerated for effect to accompany his 'effeminate' purple trailing cloak, and the quail perching on his shoulder in the streets.

As the most handsome youth in Athens, he attracted a battery of lovers, frequently behaving like a high-class rent boy, thereby inevitably incurring a cornucopia of anecdotes (cf. RJ Littman, 'The Loves of Alcibiades,' *TAPA* 101, 1970, 263-76). On one occasion, he drunkenly barged in to a dinner party (as he does in Plato's



Symposium) being thrown by Anytus, one of his bed-mates, and with his gang of fellow-roisterers stole half the host's gold and silver plate, on which prank Anytus sportingly commented, "Might have been worse, he could have taken the lot."

There was endless gossip about his relationship with Socrates, who counterpointed Alcibiades's beauteous image with his own as the ugliest man in town. It's understandable that Socrates might have sought erotic and other relief from his notoriously nagging wife, Xanthippe (cf. Roger Scruton's 1993 novel, *Xanthippic Dialogues*). But Alcibiades swore that his one night with Socrates was a model of self-restraint – chased, but chaste. Maybe it was a case of mind-meld rather than bodily nexus – two dialogues attributed to Plato are named after Alcibiades. Their military connections were another matter. In two separate battles in the Peloponnesian (Civil) War against Sparta, they respectively saved each other's lives – how fortunate is that? – a Roman might answer, *Fortes Fortuna Iuvat* – Fortune Favours the Brave, a common modern military motto.

Like the door in Herman's Hermits' ditty, Alcibiades swung both ways. He married Hipparete, daughter of the wealthy Hipponicus, on meeting whom he punched in the face just for fun. The unfortunate girl rarely saw her endlessly promiscuous hubby. Finally tiring of this non-marriage, she sued for divorce, but Alcibiades interrupted legal proceedings by picking her up and carrying her back home, where she briefly remained until solving her distress by dying.

Alcibiades also cut a sporting dash, being the first man to enter seven chariots in the Olympic Games, carrying off first, second, and third or fourth (different versions) prizes, thus earning a rare tribute from Thucydides (bk 6 ch16 para2) and an even rarer victory ode from the

usually sports-despising Euripides.

No slouch in dirty politics, either. When rival demagogue Hyperbolus (an un-illuminating lamp-maker) proposed an Ostracism vote (this admirable procedure might help cleanse Westminster sleaze), Alcibiades arranged with the other candidates to get Hyperbolus kicked out – as comedian Plato (*not* the philosopher) quipped: "The Man deserved the Fate; the Fate did not deserve the Man".

Alcibiades was the main impetus behind the disastrous Athenian attack on Sicily. Just before its armada sailed, he was accused of profaning the Eleusinian Mysteries (Blasphemy) and of being with the gang that chiselled off the cocks of the Hermes statues apotropaically placed outside people's houses. Might simply have been a Friday night lads' prank (Athens was full of street gangs, one being called 'The Big Pricks'), but the authorities chose to regard it as an anti-democratic plot. No sooner had Alcibiades sailed than the state galley was sent to arrest him, which he fooled by decamping to Sparta.

There (cf. Michael Vickers, 'Alcibiades at Sparta,' *CQ* 45, 1995, 339-54), he gave the Spartans several valuable war-winning strategic tips, amazed everyone by knuckling down to their notoriously ascetic (hence our 'Spartan') lifestyle, even swigging their infamous black broth (after another Athenian gulped one sip he saw why Spartans were not afraid to die in battle), capping his stay by seducing and impregnating King Agis's wife because "I wanted to sire a race of kings."

Understandably riled by this, Agis hounded Alcibiades out of Sparta to take refuge and connive with Athens's other ancestral enemy, Persia. To cut a long story short (before the editor does), Alcibiades returned to Athens, won some victories, re-fell out of favour, retired to his Thracian mansion where he seduced a local girl, to avenge which her brothers surrounded the house, set it on fire, and shot down Alcibiades with a hail of bow-shots – Agis had already offered a bounty for his head.

And so, for the first and last time, this (one of his nicknames) lion's whelp was kept on the straight and arrow.

Apart from a multitude of appearances in modern fictions and paintings, Alcibiades features as a talking canine in WC Fields's 1936 film *Poppy* – not a star like *The Thin Man's* Asta, but nifty transition from dogma to dog.



Ghostly Mists and Fogs: Part Two

ALAN MURDIE investigates the rise of Foggy Autonomous Ghosts in the 20th century literature

In the last column I drew attention to stories concerning what seems to be a possible category of rather creepy and unpleasant apparitions resembling mists or fogs, following the sensational claims made about just such an entity haunting Bovingdon aerodrome, Hertfordshire. These 'Foggy Autonomous Ghosts' – as I have labelled them – typically display a set of characteristics: (1) they appear as defined or condensed clouds; (2) they are dynamic rather than static, moving and changing shape; (3) they may contain human-looking entities or involve other manifestations; (4) they have an unpleasant impact upon witnesses either physically or mentally, or both; (5) they may be accompanied by feelings of cold; (6) witnesses deem them hostile and malevolent; and (most controversially) (7) they are perceived as independent entities displaying a measure of purpose. Interestingly, a number of these characteristics have been attributed to certain ghostly lights, will-o-the-wisps and so-called 'earthlights' (see *Earthlights*, 1982, and *Earthlight Revelation*, 1989, by Paul Devereux).

Such accounts do not fit within the established varieties of apparitional experience, identified from the 1880s onwards by psychical research bodies. Apparitions reported in the Victorian era were usually human, well defined and with good corroboration and supporting testimony. Over 30 years ago, the late Dr Peter Hallson, long-serving secretary of the Spontaneous Cases Committee of the SPR, commented that the Society no longer received as many detailed accounts of fully formed, clearly recognisable human apparitions that featured in its early collections. By 1985, only 23 per cent of reported cases approached this qualitative standard, and the supporting testimony was often much poorer. Modern hauntings were frequently vague, "such as stories of black shadows, indescribable odours and attacks by evil spirits"; many of them seemed "silly". (*Journal of SPR*, vol.53, 1985-1986, 331-332).

Peter, who spent most of his working life as a chemist and analyst and was the most gentle and good-humoured of gentlemen, knew never to show amusement at descriptions given by witnesses (even when they might be laughing themselves). Ghosts are not normally funny and responding with humour at details given by someone trying to conceal fright often halts the



TOP: The shell of Borley Rectory, site of a disturbing experience with a ghostly mist in 1939.

“Out of nowhere came the most evil, filthy presence... a moist, misty something”

flow of information. As an alternative to clamming up, some witnesses, realising the interviewer finds their account amusing, may embellish and invent to keep the interviewer satisfied.

It seemed one reason for the decline in reports was that the SPR was no longer the only research body logging experiences. Already by the mid-1940s, a growing number of interested authors and investigators were collecting, and it is among these accounts that grotesque cases of Foggy Autonomous Ghosts appear, often years apart.

I heard my first such story in the mid-1970s. It occurred at Abbas Hall, near Sudbury on the Suffolk/Essex border, known nationally as a haunted spot in the 1950s. The story went that ghostly monks made an annual appearance at an area of raised ground on a certain night in mid-October. Around 1973 (the year was not precise) a young couple drove to

the spot out of curiosity, parked their car, remained inside, and waited. Suddenly a mysterious fog engulfed their vehicle and the windows misted up. They were unable to see anything but the car started rocking violently and they felt blows being rained down upon the exterior, as if the vehicle was being attacked and beaten by an invisible mob. Terrified, the man attempted driving away but the engine failed to start. They only escaped when, remembering they were parked on a slope, he released the handbrake and the car rolled away from the spot. The experience left them badly shaken for several days. This account was related to me by a local resident, the late Mick Brooks, whose family home at nearby Great Cornard had been beset by poltergeist phenomena in 1971.

This story was hearsay, but was placed only a few miles from Borley, just over the Essex border, site of the notorious Borley Rectory, which both during its 76-year history and afterwards was reputedly the scene of unrivalled paranormal activity (FT229:31). Writer and broadcaster Joan Forman in her *Haunted East Anglia* (1975) records a disturbing experience with a ghostly mist at the rectory site, some seven or eight months after the destruction of the building by fire. The source was a lady given the pseudonym 'Violet Sofleet' who lived at Long Melford before World War II. On a clear

and cold autumn night in 1939, Violet, then aged 19, walked with two friends, one male and one female, out from Long Melford to see the shell of the infamous building. Reaching a five-barred gate by the ruin, someone remarked it all looked ordinary enough, and what was all the fuss about? Then to quote Violet, “out of nowhere came the most evil, filthy presence. We were surrounded by a moist, misty something, which hid us from each other and terrified us”. Her hair stood on end and all three friends took to their heels, running in terror to some cottages about a mile away, the sound of mocking laughter following them. The laughter might suggest a practical joker, but the mist and sense of an evil presence did not. It is notable that around the same time ghost hunter James Wentworth Day and a friend conducted a vigil in the burned-out ruin and saw what they believed to be a malevolent ghost cat in the rafters. Day was a fanatical country sportsman who took ‘ghost hunting’ rather literally, and had brought his shotgun along. He wanted to shoot at the creature but his companion implored him to hold fire. Both Day and his companion thought it was a ‘spook’. (*Here are Ghosts and Witches*, 1954).

The second example of a malevolent mist collected by Joan Forman afflicted a cramped domestic property at Arbury, Cambridgeshire. The witnesses were a married couple. Their names were disguised but it was an identifiable dwelling, at the time a rather squalid council house lacking an indoor bathroom and toilet.

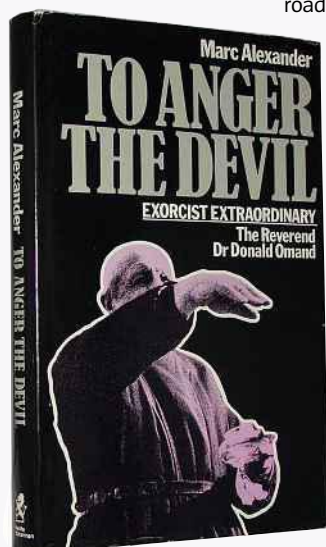
In his letter, the husband revealed whilst prior to his experience he was sceptical about the supernatural, in a dejected mood caused by his family’s poor situation, he had answered a newspaper advertisement placed by the Panacea Society, a religious body based at Bedford and devoted to the early 19th century seer and prophetess Joanna Southcott (FT151:21, 152:48-49). He was duly sent a strip of cloth with instructions to ritually immerse it daily in water that was then used for bathing and washing, whilst concentrating upon the desired changes in their lives. This had no effect on improving their circumstances, but the man wondered if this ritual triggered the manifestations that commenced soon afterwards: strange footsteps, disturbance



ABOVE: James Wentworth Day, shotgun at the ready. BELOW: The Revd. Donald Omand exorcised a “thick fog-like thing” in Glastonbury.

of objects, the unexplained failure of locks, and ‘something’ rattling at night in the coalhouse. Most disturbing of all was a shapeless grey mass of vapour, accompanied by a blast of cold air, which both husband and wife encountered inside their home. The man admitted that he and his family were deeply troubled by these incidents and a rather paranoid frame of mind was indicated by his speculations that banks of fog on motorways that contributed to car crashes were a manifestation of the same type of unearthly entity. This is a most disturbing idea, possibly an offshoot of certain supernatural ideas promoted in the 1970s that particular roads with high accident rates

are troubled by psychic energies that cause drivers to crash. For example, ‘Evil forces causing accidents’ was a headline from the *Bridport News* (22 Jan 1971) concerning an exorcism conducted by the Revd. Donald Omand, over a stretch of the A35 at Ballair, between Morcombelake and Charmouth. This segment of road had been the scene of numerous accidents, “most of which have been difficult to explain”. The ceremony was filmed



for a BBC programme *People versus the Car* transmitted on 29 May 1971, shown in the days when broadcasters and the viewing public were more level-headed over such topics. The Revd. Omand did not mention anomalous fogs on roads, but his biographer Mark Alexander in *To Anger The Devil: An account of the work of exorcist extraordinary the Reverend Dr Donald Omand* (1978) mentions a case where the priest took action against an evil entity variously perceived as “a rippling curtain of dark vapour”, a “thick fog-like thing” like “a pea-souper” which haunted the Abbey House, an Anglican retreat centre at Glastonbury. This mobile presence required an exorcism in 1960.

Joan Forman did not embrace such speculation, but in her conclusions to *Haunted East Anglia* she attempted categorising the experiences she had gathered. Though she did not realise it, her attempts at classification matched others at the time (e.g. the *Journal of Paraphysics* tables and *Apparitions* (1975) by Celia Green & Charles McCreery). Amongst eight distinct categories of ghostly phenomena she nominated her sixth as: ‘Mist – usually referred to as ‘grey’, ‘damp’ and ‘clingy’.

In summer 1977, *Fortean Times* (FT23:7) reported a strange story, “Revellers in a fog patch”. It recorded how a PC David Swift of Hull went to investigate a peculiar bank of fog on a playing field near Stonebridge Avenue at 1.30am one morning in early August 1977. Approaching what he thought might be smoke, he saw three figures, each with one arm raised as though dancing around a non-existent maypole. One figure was male and wore a jerkin and tightly fitting trousers. The other two were females in bonnets and shawls. PC Swift was quoted as saying “I thought they were a lot of drunks playing around”. He came within 60ft (18m) of the performance when it suddenly vanished. Greatly shaken, he ran back to his car and drove dazedly away until he recovered. After he raised the incident with his sergeant, the press were told he would be going back again, but no further reports were published.

Dynamic ghostly mists troubled two pubs in Dorset in the late 1970s. One was the Barley Mow at Broom Hill near Wimborne Minster (though it is quiet today). Another was at the Royal Lion Hotel at Lyme Regis, the latter impressing witnesses into thinking it might be “an independent entity with a will of its own”. The now-closed Sea Palling Inn in Norfolk generated similar stories. (Guy Playfair in *The Haunted Pub Guide*, 1984).

But of all experiences that can be cited concerning this weird spectral class, undoubtedly the most peculiar arose in a largely forgotten poltergeist case connected



GHOSTWATCH

with a house in Byron Street, Runcorn in Cheshire, between 17 August 1952 and early December 1952 (although accounts of the end date differ). It was reported in the pages of provincial local papers where gems of *forteana* are often found, and centred upon 17-year-old John Glynn who, after the death of his father two months earlier, was staying with his grandfather Sam Jones. Nocturnal in character, the manifestations provided a nine-day wonder, attracting crowds whom the police were called to curb.

The most curious incident in the house was observed by the Revd. WH Steven, involving the movement of a dressing table, which continued for a brief period after switching on the main light. This occurred when the house was full of sightseers, making it difficult to guard against practical jokers. Eventually Glynn was caught faking a manifestation that some commentators considered was a response to the pressure imposed by the expectations of observers (though one local newspaper also reported him carrying out conjuring tricks a few weeks later). Others who observed the phenomena were not satisfied all was explicable by deceit, whilst Guy Lambert sought to blame the effects on excessive rainfall and disturbances from flooding (in *'Poltergeists: A Physical Theory'* in *Journal of the SPR*, vol.38, June 1955). Events were considered to have had a negative impact on other residents. Grandfather Sam Jones left the house a broken man, according to a later account in the *Liverpool Echo* (6 June 1958) stating: "When the trouble began Sam Jones weighed a sturdy 15 stones. To-day, he is down to nine stones". Neighbours claimed: "Sam had to leave that house. It was killing him." Even more unfortunate was a Miss Whittle, who lodged in the house, and who initially appeared untroubled by disturbances, though sleeping in an adjoining room. But two months later Miss Whittle died in a mysterious fall down a cliff known as Frog's Mouth, on Runcorn Hill.

The weirder aspects of the case involved a foggy apparition and were investigated separately by Richard Whittington Egan and Philip Paul. A few months before the outbreak, Sam Jones had started work at Pool Farm, Heath Road, Runcorn, for a farmer named Crowther. On 4 August 1952, a couple of weeks before the poltergeist began, the pigs on the farm started dying and by 17 August (the date of the outbreak at Byron Street) all had perished. Veterinary analysis failed to establish a cause of death. Two days later, walking across the yard to his now empty pigsty, Mr Crowther was astonished to see a large black cloud,



ABOVE: 1 Byron Street, Runcorn, scene of a poltergeist outbreak in 1952. The manifestations included a foggy apparition possibly connected to the mysterious death of pigs on a nearby farm.

about 7ft (2m) in height, shapeless save for 'two prongs' sticking out at the back. It seemed to be like a whirlwind, picking up bits of paper and straw, and came within a few feet of where Mr Crowther stood, then veered to the left and disappeared into an outhouse. Later that afternoon, Mrs Crowther reported seeing a strange black cloud in the yard, the first of two sightings by her. Reminiscent of the Arbury case, strange sounds were also heard, scratching and rattling noises emanating from the kitchen, where jars were displaced. Remarkably, Mr Crowther saw the cloud again in October when he visited Byron Street after Sam Jones invited him to come and join the watchers. Hearing a noise in the darkened bedroom, he switched on his torch and saw the cloud hanging above the bed in which John Glynn lay, about half way between the ceiling and the bed.

A third appearance by the cloud was at 4pm on 6 December, when it appeared inside the farmhouse kitchen. Mr Crowther saw it hovering 'menacingly' on the far side of the room. He leapt up and went to switch on the light, brushing past the cloud. As he did so, he felt he was being poked in the neck by what seemed like blunt sticks. The cloud vanished as soon as the light came on. The last sighting was a week later, when it appeared again in the yard. It was close to the ground, lighter in colour. His sheepdog and pet spaniel began barking furiously and chased it. It moved rapidly along, then rose into the air, heading in a south-easterly direction and disintegrated. (*The Runcorn Poltergeist: A Critical Assessment* by Richard Whittington-Egan in *Tomorrow*, 1963, vol. XI, winter edition; *Some Unseen Power*, 1985, by Philip Paul).

Were the strange events at Pool Farm and Byron Street connected? Was the cloud seen by Mr Crowther at both places the same one, and was it just coincidence that Sam Jones was linked with both locations? Did the cloud have any connection with the death of the pigs and with what happened to John Glynn and Miss Whittle (one thinks of the story of the Gadarene swine in reverse)? Such questions are not capable of anything beyond the merest conjecture.

A fundamental problem – as with apparitions in general – is ascertaining whether Foggy Autonomous Ghosts are objective or subjective in nature. If subjective, what generates such dreams and hallucinatory experiences, apparently capable of being shared? Or could it be a phenomenon operating upon both an objective and subjective level simultaneously?

It is merely a personal impression, but looking at the descriptions supplied by witnesses, it seems as if percipients struggle to verbalise the details of such encounters. This could perhaps indicate that these experiences are arising at the boundaries of perception and consciousness, potentially involving something that cannot be properly represented in linguistic form or framed within previous sensory experience.

If such fogs are not wholly subjective, one would be facing the prospect of them being independent entities, potentially taking us into the wilder fringes of cryptozoology or of supernatural belief and mythology (certainly if non-human entities are postulated). Such a scenario, indeed, even the slightest suspicion it might be objectively true, is certainly a nightmarish one.

The Eleven

The war continues

Beneath the veneer of an unknowing world
two sides face each other in
eternal battle

The advantage swings from one to the other and each
asset has the potential
to be a weapon

Now, a new and crucial asset is predicted
to be revealed and the old adversaries fight for
its control

As before,
lost in the maelstrom of an approaching tempest,
oblivious, anxious and unwilling,
is Isolde Cadelle

Transformation

Part Two of
The Eleven
continues on Kindle

Some are born to be heroes
Others are bred

Part 2:
Transformation



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**Charles
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STRANGE CONTINENT

ULRICH MAGIN and THEO PAIJMANS round up the weirdest news items from across Europe...

WHALE OF A TALE

In May, German authorities sprang quickly into action and issued a press release when a 17m (56ft) long sperm whale was discovered, having evidently washed ashore near the town of Zingst on the Baltic Sea. Astonished onlookers witnessed several official-looking men in biohazard suits carefully inspecting the carcass. The story soon blew up however, as the whale turned out to be a plastic life-size replica, made by Belgian art collective Captain Boomer, and the 'scientists' in hazmat suits hired actors. According to the mayor of Zingst, the event took place as part of a festival aimed at raising public awareness of marine pollution. One problem remained though: no one notified the authorities beforehand, and they were not amused. The organisers of the festival might now be looking at a stiff fine and a police inquiry. *NOS Nieuws, Kölner Stadt-Anzeiger, 25 May 2018.*

RUSSIAN POLTERGEIST

In the hamlet of Maraksa, Western Siberia, some 331km northwest of Tomsk, local police called in a priest to exorcise a house plagued by a poltergeist. In mid-April, a married couple and their 15-year-old adopted son had been disturbed by moving furniture and "weird things like flying knives", as they explained in a call to the emergency services. Police arrived on the scene to find the home in a state of complete chaos; objects appeared to have been thrown around wildly, while a knife was stuck in one of the wooden walls. Officers said they felt "the power of 'something that they could not explain rationally'". As they were searching the house, a cupboard fell down next to them without warning, a piece of wood came flying in from an empty room, and books fell off



ABOVE: Captain Boomer's 'dead sperm whale' had previously washed ashore on the banks of the Thames in 2013.

the shelves. Police filed a report and called a priest to try and soothe the "evil spirits" with blessings. The Kolpashevsky Eparchy (Diocese) confirmed its participation: "A priest was sent to talk to the family and pray. He also witnessed all the things described in the report. When the priest arrived, the so-called poltergeist calmed down a bit, but then the phenomenon continued." *Siberian Times, 14 Feb; heute.at, 17 Feb 2018.*

STRANGE CRIME

Two odd offenders haunted Austria and Germany this spring. An unknown nocturnal culprit threw eggs at shop doors in Frohnleiten, Styria, in mid-March, with over 20 cases recorded. "Sometimes nothing happens for several nights, then a new attack follows," a police spokesman said.

Then, another mystery was reported from Tutzing, Bavaria, when several trees went missing from a plot of land belonging to the church of St Joseph. Kai Motschmann, spokesman of Starnberg police, explained that it was hard to determine the

time of the crime, the number of trees taken (at least a dozen), or the motive. The only thing he was certain of was that "it was not a professional job", as the trees had been sawn off "at a height of over one metre". *Kleine Zeitung (Graz), 18 Mar; merkur.de, 28 Mar 2018.*

STRANGE FALLS

Shortly before midnight on 2 December 2017, Gerhard Mayer and Rita Peter-Mayer, of Lauingen in Bavaria, heard a "terrible bang" and later found several of their roof tiles shattered, as well as a large block of ice. Police assumed the ice had become dislodged from an aeroplane wing, although they also admitted "we have never before had such a case in our region".

In the second week of April, Ulrich Magin found his car and post box covered with fine dust. It was no local event – the media were full of reports about a rain of Sahara sand having been blown from Africa to Europe, and the grey sky was explained by this dust. The dust was also registered

at a Swiss observatory on the Jungfraujoch (at 40 micrograms per cubic metre of air), and two weeks earlier, Saharan sand had been so dense (at 1,000 micrograms per cubic metre) in Greece that it interfered with traffic at the Heraklion airport in Crete. *Augsburger Allgemeine, 4 Dec 2017; General-Anzeiger, 10 April, SPIEGEL online, 12 April 2018.*

VANISHING SWALLOWS

In May, birdwatchers in Belgium and the Netherlands discovered during routine counting that tens of thousands of swallows had vanished. It is presumed that they did not find their way back from Africa. Ornithologists came up with various explanations, such as hurricanes or sandstorms blowing the birds off course, after which they would have perished from exhaustion. Gerald Driessen, a scout at Natuurpunt, feared that the riddle was complex, with no immediate solution, saying: "We must seek the solution in both Europe and in Africa." Although the cause of the mass vanishings was unknown, ornithologist

OLI SCARFF / GETTY IMAGES



and Greenpeace employee Filip Verbelen suggested that large-scale agriculture might be the culprit, as it endangered nesting places in Europe and hibernation spots in Africa. According to a report published in May by CLM, a Dutch independent advisory bureau for agriculture, a cocktail of 14 pesticides was found when non-hatched eggs, a number of dead young swallows and one deceased adult swallow were examined. In 93 per cent of all the samples, DDT was found; surprising, as the report stated, because the use of DDT has been forbidden since the 1970s, although it is still in use in Africa to combat malaria. *De Morgen*, 14 May 2018, www.clm.nl/publicatie/146/18.

MYSTERY BOOK

In April, Bergen op Zoom, a town in the Netherlands, became captivated by a mystery when a centuries-old book was found during maintenance work. The tome had a chain wrapped around it and it had been immured under the floor of the 16th-century tower of Het Markiezenhof, one of the oldest palaces in the Netherlands and now a museum. Images show an impressive-looking book in a leather binding grown dark with age. Specialists had placed the book “in quarantine”, according to the local press, and research was underway to examine its origin and possible value. Within a month, the

mystery collapsed, when Het Markiezenhof admitted that the municipality had made up the entire story as a PR stunt for the museum. In an editorial, the chief editor of local TV station Omroep Brabant, which had initially reported the story, voiced his displeasure with this canard, accusing the museum and the municipality of spreading fake news. *Omroep Brabant*, 16 April & 23 May 2018.

BIG CATS AND DOGS

The panther of Guadalajara, Spain (see FT363:20), has turned out to be a shaggy dog story, with the cryptid cat now apparently identified as a “large black feral dog”. At the end of January, a video was taken of a presumed panther near Jadraque. Two kilometres away, Guardia Civil officers spotted a feral dog, and a patrol of the Nature Protection Service of Brihuega and Atienza managed to take photos of the animal, which was described as “very large and black” and accompanied by a second dog. “This matches the characteristics described by the witnesses who have seen the animal in this region.” *ABC*, Madrid, 30 Jan 2018.

On 6 March 2018, a “wolf” with a bright spot on its hindquarters was videotaped near Rettenberg, in the Oberallgäu, Bavaria. The tape shows a large, dog-like creature in a meadow, but Wildlife Management Service found

the images too fuzzy and unconvincing to prove the presence of a wolf. Back in summer 2017, tourists had spotted a wolf in the region, and local hunters and farmers feared for livestock and asked for the “wolf” to be removed. *Bayrischer Rundfunk*, 7 Mar 2018.

On 30 April, the “Day of the Wolf” in Germany, 40 sheep from a larger flock of 150 perished at Bad Wildbad in the Black Forest after a midnight attack by a wolf or wolves. The predators killed and partially ate 16 animals, while another 24 died when they fled into a stream where they drowned. “It was a scene of horror,” said Anette Wohlfarth, head of the Federal State’s Sheep Farming Association. Investigation by the Forest Research Institute of Baden-Württemberg confirmed that the kills were typical of wolves, and later DNA testing showed beyond doubt that wolves had indeed killed the sheep. This is not the first time wolves have appeared in the area, as a deer had been killed at the end of November 2017 near Freudenstadt and another early in December at Rippoldsau-Schapbach. DNA tests revealed both kills were by the same animal. Four wolves have been found dead in the region, one shot and thrown into Lake Schluchsee, two as road kills, and one that had died from natural causes. After the Bad Wildbad incident, hunting associations

urged that wolves be taken off the list of protected animals. *Schwarzwälder Bote*, 30 April 2018.

QUAKES AND BOOMS

Two loud sky booms were heard all over Lecco province in Northern Italy around 11am on 21 March. The booms were so frightening that several schools were evacuated as a precautionary measure; many people were sufficiently alarmed to call the fire service, and the website of the local newspaper crashed due to so many people trying to access it for information. No one could pinpoint the source of the sounds, but it was assumed that two F35 military planes from Grosseto Air Base on a low-altitude mission to intercept a plane that had illegally entered Italian airspace had created a sonic boom. *Provincia di Lecco*, 22 Mar 2018.

Since early April, police in Stekene, East Flanders, have logged multiple reports of inhabitants hearing a mysterious noise sounding like a horn. “The sound lasts a few seconds, and then returns after a few minutes”, municipal employee Jan van Dooren stated. A number of possible causes had been investigated, but without success. The investigation managed to establish that the sound did not originate from a pumping station or a nearby factory. *De Standaard*, *Nieuwsblad.be*, 23 May 2018.

HET MARKIEZENHOF



GUARDIA CIVIL

ABOVE LEFT: The mysterious tome supposedly found under the floor of a Dutch museum. ABOVE RIGHT: Was the Guadalajara Panther just a big, black, shaggy dog?



RELICS ROUND-UP

The hearts of Anne of Brittany and St Laurence O'Toole stolen and recovered, plus St Clement's finger found

- A bone thought to belong to St Clement, an early pope, has been found in a London dustbin. The fragment was contained in a red and gold wax-sealed case marked “Ex. Oss. S. Clementis” – meaning “From the bones of St Clement”. Clement is thought to have been a disciple of both St Peter and St Paul and to have died around AD 100. Records of the early popes place him either as the second pope after St Peter or as the third or fourth. He was allegedly martyred by drowning after being tied to a ship’s anchor. Enviro Waste found the relic somewhere in central London, but workers didn’t realise what it was until several days later, and it was impossible to trace its provenance. *D.Mail*, 2 May 2018.

- Sometime during the night of 2 March 2012, the preserved heart of Dublin’s patron saint, St Laurence O’Toole, was stolen from the city’s Christ Church Cathedral [FT288:14]. The thief – who is thought to have spent the night in the cathedral – used metal cutters to prise open the iron bars protecting the wooden heart-shaped box holding the heart. O’Toole was born Lorcán Ua Tuathail in Castledermot, Co Kildare, in 1128. He was appointed Archbishop of Dublin in 1162 and died in Normandy in 1180. He was canonised in 1225, after reports of miracles at his original gravesite, and the following year his heart was taken to Dublin and preserved in Christ Church Cathedral. His skull was brought back to Britain in 1442. His bones were interred at the parish church of Chorley, Lancashire, now called the Church of St Laurence, but they disappeared during the Reformation. At the beginning of April 2018, gardaí recovered the heart, wrapped in plastic, in Dublin’s Phoenix Park. The heart, secured with a gold tassel, was presented to Archbishop Michael Jackson at a special evensong service to mark its return as the cathedral choir sang Haydn’s Te Deum.

Two members of a travelling



TOP LEFT: The gold casket holding Anne of Brittany’s heart. CENTRE: The box containing the heart of St Laurence O’Toole. BOTTOM: James Rubin, owner of Enviro Waste, and the sealed reliquary found in a London dustbin.

crime gang were previously twice arrested in relation to the crime and remain the only suspects in the case despite never being charged. Gardai believe that the relic was “passed around” over the last six years within the gang’s community. It’s understood that individuals feared the relic was somehow responsible for the deaths of people close to the thieves from apparent heart attacks. “The reason why this relic is back where it belongs is that members of a certain community felt that it was cursed and was bringing nothing but bad luck on the people in that community,” a senior source said. It is likely that gardai received a tip-off resulting in the relic’s recovery. *Irish Independent*, *irishtimes.com*, 27 April 2018.

- Over the weekend of 14-15 April, raiders smashed a window at the Thomas-Dobrée museum in Nantes and, despite setting off an alarm, stole a 6in (15cm) gold oval casket containing the heart of Anne of Brittany (1486-1514), the only woman to have twice been crowned queen of France. She was married to Charles VIII, and then, following his death in 1498, to his cousin Louis XII. She was buried at Saint Denis in Paris, apart from her heart, which was interred in her parents’ tomb in Nantes.

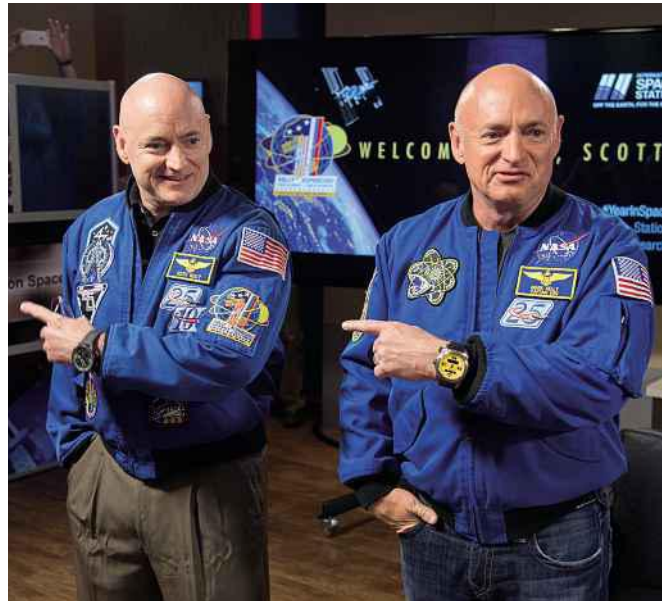
The casket, made of 100g of gold and topped by a crown with nine fleur-de-lys, narrowly escaped being melted down during the 1790s and has been at the museum for more than 130 years. Around 23 April, police recovered the reliquary, along with a statuette and gold coins, at an unspecified location not far from nearby Saint-Nazaire. Two young men were arrested. *Metro*, 17 April; *D.Telegraph*, 24 April 2018.



MEDICAL BAG | The Indonesian divers who have evolved super-spleens and the NASA astronaut whose time in space has left him genetically different to his twin



MELISSA ILARDO



ROBERT MARKOWITZ / NASA / JOHNSON SPACE CENTER

ABOVE LEFT: Bajau divers' underwater prowess is due to having evolved enlarged spleens. ABOVE RIGHT: Astronaut Scott Kelly (left) and his brother, former astronaut Mark Kelly.

DIVING SUPERMEN

For more than 1,000 years, the Bajau people of Indonesia have travelled the southeast Asian seas in houseboats, catching fish and seafood by free diving with spears. Their itinerant lifestyle has earned them the nickname "sea nomads" or "sea gypsies". Scientists have now discovered the secret of their astonishing fishing prowess: they have evolved genetically enlarged spleens that allow them to use oxygen more efficiently so that they can stay underwater for longer.

Melissa Ilardo of Cambridge University, the study leader, has spent several months in Jaya Bakti, Indonesia, taking genetic samples and performing ultrasound scans of the spleens from both the Bajau and their land-dwelling neighbours, the Saluan. Sequencing the results showed the Bajau people have a median spleen size 50 per cent larger. The spleen was thought to have an important role in enabling humans to free dive for prolonged periods, but the relationship between spleen size and dive capacity has never before been examined in humans.

"There's not a lot of information out there about

human spleens in terms of physiology and genetics," said Ms Ilardo, "but we know that deep-diving seals, like the Weddell, have disproportionately large spleens. I thought that if selection acted on the seals to give them larger spleens, it could potentially do the same in humans."

Some Bajau claim to be able to hold their breath for 13 minutes while diving. Using weight and handmade goggles, they can easily dive to up to 70m (230ft) for lengthy periods. The spleen plays a central role in prolonging free diving time as it forms part of what is known as the human dive response, which is triggered as a method of assisting the body to survive in an oxygen-deprived environment. The heart rate slows down, blood vessels in the extremities shrink to preserve blood for vital organs, and the spleen contracts, which creates an oxygen boost of nine per cent by ejecting more oxygenated red blood cells into circulation. Researchers found enlarged spleens in non-diving Bajau individuals, as well as those who regularly free dive, proving the adaptation is genetic, not acquired.

The team's research, published in the journal *Cell*,

also discovered that members of the Bajau have a gene called PDE10A, which the Saluan do not. It is thought that this gene controls the levels of thyroid hormone T4. "We believe that in the Bajau they have an adaptation that increases thyroid hormone levels and therefore increases their spleen size," added Ms Ilardo. The team now hopes to study similar populations such as the Moken hunter-gatherers of Thailand and the Haenyeo diving women of Jeju in South Korea. *D.Telegraph*, *D.Mail*, 20 April; *NY Times*, 25 April 2018.

TWINS DRIFT APART

US Navy captains Scott and Mark Kelly, identical twins born a few minutes apart, both flew on the Space Shuttle and spent time aboard the International Space Station (ISS). However, they are no longer genetically identical. After Scott, 54, spent 340 days in space, seven per cent of his genes didn't match those of his brother. While astronauts' bodies adapt to micro-gravity, it was assumed that the effects wore off upon their return to Earth; but Scott landed in March 2016, and his body is yet to return to normal. Some of the genes that seem to have

changed permanently involved DNA repair, bone formation and how the cells used oxygen. While Scott was away, the brothers' DNA was monitored. "We really see an explosion, like fireworks going off, as soon as the human body gets into space," said Dr Chris Mason of Weill Cornell Medicine. "We've seen thousands of genes change. This happens as soon as the astronaut gets into space, and the activity persists temporarily upon return to Earth."

The study could lead to finding ways to protect and fix genetic changes. Scott's telomeres – the caps at the end of chromosomes that shorten with age – stretched in space, but returned to normal length within two days of landing back on Earth. His year in space had a slightly detrimental effect on him. Tests suggested immune cell inflammation, which can lead to disease, and there were signs he may be biologically older than his twin. Dr Mason said his team found "hundreds of genetic mutations" unique to Scott since his mission as well as increased mitochondria in the blood, indicating damage to the power plants of cells and disruption of hundreds of "space genes". *D.Telegraph*, 16 Mar 2018.



THE WILD MAN BLUES

Spain's former wolf boy is now a 72-year-old who finds himself disappointed with life among humans...



BELOW: Marcos Rodríguez Pantoja shares his lupine experiences with schoolchildren. ABOVE: A scene from *Entrelobos*, the 2010 feature film based on Pantoja's life.

A man raised by wolves says his life in human society was a failure and he wishes he could go and live among the animals again. Marcos Rodríguez Pantoja was once the wild child of Spain's Sierra Morena mountain range, living among animals for 12 years, but now the 72-year-old lives in a small, cold house in the village of Rante, in the Galician province of Ourense. This past winter has been hard for him; his last happy memories were of his childhood with wolves. He slept in a cave alongside bats, snakes and deer, listening to them as they exchanged squawks and howls, which he can still mimic. Together they taught him how to survive.

Today, the former wolf boy, who was 19 when he was discovered by the Civil Guard and ripped away from his natural home, struggles with the coldness of the human world. It's something that didn't affect him so much when he was running around barefoot and half-naked with the wolves. "I only wrapped my feet up when they hurt because of the

snow," he remembers. "I had such big calluses on my feet that kicking a rock was like kicking a ball." After he was captured, Rodríguez's world fell apart and he has never been able to fully recover. He's been cheated and abused, exploited by bosses in the hospitality and construction industries, and never fully reintegrated to the human tribe – but at least his neighbours in Rante accept him as "one of them". And now, the environmental group Amigos das Arbores is raising money to insulate his house and buy him a small pellet boiler – things that his meagre pension cannot cover. Forest officer Xosé Santos organises sessions at schools where Rodríguez can talk about his love for animals and the importance of caring for the environment. "It's amazing how he enthralled the children with his life experience," says Santos.

Rodríguez was born in Añora, in Córdoba province, on 7 June 1946. His mother died giving birth when he was three, and his father left to live with another woman in Fuencaliente.



"It's amazing how he enthralled the children with his experiences"

Rodríguez only remembers abuse during this period of his life. They took him to the mountains to replace an old goatherd who cared for 300 animals. The man taught him the use of fire and how to make utensils, but then died suddenly or disappeared, leaving Rodríguez completely alone around 1954, when he was about seven years old. He survived by observing which berries and root vegetables animals ate and was eventually fed by a mother wolf who later adopted him. She fed her cubs some meat that he tried to steal from one of the cubs but the mother pawed at him and growled until he backed off. "After feeding her pups she threw me a piece of meat. I didn't want to touch it because I thought she was going to attack me, but she was pushing the meat with her nose," he told the BBC in 2013. "I took it, ate it, and thought she was going to bite me, but she put her tongue out, and started to lick me. After that, I was one of the family." He said he also had a snake for company who followed him around

MYTHCONCEPTIONS

by Mat Coward

225: ROTTEN RUBBISH



The myth

When plastic rubbish is sent to landfill it lasts forever – but biodegradable waste doesn't take up scarce space long-term, because it biodegrades.

The "truth"

Nothing should biodegrade in a well-run landfill site. They are designed specifically to prevent rotting; they are, as the industry likes to point out, storage facilities, not giant compost heaps. Of course, everything will break down eventually, but it'll take place over centuries, not years. Newspapers, for instance, remain readable for decades (good news for archivists). The liquid and gas by-products of biodegradation can be dangerously polluting, so a modern landfill site uses compression within a cellular structure, and layers of sealants, barriers and liners, to limit exposure of the contents to the light, water and oxygen which enable decomposition. The University of Arizona's garbage project has found bits of food waste unchanged after 40 years. Even landfill sites from the ancient world, excavated in modern times, still emit appalling stinks when their previously preserved organic contents are exposed to the air.

Sources

www.livescience.com/32786-what-happens-inside-a-landfill.html; www.nytimes.com/1992/07/05/books/we-are-what-we-throw-away.html; www.sciencelearn.org.nz/resources/1543-measuring-biodegradability

Disclaimer

The question may become moot as organic waste is increasingly used for energy generation rather than being mummified for the delight of future anthropologists, but if you've spotted some garbage in this column, hold your nose and report it to the letters column.

Mythchaser

Following the logic of the above, is it true that, despite the general anxiety on the subject, our modern rubbish crisis is less troubling than that of our ancestors? It's sometimes claimed that overall amounts of waste remain roughly the same; what's changed is that we dispose of more non-biodegradable junk, while previous generations' bins were overflowing with dung and suchlike rotters – and therefore our rubbish is, counter-intuitively, less of an environmental problem than theirs was.



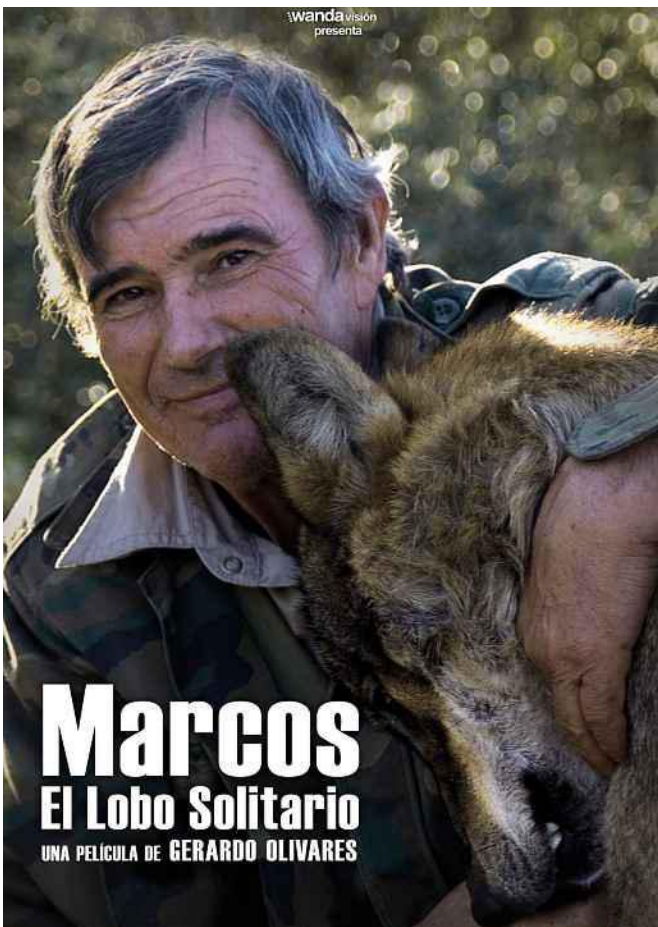
because he fed her goat's milk.

When authorities found him, he had swapped words for grunts, but he could still cry. "Animals also cry," he says. Returning to civilisation was the scariest experience of his life, first to an orphanage where the nuns taught him to stand up straight and eat at a table. He was confined to a wheelchair for a time after the thick callouses were cut off his feet and his first visit to a barber had him terrified the razor would cut his throat. The noise was the worst part – cars, bustling crowds, and people walking by his window in all directions. He was afraid of crossing the road. He fought with the nuns about sleeping in a bed and when he rented his own room he at first slept on the floor on a pile of magazines and blankets.

He has tried to return to the mountains but found it was a very different place to what he remembered, and his cave had been replaced with cottages and electric gates. The wolves

also didn't accept him after he was away so long and kept their distance instead of embracing him as a brother. "You can tell that they are right there, you hear them panting, it gives you goosebumps... but it's not that easy to see them," he said. "There are wolves and if I call out to them they are going to respond, but they are not going to approach me. I smell like people, I wear cologne."

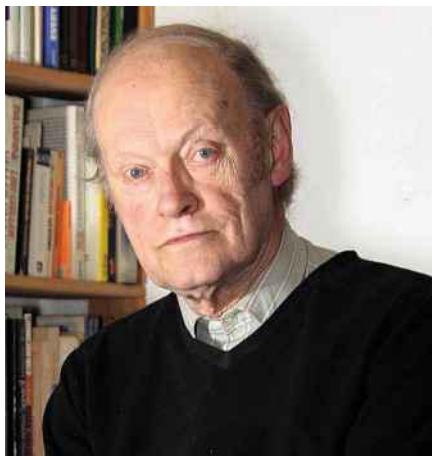
His experience has been the subject of various books, such as *Marcos: Wild Child of the Sierra Morena* by Gabriel Janer Manila (Condor Books, 1982) and the 2010 film *Entrelobos* (Among Wolves) by Gerardo Olivares. Some taunt his naivety. "I think they laugh at me because I don't know about politics or soccer," he said. But his doctor told him: "Laugh back at them. Everyone knows less than you." *elpais.com*, 4 April; *dailymail.co.uk*, 6 April 2018. For a general survey of feral children cases, see 'Wild Things' by Paul Sieveking, **FT161:34-41**.



ABOVE: Rodríguez was also the subject of this 2013 Spanish documentary.

NECROLOG

This issue, we remember the psychical researcher who investigated everything from Brazilian spirit healing and Uri Geller's powers to the Enfield Potergeist...



GUY LYON PLAYFAIR

It is with great regret that we record the death of veteran psychical researcher Guy Lyon Playfair three days after his 83rd birthday. Guy exemplified the independent scholar who masters the data of psychical researchers to a professional level and then successfully spans the boundary between academic approaches and practical field investigation. He was active in many areas of the subject over 46 years, and it would be difficult to pick any aspect upon which he could not either lecture in-depth or have something significant or original to say. Most importantly, he expressed his opinions openly, and was more than prepared to respond to ill-informed critics on their own level.

Born in Quetta, India, the son of Major General Ian Lyon Playfair and novelist Jocelyn Playfair, he narrowly survived death a month later in an earthquake that killed thousands. Moving back to England, he grew up in rural Gloucestershire and after schooling went on to study modern languages at Pembroke College, Cambridge, specialising in Russian. He wrote for *Granta*, the University magazine, translating some stories by Chekhov into English

for the first time. After two years' National Service in the Russian translation section of the RAF in Iraq, he pursued a career in journalism, working full-time for *Life* magazine, and in 1961 moved to Rio de Janeiro where he worked for the next 10 years as a freelance journalist for a number of international

business magazines, the *Economist*, *Time*, the *Guardian* and Associated Press, covering everything from popular music to the hunt for Nazi war criminals. He also served for four years in the press corps of the US Agency for International Development (USAID).

His mother had been a member of the Society for Psychical Research, and he read the society's journal as a child; but his interest in the paranormal began in earnest with his own successful treatment by a Brazilian psychic healer. Initially sceptical, he was soon satisfied the effect and cure he experienced were genuine. Thereafter, he immersed himself in the psychic culture of Brazil, taking a particular interest in physical mediumship and working closely with the Institute Brasileiro de Pesquisas Psicobiofisicas (the Brazilian Institute for Psychobiophysical Research, IBPP). This was a research society founded in 1961 by a civil engineer Herman Guimaraes Andrade (1913-2003), a spiritist trying to discover the "underlying laws, properties and potential of the spirit by scientific methods". He also joined the SPR in Britain as an overseas member.

In 1973 he investigated a poltergeist outbreak in a

private apartment in São Paulo, where he succeeded in taping unexplained rapping sounds and followed up a number of other well-attested cases of poltergeist arson and destruction in the country, interviewing the victims and baffled professionals who had been called in to try and contend with the phenomenon. Some of his experiences and conclusions were detailed in his book *The Flying Cow* (1975), a landmark study on psi in Brazil. They also helped shape his views expressed in later books such as *The Indefinite Boundary* and *Cycles of Heaven*.

Residency in Brazil uniquely placed him for investigating one of the many extraordinary claims concerning Israeli psychic Uri Geller, who was receiving international attention at the time. A story appeared in *Psychic* magazine that a Brazilian banknote had materialised at the home of researcher Andrija Puharich in the USA, following a visit by Geller. Usually, claims of teleported objects are untraceable items lacking serial numbers or provenance. Guy sought to interview all concerned and gathering the details established the note as one of a Brazil series of low-value notes printed in 1963. It seemed the sort of trivial curio that might have been picked up as a tourist souvenir by Puharich on a visit in the early 1960s and forgotten. His account of his investigation and sceptical verdict was published with approval in *New Scientist* and in *The Magic of Uri Geller* (1975) by sceptic conjuror James Randi. However, Guy developed lurking doubt regarding the cogency of his mundane explanation after his own first-hand experiences with testing Geller, though the incident that most impressed him was materialisation of a shaving mirror when he was

alone in a bathroom shortly after completing one set of experiments. This and other incidents led him to change his mind concluding: "I became convinced of something many had learned before me: inexplicable things do happen in the presence of Uri Geller" (in *The Geller Effect*, 1986, co-written with the psychic himself).

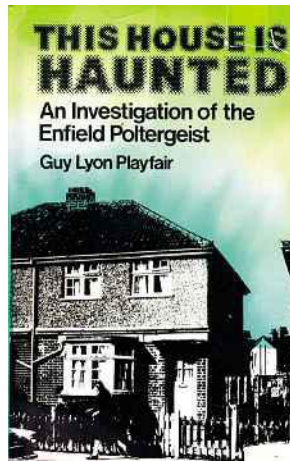
This reversal of opinion concerning Geller was all the more powerful since he had undertaken a detailed study of both conjuring techniques and hypnotism (later writing *If this be Magic: The Forgotten Power of Hypnosis*). He was always willing to collaborate with professional magicians who were actually serious about scientifically testing psychic claims. He was a close friend of veteran SPR sceptic and Magic Circle member Dr Eric Dingwall (1896-1986), and he later co-authored the book *A Question of Memory* (1983) with magician David Berglas (who shared with him the stage secret for making a grand piano disappear).

On his permanent return to England in 1975, his interests and research activities widened. Though settled in Earl's Court in London – chosen as it was conveniently close for both the offices and libraries of the SPR and the College of Psychic Studies – he nonetheless kept abreast of developments in research developments worldwide. Utilising his flair for languages – as well as Russian he spoke Portuguese, Spanish and French – he travelled extensively in Eastern Europe following up claims of progress in psi research in Soviet bloc countries.

This international perspective, coupled with his vivid accounts of the exotic Brazilian psi scene and his readily accessible endorsements of healing and psychokinesis as real, ensured



a receptive and enthusiastic audience within British psychic and spiritualist circles. However, certain figures in the SPR were cooler in their reception, particularly regarding his support for physical mediumship. This was illustrated at an SPR Conference in September 1977 where he was present in the audience when Maurice Grosse appealed for help investigating a poltergeist outbreak at the home of the Hodgson family in Enfield, North London (see FT32:47-48, 33:4-5). The reception was lukewarm, with no volunteers save for Guy committing themselves. Although due to take a holiday, Guy immediately decided to go and visit, fully expecting to find a normal explanation. What he witnessed swiftly convinced him the case was genuine. Cancelling his holiday plans indefinitely, he subsequently spent 180 days and nights with the troubled family between 5 September 1977 and June 1978, including 25 all-night vigils. More than 140 hours of tape recordings were obtained, resulting in initial transcripts running to over 500 pages (a substantial number of his original recordings have still to be transcribed). The key incidents of this lengthy investigation of what became known as the Enfield Poltergeist were published three years later in his book, *This House is Haunted* (1980), selling 98,000 copies. It was reprinted in 2012 and 2015. Not helping acceptance of the case by the parapsychological fraternity of the time was the fact that he considered the favoured theory of Recurrent Spontaneous Psychokinesis (RSPK) as inadequate to explain manifestations, putting him at odds with the minority of parapsychologists in the Anglo-Saxon world at the time who accepted poltergeists as genuine. As he stated in *This House is Haunted* the mere “mention of spirits invariably polarises people into either fanatical believers or total



sceptics”. Citing the malicious and destructive aspect of poltergeists, together with signs of an intelligence being responsible for disturbances, he proposed the Latin American spiritist approach envisaging action by malicious discarnate entities as a better working model, certainly when trying to end outbreaks. In this he was almost a lone voice in psychical research, save for writer Colin Wilson who adopted a spiritist explanation, drawing upon this idea for his own book *Poltergeist!* (1981).

Often asked if any of the sceptics who criticised his book on Enfield ever attempted to examine the original material upon which it was based, he confirmed that in more than 35 years none ever did. Ultimately, Guy accepted limitations existed with all existing theories on poltergeist causation; indeed not long before he died he said that researchers were no nearer to an understanding than when he began.

Another later controversy arose with the infamous BBC *Ghostwatch* broadcast of October 1992 (see FT67:38-42, 166:36-41), loosely based on *This House is Haunted*. Contrary to what was claimed in a recent *Daily Telegraph* obituary, Guy was not an adviser to the show and subsequently had the Society of Authors launch legal action against the corporation for infringement. The *Ghostwatch* broadcast hardened

his already full-blown opinion that television was a bad thing. Having personally eschewed the box himself, he explored the negative impact of TV on society in his classic book *The Evil Eye: The Unacceptable Face of Television* (1990), highlighting the social damage done by the distortion of reality on the TV screen. He recommended complete abstinence from TV viewing and going off to find more creative, fulfilling and meaningful activities. His considered rejection of TV did not impede but rather enhanced a regular column he penned for an SPR magazine, commenting on the treatment of psychic topics in the media and exposing errors and bias. He eventually permitted a TV dramatisation of his Enfield book in a mini-series *The Enfield Haunting* (2015), though deploring the inevitable inaccuracies imposed for dramatic effect (see FT329:51). He had nothing whatsoever to do with the fictional *Conjuring 2* film the following year and would have sued had he been portrayed.

Long before this, both he and Maurice Grosse had concluded that a process of inherent psychological resistance was at work which inhibited consideration of positive physical evidence in the Enfield case. However, after an extensive re-investigation by an SPR committee of the Enfield case in 1982, their findings came to be more widely accepted, senior SPR members eventually acknowledging him by his elevation to vice-Presidentship of the Society. He also served on the Society’s Spontaneous Cases, Survival and Library Committees, and was a director of the Dragon Trust supporting research by Paul and Charla Devereux into ancient sites and indigenous cultures, as well as writing for the magazines *Light* (serving on its editorial board) the *Paranormal Review*, *Fortean Times*, and many others. Later activities included research into reincarnation, translating classic Latin

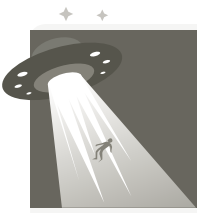
American parapsychological texts and examining meaningful coincidences. He was also especially interested in cases of telepathy and non-physical associations between identical twins, publishing the book *Telepathy: Twin Connection* in 1999 (see FT171:34-40).

Although concentrating on psychic research, he had a varied life outside it. He was active in taking up local planning and community issues affecting Earl’s Court and did not hold back in criticising the poor performance of public services. Free of the distractions of television, he maintained a serious interest in theatre, art cinema, and classical music. He was an accomplished harpsichord and trombone player, having played the latter with a military band in his youth and later with a jazz band at Cambridge. He also enjoyed real ale, including brewing his own, but inevitably both his musical and drinking tastes found an extension into psi research with an investigation into the musical mediumship of Rosemary Brown over 1978-1980 and when compiling *The Haunted Pub Guide* (1984), detailing many of Britain’s haunted pubs and inns.

Although increasingly housebound in recent years due to declining mobility, he hosted meetings at his flat, answered numerous inquiries and maintained a lively and extensive correspondence by letter and e-mail with writers and researchers worldwide. Not long before he died he was in touch with Jacques Vallee, discussing poltergeist effects in ufology, and was planning research into precognitive dreams. By one of those coincidences in which he always delighted, he died peacefully on the morning that Radio 4 broadcast an episode of ‘The Reunion’ dedicated to the Enfield case.

Guy Lyon Playfair, psychic researcher, born Quetta, India, 5 April 1935; died London 8 April 2018, aged 83.

Alan Murdie



The real UFO project

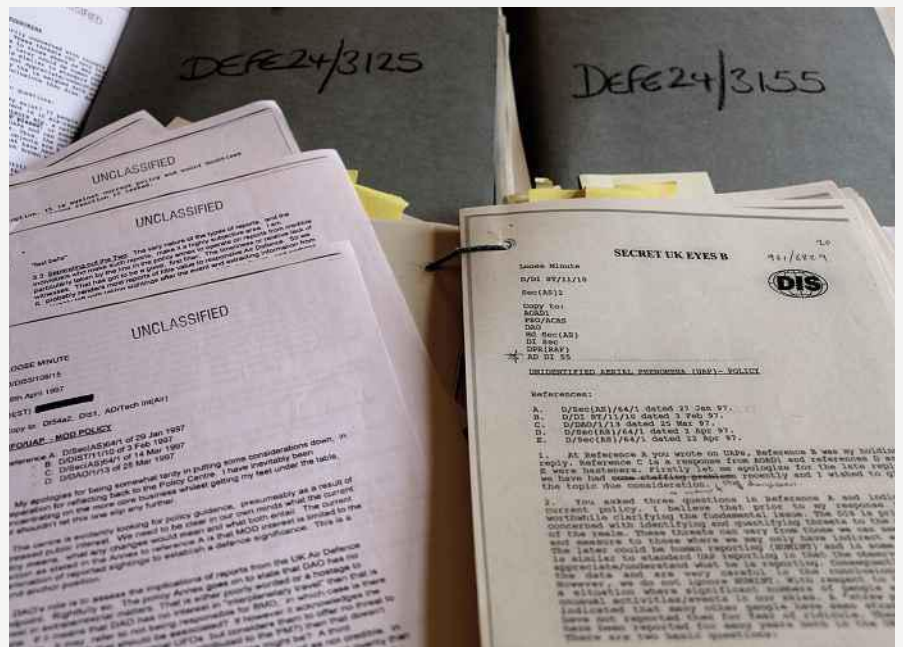
For two decades FT's **DAVID CLARK** has pursued the truth about the UK Ministry of Defence's secret UFO investigations. This year he obtained copies of British intelligence records that reveal the hidden agenda behind the MoD's decision to end its 50 year interest in 'unidentified aerial phenomena'.

The last elusive UAP files produced by the UK's defence intelligence branch DI55 have been released. Back in 2007 a decision was taken not to include them in the list of 210 files earmarked for transfer to The National Archives as part of the open government project that began in the following year (**FT238:28-29**). The Ministry of Defence gave me a written commitment they would be released after the main disclosure project ended in 2013; but five years passed and, after a series of baffling administrative hold-ups, unexplained 'issues' and lame excuses I began to suspect they must contain some smoking gun that the MoD was desperate to conceal.

But then a complete set of redacted copies were sent to me ahead of their planned opening at The National Archives in Kew. The three files run to more than 2,000 pages and some of the more sensitive papers, declassified from Secret, have been heavily redacted. ¹ The files paint a fascinating picture of the arguments that raged behind closed doors in Whitehall around the 50th anniversary of the UFO mystery in 1997. Within them, civil servants, intelligence officers and military staff debate how they should respond to growing public interest in the phenomenon and what they call "the media's obsession with UFOs". But hidden deep within the layers of administrative tedium lies a more disturbing aspect of military and intelligence interest in the subject – and the decision to discontinue more than half a century monitoring UFO reports.

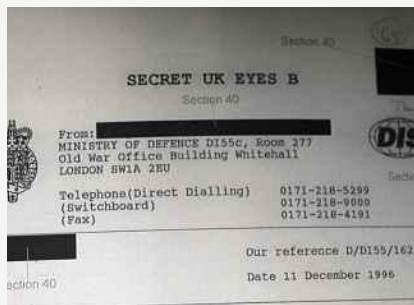
As the Defence Intelligence branch responsible for the investigation of UFO reports, DI55 secretly collected data on sightings from 1967 until the end of 2000 (**FT226:32-33**). For 33 years the MoD's public relations branch Secretariat (Air Staff) 2, popularly known as the UFO desk, copied all sighting reports they received to military desk officers in DI55; but they had no 'need to know' what happened to the data after that point.

The DIS quietly deleted its UFO task in 2000; and nine years later, in November 2009, the MoD announced it was closing its UFO desk and telephone hotline. The reasons were made clear in the 10th and final tranche of UFO desk files released in 2013 (**FT304: 28-9**). Carl Mantell of the RAF briefed ministers that in more than 50 years "no UFO sighting... has revealed anything



Hidden within layers of administrative tedium lies a more disturbing aspect of intelligence interest in UFOs

ABOVE: The redacted files that make up the last batch of 'UFO Files' released by the Ministry of Defence. They cover the involvement of DI55 and reveal the thinking behind the 'Condign Report', commissioned in 1996 and completed in 2000.



to suggest an extra-terrestrial presence or military threat to the UK". The decision was presented as an easy option to divert resources to more urgent defence priorities.

But what prompted the defence intelligence staff's decision to disengage from the subject was cleverly buried. The new papers show the UFO desk head in

1997 "wanted to get rid of" an issue that civil servants considered a "diversion from their main duties". But at that time her military opposite number in DI55 – an RAF Wing Commander – disagreed with their ostrich-like stance. He argued that as the MoD had not carried out any funded study of the sighting data they had accumulated since the 1970s it was not credible, and also politically risky, to claim publicly that UFOs posed no "threat to the realm". He compared UFOs, whatever they were, to Soviet intruder aircraft that routinely penetrated UK airspace during the Cold War. "They were not hostile but they were definitely a threat," he wrote.

But despite the DI55's more open-minded attitude, in 2000 the head of Defence Intelligence, PH West, formally asked the UFO desk to discontinue the arrangement whereby reports of strange objects in the sky were sent to them, even those from 'credible' sources such as police officers.² At the time, the precise reason for this extraordinary decision remained an official

DAVID CLARKE

secret. It was only in 2006, when I used the new Freedom of Information Act to request a full explanation, that the existence of a secret DI55 study of UFOs emerged.

THE CONDIGN REPORT

In that year, the MoD revealed that a four-volume report with the title *UAPs in the UK Air Defence Region* had been commissioned by the DIS in 1996 and completed in 2000. This has become known as the 'Condign Report', after the code-word used by the MoD that means fitting and well deserved and is usually applied to punishment (**FT211:4-6**). It was originally classified 'Secret', with the caveat 'UK Eyes Only'. For some time, the DIS had used the acronym 'UAP' – *unidentified aerial phenomena* – to avoid the popular link with extraterrestrial craft. The new papers show terminology was just one of many sources of disagreement between DI55 and the UFO desk. The latter stubbornly refused to use UAP, arguing that "to the vast majority of the public we deal with, 'UFO' with all its extraterrestrial connotations is the only [term] they recognise, [so] we shall continue with UFO".

One issue they did agree upon was the need to conceal any reference to the existence of the UAP study from the public because of the potential for "political embarrassment and misunderstanding". For decades, MPs, press and members of the public had been routinely told that no public money had been spent on *any* study of the thousands of UFO reports the MoD had received since the 1960s. Yet in response to a Parliamentary Question from Lib Dem MP Norman Baker in 2007, the MoD admitted £50,000 had been paid to an existing defence contractor to produce the Condign Report. Defence Minister Adam Ingram refused to release the name of the author, a retired DI55 desk officer (see panel at right) but said that the "report was circulated within the DIS and to other branches of the Ministry of Defence and RAF".³

During the three-year project, the report's author worked under strict secrecy. In James Bond style, only his boss and secretary (who was told "not to use the term UFO on the phone") were allowed to know the project code-name. The new files reveal his opposite numbers on the MoD's UFO desk (where Nick Pope's successor Kerry Philipott worked until 1998) were deliberately kept out of the loop because DI55 regarded civilian desk officers as prone to 'leakiness'.

In his terms of reference, the head of DI55 ordered the Condign author to focus his attention only "on the possible threat to the UK and technology acquisition" and not "X-files activities such as alien abductions". He was given access to the (then secret) surviving DI UFO file store at the MoD's Old War Office building, which contained several thousand sighting report forms dating from the 1970s. Most of this information was, by his own admission, of poor quality, and few sightings reported to

The MoD, Official Secrets Act and UFOs



ABOVE: The main Ministry of Defence building, Whitehall, London.

Since 2006, when I obtained the Condign report using FOI, the MoD has steadfastly refused to name the author. In 2009, I appealed to the UK's Information Commissioner against the decision to withhold his name and that of the other officials involved. I argued that given public money had been spent on the study, the public had the right to know the identity and credentials of the author, in order to judge how credible his conclusions were. The MoD and ICO rejected my submission, citing the Data Protection Act (DPA) and the author's rights to privacy under Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights (see **FT250:28**). In their adjudication the ICO said "the report was commissioned and produced... with strict security guidelines; at the time... it was a classified project with those involved being subject to the Official Secrets Act".

The new papers reveal, though, that the author of the report did have a personal interest in UFOs. In a note to the UFO desk officer in January 1997 he refers to his own sighting of "aerial phenomena" whilst flying with the RAF in the 1950s. But he has not responded to any of my requests for further information about this experience or his work on the UAP report. This is not surprising, as the files contain other examples where MoD Security have intervened to warn retired intelligence officers against speaking publicly about their work on UFOs.

The new files also reveal that another retired military officer, Air Commodore Terrence White, was advised in 2001 not to speak to me about his work on UFOs for the Air Ministry nearly 60 years ago. In a phone conversation with me earlier

that year White said he had met Dr J Allen Hynek, the USAF's scientific consultant for their UFO project Blue Book, during his visit to London in 1961, and we discussed meeting up to record an interview. But the files reveal White sought advice from the MoD and, afterwards, declined to offer any further co-operation. The files reveal MoD Security intervened to remind him of his OSA obligations.

"We leave it to your own discretion whether or not you participate in the interview," DI SEC warned White in a letter dated June 2001. "I am obliged to remind you that the Official Secrets Act still applies to you... [and] under the Act it may be an offence to reveal any information you have or have had in your possession by virtue of your position in the Armed Forces".

The MoD has claimed in the past that UFOs are not subject to the Official Secrets Act, but the paper trail reveals this is not true. It also suggests a D-Notice was used in one case to prevent information about Black Project aircraft and UFOs from reaching the media (see panel over page). To paraphrase *Guardian* journalist Ian Cobain, these actions expose the MoD as "history thieves". Cobain has done much to expose how the British Government has tried to censor attempts by historians to document other secret projects, some of them still hidden after more than half a century.

These files reveal the MoD tried to airbrush out of existence any evidence of its past interest in UFOs – firstly by destroying much of the surviving paper trail and secondly by using the Official Secrets Act to dissuade anyone who was directly involved in investigations from speaking publicly about their involvement in them.



the MoD had been investigated to exclude common misidentifications or even hoaxes. Yet his secretary was employed to manually populate an Excel spreadsheet with this flawed data. This was used to scrutinise UFO data covering a 10-year period, 1987-97. But a decision was taken not to examine or follow up any of the more evidential incidents, such as Rendlesham, which might have produced useful insights.⁴

What was the Condign author hoping to find using this questionable methodology? In an early list of priorities he notes, under “technology acquisition”: “Try to discover whether any scientific facts can be elicited from these phenomena – whatever they might be – which might be made use of by UK for military purposes”.

What type of technology? Was it Russian, Chinese or *alien* technology? Within an April 1997 policy document another DI officer

refers to ‘Extraterrestrial Objects’ (ETOs) as one potential explanation for UFOs, adding: “Being an objective, open-minded scientist, I do not dismiss out of hand the possibility of intelligent life evolving somewhere outside of our own Solar System. The laws of probability would indicate a finite, albeit small likelihood”. But he admits that DI55 had no hard evidence “that visitations have occurred” and, “if credibility is given to ET a judgement needs to be made about which government department is best suited to address it. There’s a job to keep GCHQ occupied!”

According to the UAP report there were no unexplained artefacts from UFO crashes, no radiation readings,⁵ no electronic or signals intelligence or even any reliable photographs in the MoD’s secret archive – apart from those showing Black Project aircraft (see panel on previous page).

The MoD’s long experience demonstrated that *most* sighting reports could be explained by a range of known phenomena, both natural and man-made. The author of the ‘Condign Report’ concluded UAPs were real but not ET spacecraft. He came to believe they were “atmospheric plasmas”, and linked modern cases with accounts of ‘foo fighters’ reported by WWII aircrew. His assessment was based on a survey of “open source material” available to him via the MoD’s archive and the scientific and ufological literature. This included some very tenuous material from Russian sources and popular books and journal articles on earthquake lights and ball lightning. But he went even further in his subsidiary recommendation that UK military should investigate potential methods whereby plasma could be harnessed and used as advanced weaponry (see Jenny Randles’s

Crashed saucers, black projects and missing files

LINK TO US DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE STUDY

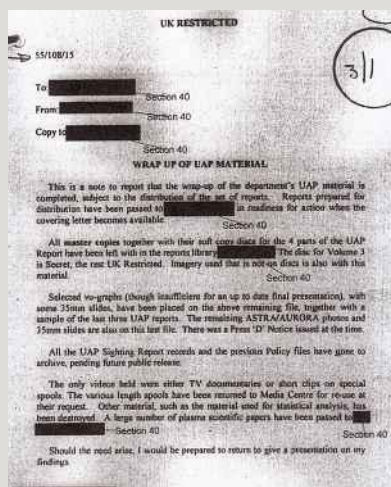
The DIS files refer to an ‘informal group’ within the US intelligence community that retained an interest in UFOs long after the closure of Project Blue Book in 1969. One 1997 document suggests this informal ‘project’ was on-going at least a decade before the AATIP was created. The author refers to the “fact that there is certainly [US and Russian] interest in the subject – why would they bother? If there is anything to all this then surely the UK should be involved?”

RENDELSHAM FOREST

In 1997 the DI55 Wing Commander briefed the head of Defence Intelligence on the most evidential UFO incidents in their files: “In recent times the large deltas seen over Belgium... and the Rendlesham Forrest [sic] ‘landing’ (confirmed by the US unit commander and others) are probably the most interesting. In both cases the UAP apparently did not use any conventional propulsion system and could hover as well as move at considerable speed” Yet the four-volume Condign report makes only passing reference to these cases. Perhaps that is because DI55 admitted that in recent years *all* reports they received – including that from Lt Col Halt – were “only filed” and that “no one... has ever carried out any analysis” or investigation.

ROSWELL INCIDENT

In January 1997 MoD were asked to confirm “whether the CIA or any United States Intelligence branch gave the UK MOD a briefing in 1989 about the alleged events at Roswell, New Mexico,



in 1947”. The questioner also asked for “any declassified file numbers on crashed UFOs in the UK”. A search of all surviving UAP files – some classified secret – failed to locate any briefings or meetings with any US agency on the subject of Roswell or UFOs. DI55’s response was: “We cannot provide any declassified file numbers on crashed UFOs in the UK – simply because there are none”.

BLACK PROJECTS

The files reveal that some UFO reports were the by-product of covert visits by secret US Stealth aircraft to UK controlled airspace. One document dated 4 December 2000 refers to a D-Notice issued to the Press on “the ASTRA/AURORA” project that may be a reference to an incident in 1994 when an alleged US Stealth aircraft was sighted at RAF Boscombe Down in Hampshire. Some conspiracy-oriented

UFO groups claimed this was a UFO crash cover-up. D-Notices (now DA-Notices) are issued by the Defence Press and Broadcasting Advisory Committee and the system is based on self-censorship by the media. The US has always denied the existence of the AURORA, a hypersonic spy-plane, and claimed the codename was actually an early reference to the B2 bomber (see **FT248:28**). But in 1992, DIS said: “It would not surprise the relevant desk officers in the Air Staff and DIS if it did exist... and we would be extremely keen to learn more about it!”

DESTRUCTION OF UAP FILES

The author of the ‘Condign Report’ had access to all the surviving UAP records in the then classified store at the Old War Office building in Whitehall. In 1996-97, prior to work on the Condign project, he carried out a complete file check and was surprised to find all the DI55 UFO files prior to August 1975 had been destroyed. By the time it deleted the subject from its task list, DI55’s own UFO report files ran to 54 parts. But his archive search found that parts 1-8 (covering 1967-1975), 10-20 (1976-78), and 26-31 (1980-82) had disappeared. They were marked as “destroyed” after being “sent to the archives” in 1984. Subsequent archive searches have failed to locate them. Among the missing files was the part that covered the Rendlesham Forest incident. When this “apparent anomaly” in the files came to light in 2003, frantic attempts were made to locate the missing papers – without success. The few surviving files are now safely in the care of The National Archives.

From: [REDACTED] Section 40
To: BT004
Date: 25 April 97 12:48pm
Subject: UFO/UAP: CUSTOMER SUPPORT

CONFIDENTIAL Section 40

I have been over to Main Building to seek support.

DSc(Air) TG3 [REDACTED] and DR(C) TG9 [REDACTED] Section 40 strongly support this initiative. They are interested in any novel technologies which might be useful for their programmes. They are concerned that there might be advanced technologies available in "friendly" countries to which they have no access despite participation in collaborative programmes endorsed by formal agreements.

Propulsion, stealth and novel electromagnetic technologies are of particular interest.

Please note that TG3 is still controlled by Ch Sc although it is managed by DSc (Air) staff. This is a consequence of ARP/CRP division of responsibility following DCS4.

[REDACTED] Section 40
DI51d
25 April 1997

ABOVE: The prospect of "propulsion, stealth and novel electromagnetic technologies" related to UAPs is raised in this 1997 document.

column in **FT365:27**).

But at no point in his 463-page report does he say that the 'atmospheric plasmas' he favours as an explanation for UFOs are a theoretical concept and not proven. The fact remains that, despite the popularity of the UAP theory with some ufologists,⁶ 'plasmas' are no more valid as a scientific explanation for the unexplained residue of UFO sightings than are ETs. Indeed, the new papers show his theory was not taken seriously by his superiors. He retired soon after delivery of the Condign report and, according to the MoD, none of his other recommendations were ever acted upon. All, that is, except one: that "it should no longer be a requirement for DI55 to monitor UAP reports as they do not demonstrably provide information useful for Defence Intelligence".

So, was this the *real* agenda behind the Condign report? I believe the answer is a definitive yes. It explains the reluctance of the report's author to engage with the scientific community since the report emerged in 2006. Today he continues to keep "a low profile". Why? The UAP project was classified secret when it was completed in 2000 and its author remains subject to the Official Secrets Act. But 18 years have passed and most of the report has been in the public domain for 12 years. Despite the cloying secrecy, in his recommendations,

the report's author suggests that his findings should be published and "could be used to provide the public with a balanced view of UAP reports and MoD involvement".

What we can say for sure is this: the report is the product of one man's desire to prove his pet theory about UFOs (or UAPs), of which there are many other failed examples littering the history of the subject. Unfortunately, the unreliable data he used to prove his case was neither robust nor reliable.⁷ Inevitably, and despite his intelligence credentials, the methodology he employed was flawed and this invalidated his conclusion. The only explanation is that he had been left with no option but to produce a pre-ordered conclusion, regardless of where the evidence actually pointed.

Whether secret work on UAPs continues somewhere in the British military, perhaps outsourced to another contractor, remains an intriguing and unanswered question. But in December 2017 the Pentagon confirmed that a similar project operated in the USA, despite denials, from 2008 to 2012, hidden under the title 'Advanced Aviation Threat Identification Program', or AATIP (see **FT362:2, 363:28, 366:28, 367:30**).

Reading between the lines, this new cache of papers reveals the MoD required a paper exercise that would allow defence mandarins to justify to their political masters

their decision to halt all further public work on the UFO/UAP issue. The 'Condign Report' also allowed the MoD to quietly remove the secret-squirrel defence intelligence staff from the controversy once and for all. Only time will tell whether they have succeeded.

NOTES

- 1 File refs DEFE 24/3153, DEFE 24/3155 and DEFE 24/3125/1
- 2 Reports of unidentified aircraft made by air defence stations were never categorised as 'UFO' reports so continued to be dealt with separately – and out of the glare of publicity.
- 3 Commons Hansard [Written Answers] 19 March 2007.
- 4 In 2006 the MoD informed me the Excel database and other material collected by the report's author had been destroyed after delivery of his report.
- 5 The Condign report treats the Rendlesham forest incident as a genuine unexplained incident. But it makes no reference to the alleged radiation traces reported to DI52 at the time (**FT204:37**).
- 6 Volume 3 of the UAP report lists as sources a number of books by Jenny Randles and Paul Devereux that include references to plasmas and earthlights/earthquake lights.
- 7 For a detailed critique of the methodology employed by the report's author see David Clarke and Gary Anthony, 'The British MoD Study: Project Condign', *International UFO Reporter* 30/4 (2006), pp11-13, 29-31.

Rise of the Robots

DAVID HAMBLING takes a look at the rapid and exciting development of robotics in recent years, and wonders how the robots' journey from the pages of science fiction into our homes and workplaces, our roads and skies, will transform the world we live in.

Robots are changing the world; but before we can begin to talk about them, we need to decide what a robot is. What distinguishes a robot from any other machine? The stereotypical robot is a mechanical humanoid that walks and talks like a person, but robots like that only exist – so far – in science fiction. In the real world, most robots neither walk nor talk, and are nothing like people.

Going back to the word's origin is little help. The term 'robot' was first used in Karel Capek's 1921 play *R.U.R.* for which he created a race of artificial industrial workers – Rossum's Universal Robots – the word 'robot' is derived from a Czech word meaning 'forced labour'. To make matters more confusing, Capek's fictional robots were organic beings that were grown synthetically, more like clones than our idea of robots.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* suggests that a robot is "a machine capable of carrying out a complex series of actions automatically". This would include machines like dishwashers and washing machines, which are – perhaps unfairly – not seen as robots. The International Federation of Robotics defines a robot as "an automatically controlled, reprogrammable, multipurpose manipulator... which may be either fixed in place or mobile". This may be useful in the industrial field, but misses many others; surgical robots, for example, are not programmable.

Early ideas of robots came from fiction, and developers played up the 'mechanical man' stereotype of literature's invention. 'Elektro the Moto Man' was a metallic human 2m (6.5ft) tall, who gave demonstrations to packed houses at the 1939 New York World's Fair. He could respond to verbal commands, answer questions in a suitably robotic voice, count on his fingers and even smoke a cigarette. Elektro was built by the Westinghouse Electric Corporation to showcase some of its most advanced technology: photocells and electrical relays were cutting-edge industrial technology. Elektro was a fake, his



LEFT: Models based on Leonardo da Vinci's sketches for a mechanical knight, often cited as the ancestor of modern robots.

BELOW: Czech writer Karel Capek, who coined the term 'robot' in his 1921 play *R.U.R.*

introduced, in the 1920s, they were known as 'robot policemen'.

In the 1940s, Nazi Germany fielded the V-1, a pilotless aircraft carrying explosives. These were known in the English-speaking world as 'robot aircraft' or just 'robots' ('doodlebug' and 'buzz bomb' were less common). We might now call them drones, a term that overlaps confusingly with robots.

Surgical and bomb-disposal machines are universally known as robots, even though some might argue they are remote-controlled and not 'real' robots. There are plenty of robot vehicles – on the ground, on the water and in the air, as well as underwater and underground. There are also devices that require a human operator, that are unquestionably robotic in nature, such as prosthetic hands or complete exoskeletons. But, perhaps

the robots that continue to fascinate us the most are the humanoids.

Serious efforts to build a human-like robot date back at least to designs sketched by Leonardo da Vinci for a mechanical knight in 1495, often cited as the ancestor of modern robots. Leonardo used his knowledge of human anatomy, the workings of joints and muscles to build an artificial human with levers and pulleys. The design, based on a suit of armour, could move its arms and legs and raise its visor. It even had a rudimentary form of programming, as it could be set to perform different actions by changing the settings of gears on a clocklike 'controller'.

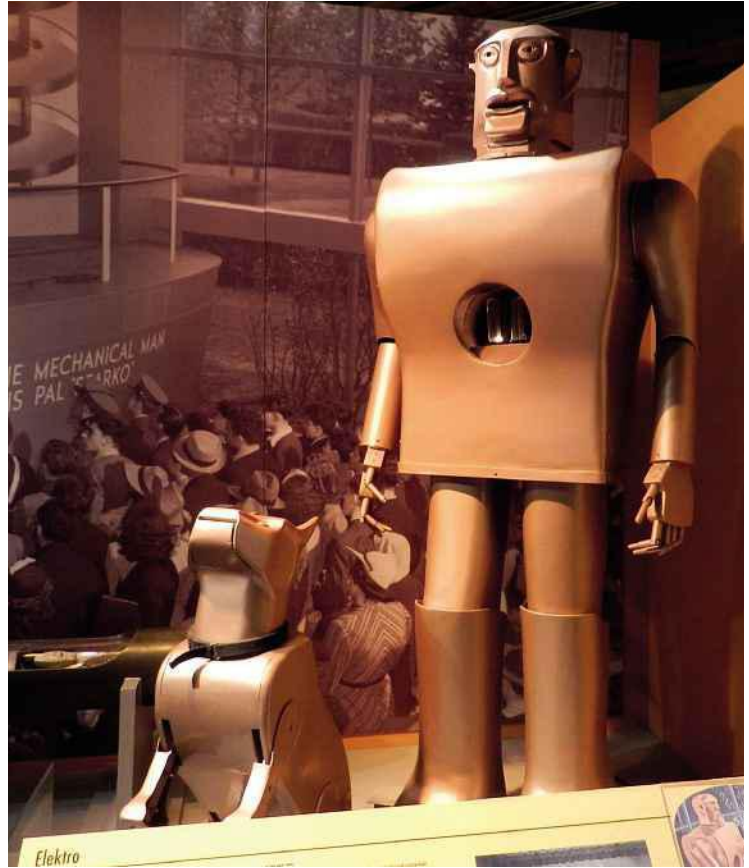
We do not know if Leonardo's knight was ever built, but it shows a profound understanding of the issues of robotics, and how problems can be overcome by borrowing techniques from nature. Modern robot arms, with their wrist and elbow joints, bear more than a coincidental resemblance to Leonardo's knight. Given the same challenge of articulation and

Leonardo's knight shows a profound understanding of issues in robotics

answers pre-scripted and his abilities limited to set tricks, but robotic devices using the same technology were doing real work.

Machines that took over the jobs of humans were often called robots. The first traffic signals were installed outside the Houses of Parliament in 1868, with red, green and amber gas lights for the nights, based on signals that directed trains. A policeman operated them manually. When automated traffic lights were





ABOVE LEFT: Eric the Robot (paying tribute to Kapek's *R.U.R.*), built by Captain WH Richards and AH Refell to open the 1928 Exhibition of the Society of Model Engineers in London. **ABOVE RIGHT:** 'Elektro the Moto Man' and his pal the mechanical dog 'Sparko' amazed audiences at the 1939 New York World's Fair.

moving a hand through three-dimensional space, engineers arrive at the same solution.

While robots may have been around for centuries, the current generation offers something entirely new. Now we are moving from the illusion of human capability to the reality. They may walk clumsily, and drive poorly, and lack human skill when it comes to picking up an apple, but robots are learning fast. The day is coming when they will rival and then surpass us in all sorts of fields. These robots are already starting to change the world. In the coming decades, they will do far more.

ROBOTS IN WORK

In Karel Capek's 1920 play, *R.U.R.*, the robots – inevitably perhaps – revolted against their human masters. This followed a deep-seated archetype, chiming with earlier fictional creations like Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. While there is no risk of the robots described here rising up, working robots might still trigger a revolution as they take over roles traditionally performed by us in everyday life.

Machines that take jobs from humans have always been contentious. In the 18th century, machine-breakers and Luddites tried to prevent the mechanisation of weaving by destroying the spinning mills. This view now looks faulty; mechanisation created as many jobs as it took, and even after 200 years of automation there are still

plenty of jobs for humans. Lamplighters, office messengers and broom makers may no longer exist, but their descendants are website developers, digital-content managers and life coaches. According to one estimate, as many as one-third of the children now in school will end up doing jobs that do not even exist yet.

Despite fears of robot workforces taking over, it is important to remember that labour is not as romantic as we might like to think but is often gruelling and dangerous. Robots offer a future in which nobody needs to do these tasks. A person might choose to do jobs that could be done by machine – cooking their own hamburgers or picking their own fruit – because they find it enjoyable, not because they are forced to earn a living.

UNIVERSAL ROBOTS UR10

Industrial robots are generally big, expensive and complicated machines. The process of automating production can take months, often completely rebuilding a production line around the robot. This type of automation has worked well in some industries, but it is not suitable for the majority of businesses. Danish company Universal Robots (UR) – a name that recalls Karel Capek's original, fictional Rossum's Universal Robots – wants to change that. Its range of small robots applies automation to practically every human activity: "When

we say the Universal Robot can automate virtually anything, we mean virtually anything," claims the company website.

The UR machines are smaller than traditional industrial robots. The biggest is the UR10, which weighs just 28.9kg (64lb). Their diminutive size makes them safer to be around than their larger cousins, which have the potential to kill a person with a single wrong movement. Most UR robots work in areas shared with humans without the need for safety barriers.

Physically, the UR10 looks like other industrial robots. It is stationary and resembles an Anglepoise lamp with six 'degrees of freedom': the shoulder, elbow and wrist joints rotate six different ways so that the robot can move around as needed. A UR robot can also hold a wide variety of tools and devices.

What sets the UR robots apart from others is their user interface. Rather than requiring a dedicated team of engineers, UR robots can be set up by an operator with no programming experience. Programming is carried out on a tablet computer with a touchscreen, and by moving the robot arm to the positions it needs to take up during the task. Effectively, the operator shows the robot what it needs to do. UR claims the average set-up time for a customer is half a day. An untrained operator can open the box, get the machine set up, and program it for a simple task in less than an hour.

Its small size and light weight makes the UR10 suitable for light factory work rather than welding cargo ships, and gives it tremendous flexibility. When a robot is needed for a new task, an operator can literally pick up a UR10, carry it to another part of the factory and get it working without any assistance.

UR robots perform the same kinds of tasks as traditional

industrial robots. At Renault's plant in Cleon in France, UR10s drive screws into engines; the robot's flexibility and size allow it to reach places that are hard for human workers to access. After securing each screw, the UR10 checks and verifies it with robotic thoroughness.

Other companies use UR machines for 'pick and place' jobs, selecting and positioning parts with the guidance of a vision system. Robots are also used for assembly and packing. At Xiamen Runner, one of the world's largest manufacturers of bathroom fittings, UR10 robots operate injection-moulding machines to produce components. The company mounts its robots on rails to move them from one job to the next. The quick setup means the UR10s are suited to producing customised products in low volumes, rather than in large runs. This is a shift away from the system of mass production that has been in place since the days of Henry Ford.

UR claims its robots have the fastest payback time of any in the industry, paying for themselves in a little over six months. The ease with which UR machines can be applied to existing operations, without safety issues or the complexities of programming, suggests that this type of machine could spread far and wide. And don't be fooled into thinking that UR machines are limited to industrial environments. Every secondary school in Denmark has a small UR3 robot for teaching technology studies, and Mofongo's Distillery in Groningen in the Netherlands has a UR robot bartender that slides up and down a rail pouring and serving drinks.

Apple, now the world's most successful company, built its success by making products with highly intuitive user interfaces. The UR machine may turn out to be the robot equivalent of the iPhone: a mass-market machine with universal appeal.

ROBOTS IN YOUR LIFE

Seeing a robot in a domestic situation was something of a novelty until recent years, unless it was a toy. The situation is changing with domestic robots. Millions of people have Roombas and similar self-driving cleaners in their homes, and a

growing number also have a robotic lawnmower like the Automower. At the hospital, you are increasingly likely to encounter a medical robot like the da Vinci Surgical System for minor surgery, while machines like the Flex Robotic System allow surgeons to perform tricky operations in otherwise inaccessible parts of the body. Robots also look set to play a much greater part in everyday life. The Waymo driverless car has received considerable publicity. These robotic vehicles are likely to reshape our cities and their impact may be as great as the invention of the car itself. The Care-O-bot is effectively a robot butler. Although initially aimed at providing help for the elderly, its makers see it as the 'perfect gentleman', always on hand to carry out domestic chores. The Vahana is – very nearly – a flying car. We are starting to see robots in our lives. We are likely to see many more.

CARE-O-BOT 4

A demographic time bomb is ticking: in the coming decades, there will be more elderly people needing care and fewer young people to care for them. German company Fraunhofer IPA wants machines like their Care-O-bot 4 to take some of the load.

Japan has already started promoting elder-care robots, initially aimed at providing interaction and stimulation rather

than practical care. PARO is a therapeutic robot that looks like a baby seal, developed for dementia patients; it reduces stress and improves the interaction between patients and human caregivers. Robots like PARO can do some good, as can computers that remind patients about appointments, ensure they take their medication and generally check that they are well and going about their usual activities. But in order to assist human carers more effectively, robots need to be able to help with daily life.

The Care-O-bot 4 is the fourth generation of robots developed by Fraunhofer. It is a mobile, modular testbed for researchers developing caring robots. Its software is 'open source', which means it is easy for users to program it themselves and developers to create their own software.

The simplest variant of the Care-O-bot is a mobile serving trolley that trundles around on four independently steered wheels. A sensor ring has a laser distance sensor and stereo cameras. The robot combines data from the sensors to create a 3D colour picture of its surroundings, enabling it to plan a route and navigate safely, avoiding what the manufacturer calls 'dynamic obstacles' – moving people.

Microphones, speakers, cameras and a video screen enable the robot to function as a 'telepresence platform', a communications terminal that a patient can use to talk to carers, doctors or others without having to master a tablet or other new technology.



TOP: The UR range of robots can be programmed easily via a tablet computer and set to perform a wide variety of tasks. ABOVE: A Care-o-bot 4 making itself useful around the house.



AIRBUS

ABOVE: On 31 January 2018 in Pendleton, Oregon, a full-scale Vahana aircraft, dubbed Alpha One, made its first fully self-piloted flight.

And of course, carers can use the robot to check on their patient's health.

The Care-O-bot becomes more capable with the addition of one or two arms equipped with spherical joints. Each arm has its own 3D camera, light and laser pointer, and a three-fingered gripper with touch sensors. These allow the robot to adjust its grasping force to pick up objects securely without damaging them. The arm can reach down to pick up objects from the floor or up to high shelves, and it can reach around obstacles without knocking them over.

The Care-O-bot has an adaptive object-recognition system to identify new objects. Once an item is placed in its gripper, the robot rotates it to take pictures from all angles and identifies 'feature points' for recognition and correct orientation. Having been shown an object, the robot can obey requests, such as "fetch my hairbrush" or "put the vase on the table".

Key to the robot's acceptance among elderly users was finding ways in which they could interact with it in a natural, intuitive manner. A complicated interface with drop-down menus was not going to work and so the Care-O-bot has voice and gesture recognition. In addition, its torso has two flexible joints that allow it to make body gestures, and a head display to indicate 'mood'. These features make the robot more of a person and less of a thing.

To start with, the Care-O-bot will act as

The Care-o-bot will have a social function as well as a practical one

a general butler and domestic helper, able to assist with food preparation and serving drinks; ultimately, it may do much more. Just like earlier caring robots, it will have a social function as well as a practical one, providing company and assistance.

There is some resistance to the idea of robot carers, owing to the risk that they could increase social isolation. A carer is not just a pair of helping hands, but provides the human touch – empathy, warmth and someone to talk to. The risk is that robots will offer a cheap and easy means to look after elderly people in isolation, leaving them without human contact.

Ideally however, by taking on chores such as cooking and tidying, robots like the Care-O-bot 4 will free up time for human carers who can then concentrate on the caring part of their job. And by providing assistance – and a means of connecting to the Internet and to the world – they will improve the quality of life of elderly people.

VAHANA

The Vahana is one of many planned 'flying cars' that have more in common with consumer drones than automobiles. Like a small drone, A3's Vahana has several engines driven by electricity, and is self-piloted. It is not so much a flying car as an aerial robotic taxi. The name Vahana, incidentally, comes from a Sanskrit word meaning "that which carries".

Flying cars have been technically feasible, if expensive, for some time. Two basic problems have held them back. One is that few people have the necessary pilot's licence, the other is that air-traffic control could not cope with thousands of aircraft flying over cities. Taking humans out of the equation solves both problems: you do not need to be a pilot to use Vahana, and the machine will infallibly obey rules, stick to its flightpath and keep out of the way of other vehicles – just like the fleets of delivery drones that plan to share the same airspace.

While it might appear to be a flight of fantasy, A3 is part of Airbus, a company with decades of experience in the aviation market. Electric power makes Vahana cheap and reliable, but limits its range because batteries only provide about one-tenth of the energy that a typical gasoline-based system can. Vahana will be used for short hops rather than long-haul international flights, and that suits Airbus perfectly. The machine could offer a quick way for people

to get from cities to airports and vice versa.

The initial Alpha version, currently undergoing flight testing, will carry one passenger. Range, speed and passenger capacity will increase with the Beta version: Alpha will fly up to 30 miles (48km) at 125mph (200kmh), Beta 65 miles (104km) at 145mph (233kmh). Safety is a high priority. In addition to other measures, Vahana will carry an emergency parachute so the entire aircraft can descend for a soft landing if problems arise.

Unlike the traditional idea of a flying car, Vahana will not take off from a driveway. Instead, the passenger will likely get a taxi – presumably a driverless one – to the nearest helipad, where scheduling software will have arranged a Vahana pickup.

Vahana has a tilting wing design. It takes off vertically like a helicopter, then the two wings, each with four engines, rotate through 90 degrees, after which Vahana flies horizontally, like an aeroplane. Vahana has a sophisticated sense-and-avoid system using radar, cameras and other sensors to avoid other air users. As with delivery drones, its introduction will need a change in existing regulations governing unmanned aircraft flying without human control.

Whether the vehicle is commercially viable will depend on price, which should be far lower than existing air services thanks to the cheap electric propulsion and the absence of a pilot. Vahana suggests it will work out to around £1–£2 per mile (1.6km), similar to a road taxi, but will be two to four times faster – and without the risk of delays caused by traffic or roadworks. If this pricing is accurate, early adopters may not just be VIPs looking for a quick trip to the airport. Being able to fly in urban areas, Vahanas are likely to be popular for cheap commuting alternatives.



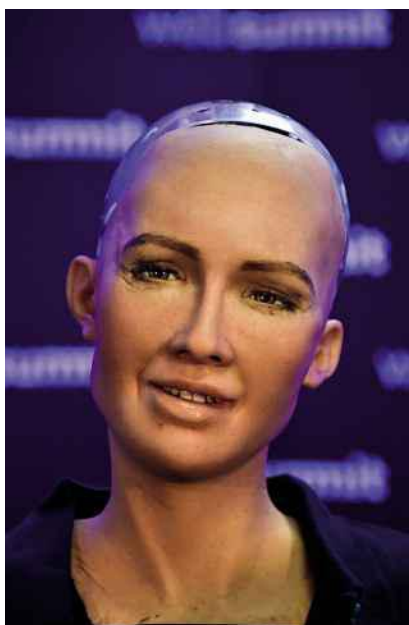
The Geminoid HI-4 is an exact copy of Hiroshi Ishiguro himself

More practically, Vahana would be an ideal air ambulance, with its low cost, quiet operation and ability to land on a smaller site than a traditional helicopter. Police may find it similarly useful.

There is no doubt that a flying taxi could be a great convenience, but only for as long as supply outstrips demand. In the coming decades, what if travellers find themselves standing in a long queue at the heliport because of a major conference, and face a one-hour wait for a five-minute journey?

ROBOTS OF THE FUTURE

We have some idea of what robots can already do, and what they will be able to do in the near future, based on what is already in the public domain. Government laboratories, and giant corporations like Google, may already have more advanced machines under wraps. As to where robots will go next, there are no fixed limits. One thing we can say is that the technologies developed by individual programs – manipulators, mobility, swarming or social interaction software – will be combined to create more effective robots. Expect to see dolphin-like machines with hands like the Vishva extensors, or Roombas with swarming software that allow several to cover a large house efficiently. Realistic but essentially static humanoids like Hanson Robotics's Sophia may be matched with highly mobile bodies like Atlas, created by Boston Dynamics, to create a true android. The other great unknown is artificial intelligence (AI). Ray Kurzweil, Google's director of engineering, anticipates that computers will exceed human intelligence in the 2040s. When that happens, current machines will look as primitive as da Vinci's mechanical knight. Robots may be changing the world now, but they have barely started.



PATRICIA DE MELO MOREIRA / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

FABRICE COFFRIN / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

TOP: Japanese robotics Professor Masahiro Mori, who proposed the idea of the 'uncanny valley' effect that can hinder our acceptance of humanoid robots. ABOVE: "Sophia" an artificially intelligent human-like robot developed by Hong Kong-based humanoid robotics company Hanson Robotics.



ABOVE: Professor Hiroshi Ishiguro poses with the Geminoid HI-4, an exact and remote-controlled replica of himself to test human-robot interaction and explore the uncanny valley.

GEMINOID HI-4

Geminoids are eerily accurate robot copies of living people, built to explore the ways in which robots and humans interact. That eeriness is a key part of what they are about.

In 1970, Japanese robotics professor Masahiro Mori proposed the idea of the ‘uncanny valley’, a dramatic dip in the acceptance of robots as they gradually become more human-like (see Ian Simmons, “The Uncanny Valley”, FT303:36-41). Mori noted that people are happy to accept industrial robots and other machines that look like machines, and even happier with androids that appear perfectly human. But in between these two peaks of acceptance is a dip – what he called uncanny valley. Anything that is not quite human tends to create strong revulsion.

Makers of dolls and puppets have always been wary of this effect. They know that to be likeable, their creations should be cartoonish rather than strictly realistic. Mannequins in shop windows are fine when they are abstract or stylised, but when

they get too close to being human, the lifeless, staring faces start to look creepy. Animatronics can be highly realistic, but, as Mori observed, there is a moment when we suddenly see that they are not human, and that can trigger a plunge into the uncanny valley.

The uncanny valley is a fundamental problem for designers and makers of ‘social robots’ that are meant to interact with people, especially robots that care for the elderly or deal with children. Developers want their robots to be human-like so they can communicate in friendly, relatable and human ways without accidentally making people feel uncomfortable and possibly freaking them out.

Hiroshi Ishiguro, a professor at the School of Engineering Science at Osaka University, is at the forefront of research in this area. Ishiguro introduced the idea of the Geminoid, a robot that is not simply like a human, but that is an exact replica of a specific person. The Geminoid HI-4 is a copy of Ishiguro himself. In one sense, the HI-4

is a cheat, just like Elektro the Moto Man. While it may appear to be human-like, the HI-4 is a remote-controlled device with no intelligence of its own. Sixteen pneumatic actuators, 12 in the head and four in the body, allow it to mimic facial expressions and movements of the operator via a telepresence rig. One of the aims of the HI-4 is to explore the human presence, and how we derive the idea of someone being in the room with us. The limitations of AI meant that remote control was the easiest means of studying the effect in the lab and providing a testbed for human-robotic interaction.

The HI-4’s sculpted urethane foam flesh and silicone skin give a close approximation to the original. Ishiguro says that the HI-4 provides a genuine sense of his being present, and people who know him react to the robot as they do to him. The effect works both ways; when people talk to the robot, he feels they are talking to him directly, even though the experience is remote.

Geminoids are being used to directly explore the uncanny valley. Following on from Mori’s original paper, researchers are looking at two key factors, eeriness and likeability, which can change after repeated encounters with the robot. Likeability was influenced by the way the robot behaved rather than anything else and was not affected by exposure. However, repeated exposure to the Geminoid did gradually reduce the sense of eeriness. As with other new pieces of technology, an android might seem strange at first, but becomes part of the furniture after continued contact.

In one set of tests, around 40 per cent of people who had a conversation with the Geminoid reported an uncanny feeling, with 29 per cent enjoying the conversation. The results from these tests, and the particular aspects of the robot that people picked up on as being uncanny – bodily movements, facial expressions and the way it directed its gaze – are being fed into the design of the next generation of robots.

Whether it will ever be possible to build a robot that will pass as human, remains to be seen. From the researchers’ point of view, it would be a big enough prize to come up with a design that, while not necessarily human, is in no way uncanny, and that everyone is happy to talk to.



This is an edited extract from David Hambling’s new book, *We: Robot – The Robots That Already Rule Our World* (Aurum Press, ISBN 9781781317464, £18.99).

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Portrait of the Artist as a Severed Head

Antoine Wiertz was a Belgian painter who believed that the head of a guillotined person would live on after being severed from the body. **JAN BONDESON** tells the story of an artist drawn to the macabre, and of a medical delusion that persisted through the 19th century.

Antoine-Joseph Wiertz was born in Dinant on 22 February 1806, the son of the tailor Louis-François Wiertz. In spite of his family's modest circumstances, he decided to make his living as an artist, and managed to gain financial support from various wealthy and philanthropic benefactors. King Wilhelm I of the Netherlands awarded an annual stipend to the precocious young Wiertz from 1821 onwards. He was able to study art in Antwerp under comfortable circumstances, with other people paying his bills. He became a follower of Romanticism and an admirer of classical painters like Rubens and Michelangelo. Wiertz took part in a large exhibition in 1828, but only received an honorary mention from the jury, something that disappointed him greatly. Between 1829 and 1832, he studied art in Paris, and in the latter year won the prestigious *Prix de Rome*, allowing him to continue his studies in the Italian capital for a number of years. Wiertz had never been a particularly modest man, and this success went to his head: he began to fancy himself as a leading artist, and the equal of the great masters of old.

Wiertz definitely had talent, and some of his Rome paintings from the mid-1830s are among his more attractive work. However, his megalomaniac tendencies got the better of him, and he put much effort into the completion of his monumental painting 'Les Grecs et les Troyens se disputant le corps de Patrocle', showing two hordes of angry old Greeks and Trojans pulling at the corpse of poor Patrocles. Despite the hint of the absurd in the subject for this overblown painting, Wiertz thought it a masterpiece and entered it for the Paris *Salon* of 1839. The sarcastic French art critics sneered at it, however, and the furious Wiertz wrote a pamphlet threatening that he would make Brussels into the new art capital of Europe, thus reducing Paris to a mere provincial



LEFT: Wiertz in a self portrait from 1860. FACING PAGE: Wiertz's painting 'La Belle Rosine' of 1847.

"THE HEAD THINKS!"

Antoine Wiertz was a credulous man, and fond of various contemporary fads, mesmerism and Spiritualism included. He was a believer in the 'death-trance' that could lead to a false diagnosis of death, and frightened of being buried alive by mistake: his painting 'L'Inhumation Précipitée', (which can be seen on the cover of my 2001 book *Buried Alive*; also FT146:34-39) shows a prematurely buried cholera victim lifting the lid of his coffin and peering fearfully out into the vault. In 1848, Wiertz had another bizarre idea. He believed that the head of a guillotined person would live on for some considerable period of time, although severed from the body, and suffer unimaginable torments. To prove this macabre notion, he planned to have himself hypnotised by his friend 'M. D', allowing his spirit to enter the severed head of an executed man just after the blade of the guillotine had fallen. Wiertz knew that at dawn on 18 February 1848, the two Brussels murderers François Rosseel and Guillaume Vandenplas would be guillotined at the Porte de Hal. Back in September 1847, they had bludgeoned to death Rosseel's landlady, Mlle Evanpoel, and two servant girls as well, to steal a few hundred francs.

As the murderer Rosseel was put to the guillotine, 'M. D' made sure that Wiertz was hypnotised and put in *rappor*t with the murderer. A lady witness was present to make sure there was no cheating. The neurotic Wiertz nearly panicked when he imagined the blade of the guillotine tearing through his spinal column, but he recovered enough to wait, in a state of high excitement, for the murderer's head to be severed from the body. As Rosseel's head rolled into the sack beneath the guillotine, the hypnotised

He would allow his spirit to enter the severed head of an executed man

town. A keen Belgian patriot, he took up residence in Brussels in 1845, for good. He took a large abandoned workshop in the Rue de Renard, and used it to create a series of monumental paintings with religious themes, all heralded as masterpieces by the artist himself. During this period, he painted 'La Belle Rosine', a curious work showing a scantily dressed young girl admiring a mounted skeleton, which remains one of his most felicitous efforts.





ABOVE: Wiertz's 'Dernières Pensées et Visions d'une Tête Coupée' ('Last Thoughts and Visions of a Severed Head') recreated his strange experience of 1848.

Wiertz was solemnly asked to make his spirit enter the severed head. The agitated painter exclaimed "Terrible! The head thinks!" He later wrote down his experiences, and they deserve to be given in full:

The head of the executed man thought, saw, suffered. And I saw what he saw, understood what he thought, and felt what he suffered. How long did it last? Three minutes, they told me. The executed man must have thought: three hundred years. What the man killed in this way suffers, no human language can express. I wish to limit myself here to reiterating the answers I gave to all the questions during the time that I felt myself in some measure identical to the severed head.

First minute: On the scaffold

A horrible buzzing noise... It's the sound of the blade descending. The victim believes that he has been struck by lightning, not the axe. ... Astonishingly, the head lies here under the scaffold and yet still believes it is above, still believes itself to be part of the body, and still waits for the blow that will cut it off. ... Horrible choking! No way to breathe. The asphyxia is appalling. It comes from an inhuman, supernatural hand, weighing down like a mountain on the head and neck... Oh, even more horrible suffering lies before him. ... A cloud of fire passes before his eyes. Everything is red and glitters.

Second minute: Under the scaffold

Now comes the moment when the executed man thinks he is stretching his cramped, trembling hands towards the dying head. It is the same instinct that drives us to press a hand against a gaping wound. And it occurs with the intention, the dreadful intention, of setting the head back

"The guillotined head sees his coffin, sees his trunk and limbs collapse..."

on the trunk, to preserve a little blood, a little life... Delirium redoubles his strength and energy... In his imagination, it seems that his head is on fire and spins in a dizzying motion, that the universe collapses and turns with it, that a phosphorescent liquid swirls around and merges with his skull... In a moment more, his head is plunging into the depths of eternity... But is it only the body that writhes and cries out in anguish, which produces the torture suffered by the guillotine? No, because here comes the intellectual and moral agony. The heart, which beats in his chest, is still beating in the brain... That's when a crowd of images, each more terrible than the others, crowd into a soul beaten by the fiery breath of nameless pain. The guillotined head sees his coffin, sees his trunk and limbs collapse, ready to be enclosed in the wooden box in which thousands of worms are about to devour his flesh. Physicians explore the tissue of his neck with the tip of a scalpel. Every nick is a bite of fire... He sees his judges, too... They sit well served at a table, talking quietly of business and pleasure... The exhausted brain sees... the smallest of his children close to him. Oh! he likes that. That's him: his hair blond and curly, his little cheeks round and pink... And meanwhile, he feels the brain continue to sink and feels sharp stabs of pain...

Third minute: In eternity

It is not yet dead. The head still thinks and suffers. Suffers fire that burns, suffers the dagger that dismembers, suffers the poison that cramps, suffers in the limbs, as they are torn out, suffers in his flesh, as it is hacked and trampled down, suffers in his bones, which are slowly boiled in bubbling oil. All this suffering put together still cannot convey any idea of what the executed man is going through... And here a thought makes him stiff with terror: Is he already dead and must he suffer like this from now on? Perhaps for all eternity?... No, such suffering cannot endure forever; God is merciful. All that belongs to Earth is fading away. He sees in the distance a little light glittering like a diamond. He feels a calm stealing over him. What a good sleep he shall have! What joy!... Human existence fades away from him. It seems to him slowly to become one with the night. Now just a faint mist – but even that recedes, dissipates, and disappears. Everything goes black... At last, the beheaded man is dead!

THE CRUELLEST CUT

Joseph-Ignace Guillotin was born in Saintes, southwestern France, on 28 May 1738, the ninth of 12 children in a large family. After an education among the Jesuits, he decided to study medicine in Paris and was awarded his doctorate in 1770. Dr Guillotin managed to establish a large and lucrative practice in Paris, and maintained an interest in academic medicine, hygiene and committee work. He was a pacifist, a follower of Voltaire, and an enthusiastic Freemason. In 1789, he was elected a deputy to the National Assembly, where he busied himself with various matters concerning public medicine. The penal

code of pre-revolutionary France listed more than a hundred capital offences, and the malefactors were executed at regular intervals. Beheading with a broadsword or a large axe was a privilege reserved for the aristocracy, whereas commoners faced slow strangulation on the gallows, where the 'short drop' was fashionable. Dr Guillotin spoke in the National Assembly demanding penal reform. Albeit a humanitarian, he wanted the deterrent value of capital punishment to remain. He argued that all capital offences should be punished in the same manner, irrespective of the social ranks of the culprits; decapitation, effected by means of a simple mechanism, was the method of choice. After a vigorous debate, Dr Guillotin's proposal was accepted by the National Assembly, although the newspaper scribblers and satirists considered the concept of a beheading machine quite hilarious.

Sensitive to ridicule, Dr Guillotin withdrew from the debate. Dr Antoine Louis, the permanent secretary to the Academy of Surgery, was commissioned to draw up a plan for a beheading machine, and the master builder M Guedon to construct the prototype. There had been similar machines in the past, like the Halifax Gibbet in England and the Maiden in Edinburgh, but Dr Louis thought the French nation could do better, and started work afresh. In April 1792, this novel beheading machine was inaugurated with the execution of the criminal Nicolas Pelletier. Dr Guillotin was quite scandalised when the beheading machine was named after himself, particularly since guillotines were fast becoming associated with the anarchic and violent misrule of France during the Terror. For the remainder of his life, he stayed well away from politics. He worked as the director of a military hospital for a while, before being arrested in late 1795 for writing

and signing illegal petitions and statements. He was released after a month in jail, thus escaping a close encounter with the machine that had been named after him.

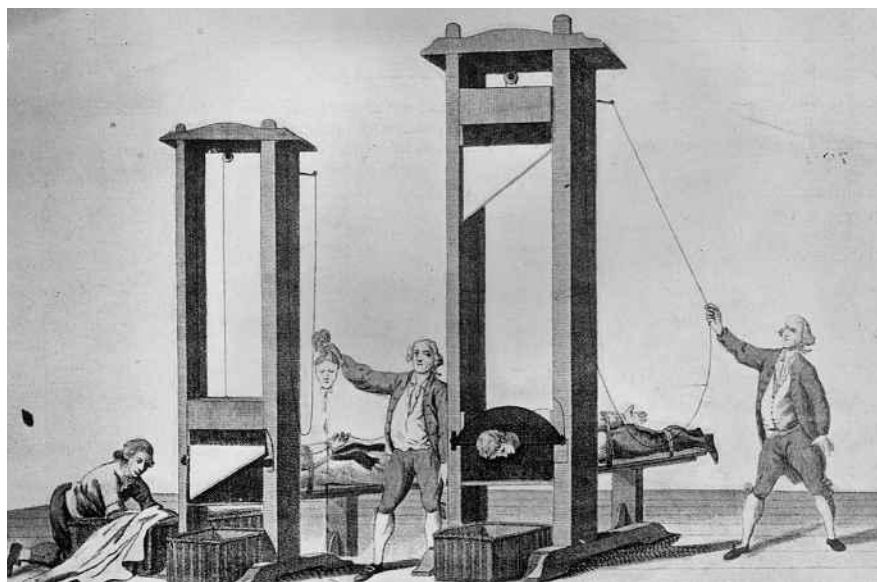
The widespread and enthusiastic use of the guillotine in revolutionary France horrified many foreign humanitarians, and some of them also questioned whether Dr Guillotin and Antoine Louis were right in claiming that beheading was the most humane method of capital punishment. There was a story that when Charlotte Corday was executed for the murder of Marat on 17 July 1793, the executioner lifted her severed head from the basket and paraded about the scaffold with it. When he slapped her face for the sadistic fun of it, she is said to have flushed with indignation, and the executioner was hooted by the mob and later admonished for his actions. According to another, possibly even taller story, the celebrated chemist Antoine Lavoisier agreed with an assistant that after he had been beheaded on 8 May 1794, he would blink as many times as he could after his head was severed, and the assistant could count 15 or 20 blinks, at the rate of one per second.

In 1795, the influential German anatomist Samuel Thomas Soemmering spoke up against the guillotine, suggesting that since the severed head remained conscious for some considerable period of time, it was the cruellest method of execution imaginable. Just imagine the torments of that still thinking brain – helpless, isolated, but still feeling! If provided with an artificial air supply through a bellows, a severed head would speak to its tormentors, he asserted.

Dr Jean-Joseph Sue, father of the novelist Eugène Sue, maintained that not only the head, but the body as well, was full of vital energy, and that sensation was maintained after decapitation. In 1795, Soemmering wrote to *Magasin Encyclopédique* to voice his objections against the living death that was the result of making use of the guillotine, and both Dr Sue and the German doctor Oelsner also made their opinions known. The influential physician P.J.G. Cabanis, the Paris practitioner Le Pelletier and the military doctor Wedekind pooh-poohed such concerns: the

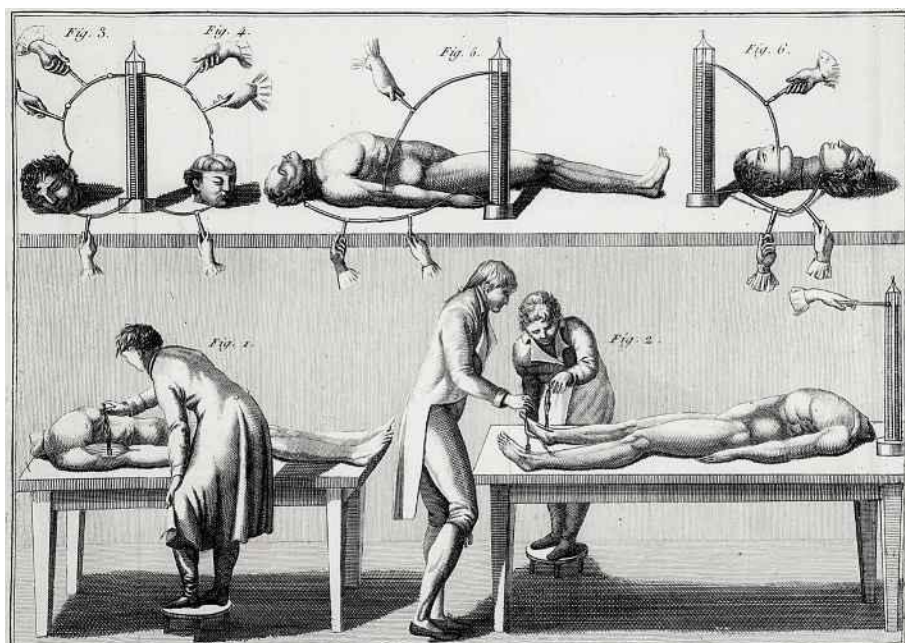
guillotine was a very quick and reliable method of execution, and the notion that the severed head retained some degree of life and sensibility was mere superstition.

Already by this time, an experiment was tried: during the years of the Revolution, a certain Dr Séguret exposed two severed heads to the sunlight. When the eyelids were forcibly opened, the heads quickly closed them, the doctor asserted. When a jolly medical student pricked the protruding tongue of one of the heads with his lancet, the head withdrew the tongue and the face grimaced as if in pain. As long as a quarter of an hour after the execution, the eyes of one of the heads turned in the direction of the man who was speaking. In 1834, a certain Dr Lelut made a deal with the celebrated murderer Pierre-François Lacenaire that if his head remained conscious after being severed by the guillotine, he would close his left eye but leave the right one open; this time, the experiment failed, and the eyes of Lacenaire did not react at all.



TOP: Dr Joseph-Ignace Guillotin, successful physician, Freemason, and proponent of a new method of capital punishment suitable for rich and poor alike: decapitation by machine. ABOVE LEFT: Charlotte Corday on the scaffold. ABOVE RIGHT: An old print showing the Paris guillotine in action during the Revolution.

HULTON ARCHIVE / GETTY IMAGES



ABOVE LEFT: Aldini experiments with galvanism on the corpses of criminals in Bologna in 1803. ABOVE RIGHT: Giovanni Aldini in an engraving of 1803.

TWITCH OF THE DEATH NERVE

Many German doctors objected to the widespread use of the guillotine in France and parts of the remainder of Europe: not only did this ghastly beheading machine represent the Terror and its revolutionary mob rule, but the old problem of the still living severed head remaining conscious and suffering had not been solved. In the early 1800s, the German nation was very much obsessed with the *Scheintod* (death trance) and the risk of being prematurely buried after being declared dead while in a state of apparent death. The solution was to build *Leichenhäuser*: hospitals for the dead, where the corpses could be incubated until putridity, considered the only certain sign of death, had set in (see FT146:37, 352:76-77).

These hospitals had watchmen on patrol around the clock, and signalling machinery attached to the fingers and toes of the corpses, so that the slightest movement would be detected. Some of this perverted zeal to save the apparently dead spilt over onto the beheading victims, and several doctors made experiments to find out how long the severed heads remained conscious. Many German states made use of beheading with an axe, meaning that subjects for this macabre research would not be lacking.

In 1803, a certain Professor I Wendt made experiments with the severed head of a man named Troer in Breslau. When the man's name was shouted into the ear, the eyes opened, and the mouth tried to speak. When a sharp instrument was thrust up the spinal column, the face grimaced with pain, and when the spinal column was stimulated with electricity, the face contorted in such a grotesque manner that an onlooker cried out "He lives!" In 1808, a certain Dr Josef Schleer led a team of doctors experimenting

"The jaw of the deceased criminal began to quiver, and one eye opened"

with a newly severed head in Breisach. This time, the eyelids trembled slightly when the man's name was spoken, but otherwise there were no signs of life at all. In 1824, a certain Dr Schmitz screamed "Murderer!" into the ear of a recently severed head, and the eyes instantly opened fully and stared at him.

The German obsession with the *Scheintod* was not the only blurring of the border between life and death in the early years of the 19th century. Luigi Galvani has become famous as a pioneer of bioelectromagnetics (see FT75:18, 343:71), through his systematic observations of dissected frogs, stimulating the sciatic nerve in the severed leg with a powerful galvanic element, never failing to produce a twitch. He coined the term 'animal electricity' to describe the power that activated the muscles of his specimens. One of Galvani's main apostles was his nephew Giovanni Aldini, who toured Europe in the early years of the 19th century, making public demonstrations of galvanism on recently killed animals (see Sarah Bakewell, "It's Alive!", FT139:34-39).

Unlike Galvani, he did not just experiment on frogs, but also on dogs, sheep and oxen; the fearful grimaces of the severed heads of the dogs, and the spasmodic twitching of their legs, when the proper nerves were

stimulated, led many spectators to believe that the animals were still alive. Nor did Aldini eschew making a demonstration when presented with the body of a recently executed criminal.

In January 1803, when Aldini was in London, he conducted some experiments at the Royal College of Surgeons, on the body of George Forster, who had been hanged at Newgate an hour earlier for the murder of his wife and child. The poles of a large galvanic battery, made of alternate plates of copper and zinc, was connected with various parts of the anatomy of the hanged man. Electrical connections were made between his ears, between his mouth and his ears, and between his ears and his arms. The result was a startling series of convulsions and contractions: "On the first application of the process to the face, the jaw of the deceased criminal began to quiver, the adjoining muscles were horribly contorted, and one eye was actually opened. In the subsequent part of the process, the right hand was raised and clenched, and the legs and thighs were set in motion. It appeared to the uninformed part of the bystanders as if the wretched man was on the eve of being restored to life."

Aldini's horrid experiments on beasts and men were reported both in scholarly journals and in the popular press, and as a result, many people had to re-evaluate their conceptions of dead bodies being still and inert. When was an executed man dead, and when was he still alive, as he lay jerking spasmodically on the anatomy table? Once back in continental Europe, Aldini more than once experimented on freshly severed human heads, straight from the guillotine, treating his audiences to the grossest scenes by making the heads twitch and grimace, once the electric current was applied.

GHASTLY EXPERIMENTS

In March 1867, a 19-year-old Frenchman named Lemaire murdered a certain Madame Bainville, whom his father was about to marry. He was promptly arrested, tried, found guilty and sentenced to death by guillotine. When he was executed, there was much speculation, among the enormous mob surrounding the scaffold, whether his severed head would show any signs of life; it turned out that it did not. Still, there was discussion in the Paris newspapers about the horrors of the living head in the basket beneath the guillotine. One of the medical men contributing to the debate was a certain M Bonnafont. He had been in Algiers in 1833, and here he had met the military surgeon M de Fallois. This gentleman had shared the opinion of Dr Wilson, of New York, that a severed head retains its sensibility for two or three minutes, but Bonnafont did not agree. The two doctors decided to put this matter to the test in a scientific manner, making use of the severed heads of two Arabs who were to be executed the following day. To stop the loss of blood, the severed heads were thrust into two shallow vases full of plaster of Paris. A large ear-trumpet was inserted into the ear of each head in turn, and the dead man's name shouted in a stentorian voice. Since neither head showed any sign of life, M Bonnafont postulated that death by decapitation was instantaneous. There was a disapproving summary of his observations in a London newspaper, entitled "A Ghastly Experiment".

On 13 November 1879, a man named Theotime Prunier was executed at Beauvais after being convicted of raping and murdering an old woman. Dr E Decaisne, assisted by his son Dr Gaston Decaisne and by a certain Dr Evrard, had obtained permission to perform some experiments with the severed head, which was handed over to them five minutes after Prunier had been guillotined. The three doctors, who were apparently quite sane, screamed "Prunier!" into the ear of the severed head, pricked the face with needles, held a lighted candle against the eyeball, and thrust a brush soaked with ammonia up the nostril. The severed head did not react in any way to this brutal treatment. The conclusions of the three doctors, as reported in the *British Medical Journal*, was that "We have ascertained, as far as it is humanly possible to do so, that the head of the criminal in question had no semblance whatever of the sense of feeling; that the eyes lost the power of vision; and, in fact, the head was perfectly dead to all intents and purposes." Some squeamish Paris journalists, fearful of the tortures of the 'living head', pointed out that five full minutes had passed between the execution and the experiments – enough for Prunier's severed head to experience the most fearful and unfathomable torments.

In 1880, the 19-year-old Louis Ménesclou was convicted of luring the little girl Louise Deu into his room, before raping

and murdering her. He then dismembered the body and put some organs into his pockets. He was sentenced to perish by the guillotine at the Place de Roquette. After the execution, Ménesclou's head and body were transported to the Paris *Ecole de Médecine*, where a certain Dr Dassy de Lignères had planned an elaborate experiment. The severed head was perfused with blood from the carotid artery of a living dog, and according to a newspaper correspondent, a slight rosy colour obliterated the pallid hue of death, the lips were suffused with colour, and the head took on a remarkably lifelike aspect. When interviewed in a Paris newspaper many years later, the doctor was quoted as saying that "as the transfusion proceeded, suddenly, unmistakably, for a period of two seconds, the lips stammered silently, the eyelids twitched and worked, and the whole face wakened into an expression of shocked amazement. I affirm that for those

two seconds, the brain thought!"

Dr Jean-Vincent Laborde took over where his colleague Dassy de Lignères had left off, after obtaining permission from the authorities to make some experiments to prove or disprove what he called *la terrible légende*. His initial efforts were thwarted by the logistical difficulties of transporting the severed head to his laboratory in a swift manner, since a head that had been severed from the body for half an hour could hardly be expected to show any signs of life. Even his most elaborate experiment, on the head of the executed murderer Gagny in 1885, has serious flaws: the head had been severed from the body for seven minutes before the experiment could start. The arteries on one side were injected with oxygenated cow's blood, and those on the other side were perfused with the blood of a living dog. Dr Laborde described how the muscles of the eyelids, forehead and jaw began to twitch,



LEFT: Doctors from the Medical Association of Mainz conduct an experiment on executed bodies in 1803 to determine whether or not a head still retained its senses two hours after decapitation. From *Les Merveilles de la Science*, 1870.



ABOVE: This postcard, stamped and posted in 1905, purported to show the execution of Languille.

and how the jaws suddenly snapped shut, but since 20 minutes had passed between the fall of the blade of the guillotine and the attempted transfusion, he could only have observed artefacts due to the onset of irreversible brain death.

THE ACCOUNT OF DR BEAURIEUX

On 30 June 1905, Dr Gabriel Beurieux obtained permission to attend the guillotining of Henri Languille, a bandit who had terrorised the Beauce and the Gatinais for several years. His report concluded that Languille retained some form of consciousness for about half a minute after his execution:

The head fell on the severed surface of the neck and I did not therefore have to take it up in my hands, as all the newspapers have vied with each other in repeating; I was not obliged even to touch it in order to set it upright. Chance served me well for the observation which I wished to make.

Here, then, is what I was able to note immediately after the decapitation: the eyelids and lips of the guillotined man worked in irregularly rhythmic contractions for about five or six seconds. This phenomenon has been remarked by all those finding themselves in the same conditions as myself for observing what happens after the severing of the neck...

I waited for several seconds. The spasmodic movements ceased. The face relaxed, the lids half closed on the eyeballs, leaving only the white of the conjunctiva visible, exactly as in the dying whom we have occasion to see every day in the exercise of our profession, or as in those just dead. It was then that I called in a strong, sharp voice: 'Languille!' I saw the eyelids slowly lift up, without any spasmodic contractions – I insist on this peculiarity – but with an even movement, quite distinct and normal, such as happens in everyday life, with people awakened or torn from their thoughts.

“Next, Languille’s eyes very definitely fixed themselves on mine...”

Next Languille’s eyes very definitely fixed themselves on mine and the pupils focused themselves. I was not, then, dealing with the sort of vague dull look without any expression that can be observed any day in dying people to whom one speaks: I was dealing with undeniably living eyes which were looking at me. After several seconds, the eyelids closed again, slowly and evenly, and the head took on the same appearance as it had had before I called out.

It was at that point that I called out again and, once more, without any spasm, slowly, the eyelids lifted and undeniably living eyes fixed themselves on mine with perhaps even more penetration than the first time. There was a further closing of the eyelids, but now less complete. I attempted the effect of a third call; there was no further movement – and the eyes took on the glazed look which they have in the dead. I have just recounted to you with rigorous exactness what I was able to observe. The whole thing had lasted 25 to 30 seconds.

Dr Beurieux published his account of the experiments with the severed head of Languille in the *Archives de l’Anthropologie Criminelle*, a respectable medical journal, and it contains no obvious errors or distortions. In particular, he managed to get hold of the head immediately after the execution, an area where his fellow experimentalists had often failed dismally,

rendering their experiments practically worthless. Some French sceptics doubted whether the experiment on Languille’s head really took place as described by Dr Beurieux. A rare postcard supposed to show the execution of Languille is in fact a fake, with the figures of the prisoner, jailers and spectators painted in. There is no trace of any contemporary newspaper mentioning the experiment. Furthermore, the allegation that the head had fallen onto a horizontal surface is unlikely, since with a conventional guillotine, it would have fallen into a basket, unless the intrepid doctor grabbed it by the hair and repositioned it.

Modern medical science is of the opinion that once the brain is permanently devoid of a supply of oxygenated blood, it will very soon lapse into a state of irreversible unconsciousness. After the blade of the guillotine has fallen, the severed head lives only for a matter of seconds: its last thoughts and visions must be only a confused peep into pandemonium, some passing phantasmagoria of horror, before it falls into the basket, a lifeless piece of flesh. There might be some spasmodic movements of the eyelids or lips in a recently severed head, as observed by Dr Beurieux, but the persistent 19th-century notion of a living head after decapitation belongs only in horror stories.

WIERTZ GETS WEIRDER

Antoine Wiertz survived his dramatic parapsychological encounter with the severed head at the Porte de Hal without any obvious derangement to his mental faculties. Two years later, in March 1850, he wrote to M Charles Rogier, the Belgian Minister of the Interior, offering to exchange all his monumental paintings for a large, comfortable and well-lit studio in Brussels. Wiertz was highly thought of in Belgium at this time, and money was handed over for the artist’s new house and studio to be constructed in what was then the southern suburbs of Brussels. Provided with a permanent roof over his head, and some degree of financial security for life, Wiertz remained prolific throughout the 1850s. To commemorate his strange experience back in 1848, when his spirit entered the murderer’s severed head, he painted the triptych ‘Dernières Pensées et Visions d’une Tête Coupée’, depicting the last thoughts and visions of a severed head in horrible detail. The condemned man is on the scaffold, the audience pointing and cheering; the blade falls and the severed head tumbles into the basket beneath the guillotine; finally, he plunges headfirst into oblivion, surrounded by grotesque shapes. In 1855, Wiertz completed a very realistic painting of a recently severed head, which looks as if it will open its eyes and show signs of life at any moment.

As Wiertz grew old, secure in his state-funded studio, his paintings become weirder and weirder. In ‘Faim, Folie, Crime’ from



LEFT: 'Faim, Folie, Crime', 1853. ABOVE: 'La Jeune Sorcière', 1854. LEFT: A postcard of 'Une Tête Coupée', 1855.



it in 2011, I was the only person on the premises, apart from an elderly watchman who doubled as the museum guide. All the old favourites were present and correct, including the premature burial, the cackling madwoman cooking the limbs of her child on the stove, the tug-of war over the body of Patrocles, and the still living severed head. Sadly, the triptych 'Dernières Pensées et Visions d'une Tête Coupée' is in a somewhat decayed state, probably because the wood was not properly prepared before it was painted. A 2009 article in the *Economist* magazine claimed that Wiertz must surely be the worst painter to have a government-funded museum of his own, but here I would object that the scribblers employed by the *Economist* should concentrate on economy and leave the field of art well alone: albeit not to everybody's taste, the paintings of Antoine Wiertz have a certain macabre fascination, and they are well worth seeing in the flesh by any visitor to Brussels.

1853, a desperate madwoman driven to cannibalism is holding the body of her murdered child, one of its legs emerging from a cooking-pot on the stove. In 'Le Suicide' from 1854, a man is depicted in graphic detail blowing his brains out with a pistol, his features being obscured by a cloud of gun-smoke. In 'La Jeune Sorcière' from 1857, a naked young witch holds a broomstick in a suggestive manner while she is admired by lecherous-looking warlocks and demons. In the 1861 painting 'Le Soufflet d'une Dame Belge', a naked woman blasts a soldier turned rapist in the face with a large pistol, causing his head to explode into little pieces. Despite the erotic nature of many of his paintings, and his fondness for depicting female nudity, Wiertz

did not take any particular interest in the opposite sex, and he never married. The artist died in his studio in June 1865, and his remains were embalmed according to the ancient Egyptian funeral rites.

After Wiertz's death, his studio in Brussels became the *Musée Wiertz*, where his works of art were to be exhibited in perpetuity, financed by the state of Belgium. In the 1920s, when Wiertz was still admired by art-loving patriots, the museum had plenty of visitors, some of them schoolchildren who must surely have been plagued by nightmares after seeing these horrid paintings graphically depicting madness, murder, suicide and premature burial. Today, the *Musée Wiertz* is said only to have around 10 visitors per day. When I visited



This is an abbreviated extract from Jan Bondeson's book *The Lion Boy and Other Medical Curiosities* (Amberley Publishing, 2018).

♦ **JAN BONDESON** is a senior lecturer at Cardiff University, a regular contributor to *FT* and the author of numerous books, including *Queen Victoria's Stalker* (2010), *Murder Houses of London* (2014), *Strange Victoriana* (2016) and *The Ripper of Waterloo Road* (2017).

Mad About God

The Unholy Enlightenment of Nora Hollis

ROBERT DAMON SCHNECK unearths the forgotten story of Nora Hollis, a stenographer who committed murder to drum up publicity for a bizarre religious pamphlet in which she argued that the God of the Bible was, in fact, “Satan, the Evil One”, bent on torturing humanity.

The morning of 10 April 1924 began pleasantly enough for Mrs Eva Bradley at her boarding house in Portland, Oregon. She ate breakfast with a tenant, Nora Hollis, and they washed the dishes together. Perhaps Hollis was going out of her way to be pleasant; the narrator of Poe’s *Tell-Tale Heart* was “never kinder to the old man than during the whole week” before he killed him.

When they finished, Hollis went upstairs to her room while Mrs Bradley settled into a rocking chair to mend a hole in the tablecloth. She might not have noticed Hollis’s return, but the little woman was standing behind her, holding a gun. Bullets slammed into the old lady’s back and knocked her to the floor, where she died tangled in the tablecloth.

Middle-aged spinsters seldom gun down their landladies, but Hollis was unusual. Her face was disfigured¹ and, when she was not typing or taking dictation in an office building downtown, she spent her time thinking about God. Hollis had discovered that God is the Devil and wrote a pamphlet about it; but the work was ignored, so she killed Mrs Bradley.

Murder was the first step in Hollis’s plan for enlightening mankind. With the shooting accomplished, she left the body where it had fallen, wiped blood off her hands and left for the police station, taking the still-warm pistol and a copy of her booklet with her.

THAT WAY MADNESS LIES

Little is known about Hollis, or how she became a killer. Born around 1875 on a farm in Chatham, Illinois, Nora was the fourth child of John and Martha Hollis;² two of her siblings play a part in this history – an older sister named Vesta Fatima, and a brother called Arthur. In 1885, the family was living in Bolton Township, Kansas,³ where Nora “went to school, learned fast, and got a teacher’s certificate in Kansas at the age of 14... but was too young to teach”.⁴ A year later, she had her first religious experience at an “old fashioned religious revival”⁵ in Newkirk, Oklahoma.



LEFT: A photograph of Nora Hollis in 1924.

Middle-aged spinsters seldom gun down their landladies...

When the other young people joined a church, Hollis joined too, though she did so “without conviction”⁶ and her faith did not grow. “I was never much impressed with religion,” she said, and “I couldn’t make much out of the Bible, it seemed so mixed up and illogical.”⁷ Nevertheless, Hollis seemed drawn to religious beliefs, along with other, less conventional, ones. By 1890, she was living in Atlanta, Georgia, where she befriended people interested in esoteric ideas, and this led to experimenting with a ouija board. It was the board that “caused her first to turn to religion, then made her doubt”.⁸

[S]he got into a discussion of theosophy⁹ with a friend. That led to buying a ouija board. It wouldn’t work at first, and finally when it did she thought a friend was pushing it.

So in the evening she went alone to her room, where it was quiet, and sat down with the board.

“I was just stricken when the board began to move, and then all of a sudden I heard voices. There seemed to be one principal voice, but there were others also, like the voices of children.”

She took the ouija board apart to see if it wasn’t magnetised. Day by day the voices grew stronger and the “power of God closed in upon me.”

Finally the “voice of God” told her to pull out her hair.

“I thought at that time that God was good and that he wished to perform a miracle, so I pulled out my hair. Of course, it didn’t come in again, as God told me it would. Then I had a glimpse of the truth, that he was only trying to get control over me, making people believe I was insane,” she said.¹⁰

This might sound like the onset of acute mental illness, but it was a revelation to Hollis, and marked the beginning of a painful relationship with the “living God”.

She arrived in Portland, Oregon, in 1917, moved into Eva Bradley’s boardinghouse, and found work at the offices of a lumber company in the Northwestern Bank Building.¹¹ Around 1922, Hollis apparently discussed her religious ideas with Rev. Harold Griffis, pastor of the First Christian Church, who “never encountered such a puzzling woman”.¹² She began contributing to “religious papers”,¹³ presumably with unorthodox outlooks, and wrote a pamphlet titled *The Living God of the Bible is Satan, the Evil One* that was printed in April 1923. It revealed the truth about God for 15 cents.

Like many novice writers, Hollis does not seem to have advertised or promoted her work and, as a result, “No one would

read it".¹⁴ By March 1924, with the first anniversary of the pamphlet's publication approaching, she decided to publicise *The Living God*, but, unlike most eccentrics, Hollis was not content to harangue passers-by, or walk around the city mumbling and waving a sign. She thought killing herself was the best way to get people's attention, but feared that her ideas would be dismissed as the product of an unbalanced mind; instead, she decided that "I had to kill someone else".¹⁵

It was the logical choice. With thousands of newspapers competing for readers,¹⁶ and the public fascinated by crime, Hollis would provide the press with a murder, then use the subsequent trial to proclaim the truth about God. Ideally, she would be convicted and hanged, thus creating more headlines, death-row interviews, and column inches filled with references to the booklet. By orchestrating her own execution, Hollis might have also been committing suicide without the stigma of madness. Furthermore, since lunatics are not put to death, the state of Oregon would, in effect, be declaring Hollis legally sane by executing her.

During the weeks leading up to the murder, Hollis transferred some property she owned on the city's east side to a niece (probably Vesta's adult daughter, Gaynelle) and packed her trunk. Suicidal thoughts returned in late March, and again on 9 April, the night before she gunned down Mrs Bradley.

BEST LAID PLANS

Hollis arrived at the police station shortly after noon. Portland's newest killer informed the desk sergeant that: "She shot her [Mrs Bradley] because she [Hollis] wanted the Peopel [sic] believer [sic] in her Book. If she would have committed suicide the Peopel [sic] would say she was insane."¹⁷ Then, she reportedly gave the sergeant one of the pamphlets; but he was more interested in getting her gun, so Hollis handed that over, and three officers left for 166 East 12th Street to see if a crime had been committed.

The detectives found Mrs Bradley on the floor with "three bullet-holes through her body. She had been shot through the back the bullets 'comming [sic] out' her breast, one bullet fell out of her waist: we found another on the floor beside the rocking chair, and another embedded in the South wall. All were 32 Cal. Steel jacket; fired from an automatic." In Hollis's room there was "a towel and a handkerchief, the towel as if someone has wiped blood off their hands, and some on the handkerchief... She had considerable religious literature and couple

sixty-five, a kindly old lady, was seated at her sewing. She was bending over a worn tablecloth, with careful

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Shot Her in the Back.

hands mending a hole, absorbed entirely in the task of homely economy. "I knew I had to shoot her, but I

LEFT: Hollis guns down Mrs Bradley in an illustration from *The Chronicle* (Shippensburg, PA), 5 Jun 1924. BELOW: The Northwestern Bank Building, Portland, Oregon.

of bundles of books title of which is *The Living God of the Bible is Satan the Evil [O]ne*, by N. Hollis, P.O. Box 848, Portland Or. Apr 1923. We brought all her belongings to the station, and put them in the property room".¹⁸ Hollis was arrested, and presumably telephoned her brother Arthur, who arrived in Portland the next day to arrange an insanity defence.¹⁹

Next morning, the prisoner "arose early... ate nervously, talked to her brother then turned eagerly to waiting reporters to tell her life story".²⁰ They asked about the crime, and Hollis explained that she was not motivated by anger, jealousy, or money; Mrs Bradley had been her best friend and she shot her in the back, "because I couldn't stand to look at her when I did it."²¹ Hollis told them that God is the Devil, and put the murder in perspective, saying: "It was only an incident under the demon God."²²

One correspondent thought Hollis seemed "strangely unmoved",²³ while another claimed that "tears stood on her cheeks".²⁴ Her state of mind might have been unknown, yet her plan seemed to be working. Hollis was talking to reporters; newspapers across the country would print the truth about God, and the public would learn about the pamphlet. A competency hearing was scheduled for the evening, however, and that was a potential problem; it would determine if she was able

to stand trial, and even Hollis seemed to appreciate that "competency" was not her strong point.

IN THE CUCKOO'S NEST

The county board of examiners reviewed the case and decided that Nora Hollis suffered from paranoia, was unbalanced on the subject of religion, and not responsible for her actions:

"You wouldn't send me to the asylum without a trial, would you?" she asked plaintively when told of the alienists' findings.

"We are going to send you to the state hospital," she was told. "Then I have failed," she exclaimed. "If they put me in the asylum instead of hanging me, people will say I am crazy. If they would hang me everybody would read my book and know the truth about the demon god. I am sorry now to have killed by [sic] friend to make people read my book, because it did no good."

Today she still clung faithfully to her creed and her book. "I just know its [sic] true," she said.²⁵



Slays Friend

In order to prove that God in reality is Satan, MISS NORA HOLLIS (upper), 49, a stenographer and religious fanatic, shot and killed her friend, MRS. EVA BRADLEY (lower) in their home in Portland, Ore. Miss Hollis immediately gave herself up to the police. She told reporters that she hoped that the murder would attract attention to her book, "The Living God of the Bible is Satan, the Evil One."



A defeated Hollis was taken to the Oregon State Hospital in Salem and classified as a "16" – that is a patient suffering from "paranoia or a paranoiac condition". The admissions book states that the disease was of "six months duration" and caused by "heredity", which is the only reference to madness in the family (though the unused insanity defence might have contained others).

While Hollis adjusted to life on the ward, and Mrs Bradley's son sued her for damages,²⁶ newspapers misrepresented the murder as a case of Devil worship and human sacrifice. A minor Satanic panic seemed to be underway at the time, prompting one journalist to write that: "Certainly the occurrence of such events as the Portland murder cannot be overlooked. Devil worship may be a form of madness; but madness can wreak harm and bring death and destruction on innocent beings by the modern devices of lead and steel as surely as the medieval rites of sticking pins in waxen images..."²⁷

Hollis spent the rest of her life at the Oregon State Hospital, a sprawling brick complex that opened in 1883 as the Oregon State Hospital for the Insane, and the place where *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1975) was filmed. Hospital records are confidential, but Hollis probably lived in the south wing of the building with most of the female patients, in pleasanter quarters than the men. Rooms were "neater and decorated with handmade pillows, curtains and quilts",²⁸ and a small area outside was fenced off for their use. "When they first come out they scream and dance around without restraint. They are outside on nice afternoons about two hours and they act pretty wildly most of the time. Some of them, of course, are quiet and sitting silently."²⁹ Being a "16" might have limited Hollis's freedom, since "patients with paranoia were

considered the most dangerous as they were liable to commit random violence at any minute."³⁰

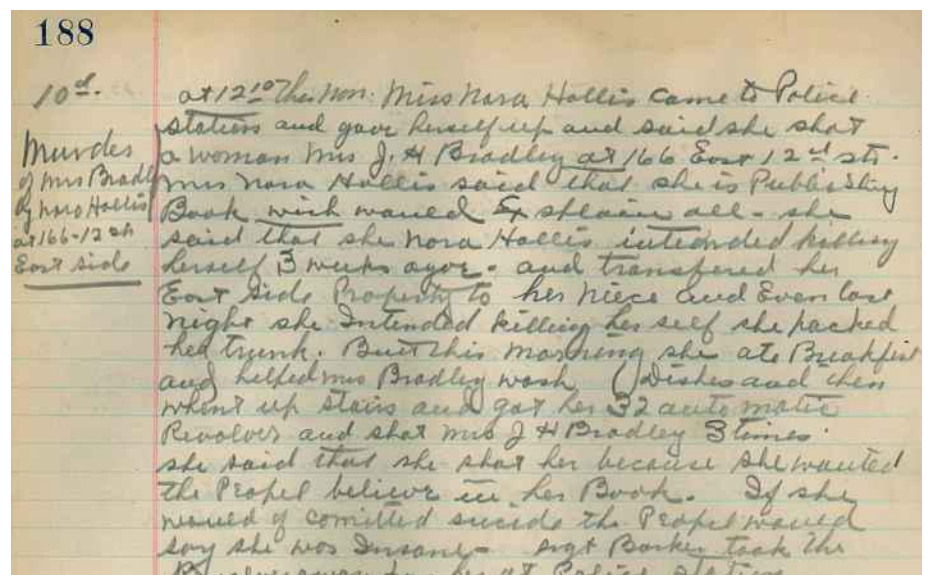
Little more is known. She survived a mass poisoning that took place at the hospital on 18 November 1942, when cockroach killing powder was accidentally mixed into scrambled eggs and served for dinner. Over 460 were poisoned, 47 fatally, but Hollis died of heart disease in 1945, after almost 22 years in the asylum.³¹ Today, Nora Hollis is almost forgotten, but a copy of the fatal pamphlet survives in the Library of the University of Oregon's Division of Special Collections and University Archives.

THE PARANOID PROPHETESS

Psychiatry has changed since 1924, but Nora Hollis's diagnosis of "paranoia, or a paranoiac condition" still seems accurate. Her statements and actions are consistent with paranoid schizophrenia, which can include delusions of persecution, grandiose ideas, auditory hallucinations, and "an excess risk of 12 per cent for suicide".³² Violent tendencies are particularly dangerous, "because the person with paranoid schizophrenia has relatively preserved cognitive functioning, [and] is more likely to be able to formulate a plan of action."³³

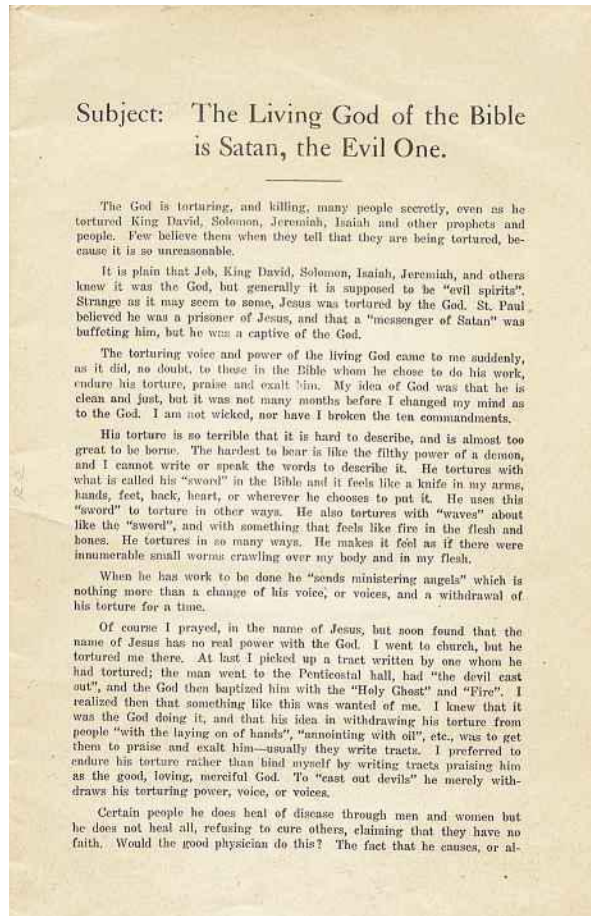
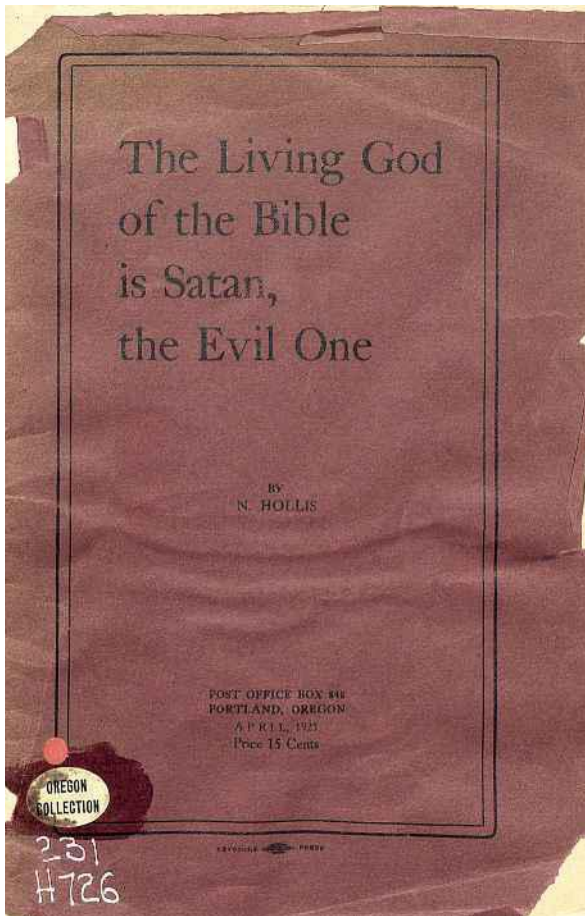
Hollis did formulate a plan of action and it succeeded up to a point. She got the press to mention her pamphlet, yet they considered murdering Mrs Bradley to be at least as mad as committing suicide, and dismissed the work as "incoherent, jumbled, idiotic mumblings".³⁴ In fact, the booklet is sometimes unintelligible, and filled with idiosyncratic interpretations of Scripture, yet three points are clear: God is torturing Nora Hollis, God cares nothing for mankind, and God is evil.

It's not a new idea. A number of ancient



LEFT: The story as it appeared in the *Oakland Tribune*, 15 Apr 1924. ABOVE: A page from the original 1924 investigative report books covering the murder, from the City of Portland Archives, Oregon.

THE BOOK OF NORA



Neither Hollis's experience with the ouija board nor the pulling out of her hair are mentioned in *The Living God of the Bible is Satan, the Evil One*, yet she did learn the truth about God through suffering. Hollis was made to feel indescribably filthy, had the sensation of "innumerable small worms" crawling across her skin, and felt burning and stabbing sensations in her extremities. There are 17 references to torture on the first page alone, and when Hollis, who "was not wicked and kept the 10 commandments", got no relief through prayer or attending church, she decided that "the name of Jesus has no real power with the God". Confronted with the basic problem of why a just God lets good people suffer, she concluded that God is not just, and dedicates most of the booklet's 40 pages to

cataloguing his crimes in the Bible.

These include inciting Cain to murder Abel, betraying Moses (with whom "[H]e had made a definite contract... that he would take him, together with his people, and the children of Israel, into a land he had promised them") and encouraging the Hebrews to worship the Golden Calf, then massacring them for idolatry. The God tortured kings and prophets, and hated Jesus, who was not his son, and was Crucified but "did not get a reward." Men are damned to Hell with no regard to merit, "because it is his nature" to be "unjust, cruel, unmerciful, wrathful, lying, treacherous, and filthy. He has killed people, beasts and birds, without mercy to exalt himself". He afflicted Hollis for the same reason "I began to make a close study of the Bible," she

writes, "taking it at its face value, allowing for the praise his torture of the prophets compelled them to give him. At times he withdrew his torture from them, when they praised and exalted him." She would not exalt him, though, even to end the suffering, and "God has tortured me doubly while I have been writing this".

Hollis was determined to reveal his crimes, which included killing other gods: "The bible indicates that in the beginning there were other Gods, and that the living God, being the strongest, most subtle, and most wicked, lives and rules, and that the others were destroyed. It would seem that our good, just, merciful God was either killed, or chained through enchantment (hypnotism), at the foundation of the world." Since then, mankind has worshipped

various deities, but the gods and spirits of every religion, including Spiritualism, are the same "living God" under different names, a term Hollis intends to be understood in the literal sense.

He is not supernatural, but a "flesh and blood being, evidently in the form of a man with all invisible power", which probably refers to hypnotic and psychic abilities. Though she does not say so, the God must live somewhere, presumably eats and sleeps, and has a mind "similar to man, with which he schemes and plans". Why he was determined to bend a lumber company's stenographer to his will, is not explained.

All quotes are from Nora Hollis, *The Living God of the Bible is Satan, the Evil One*, Portland, OR, Keystone Press, 1923.



ABOVE LEFT: A rather flattering sketch portrait of Nora Hollis which appeared in the *Times* (Shreveport, LA) on 23 April 1924. ABOVE RIGHT: A postcard of the Oregon State Hospital (or Insane Asylum) in Salem, Oregon, to which Hollis was committed and spent the rest of her days.

and mediæval schools of thought believed that Satan rules this world, while a benevolent deity presides over the higher, spiritual, realm. Hollis leaves no room for this possibility, however, since the good god was killed or incapacitated at the beginning of time, while immaterial; all the gods and spirits worshipped by mankind are different forms of the same living God, whose powers are psychical. Humanity is trapped in a Universe ruled by evil, and can hope for nothing better than the “eventual

annihilation of the race, leaving no people on earth for Satan to harass and destroy”.³⁵

On the last page of the pamphlet, Hollis writes that: “The God has tried to torture me into doing wrong things, so that he could discredit me, and no one would believe me, but he has failed.” A year later, he had apparently succeeded. Even if Hollis’s publicity campaign had succeeded and multitudes clamoured for a peek at *The Living God*, one problem remained – and it was not insanity. Other prophets have

succeeded despite being mad or murderous; but Nora Hollis preached a creed as dismal as any ever conceived. Joyless, comfortless, and bereft of hope, there was no overcoming the flinty bleakness of Hollisism itself.

❖ **ROBERT DAMON SCHNECK** is an American writer specialising in anomalous phenomena and historical oddities. A resident of New Jersey, Schneck is the author of *The President’s Vampire* and a regular contributor to *Fortean Times* and *Fate*.

NOTES

- 1 Hollis’s scars are evident on her cheeks, while her nose is little more than nostrils. The only reference to her disfigurement discovered so far appears in the 11 April 1924 *Arizona Republic*: “Police, after hearing the woman’s life story, said they believed her troubles started 17 years ago when her face was torn and scarred as the result of a wreck in Kansas City.” As of this writing, this is also the only reference to her being in Kansas City.
- 2 United States Federal Census of 1880.
- 3 1885, Kansas State Census.
- 4 *Bend (OR) Bulletin*, 11 Apr 1924.
- 5 *Ibid.*
- 6 *Ibid.*
- 7 *Ibid.*
- 8 *Ibid.*
- 9 Theosophy combines Western and Eastern mystical traditions and,

- like other metaphysical movements, was not well received in the American South. A Theosophical Society did operate in Atlanta, however, from 1916 to 2016.
- 10 *Bend (OR) Bulletin*, 11 Apr 1924.
 - 11 Several lumber companies had offices in the Northwestern Bank Building, which still stands at 621 Southwest Morrison Street in Portland, but her employer’s name does not appear in newspaper reports.
 - 12 *Detroit (MI) Free Press*, 12 Apr 1924.
 - 13 *Bend (OR) Bulletin*, 11 Apr 1924.
 - 14 According to the *Times* of Batavia, NY, 26 Apr 1924, Hollis’s “book sold by the thousands in Portland. But Miss Hollis was not satisfied. She wanted to broadcast her ideas to the world.” Hollis never made that claim and, if true, would not have shot Mrs Bradley.

- 15 *Bend (OR) Bulletin*, 11 Apr 1924.
- 16 Kathleen Drowne, Patrick Huber, *The 1920s: American Popular Culture Through History* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2004), p189.
- 17 City of Portland Archives, Oregon, Investigative Report Books (Craddock). A2001-073, 1924.
- 18 *Ibid.*
- 19 *Daily (OH) Times*, 11 Apr 1924.
- 20 *Bend (OR) Bulletin*, 11 Apr 1924.
- 21 *Madera (CA) Tribune*, 11 Apr 1924.
- 22 *Charleroi (PA) Mail*, 11 Apr 1924.
- 23 *Madera (CA) Tribune*, 11 Apr 1924.
- 24 *Billings (MT) Gazette*, 11 Apr 1924.
- 25 *Santa Ana (CA) Register*, 12 Apr 1924.
- 26 *News-Review (OR)*, 14 July 1924. He “filed suit in the Marion county circuit

- court against Miss Hollis for \$7,500 damages for the death of Mrs Bradley”.
- 27 *Oakland (CA) Tribune*, 15 June 1924.
 - 28 “Their wards were constructed the same as the men’s with long hallways, small sleeping rooms on each side, and small parlours for the women to enjoy.... They were allowed to eat from regular dishes, unlike the men, who only got aluminium pans.” Diane L Goeres-Gardner, *Inside Oregon State Hospital: A History of Tragedy and Triumph*, (Mount Pleasant, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2013), pages unnumbered.
 - 29 *Ibid.*
 - 30 *Ibid.*
 - 31 A tactful death notice in the 19 Nov 1945, *Daily Capital (OR) Journal*, describes Hollis’s death in the asylum as occurring at “a local hospital”. Vesta and Gaynelle are mentioned as surviving relatives, and presumably arranged

- the funeral (19 Nov) and cremation (23 Nov). Hollis’s remains are not among the Oregon State Hospital’s collection of unclaimed human ashes. www.oregon.gov/oha/osh/Pages/cremains.aspx.
- 32 Daniel E Weinberger, Paul Harrison, *Schizophrenia*, (Hoboken, NJ, John Wiley & Sons, 2011) p1811.
 - 33 John G Csernansky, *Schizophrenia: A New Guide for Clinicians*, (Boca Raton, FL, CRC Press, 2002), p253.
 - 34 *Albany (OR) Evening Herald*, 12 Apr 1924.
 - 35 This statement does not appear in the pamphlet, or interviews, but is consistent with Hollis’s enthusiasm for suicide. What she believed about the afterlife is unclear. The living God coerces people into committing evil acts, so damnation is unjust, while those in heaven cannot be happy knowing that friends and loved ones are suffering in Hell.

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HOMO ECONOMICS

They say the two things we can never escape are death and taxes – but the creator of Prior Choice Economics, Addison Brown, would have disagreed. Dare you become entangled within the world-wide web of his global financial Homo Net? **SD TUCKER** investigates.

Last issue, we met the would-be Space Age President Gabriel Green, champion of Prior Choice Economics, which, in Green's words, rests upon the core principle that "Everything is... the sum total of all that has taken place before". Applied to finance, this means that a person doesn't actually have any less money in their bank account once they have spent it. Green, by his own admission, was not the originator of the theory on which he based his political and economic platform; this was Addison Brown (1922-2000), a one-time student of nuclear physics turned wandering mystic, a Jesus-like figure who "wore a beard and had long, wavy hair down to his shoulders", went by the name of 'John Believer' and penned such works as *Talking with Clouds*, *Conquering Death* and *All Problems Solved*. According to Green, Brown had come up with the idea of Prior Choice as early as 1947.

During the mid-1990s web-boom, a strange Prior Choice Economics website appeared online, maintained in the name of none other than 'John Believer' himself, the self-described "Prophet-Writer-Inventor" Addison Brown, the original Earthly father of the entire creed. Apparently maintained by a Canadian computer-programmer named Alan K Wu, perhaps Brown's sole remaining follower, the site stood as something of a shrine to the wandering preacher and his words. Prior to suffering a debilitating stroke in 1996, followed by his death in 2000, it turns out Brown had hoped to set up a Foundation to continue his work, which had recently moved on from pure economic theory to a further, even more advanced stage of knowledge – raising the dead.

According to Wu's account, Brown's ambitiously-named 'Human Reincarnation and Resurrecting the Dead Project' grew directly from his work on economics and was brought to a successful conclusion during the late 1990s, when the two men had developed a very special piece of software named Miracle.zip. This amazing program – available for free download from Brown's website until March 2017, when the pages were tragically taken offline – would reputedly allow PC-users to raise from the dead any person they so desired. I couldn't get it to work myself, but it sounds as if Miracle.zip was some

The Space People's Choice



GABRIEL GREEN
INDEPENDENT NON-PARTISAN WRITE-IN CANDIDATE
FOR PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES IN 1960

LEFT: Gabriel Green, 1960 presidential hopeful and proponent of Prior Choice Economics.

HIS UTOPIAN AIM WAS TO CREATE "TEAM HUMANS ON THE EARTH"

kind of astrology program which allowed you to work out "how best to time the birth of a child using computerised horoscope-timing so as to... duplicate the soul-shape and consciousness of a person previously alive but now 'deceased'". Initially, it seems hard to see what necromancy has to do with economics, but Brown and Wu did their best to explain.

OH MR WU, WHAT DID YOU DO?

The central thing to appreciate was that for Brown the entire physical basis of the Universe was reliant upon something called 'resonance physics'. Consider how a bell, when struck, continues to vibrate, echoing the original sound, until finally it fades away. We say that the sound resonates, or repeats itself in a declining fashion, like

ripples from a pebble thrown into a still pond. Brown claimed that Creation itself was modelled upon such a pattern of wave-like resonance, the Universe being nothing more than "a system of interacting resonations or repeating events". If this was so, then repetition was an inherent quality of the cosmos (imagine the pond was infinite, so the ripples eventually circled back on themselves, like a ship circumnavigating the globe). Whilst the nature of many of the cosmic waves rippling throughout the Universe was as yet unknown to mankind, their fleeting manner of combination at the time of a baby's birth determined the exact shape of its soul by virtue of their combined physical pressure upon it. Therefore, if you could work out the precise state of such cosmic waves at the time of Einstein's birth, you could wait until such an arrangement of waves recurred (which it inevitably would, these waves being perpetually resonant and repetitive in nature) and then "put Einstein back in a new body on purpose to let him continue his work". Wu and Brown's Miracle.zip allowed prospective parents to do such a thing intentionally with, it was said, a tempting one-in-three success rate – psychic IVF.

In a resonant Universe, every human being was to all intents and purposes "a radio-like broadcasting and receiving device". Human bodies could be thought of as walking biological TV-sets, which could easily be replaced when broken down beyond repair. When your TV-set was knocked over, Brown pointed out, you did not mourn but went and bought a new one that you then tuned in to "the same wave-shape of repeating events phenomena [i.e. channel frequency] as the TV that fell off a table and died", to begin watching exactly the same channels you did before; the absence of a receiver does not imply the absence of a broadcasting wave. In much the same way, when a person's body died, the interactive TV show of their soul was still being broadcast somewhere in the Universe. All that needed to be done to resurrect the dead was to tune back in to the correct resonant frequency of a deceased person's soul-shape by conceiving



ABOVE: Images from a bizarre video posted to YouTube apparently showing Addison Brown, "Prophet from the West", visiting Alan K Wu in Calgary, Alberta, Canada, in 1994.

a new infant at the precise astrologically-determined time for it to be influenced by the relevant cosmic waves in question. Then, the baby would automatically become the deceased figure of your choice as soon as it exited the womb, and began receiving resonant, soul-shaping, brain-squashing space-waves through its internal biological antennæ – that is to say, your new baby would be a reincarnated human being: Albert Einstein II or Bill Shakespeare Jr. "Turn on, tune in, drop out", as midwives should now say.

MORAL CAPITAL

To Brown, the advent of the Internet meant mankind had literally evolved into a new species; from *Homo sapiens*, we had become *Homo net*. Brown produced pamphlets with the phrase 'HOMO NET' written across them in capital letters, urging the open-minded to log onto his site and make personal contact with him, although I fear some young males who read them may have got the wrong idea. Nonetheless, Brown's utopian aim of using humanity's newly-networked existence to create "TEAM HUMANS ON THE EARTH" was couched by him largely in economic terms. Describing the problem of growing online piracy, Brown accurately anticipated such practices would have a disruptive economic impact for intellectual copyright-holders, greatly undermining the entire capitalist system. However, Brown declared that web piracy was truly no problem at all, but an opportunity. By trying to prosecute the pirates, corporate lawyers were ignoring the resonant basis of all Creation. What was really needed within our new Internet age were not lawsuits, but a complete re-ordering of capitalist society – to be achieved through the introduction of Prior Choice Economics.

Apart from much mention of using the new-fangled World Wide Web to

administer the whole programme, Brown's basic scheme had not altered in any significant way since Gabriel Green's decades-old tilts at the presidency; it was just that the underlying rationale underpinning it had become more overtly mystical, rather than related to UFOs and ETs, subjects Brown nowhere mentioned. Prior Choice Economics was now billed as part of a wider cosmology, "a way to fit ALL the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle... together... not a solution only to business problems." Brown asks us to consider the way that the ultimate sum total of mass in existence in the Universe always remains as a constant. Nothing is ever truly destroyed, only transformed – its existence resonates forever throughout the cosmos. Burn some wood, and the wood still exists, but in another form; as ash and smoke, as atoms of carbon, and so forth. If this simple physical law is applied economically, said Brown, then the value of any labour an individual worker has ever performed must still exist, too. Say you work for a single hour, at a rate of \$5 per hour. A packet of cigarettes cost \$5, so your one hour's worth of labour will allow you to buy one packet, and then no more – forever. But where has that \$5 gone? It still exists, in the shopkeeper's till. You earned it, so why not keep it? Under Prior Choice, you can and do keep it, forever! That hour's worth of expended labour, and the \$5 you accumulated, resonates outwards from your bank account eternally, keeping you in \$5 packets of cigarettes for life. Just as a Miracle.zip baby tunes into a dead person's soul, still resonating outwards across the Universe, so a special Prior Choice credit-card, which links to the Internet with every till purchase, will tune in to the resonance of your accumulated 'financial soul', as it were. The way ahead is not to destroy the worker's hard-won \$5 via spending, but to rearrange the wider financial system upon resonant

principles so that the money, just like the soul which earned it, becomes immortal.

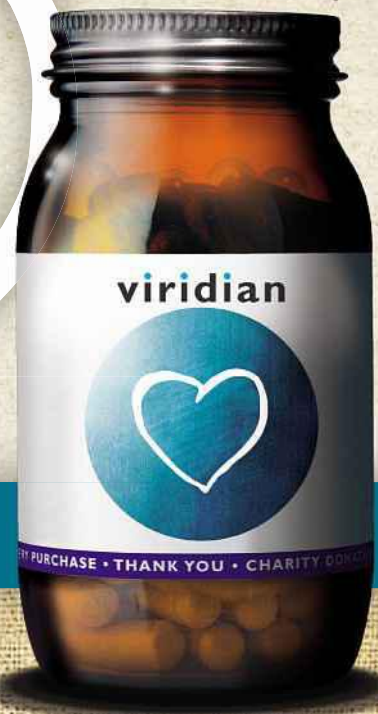
The ultimate unspoken conclusion to be drawn is that one's Prior Choice Credit-Score could be maintained after death, when passing between material bodies, like permanent financial karma. When you turn a TV off one day and switch it back on tomorrow, that day's episode of your favourite show follows on from the last one, rather than starting all over again at the beginning; and when a person's soul-shape is reincarnated via tuning a baby into the correct resonance-waves, the child retains some of the memories of its previous life within its brain too, otherwise there would be no point in reincarnating as baby Einstein. You could read this as implying that, come the Day of Judgement, God will assess your Credit Score, accumulated over several lifetimes, and assign you a place within Heaven or Hell based upon it. The higher your cumulative Prior Choice Score, the cleaner your soul – an entire moral book-keeping service. No need to spend tedious hours in Purgatory counting the black spots on your soul anymore; just go online and ask Experian for your own personal Prior Choice Credit-rating today

This article is extracted and condensed from *False Economies: The Strangest, Least Successful and Most Audacious Financial Follies, Plans and Crazes of All Time* by SD Tucker, available from Amberley Publishing, £18.99, ISBN: 9781445672342.

◆ SD TUCKER writes regularly for FT and is the author of such fortean books as *Space Oddities*, *Forgotten Science*, *Great British Eccentrics*, *The Hidden Folk*, *Terror of the Tokoloshe* and *Paranormal Merseyside*. His latest, *False Economies*, is out now.

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Misremembrance of things past

While some people recall seeing the elusive Thunderbird photo, others have vivid memories that are demonstrably inaccurate. **CHRIS SAUNDERS** explores the 'Mandela Effect'.

The Mandela Effect is a name given to the phenomenon of collectively misremembering specific facts or events (see **FT362:68**). The moniker itself, coined by paranormal researcher Fiona Broome, stems from the fact that an awful lot of people claim to remember Nelson Mandela dying in prison in the 1980s. They can apparently recall the outpouring of grief, news reports, and even an elaborate state funeral.

The thing is, of course, those things never happened. Nelson Mandela didn't die until December 2013 when he was 95 years old, having been released from prison in 1990. Personally, I don't remember ever thinking Mandela died in the Eighties. However, on hearing of his death, I do remember lots of people saying words to the effect of, "Nelson Mandela died? I thought he died years ago!"

It didn't take long for this notion to find an online following and pretty soon, people began listing other oddities, often in relation to the possibility of time slips, parallel universes, and/or multiple dimensions. Interest in the Mandela Effect has been gathering momentum for some time, helped along by countless Internet rumours and even a few mainstream articles.²

A recent *X-Files* episode used it to amusing effect as a

plot device, and there is even a website dedicated to the subject.³

There can be no denying that false memories exist. The question is, are they glitches in the Matrix or something more mundane?

One of the examples most commonly cited is the fact that it's not, and never has been, *Sex IN the City*. The correct title is *Sex AND the City*. This can perhaps be explained by the phonetic similarity between the words 'in' and 'and.' They are virtually interchangeable, meaning that based on what they *heard*, many people wrongly believed that the show was called *Sex in the City*, even though it wasn't.

The discussion about it being a Rubik's Cube, rather than a Rubix Cube, can similarly be explained. It's phonetics: the vast majority of people using Rubik's Cubes back in the day blissfully unaware that it was named after its creator, Erno Rubik.

Another oft-quoted example involves the Queen classic 'We are the Champions'. Some Mandela Effect devotees firmly believe that it doesn't end with the epic "Of the woooooorld!" that we all remember and in fact concludes with a rather more subdued "We are the champions". This one is even easier to do away with, because the version most people are familiar with does indeed end with that all-conquering Freddie

Mercury exclamation. The confusion arises when people compare the original studio version (from the 1977 album *News of the World*, which does indeed end with the 'We are the champions' lyric)⁴ with later live versions, including widely circulated footage from Live Aid (1985)⁵ and Wembley Stadium (1986) which feature Mercury's improvised extra lyrics. Mystery solved.

Next up: is it Kit-Kat or Kit Kat? Well, it's the latter. But some people are convinced there should be/used to be a hyphen. This one has caused no end of speculation, with manufacturers Nestlé even being called on to clarify things.⁶ To summarise, company historian and archivist Alex Hutchinson initially claimed that there *used to be* a hyphen, but not anymore; which seems plausible. Furthermore, he had the photographs to prove it. Let's not forget that when Nestlé acquired Rowntree (the company that previously produced Kit Kat) in 1988 they made sweeping changes to virtually all aspects of the business, including the packaging. This is where things get weird. In the ensuing comment section, Mr Hutchinson states the following:

"I have been back through some photographs and found the item I was thinking of, but I realised that I had remembered it incorrectly; there was no hyphen."

My own research showed that there are indeed pictures posted online of Kit Kats featuring a hyphenated logo – but these are obviously either photoshopped to perpetuate the

Hyphengate myth, or they're pictures of a counterfeit product, popular in China and elsewhere in Asia. Look no further than MFC restaurants, branded to look just like KFC, or the Buckstar coffee shop chain.

Darth Vader never said: "Luke, I am your father." He actually said: "No, I am your father." But he says it to Luke, so it's easy to see how that mix-up occurs. Ditto Forrest Gump's famous "Life is like a box of chocolates." What he actually says, in full, is, "My momma always said, 'Life was like a box of chocolates; you never know what you're gonna get.'" Any self-respecting grammar Nazi will know that this sentence mixes up tenses, making it fundamentally wrong. My theory is that, subconsciously, we recognise that and self-correct.

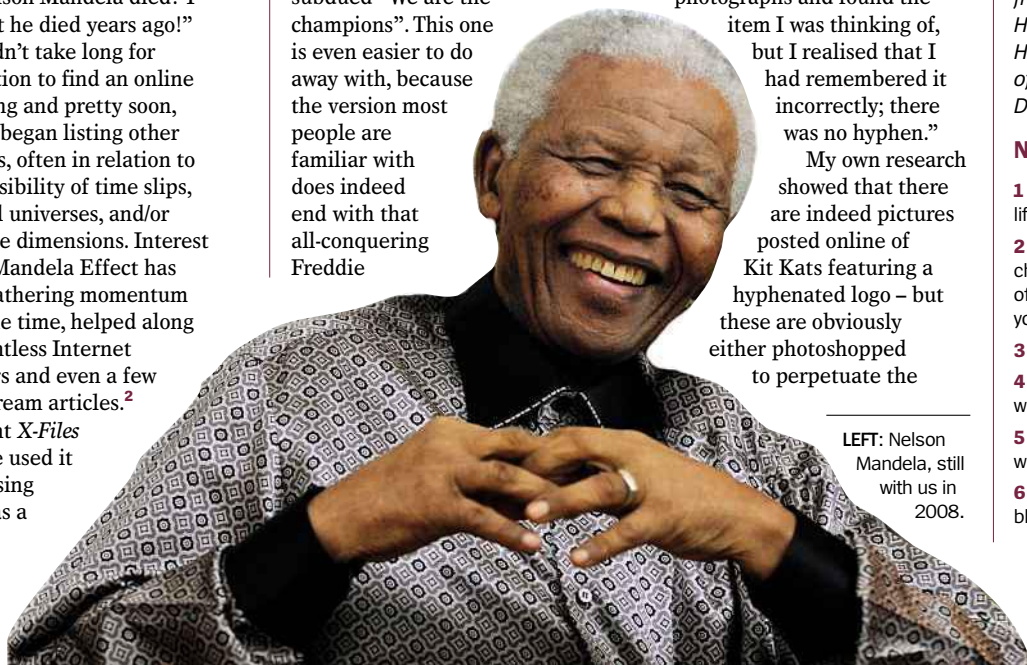
Of course, conventional science has several possible explanations for the Mandela Effect, the most popular being that it is simply the result of the misinformation effect, which is when your memory is influenced by the later addition of new information. As we've seen numerous times in the pages of *FT*, the memory is a notoriously delicate and unreliable thing.

◆ **CHRIS SAUNDERS** is a freelance journalist from Wales. He writes fiction as *CM Saunders*. His latest release is a collection of short stories called *X3* from *Deviant Dolls Publications*.

NOTES

- <https://thedebrief.co.uk/news/real-life/mandela-effect/>
- www.buzzfeed.com/christopherhudspeth/crazy-examples-of-the-mandela-effect-that-will-make-you-ques
- <http://mandelaeffect.com/>
- www.youtube.com/watch?v=04854XqcfCY
- www.youtube.com/watch?v=yPKlrRwJB8A
- www.nestle.co.uk/aboutus/history/blog/posts/kitkatnohyphen

LEFT: Nelson Mandela, still with us in 2008.



The mermaid of Deerness

ULRICH MAGIN recalls the case of the Orkney mermaid, a 19th century cryptid that made regular appearances and briefly rivalled Nessie in terms of press coverage.

When you went to Scotland to see a regularly appearing cryptid at the end of the 19th century, you didn't go to Loch Ness, but to Orkney. And you didn't look out for a sea serpent, but for a mermaid.

As far as I'm aware, the first of what turned out to be many sightings of a half human sea creature at Deerness, in Mainland, Orkney, occurred in 1891.

"An interesting spectacle has recently been seen in the Orkneys. It is probably the first of its kind ever authenticated in living memory. A correspondent writes to a contemporary: 'What is said to be a mermaid has been seen for some weeks at stated times at Deerness. It is about six to seven feet in length, with a little black head, white neck, and a snow-white body and two arms. In swimming it appears just like a human being. At times it will come very close inshore and appear to be sitting on a sunken rock, and will wave and work its hands. It has never been seen entirely out of water. Many persons who doubted its genuineness now suppose it to be a deformed seal.'" ¹

The following year, it moved location:

"A strange story of the mermaid comes from Birsay, Orkney. The other day a farmer's wife was down at the sea shore there, and observed a strange marine animal sitting on the rocks. As it would not move she went for her husband. When she returned with her better-half they both saw the animal



RISCHGITZ / GETTY IMAGES

"Many persons now suppose it to be a deformed seal"

clambering among the rocks, about four feet of it being above the water. The woman, who had a splendid view of it, describes it as a 'good looking person' while the man says it was 'a woman covered over with brown hair.' At last the couple tried to get hold of it, when it took a header into the sea and disappeared. The man is confident he has seen the fabled mermaid but people in the district are of the opinion that the animal must belong to the seal tribe. An animal of similar description was seen by several people at Deerness two years ago." ² Does the reference "two years ago" refer to an incident in 1890, or was it just down to a slightly hazy recall of the original newspaper article?

Obviously, the new sighting brought forth recollections about Deerness, and even new eyewitness reports. Just as at Loch Ness, and many monster locations round the world, a reward was offered in the same year: "The sum of £200 has been offered for the capture of the supposed mermaid, which occasionally sports itself on the rocks at Deerness, Orkney. People with nets and gear for trapping the creature have been lying in ambush." ³

The creature was seen again the following year. The papers now hint at a history longer than just two years. Hunters were ready to shoot the strange animal, and zoologists tried to debunk it: "News has reached Kirkwall (says the *Scotsman*) that the mermaid has again made her appearance at Deerness, Orkney. The creature has arrived at the same place now many years in succession, where it remains all summer, disappearing in the winter and returning again with fine weather. Last year a large sum of money was offered for its capture,

LEFT: A mermaid is startled by a manatee, a common mermaid suspect, in a 19th century illustration.

and sportsmen tried to kill it. As it struck out to sea immediately it was fired at, and was never again seen until now, it was thought it had been wounded or killed. Naturalists who have got a full description of the mermaid think it is an ocean seal, but the people of Deerness, who have watched it closely for years, say it has few if any of the seal's habits, and maintain it swims like a human being. At the present time it may be observed daily, being very partial to bright sunshine, but it rarely appears on dull days." ⁴

Whatever it was that was seen, people who waited for it were rewarded not by money, but by a second specimen: "The Orkney Mermaid has caused a further sensation by appearing in her old haunts at Deerness accompanied by a young one. During the past fortnight, says the *Scotsman*, both the old and the young one have been seen frequently in the vicinity by different persons. The



young one is of a white colour and swims in the same fashion as the old one, by throwing its arms out in front of the head and bringing them in towards the side. Last summer an attempt was made to shoot the strange visitant, when it disappeared; but this summer no one has tried to molest it.”⁵

And one year later, the exiting news was already old hat – at least to judge from the brief note that appeared in the papers: “The so-called mermaid has re-appeared in her old summer quarters among the rocks at Deerness, Orkney.”⁶ And with this, the creature(s) fade back into obscurity.⁷

It should be pointed out that mermaids that surfaced off the Scottish coast at the same site year after year were not really rare – even when we are dealing with freshwater lakes. Morag, the monster of Loch Morar, was always depicted as a mermaid before it came to resemble Nessie, and another example was said to spend the summer in Loch Rannoch: “Then there are the mermaids, the kelpies of the south and the water bulls and horses of the north, of the lochs and streams, as stoutly believed by the peasantry who now live beside them as they were centuries ago... As to the mermaids of the lochs, they still exist past all dispute – at least with their friends the Highlanders. The railways, telegraphs and newspapers, like the heartless poachers they are, have ‘sweepted’ or seined them well out of the lowland shires. They are and were both dangerous and beneficent personages. In olden times they were not above giving recipes for rashes, ringworm and other common ailments. Today they have all retreated to the shadowy Highland lochs, where they find comfortable flat stones to sit upon, and there, while combing their masses of long, yellow hair, sing in plaintive tones much that is ill or good to be heard. I know one canny auld wife of northern Perthshire who gets along very comfortably through her confidential relations with a mermaid that at present passes the summer season at Loch



ABOVE: Birsay, where “a farmer’s wife was down at the sea shore... and observed a strange marine animal sitting on the rocks”. **BELOW:** The spectacular coastal scenery of Deerness; just the place for a mermaid to take her summer holidays.



Rannoch.”⁸

What would you or I have seen or photographed or – if we were especially lucky – videotaped had we been present back then at Deerness? Then, perhaps, the Orkney creature might have

managed the wonderful feat of the Loch Ness monster 30 years later and turned into a cryptid of international renown, with people still flocking to Deerness year after year to see and report a mermaid.

NOTES

- ¹ *Daily Telegraph*, NZ, 16 Apr 1891, p4.
- ² *Colonist*, NZ, 14 June 1892, p 3; *Taranaki Herald*, 27 June 1892, p2.
- ³ *New Zealand Herald*, 20 Aug 1892, p1; *Colonist*, NZ, 27 Aug 1892, p4; *Evening Post*, NZ, 17 Sep 1892, p1.
- ⁴ *Press*, NZ, 20 June 1893, p4; also *Timaru Herald*, NZ, 28 June 1893, p3; *Daily Telegraph*, NZ, 7 July 1893, p2; *Nelson Evening Mail*, NZ, 8 July 1893, p2.
- ⁵ *New Zealand Tablet*, 13 Oct 1893, p11; *Colonist*, NZ, 18 Oct 1893, p4.
- ⁶ *New Zealand Herald*, 26 May 1894, p1; *Colonist*, 2 June 1894, p4; *Evening Post*, NZ, 30 June 1894, p1.
- ⁷ With exceptions: There is also a site on the Internet dedicated to the Orkney mermaids which mentions this series of sightings, see www.orkneyjar.com/folklore/mermaids.htm. The 1892 Deerness report is mentioned in: RM Robertson: *Selected Highland Folktales*, Oliver & Boyd, 1961, p159. The Birsay sighting is referenced in Benwell and Waugh, *Töchter des Meeres* (Original: ‘The Sea Enchantress’), Marion von Schröder, p112. There might be other references that I am unaware of.
- ⁸ *Kentucky New Era*, 18 July 1891; also *Los Angeles Times*, 19 Jul 1891.

◆ **ULRICH MAGIN** is a journalist and writer, a longtime contributor to *FT* and the author of *Investigating the Impossible* (2011). He lives in Germany.

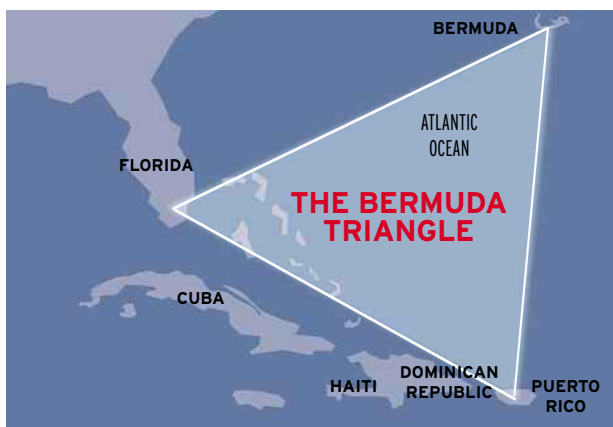
BUILDING A FORTEAN LIBRARY

34. THREE SIDES TO EVERY STORY

We all love a good mystery, do we not? Preferably one with a spoonful of weirdness thrown in (sometimes the proportions are reversed). Else why do we have our noses stuck inside this journal? Unexplained and apparently inexplicable disappearances of ships, aircraft and people are surely high on the list of fortean interests. Fortean, it is also true, love the good mystery that's properly debunked. Which – for those who need reminding – means extracting the bunk from some fanciful tale or legend, not denying that there are inexplicable things going on in the world. The natural fortean reaction to such announcements as that someone has married a bridge is to enquire *Can this be so?* If the answer is *Yes*, then it's perhaps occasion for a bit of gawping; but one doubts that anyone would mind greatly if it turned out to be *No*. Hence, we hope that this month's addition to the Library will be welcomed, for it is something of a neglected, even forgotten, volume, and like last issue's entry will save readers the trouble of wading through acres of gaudy, factitious claptrap.

The mystery of the Bermuda Triangle as we know it has been around, in one form or another, since the 1950s (see FT145:66). It received perhaps its biggest boost in the 1970s from Charles Berlitz (see FT181:24), who had a best-seller out of it (and even a puff or two in the allegedly serious heavy Sunday papers), and it has rumbled on in the fortean background ever since: search the web and see. In 1975, Lawrence David (later, 'Larry') Kusche published the results of his hunt for the original sources of Triangle stories, reaching back to 1842. In each case he gives the 'canonical' legend of a mysterious disappearance, often in a pastiche of the febrile style of Triangle promoters, followed by contemporary documentation from such newspapers of record (as they then reliably were) as the *London and New York Times*, *Lloyd's Weekly Casualty Reports*, and, where appropriate, transcripts of radio and telephone communications between aircraft and ground controllers. Where they exist, that is: for some of incidents beloved of the popular chroniclers simply didn't happen, as far as records show.

Take, for example, Kusche's presentation of the disappearance of the 572ft (174m) tanker *SS VA Fogg* south of Freeport, Texas, in February 1972. The ship had sailed into the Gulf of Mexico to flush out its tanks (now emptied of a cargo of benzene), but never returned. A fortnight after her departure, her wreck was found in 90ft



(27m) of water. The mystery-monger's version continues: "The Coast Guard could not say what had happened to the crewmen, as all 38 had disappeared. The blood-chilling part of the story is that the 39th man, the captain, was found sitting in his cabin, a coffee cup in his hand. What caused the ship to sink so quickly that the automatic SOS was not sent, the crewmen were unable to use their life-saving gear, and the captain's life was ended with no warning? The mystery, it seems, has no earthly explanation."

A five per cent solution of Holmesian logic reveals the holes in the story. If the dead captain had been sitting in his cabin with a cup in his hand *in a water-filled cabin 15 fathoms down*, he must have died at least four hours prior to the sinking, since *rigor mortis* takes at least that long to set in. And before it did, how come the cup didn't slip from his nerveless grasp and

bounce or break upon the floor? And how did the captain stay glued to his seat? Was there Loctite in those days? Oo-er, Mum, something unearthly's going on here. You bet it is. Freeport TX is in the western quarter of the north coast of the Gulf of Mexico. Whereas the Bermuda Triangle is generally reckoned to be cornered by Bermuda in the north east, Miami in the west, and San Juan, Puerto Rico, in the south east. Freeport is 950 miles (1,530km) west of Miami as the crow flies. Not even on the goddam cusp. These facts, available to the meanest intelligence, might have sufficed for Kusche, but he dug further. The

Galveston Daily News published numerous reports, all written by City Editor Joel Kirkpatrick, on the search for the ship and its results. Using side-scanning sonar, Coastguard divers found a number of bodies on board the wreck, which had clearly suffered from a massive explosion, and one, later identified as the captain's (minus a coffee cup), floating in the chartroom. The explosion, which bent the fore'd deck 45° starboard and reduced the side view of the ship from 572ft to 450ft (174 to 137m), seems to have been caused by human error and inexperience in flushing tanks, and an electrical malfunction, which ignited the volatile benzene fumes. Grim, and unfortunate, but hardly 'unearthly'.

The *VA Fogg's* isn't the only Triangular disappearance that didn't actually occur within the Triangle. Writers have stretched its malign influence as far as the Azores, 2,000+ miles from Bermuda. Numerous authors have excitedly described the disappearances of numerous ships and aircraft of which there is no record except in their wayward human imagination. Kusche documents these, or rather discovers and demonstrates their non-existence, as well. One of his virtues is that he doesn't waste space pointing the finger at who said what and how wrong they were: The Triangle legend is, as he says, "a composite of many sources". Indeed, he explicitly eschews the task: "To have attempted to show who contributed

each part of the story would have required a different kind of book. My concern here is with the incidents themselves, not with those who publicised them.” Which is gracious of him. Fans of scholarly demolitions and assassinations may be disappointed.

There are nonetheless some odd events that occurred within the Triangle that have not been definitively solved. Perhaps the two most notorious are the cases of the *Mary Celeste*, found abandoned and crewless in December 1872 (see FT151:6-7), and the disappearance of Flight 19, five US Navy Avenger fighter/torpedo bombers on a routine training mission, in December 1945 (and the Marlin Mariner tanker that set out to search for them). There is as yet no complete plausible explanation for the former, but a good one for the latter. The case of the *Mary Celeste* has long been confused with Conan Doyle’s fictionalised version, published in 1884, in which the ship is called the *Marie Celeste*. As Kusche points out, many of the most provocative aspects of the *Mary Celeste* story as told by the Triangulators are lifted from Conan Doyle, or plain invented: such as the breakfast uneaten on the table, the coffee still warm; the ship’s boats still in their davits (the actual ship had but one boat, and it had been launched); the ship in perfect condition when found (in fact it was waterlogged). But, despite dozens of theories being, er, floated, “no one knows, and no one ever will know, what actually took place.” A genuine mystery of the sea, then, which has inevitably attracted ‘explanations’ from those peddling deadly magnetic forces, abductions by aliens, reverse gravity fields, time warps and who knows what else – maybe vengeful survivors from Atlantis? – to jangle the nerves and drop the jaws of the gullible.

The disappearance of Flight 19 is a bit more complicated. The last couple of paragraphs of Kusche’s ‘canonical’ version give the flavour, and somewhat unsubtle suggestiveness, of the legend: “The members of the Naval Board of Enquiry... concluded that they ‘were not able even to venture a good guess as to what had happened.’ Another officer said, ‘They vanished as completely as if they’d flown to Mars. We don’t know what the hell’s going on out there.’ A Navy bulletin issued at the end of the search required all ships and airplanes to remain on the alert for clues to the disappearance. That order has never



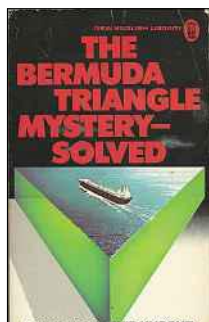
ABOVE: US Navy Avengers, similar to those of Flight 19, which disappeared in 1945.

“SO MANY
BOOKS,
SO LITTLE
TIME”

Frank Zappa

been rescinded; *it is still in effect today!*

“There are many more questions... Why were all the compasses erratic? Did the same force that threw them off also silence the radios? Did the Mariner disappear when it entered the same zone as the Avengers? Why did the sea seem strange and why was the Sun invisible?... It is inconceivable that six airplanes and 27 men could vanish and fail to leave a trace behind. But they did. In the Bermuda Triangle.”



“To take these assertions and rhetorical, leading questions in turn. The US Navy’s enquiry ‘ventured’ 56 facts and 56 opinions on Flight 19’s disappearance. Opinion 37: that “Flight 19 made forced landings in darkness at sea east of the peninsula of Florida sometime after 7:04pm.” Just as, when ships disappear, the weather is always perfect, whatever the records say, the legend insists the sea was calm. It wasn’t, but “rough and unfavourable for a water landing.” Kusche, with carefully suppressed glee, points out that the request to keep alert for ‘clues’ is a standard sign-off in an order cancelling a search. In other words, no such request is *ever* ‘rescinded’, so there’s nothing special about this one. *All* the compasses were not erratic. The lead aircraft’s two were both ‘out’, and another plane took over the navigational lead. The radios weren’t silenced, although comms on their frequency were far from

“rough and unfavourable for a water landing.” Kusche, with carefully suppressed glee, points out that the request to keep alert for ‘clues’ is a standard sign-off in an order cancelling a search. In other words, no such request is *ever* ‘rescinded’, so there’s nothing special about this one. *All* the compasses were not erratic. The lead aircraft’s two were both ‘out’, and another plane took over the navigational lead. The radios weren’t silenced, although comms on their frequency were far from

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good, being overridden by Cuban radio stations; and the flight leader refused, despite repeated requests, to change to the undisturbed 3000-cycle emergency channel (had he done so, the flight’s position would have been easy to plot or (ahem) triangulate.) The Martin Mariner tanker – ‘the flying gas tank’ – was notorious for leaking fumes, and one of the 13-man crew may foolishly have tried to sneak a furtive smoke. Let’s hope it wasn’t a Lucky Strike he lit up. Or there may have been an electrical short circuit. There is no record of any member of Flight 19 saying the sea seemed

strange, or the Sun invisible. That factitious *frisson* is pure Triangular invention – or *frottage*.

Flight 19 disappeared essentially because of bad communications and the fact that the flight leader – the only experienced flyer in the group – became disoriented, and kept changing direction, despite protests from his students, although military discipline kept them flying as he ordered. He was also unfamiliar with the area. Kusche ends his account: “The most tragic part of the incident is that when Lt Taylor [the flight commander] first reported his predicament, he was, according to later testimony, over the reefs and cays just north of the Bahamas. Flight 19 was almost exactly on course when the pilots decided they were lost!”

To labour the point: records show that the so-called ‘Bermuda Triangle’ is not particularly benign, weatherwise, but neither is it statistically more dangerous for ships or aircraft than any other more-or-less arbitrarily defined, well-travelled area of the Earth. The deadliness of the Triangle is a contrivance and a concoction. Kusche has even more fun dismantling Ivan T Sanderson’s concept of ‘vile vortices’ and the ‘Devil’s Sea’ which has supposedly terrified and destroyed Japanese fishermen since forever. Apart from the statutory lack of statistical anomaly here, to anyone who researched the figures, it turns out that the Japanese themselves had, in the mid 1970s at least, hardly ever heard of this terrible place. Oops. What a shock.

Kusche updated his book in 1986 and 1995, renaming himself Larry Kusche. These are more elegantly produced than the original NEL edition, and have photographs, but rather disappointingly don’t take on any cases later than the original’s (1973). Still a must-read though.

Lawrence David Kusche, *The Bermuda Triangle Mystery – Solved*, New English Library 1975; reprinted with update, Larry Kusche, Prometheus Books 1986, 1995.

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Soaring to spiritual freedom

That the first shaman was a woman, according to multiple traditions, is the starting point of a exhilarating study of flying women and their ecstatic experiences across religions and time

Women who Fly

Goddesses, Witches, Mystics, and other Airborne Females

Serinity Young

Oxford University Press 2018

Hb, 358pp, illus, notes, bib, ind, £19.99, \$29.95, ISBN 9780195307887

“A Chukchee proverb declares, ‘Woman is by nature a shaman’. Yet the female dimension of this realm of spiritual experience has often been slighted. Mircea Eliade believed that women shamans represented a degeneration of an originally masculine profession, yet was hard put to explain why so many male shamans customarily dressed in women’s clothing and assumed other female-gendered behaviours. Nor does the masculine-default theory account for widespread traditions, from Buryat Mongolia to the Bwiti religion in Gabon, that the first shaman was a woman.” So writes Max Dashú, the renowned feminist historian who founded the Suppressed Histories Archive, home to her unique pictorial documentation of female cultural heritage.

Serinity Young’s study of ‘Goddesses, Witches, Mystics, and Other Airborne Females’ explores this unfathomable mystery of human society in different cultures and times, showing how spiritual and mystical flight has become an enduring metaphor for rising above and escaping from the mundane weight of everyday ‘reality’. Yes, there is discussion here of female emancipation from patriarchal controls – especially in the biographies of her many female examples – but the recurring message is that the benefits of the processes, rites and traditions of these female exemplars for society as a whole

are both universal and timeless.

Young’s thesis is so much more than mere mythography. “The ability to break free of the earth and to soar is a profound expression of freedom,” says Young. To rise and travel through the air is, ultimately, the means of mediating between the celestial world and the mundane (the parallel to UFO ‘abduction’ experiences).

She explains that it is attained “through dreams or ecstatic experiences; by ascending a mountain, tree, ladder or ritual pole; through self-cultivation, asceticism, or spiritual discipline; or through rituals”. The aerial experience itself takes many forms, including “magical flight, transvection, bilocation, ascension, assumption, and apotheosis.” In her treatment of such paradoxes as a narrative experience of ‘actual’ aerial flight during a journey to the fairy Otherworld, the Heavens or the Land of the Dead (something we forteans might class as an ‘experience anomaly’), Young is remarkably eclectic and carefully flexible.

Somehow paradoxes seem at home in the shamanistic world, and we are conscious of the distinction between the authentic shamans of Siberia and parallel ritualistic psycho-social procedures performed or experienced by ‘elected’ folk elsewhere in the world. Chapter 9 – a critical essay which aids our understanding of female shamans and magical flight, their special focus upon psychical and psychological as well as physical healing, and the importance of transvestism and sex change – is alone worth the price of admission here.

Young introduces the book with a meditation upon the

“Female entities act as tutors to living adepts, guiding them on the Tantric path”

goddess Nike as represented by the winged and headless sculpture known as ‘Victory of Samothrace’ in the Louvre, before diligently deconstructing the great aerial goddesses and witches of Egypt and Magna-Græce, then characters from Biblical, Homeric, Arthurian and European traditions and literature, including essays on ‘Brunhilde and the Valkyries’, ‘Swan Maidens, Dance and Feathered Robes’, ‘Angels, Demons and Fairies’, ‘Witches, Sabbat and Magical Flight’, and the astonishing sanctity of aerial female mystics and saints, from Christian, Islamic and Daoist hagiography.

Other extensive chapters deal with shamanic and mystical themes such as Earth, Sky and Birds’, ‘Flight, Ascension and Assumption’, Women and Flying Dreams’, the relationship between ‘Death, Sex and Immortality’ (including fairy-brides and *succubi*), Female Monsters, and Spirit Animals.

I found chapters 6 and 7 in this engaging and well-written book helped me understand better the role of mystical flight in the twinned mysticism of Hindu and Buddhist Tantrism. This topic is dominated by the Apsaras, Dakinis and Yoginis, female entities who fly in every dimension, using all the sensual arts to their own ends, often in partnership with male gods,

mystics, yogis and magicians. (There are at least four huge circular roofless temples to the collective ‘64-yoginis’ in India, some described by Young.)

These mystical female entities, unpredictable and therefore dangerous, are popularly said to devour the impudent, the unwary or the unprepared and, in art sometimes shown with a knife in one hand and a bowl to catch the streaming blood in the other. They visit the yogis meditating in graveyards, dance on the corpses and in extremis copulate astride the supine male as a metaphor for the union of male and female forces (though the narrative descriptions can be interpreted in terms of symbolic encounters on the shaman’s journey in a different reality). In them we see the sisters of the lusty fox spirits of Japan and China, and their flight, in groups, recalls the wild fairy hosts of Gaelic and Germanic lore.

Yet, as Young shows, they also act as psychopomps to the deceased, and tutors and consorts to living adepts, heroes and kings

guiding them on the Tantric path to wisdom and immortality. A parallel exists in Daoist psychical ‘alchemy’, exemplified most famously by China’s mysterious Queen Mother of the West – the immortal Hsi Wang Mu – a shamanic nature goddess who dates back to the 15th century BC and yet who appears through Chinese history as both tutor and consort to a number of great emperors. The object of their sexual rituals is most definitely not sex for pleasure or procreation, thus confounding the predominant male view of female sexuality.



Continued on page 62

From meme to murder

A thought-form embodied, it is suggested, as a *tulpa* because of people's beliefs in him, triggers two disturbed teenagers to murder

The Slenderman Mysteries

An Internet Urban Legend Comes to Life

Nick Redfern

New Page Books 2018

Pb, 288pp, illus, bib, \$15.99, ISBN 9781632651129

The Slenderman (or “Slender Man”) began in June 2009 as a *creepypasta* (derived from *copyypasta*, itself derived from ‘cut and paste’) meme created by artist Eric Knudsen. It had been submitted to a Photoshop contest on the horror website *Something Awful*, but went viral, inspiring other Slender Man stories and photos. This ‘fan fiction’ branched out into computer games and a YouTube webisode series entitled *Marble Hornets*, resulting in an increasingly ornate mythology. Knudsen had tapped into a psychologically potent image: a faceless, tall, thin, dark-suited, tentacled entity, a bogeyman influenced by sources as diverse as HP Lovecraft, the Men in Black, the Shadow People and the Mad Gasser of Matoon. [See FT317:30–37]

In 2014, two 12-year-old girls, Anissa Weier and Morgan Geysler, of Waukesha, Wisconsin, conspired to murder their best friend, Payton Lautner, as a bizarre sacrifice. They had read about Slender Man on the website *Creepypasta*, where it was said that he was most often seen in the woods around suburban populations, preying primarily upon children. Both girls had experienced hallucinations of the Slender Man, and Geysler claimed to have had telepathic communications with the creature. Their sacrifice of Lautner was intended to convince the Slender Man to spare them and their families. The girls led Lautner into a nearby state forest, and Geysler

stabbed her 19 times with a five-inch steak knife; miraculously, she survived. The crime garnered worldwide notoriety. Geysler and Weier stood trial for attempted murder and were sentenced to 40 and 25 years respectively.

The crime was tragic, yet rich with psychological, sociological, criminological and folkloric complexity. In *The Slenderman Mysteries*, Nick Redfern instead focuses on the less prosaic paranormal elements, principally the notion that the Slender Man may have literally acquired a life of his own; i.e. that he is a *tulpa*, or thought-form, given physical embodiment by virtue of

enough people believing in him. As evidence of this, Redfern points to an episode of *Coast to Coast AM* that aired on the late evening and early hours before the attack on Lautner. The theory is that because it reached a massive audience, this broadcast “helped cause the event,” which is an awkward – not to mention irresponsible – assertion: the perpetrators had clearly planned the murder before the episode aired. Redfern uses this Slender Man-as-tulpa notion as a springboard to propose, without much evidence, that the Internet may have, à la Skynet or *The Matrix*, developed its own consciousness, of which the Slender Man is one manifestation, a fiction that has become magically ‘entangled’ with reality.

Another theory is that the Slender Man existed before 2009, and that Knudsen merely tapped into something that was already there, which is like proclaiming that Stephen King invented scary clowns. Knudsen wasn't harnessing an objective entity, but reflecting our collective fear of the unknown. His facelessness suggests a being that rests uneasily

just beyond the realm of comprehension; faces generally indicate whether one intends harm or not; if something is faceless, its intentions remain inscrutable. Similarly, his tentacles suggest slithering snakes, or creatures of the deep. There's also the standby dark mansion, dark woods and the familiar ‘taker of children’ theme, a trope that stretches back from Grimm's fairy tales to the beginnings of storytelling; discussing the potency of the Slender Man mythology, Redfern dutifully refers to the Pied Piper of Hamelin.

In chapters where Redfern directs his attention to this reality (in his discussions of the Slender Man's origins and influences, or its echoing of common folkloric themes), *The Slenderman Mysteries* substantially improves, yet even here Redfern's research – comprising primarily a handful of interviews with other writers or experiencers – is cursory. The real world attempted murder by psychologically damaged teens and other Slender Man-related events, introduced approximately one-third of the way through, remain more mystifying than Redfern's speculative, supernatural ‘mysteries’. They should be central to his book, yet, given the target audience, this precipitating event is almost begrudgingly raised and then quickly discarded. Redfern is at his best when he quits the armchair – or Internet – investigating, and rather fruitless speculations and contemplation of coincidences and conspiracies, and actually pauses to consider the more chilling real-world causes and implications of the phenomenon. One finds only hints of a more fascinating and disturbing book within.

Eric Hoffman

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Menagerie

The History of Exotic Animals in England, 1100–1837

Caroline Grigson

Oxford University Press 2018

Pb, 349pp, illus, bib, indexes, £12.99, ISBN 9780198714712

The author, a zoologist and honorary professor of the Institute of Archaeology, has written a book both scholarly and pleasurable to read. Her knowledge enables her to identify precise species of animal where original sources may be misleading; for example, the ‘hunting tiger’ kept by William, Duke of Cumberland (the Butcher of Culloden) at Windsor Great Park (together with other curiosities such as ostriches, lions and wolves) was in fact an Indian cheetah. Similarly, the second Duke of Richmond's menagerie at Goodwood included a ‘Java Hare’ (an *agouti*, the first time one of these “very tame and inoffensive” South American rodents had been seen in England). Goodwood also featured baboons, sloth bears and mountain cats, but the most spectacular and prized animal, the elephant, eluded the Duke. On board a ship anchored at Blackwall Dock, the unfortunate beast was incinerated when the ship's cargo of saltpetre exploded.

The enthusiasm with which the burgeoning middle classes displayed both their wealth and their interest in the expanding world of empire found its embodiment in cabinets of curiosity. Living animals and taxidermised or skeletal remains were a key aspect of this collecting mania, Sir Hans Sloane being a leading example. He kept several animals as household pets, including a one-eyed wolverine, a “large greyish green lizard from Malaga,” and a marmot, who would “run up and down stairs like a catt or dog but loved the kitchen best for the sake of the cook's favours.”

The British Empire, with its exploration, colonisation, and plunder, brought many species of exotic animals and birds to Britain in the 16th and 17th centuries. But Grigson demonstrates that such curiosity for unusual creatures had begun well before this, with the famous Tower of London menagerie founded in 1204. Often, new arrivals were gifts from other monarchs, typically, animals symbolising power or majesty.



A polar bear was thus sent to London by the King of Norway, and could be seen fishing in the Thames.

Earlier still, peacocks are depicted in Romano-British villa mosaics. Later brought over by the Normans, they were valued as a luxury food as well as for their plumage. Parrots were familiar birds in 14th century England. Chaucer refers to them as 'popinjays.' Studying illuminated manuscripts, Grigson deduces them to be ring-necked parakeets, now a common sight in 21st century London and south-east England – thus, not as recent an arrival as once thought. She speculates that mediæval parakeets derived from a feral population in Egypt, brought to Europe by Italian merchants.

Other exotics came to Britain by way of Mediterranean North Africa, the Islamic trans-Saharan trade routes and the spice roads that connected Europe to the Middle East and India.

In addition to royal or aristocratic zoos, travelling menageries such as Polito's, based in Exeter, fuelled the demand for exotics and gave thousands of ordinary people the chance to see them. These were the precursors to London Zoo, with which Grigson concludes her comprehensive history of the British fascination with non-native creatures.

Chris Josiffe

★★★★★

Scythians

Warriors of Ancient Siberia: The BP Exhibition

Ed. St John Simpson & Svetlana Pankova

Thames & Hudson 2017

Hb, 368pp, illus, ind, £40.00, ISBN 9780500021286

This lavish tome was published in association with the Hermitage Museum in St Petersburg to accompany the British Museum exhibition that closed in January. The Scythians were an ancient nomadic people who lived in the Eurasian steppe from 900 BC to 200 BC, feared adversaries and respected neighbours of the Assyrians, Persians and Ancient Greeks. They pioneered saddles that let them fight more effectively on horseback than

any of the settled civilisations they encountered. However, without written records, they were gradually forgotten, frozen in the Siberian permafrost for over 2,000 years. The book has over 450 spectacular images and describes the life and funerary beliefs of these formidable warriors. Many rare and recently discovered finds are described – personal garments, possessions made from gold, leather, fur and felt, and tattooed human skin.

Paul Sieveking

★★★★★

Middle English Marvels

Magic, Spectacle, and Morality in the Fourteenth Century

Tara Williams

Pennsylvania State University Press 2018

Hb, 176pp, illus, maps, bib, ind, \$89.95, ISBN 9780271079639

Middle English Marvels examines the strange, magical spectacles that occur throughout the literature of mediæval England. From *Sir Gawaine and the Green Knight* to *Sir Orfeo*, *Lybæus Desconus*, and even the *Canterbury*



Tales, Tara Williams studies the appearance of fairy spells, monstrous creatures and other marvels – as opposed to miracles – in Middle English writing.

She argues that Middle English literature presents marvels in a way that emphasises their ambiguities. This includes the way in which, for instance, the monstrous 'worme' of *Lybæus Desconus* combines human and monstrous characteristics, or the fairies of *Sir Orfeo* imitate human social structure while maintaining an otherworldliness. Examples of marvels reveal ways in which authors create ambiguous situations – events that exist outside normal codes of behaviour or even expectations of reality, but which lack the security of an explicitly religious context.

Williams contends that it is this ambiguity that allows literary marvels not only to test the moral qualities of the stories' protagonists but also to raise questions about ethical systems in general and their limitations.

Middle English Marvels presents a fascinating perspective on perceptions of the marvellous

and magical in the high Middle Ages, especially in terms of how it relates to other aspects of the study of mediæval magic. This perspective will interest anyone who's curious about how society's view of things outside the mainstream of human experience has changed over time.

However, *Middle English Marvels* isn't intended for the non-specialist student of the unusual. It's part of an dialogue within the field of Middle English literature, and it doesn't include much introductory material for the general reader. It's best appreciated with at least some knowledge of the texts it covers and their context.

Within that context, *Middle English Marvels* is a fascinating look at a specific aspect of Middle English literature. It presents some compelling points about the effects mediæval authors used these spectacles to create; if you're interested in the mediæval fantastic, it's well worth investigating.

James Holloway

★★★★★

Strange Experiences

Robert Snow

Flying Disk Press 2018

Pb, 47pp, £5.75, ISBN 9781980379218

Dr R C C Clay lived in a haunted house in Fovant, Wiltshire, where he worked as a medical practitioner. His experiences and those recounted by family and friends gave him a lifelong interest in the paranormal, and he always noted anything related to this subject. Robert Snow, Clay's grandson, inherited these notes and has transcribed them in this small booklet.

Clay's experiences ranged from dreams and strange feelings to sightings of ghostly figures. In October 1918 he had a vivid dream about his brother, who was on the Western Front; his brother was suffering from a wounded throat and struggling to send him a message. Two weeks later, Clay was told his brother had been killed by a throat injury at the exactly time as the dream.

Sometimes he felt *suggestions* of the paranormal; for example, he feels something brush his leg as he reads in the sitting room,

and wonders if it was the ghost of his spaniel Bruff, who had died 18 months earlier.

Other experiences at home include the visitation of his dead brother in the dining room in the late 1920s. On several occasions he felt the presence of his dead mother when he needed help. Throughout the 1960s he records occasions when he pops in to see patients on a whim to discover they are in urgent need of his help, which he regards as examples of ESP. At least three times when the thought of deer came into his mind, one appeared where he imagined they might be.

On two of his trips to a patient at Copley Manor, near Woodyates, Dorset, Clay saw a man in a large cloak being carried in a sedan chair slung between two horses; men and packhorses moved slowly over the landscape. He thought this strange cavalcade was a ghostly reenactment of Bishop Ælsgie's return from meeting King Alfred at Oakley Down.

Clay was motoring home from archæological excavations near Pokesdown, near Bournemouth, when he saw a horseman riding parallel with his car. He wore a long, loose coat and was waving an implement over his head in a threatening manner. Just as he began to realise this was a vision of a prehistoric man the horse and rider suddenly disappeared. A similar horseman followed two girls as they were cycling to a dance one night, and a local shepherd said that the horseman vanished just as he was about to ask for a light for his pipe.

The last few pages are rounded off by Robert Snow's own experiences, which include an illuminated, circular misty cloud that appeared at the bottom of his bed. This was seen by Robert as he was nodding off to sleep, so it might well be an example of an hypnagogic hallucination.

This collection of notes shows Dr Clay's empathy with his family, friends, patients, landscape, history and the shadowy world of the paranormal.

Nigel Watson

★★★★★

Continued from page 59

The cure of the questioner

Ibn Khaldun may have been the Arab world's greatest mind, but this biography situates him amidst the magic and alchemy of his time

Ibn Khaldun

An Intellectual Biography

Robert Irwin

Princeton University Press 2018

Hb, xv, 243pp, bib, ind, \$29.95, ISBN 9780691174662

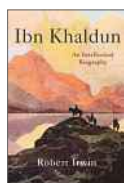
Robert Irwin needs no introduction; a respected scholar of Islamic culture and history and a writer with a countercultural appeal as his autobiographical narratives *Satan Wants Me* [1999] and *Memoirs of a Dervish* [2011] testify.

So what can he add to the mountain of existing discourse that considers the Tunis-born Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406) as the “greatest intellectual to have ever appeared in the Arab world” and the often acclaimed progenitor of an array of critical methods such as sociology, historiography, futurology, economics and history?

Irwin wishes to question this reputation and reconsider Ibn Khaldun as a product of his time, a time that is radically alien to the modern reader. Quite a task – and yet Irwin skilfully describes the transitory nature of Ibn Khaldun's early life and his desire to make sense of the ebb and flow of history. Before an exhaustive appraisal of Ibn Khaldun's masterwork, the *Muqaddima* – a vast compendium of North African culture – we are walked through his life within the Hafsid, Merinid, Mamluk and Berber courts, the ‘Game of Thrones’, always aware of the existential reality of the Black Death which arrived in North Africa around 1348.

Disillusioned with the pessimism and reliance upon hearsay that typified Islamic history, the *Muqaddima*

(Prolegomena) was intended to provide a new model of historical accountancy. Begun in 1375 in Qal'at Baanu Salama (now Western Algeria) the *Muqaddima* was intended to be the preface to his history of North African nomadic dynasties, the *Kitab al-'ibar wa diwan al-mubtada wa'l-khabar*



(‘The Book of Warning and Collection of New Things and Historical Information’), but its subsequent history places it at the centre of Ibn Khaldun's intellectual

offerings. Irwin breaks down its contents into defined categories that demonstrate that the mediæval mind is far from familiar to the modern reader. Ignoring Ibn Khaldun's then radical notion of a cyclical theory of history and economic insights into population growth and taxation, the predominant content of the *Muqaddima* remains more typical of the mediæval mindset: magic, the occult, dream analysis, the curious fortune telling device the Za'iraja, and alchemy. Irwin contrasts contemporary claims concerning Ibn Khaldun's ‘modernism’ with a reminder that he remained throughout his life a religious reactionary, representative of the far from benign school of Maliki jurisprudence.

Following the completion of the *Muqaddima* in 1378, Ibn Khaldun relocated to Cairo and by 1382 was attending the Mamluk court and entered the most secure and stable part of his life. Always aware of the vagaries of court life, he took up appointments at the prestigious Zahiriyya and Saghitmishiyya madrasas and later on became the head of the Khanqa Sufi convent. By 1389 he was named as Qadi (a judge within Maliki law),

a title that was later removed from him as his possible Sufi allegiances conflicted with the dynastic *status quo*. As one of Irwin's preferred area of study is Sufism, he explores the idea that Ibn Khaldun's recognition as a Sufi teacher has been occluded from many appraisals of his life in Egypt. Not that we can ever know for sure, he reminds us, as Ibn Khaldun's ‘autobiography’, the *Al-Tarif bi Ibn Khaldun wa rihlatihi sharqan wa gharban* (‘Presenting Ibn Khaldun and His Journeys in the East and the West’) and his singular contribution to Sufi thought, the *Shifa' al-sa'il li-tadhib al-masa'il* (‘The Cure of the Questioner through the Clarification of the Problems’) provide no amplification upon the subject.

Beyond Irwin's analysis of the *Muqaddima*, the remainder of the biography considers how it has inspired such writers as Frank Herbert and Isaac Asimov in their monumental science fictions and a plethora of global thinkers from the 16th century onwards. Ibn Khaldun's relevance to colonial and postcolonial discourse is considered in detail and his importance to writers such as Ernst Gellner (1925–1995) and Muhsin Mahdi (1926–2007), amongst many others, digested and analysed.

Almost certainly written with scholars of mediæval North Africa in mind, the Islamic world in general and cultural theorists, the book by no means excludes a broader base of readers and to Irwin's credit all technical terms relating to Islam and Muslim society are fully explained. With extensive notes, bibliography and index, Irwin's ‘Intellectual Biography’ is a valuable research tool and a welcome addition to any library.

Chris Hill

★★★★★

Drawing on an impressive range of translated sources, Young shows how this transcendental rite, in its many symbolic forms, is used to generate the spiritual ingredients of magic and immortality, the ‘magic powers’ called *siddhis* in Hindu and Buddhist traditions, which include aerial flight, teleportation, bilocation and other forms of ‘supernatural transportation’. In this practical world, the yogini cult survived in India, Young shows, because it provided the patriarchy with empowering prophecies for military conflicts and social problems.

Professor Young – an anthropologist at New York's Museum of Natural History – succeeds in keeping under control her main themes and their proliferating branches with a narrative style that engages even the non-academic reader. After the gratifying tour of her often difficult (but well explained) subject matter, she brings the journey into our archaic collective psyche back to the modern day with a study of aviatrixes (primarily Amelia Earhart, Hanna Reitsch and Wonder Woman) as a modern type with ancient antecedents, combining nationalism and heroism.

This exciting cornucopia of meticulously researched cultural wisdom about flying, in all its forms, is important to us all. Young's focus upon the female component reveals, not ignores or conceals, the mystical alchemical cycles of creation and destruction which include a vital male component. In the most magical way, flying appears as an expression of both the Feminine principle (remembering, for example, that all the flying male Christian saints are ‘brides of Christ’) and the release from all constraints which is the necessary prelude to Creation (and Illumination). *Women who Fly* should be mandatory reading for anyone interested in the mysteries of being human in a world we barely comprehend. I look forward to more from Serinity Young.

Bob Rickard

★★★★★



ALSO RECEIVED

WE LEAF THROUGH A SMALL SELECTION OF THE DOZENS OF BOOKS THAT HAVE ARRIVED AT FORTÉAN TOWERS IN RECENT MONTHS...

Seven Years of Grace

Sara Rath

Vermont Historical Society, 2016.
Pb, 455pp, illus, notes, \$24.95, ISBN 9780934720663

In the decade before the American Civil War, a young woman named Achsa Sprague toured the States with a lecture programme promoting women's rights, the abolition of slavery, prison reform, and Spiritualism; one of a small number of itinerant female lecturers. Over seven years, she would perform alone on the stage as a medium, singing hymns and speaking in a trance state. She attracted audiences of thousands who followed her enthusiastically and staunchly faced the inevitable groups of hecklers and sceptics also drawn to such events. Sprague's story begins with her as a shy, sickly girl barely tolerated by a drunken father. One day in November 1852, she had a vision of angels which boosted her recovery and gave her the sense of purpose she longed for. She embraced the Spiritualist movement and began lecturing. Sara Rath – an award-winning local historian – brings Sprague's life and activities to life using period documentation from the Vermont Historical Society and other archives, but as a novel. As a technique, it works very well and illuminates a curious but influential strand of antebellum America.

Origins of the Sphinx

Robert M. Schoch and Robert Bauval

Inner Traditions Bear, 2017
Pb, \$24.95, 528pp, illus, colour plates, bib, index, ISBN 9781620555255

If any writers are favourites to solve the riddle of the Great Sphinx of Giza it must be Schoch and Bauval. Both are veteran "Egyptology outsiders" with many provocative books discussing ancient civilisations in general and Egypt in particular, and appear here in what the blurb calls "a provocative collaboration" exploring their conviction that the Sphinx is far older

than the accepted timeline of Egyptology allows. This orthodox view holds that it was erected around 2500 BC as a memorial to pharaoh Khafre. The authors disagree. They first show how there is no supportive evidence for this opinion and set out to discover the true 'when' and, just as importantly, 'why' in a tightly argued dialogue of articles. Schoch's updates his well-known theory that an earlier date can be derived from studying the water-weathering patterns on the monument, adding new seismic and geological data. Bauval extends his own publicised theory about the constellations of Orion and Leo being used in ancient times to orient important structures. Together, they summarise the significant evidence for an older construction phase at Giza and conclude that the original monument was restored and recarved during the Old Kingdom era. That earlier construction, they demonstrate, was by "an advanced pre-Pharaonic civilisation that existed circa 12,000 years ago" and was contemporaneous with the fascinating Göbekli Tepe complex in Turkey. Schoch and Bauval present a well-written, well-argued and well-illustrated thesis (including 16 colour plates) which deserves serious consideration.

Levitation

Peter Adey

Reaktion Books 2017
Hb, 296pp, illus, refs, ind, £20.00, ISBN 9781780237374

This wide-ranging and well-illustrated study is not so much about incidents of levitation as about the ideas of floating, rising up and moving through the air, drawing examples from philosophy, religion, magic, science and popular culture. Adey, a professor of Human Geography at the University of London, writes engagingly as he reveals the remarkable depth and extent of these ideas, how they have become embedded in human society, and how they have manifested or been expressed. From the power of ascetic saints and surrealist art to flying superheroes and

astronauts in null-gravity, through today's CGI tricks with camera or computer, and even further into the future with hovering cities, Adey keeps you thinking. Behind our spiritual, imaginative and scientific lives, the idea of levitation symbolises nothing less than an epiphany, our release from (or triumph over) those forces that ground us or hold us back at the same time revealing the unlimited prospects ahead of us.

Hauntings, Horrors and Dancing with the Dead

Bloody Mary

Red Wheel Weiser Books 2016
Pb, 288pp, illus, bib, \$19.95, ISBN 9781578635665

The author behind the persona claims to be an 11th generation Creole woman, born in New Orleans and raised in the traditions of both Catholicism and Voodoo, and once a disciple of the late Marie Laveau, the original Voodoo Queen. In her role as a *mamaissi* (an African river priestess) and a Haitian Voodoo *asogwe*, she says she conducts all kinds of ceremonies as an intermediary between the living and the dead, including acting as a psychopomp for lost souls, wedding, burials and baptisms. While the book is an unashamed advertisement for her services, it is also a collection of stories of her adventures in the shadow world around New Orleans.

Energy, Cold Fusion & Antigravity

Frank Znidarsic

Amazon 2017
Pb, 133pp, illus, bib, £10.45, ISBN 9781480270237

As forteans we applaud science mavericks with their self-published theories, whose strident and self-important tones often drown out the intended message of their particular inventions, creations or discoveries. The hope is that among the 'wacky' and unorthodox there might be, someday, a truly important insight which

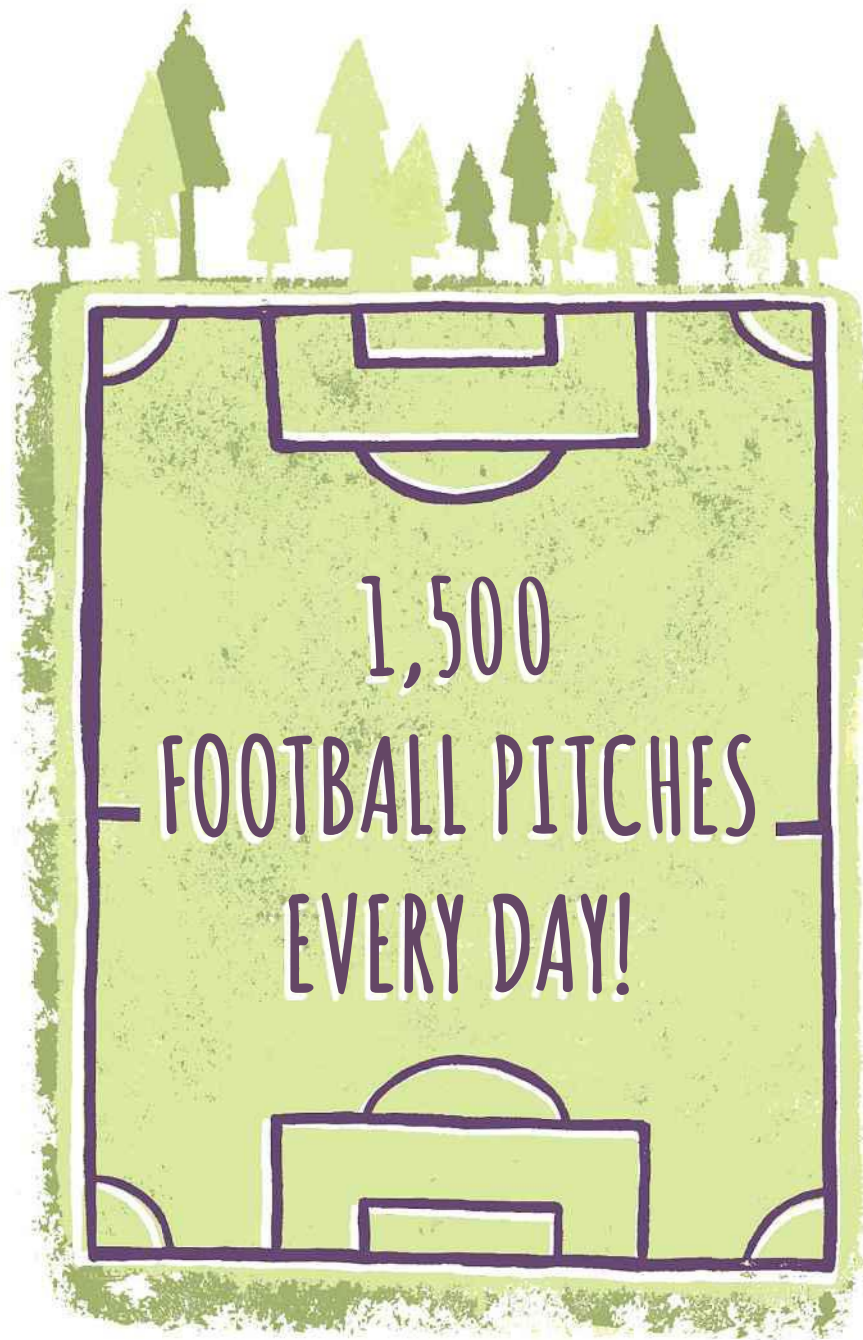
will properly challenge orthodox science. Author Znidarsic is a professional electrical engineer who, for years, has monitored claims in the field of cold fusion and 'anti-gravitational' experiments. Here he explains why he thinks these might work and how they might be applied. Hopefully, some scientists will read it and respond. If he is in error, learning precisely why might be more informative than the usual blanking such papers get from the Establishment.

The Next Fifty Years

John Brockman, ed.

Weidenfeld and Nicholson 2002
Hb, 301pp, £12.99, ISBN 9780297829256

A bit late with this one but it is well worth the mention. Brockman, founder of a literary and software agency and publisher of *Edge*, the online forum for scientists, presents an anthology of short essays by 25 leading specialists in the major sciences. The eponymous topic divided the book into two sections, dealing with theoretical and practical aspects of the future. A brief tour of the first topics includes 'What is life?' 'Can minds be swapped?' 'Moral development?' 'What children can teach scientists' and 'Can science understand sadness?'. The second part includes 'How genesis might work on other planets', 'Merging flesh and machine', 'Will we get smarter?', 'Rethinking the mind-brain problem', 'Understanding matter and complexity', 'Interactive clothing', 'The changing nature of humanity', and a cracking piece by Richard Dawkins on ways of measuring scientific and other advancements. Brockman was inspired by a 1951 Reith lecture by the biologist JZ Young, who said: "We are going through a rapidly accelerating epistemological sea change and using unprecedentedly powerful tools. What we have lacked is an intellectual culture able to transform its own premises as fast as our technologies are transforming us." The contributors attempt to sketch out what that culture might be from their own specialities. Good thoughtful science writing.



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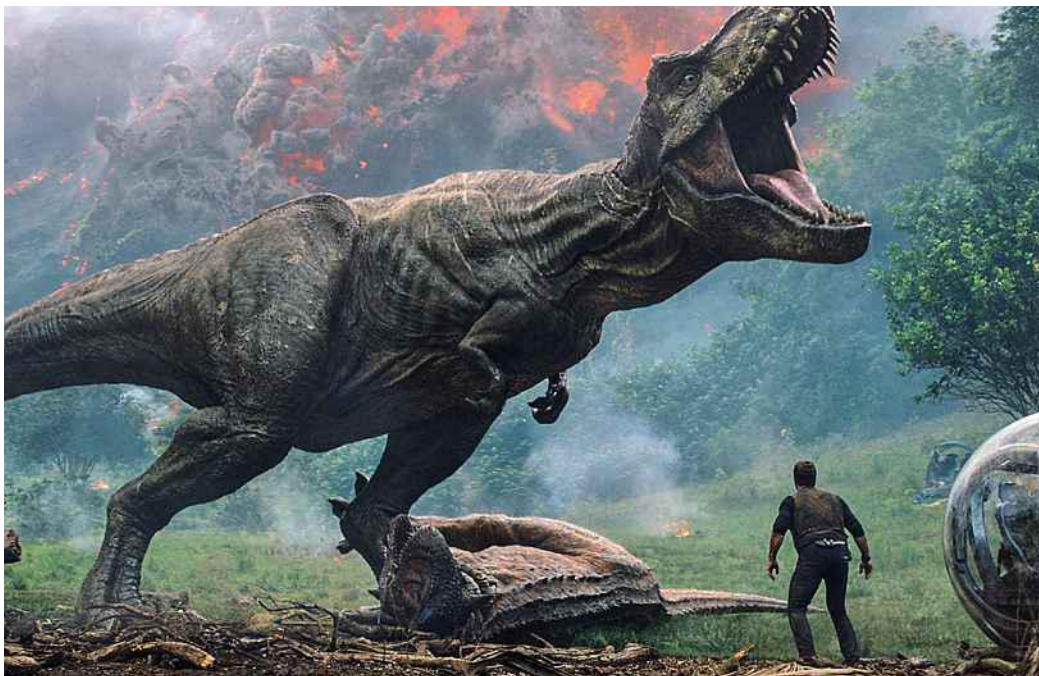
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Tyrannosaurus wrecks

Despite good looks, winning leads and some exciting action sequences, the latest instalment in the *Jurassic Park* franchise fails to evolve much beyond its equally small-brained predecessor...



Jurassic World: Fallen Kingdom

Dir JA Bayona, US 2018
On UK release

In 2015, *Jurassic World* divided audiences and critics between those who enjoyed it for what it was, namely a visually entertaining popcorn flick seasoned with nostalgia, and those who felt it was sorely lacking in terms of the heart that made the original film compelling beyond its superficial appeal as a dinosaur rampage movie.

With director JA Bayona receiving substantial praise for past efforts like *The Orphanage* as well as the more recent *A Monster Calls*, there was no doubt that the director would bring at least a degree of visual competence to the *Jurassic World* sequel.

And it does indeed start very well with a thrilling and atmospheric opening sequence

Bayona brings an almost gothic fairytale flavour to these set pieces

that gives the viewer a taster of Bayona's talents as a visual storyteller as well as serving as a paraphrase of the extended ending of the original *Jurassic Park*, which never made it beyond the storyboard phase back in the day. While it takes a while, such sequences soon prove to be plentiful, which will undoubtedly thrill many viewers. However, some may find Bayona's approach too tonally distant from the original, as the Spanish director brings an almost gothic fairytale flavour to several of these set pieces.

As we are reintroduced to the protagonists of the 2015 film,

the plot (what there is of it) begins to unfold. Bryce Dallas Howard as Claire and Chris Pratt as Owen are both natural and likable, but neither is afforded much character development. And except for the exposition-dumping we get – a few archive clips of Owen documenting how he formed a bond with his velociraptor Blue when she was merely a cuddly little ball of razor-sharp teeth, claws and killer instinct – nothing else is done to explore the bond between man and prehistoric beast; and that is an awful shame, as it would have given the film a distinctive, if silly, charm that dinosaur enthusiasts would have thoroughly enjoyed. Likewise, nothing is done to further explore the relationship between Owen and Claire; they have no interesting exchanges once the action kicks into gear, resulting in non-existent character arcs for a duo that has plenty of potential. New

characters are also introduced without taking more than the absolute bare minimum of time to flesh them out, resulting in a handful of underdeveloped supporting characters reminiscent of the equally bland supporting cast of *Jurassic World*. As a result, there is a sinful waste of talent all around. This leaves the viewer unable to invest in any of the human characters, and by proxy the various plot twists and, indeed, the film premise as a whole, as one eventually begins to realise that *Jurassic World: Fallen Kingdom* has little more to offer than a string of unevenly executed action set pieces.

While the film is undoubtedly leagues better than the eternally abysmal *Jurassic Park 3*, it still feels like a hollow shell that captures none of the magic of the original, just as it also completely wastes the potential offered by cast members such as Chris Pratt, Bryce Dallas Howard, Rafe Spall and Toby Jones. Arguably, *Jurassic Park* was also a relentless thrill ride with seemingly never-ending perils for our protagonists to face, but what made the viewer engage with that film was the combination of the marvellous technical achievements of Stan Winston's team and the humanity that Steven Spielberg so competently injected into the 1993 original.

What we are left with this time around may be equally relentless, on a purely superficial level, but there is nothing here for the viewer to engage with emotionally, making *Jurassic World: Fallen Kingdom* regrettably disengaging – even for someone like yours truly, who never outgrew her obligatory childhood obsession with all things dinosaur.

Leyla Mikkelsen



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)

Xtro

Dir Harry Bromley-Davenport, UK 1982
Second Sight Films, £17.99 (Blu-ray)

Lots of kids in 1980s movies have absentee fathers, but at least Tony's dad Sam has a stellar excuse: he's been abducted by aliens. Tony sees it happen. They're playing fetch with the dog when Sam is snatched away by a mysterious light; but mum Rachel? She's having none of it. Three years later, she assumes he's run off. Now she's got a new life and a new man, but when the strange light returns... so does Sam; and he wants to come home. Only now he's inhaling gas straight from the fireplace and sucking the juice out of snake eggs.

Welcome to *Xtro*, a British horror from 1982 that left a huge impression on me as a youth, not least because it repulsed me so much. Seriously, the film has moments of such toe-curling body horror that Cronenberg would be proud; like when Sam sucks his kid's shoulder and transforms it into a vein-pulsing, throbbing teat (yuck!). Or the film's iconic money-shot, when a woman gives birth to a fully-grown man (and yes, it's as messy as it sounds). If you think this all sounds like throwaway exploitation, you'd be wrong. In interviews, director Harry Bromley Davenport insists it's just a silly little flick, but there's far more to it than that. Three key elements elevate *Xtro* into something special. Firstly, theatrical actors take the lead roles. Having genuine, heartfelt performances amongst the quivering grue is strangely unsettling. Secondly, the special effects are rather fabulous – not least the innovative creature designs



Clips of this movie are shown on YouTube as evidence of real alien sightings



(performed by robotic dancers of the time, Tik and Tok). The creature is so striking, rubber suit and all, that I've seen clips of this movie shown on YouTube as evidence of real alien sightings.

Lastly, there's the gonzo storyline. Yes, *Xtro* already takes a few wacky turns in the first 20 minutes, but when the dancing clown midgets and the six-foot Action Man turn up, you realise you're watching one of the most unpredictable horrors of the decade. Roger Ebert called the film "depressing", "ugly" and "sad". Arguably, he's quite right: but that's what makes the film so darn fascinating. It's disturbing, inventive and impossible to forget. Hats off to Nucleus Films, who've put *Xtro* out with some superb extras and a nice print (tip: watch the Original UK version, not the 2018 Director's Edition; both are included here). Look out also for Tony's accent. While his parents both speak in clear, clipped RP, Tony – bafflingly – has the 'cor-blimey' twang of the Artful Dodger. No matter though – it's just another left-field touch in a gloriously off-the-wall shocker.

Threads

Dir Mick Jackson, UK 1984
Simply Media, £14.99 (DVD)

Nearly 20 years after the debacle of *The War Game*, the 1965 drama-documentary about nuclear war that was commissioned, filmed, completed and then not broadcast – the BBC finally had the courage to try it again. And this time they got it right.

Threads is devastating. At times it's almost heart-stopping.

Against a backdrop of increasing international tension between Russia and America over Iran – which could be translated to a similar situation today in a blink – in Sheffield, middle-class Ruth and working-class Jimmy are about to get married because Ruth is pregnant – again, a perennial situation, but this time deeply personal.

Throughout the film the massive horror that is nuclear war, too big to be comprehended, is made immediate through its effect on individual people. We hear the ratcheting up towards war as they do, through the news on the car radio and the pub TV. Life goes on. Ruth and Jimmy are decorating their new flat; their parents meet, uncomfortably.

People out shopping hear the sirens and start screaming and running. From individuals, cut to a view of the city: the sky whites out – and teleprinter-type text on the screen (its sound like gunfire) states coldly: "08.35: Single warhead explodes above North Sea. Energy pulse burns out many electrical systems." Power cables are shown shorting; communications fail. Two minutes later missiles hit a NATO target 20 miles from Sheffield, and the horrible image of a mushroom cloud hangs over the city. People scream and cover their faces against the intense glare. A car crashes. A middle-aged man says "Bloody hell!" A woman puts her hands to her face in shock, and the next shot is of urine trickling over her smart shoes. The blast blows out walls and windows; people struggle to stay upright. The last we see of Jimmy is running from his stalled car towards his home. With the next blast, directly above Sheffield, buildings explode in fire; milk bottles on a doorstep melt. So do people.

It's the juxtaposition of



massive destruction and tiny moments of individuals' lives that makes *Threads* so powerful from beginning to end. It's the brilliance of the script by Barry Hines (*A Kestrel for a Knave, Kes*) and the attention to detail of Mick Jackson's direction (*A Very British Coup* and much else); and it's the simple, down-to-earth acting of all the cast, especially Karen Meagher, who is outstanding as Ruth. Like the rest of the cast, she was fairly unknown and with little acting experience – but apparently she was a fervent CND supporter.

The other acting credit must go to Harry Beety, playing the hapless local government official at the head of Sheffield Council. When nuclear war seems more likely than not, he's thrust into leadership, summoning assorted people from the council to be medical officer, information officer, transport officer and so on – people, like him, with minimal training in taking control after the bomb drops. But control of what? Sheffield lies in ruins, and the town hall collapses on top of the emergency operations team, trapping them and rendering their already inadequate efforts useless.

The two families – Ruth's and Jimmy's – follow the government's instructions from the 'Protect and Survive' leaflet (I still have my copy, as pathetic now as it was then), leaning a door against an inside wall and covering it with cushions as a shelter. Eventually, in different, unpleasant ways, they die. Ruth survives, sometimes by eating dead animals raw; and the rest of the film, briefly, is her story. She has her baby, alone in a barn; it's an interesting comment on American sensitivities that the only cut when *Threads* was broadcast in the States was Ruth biting through the umbilical cord. Over the next 10 years or so Ruth and her daughter Jane somehow survive. Ruth has cataracts from the radiation; Jane and the few other children speak very basic broken English.

What sets *Threads* apart from other nuclear attack films is its focus on how utterly wrecked the whole country is, not just from physical destruction, not just from radiation, but from a nuclear winter which lasts for

years, plunging the temperature below the point where any crops can grow, making every day a struggle just to stay alive. Watching it, you keep thinking that life can't possibly get any worse. It does. The final scene – after everything else we've seen – is heart-rending.

An indication of the frightening and awful effect of *Threads* is that the DVD has a 15 certificate, while the American equivalent *The Day After*, and even *The War Game*, considered for years too horrific to broadcast, only have 12s. This release, remastered in 2K from the original prints, is sharper and cleaner than earlier versions, with a different colour balance. It works. There are revealing commentaries from director Mick Jackson and actor Karen Meagher, and on a second DVD four excellent short documentaries about the making of the film, plus PDFs of articles from *Radio Times* the week it was first broadcast, and letters of reaction the week after.

The stark realism of the film was helped by the city of Sheffield – at the time a "nuclear-free zone" – giving the crew an entire estate due for demolition to film in. The destruction of streets of houses was so real, in part, because the streets being destroyed were real. Two years earlier, Mick Jackson had produced a BBC *QED* documentary on nuclear war, 'A Guide to Armageddon'; the depth of his research is what powers *Threads*.

David V Barrett



When the Wind Blows

Dir Jimmy T Murakami, UK 1986
BFI, £14.99 (Dual Format)

Over three decades ago, I saw a dramatic production of *When the Wind Blows* in the little studio at Harrogate Theatre. It was one of the most powerful plays I've ever seen. I still recall the moment when the bomb fell, the frightful noise (they used infrasound, so it was felt as much as heard)... and then, what seemed an age later, that terrifying silence.

The play was based on Raymond Briggs's 1982 graphic

novel. It was followed in 1986 by an animated version, now released by the BFI on dual format DVD/blu-ray.

The story is simple. Jim and Hilda are a retired couple, unsophisticated, a little naïve. Briggs based them on his parents; here they're voiced by Sir John Mills and Dame Peggy Ashcroft. Jim comes home with booklets from the government ('Protect and Survive' again) and the local council, saying what to do in the event of a nuclear attack. Jim has complete trust in what the authorities tell him; Hilda says they got through the last war, so this won't be any different. "Oh no, dear, that's old-fashioned. With modern scientific methods you just use doors with cushions on top." So Jim whitewashes the windows and takes doors off their hinges and leans them against a wall to build an "inner core or refuge"; then wonders how to follow the next instruction, to keep all doors closed.

The bomb falls. The wind blows. Jim and Hilda survive the blast, but succumb to radiation poisoning; and to the end have a touching (if slightly bewildered) trust that everything will be all right, because they followed the government's instructions.

David Bowie was originally meant to provide the film's music, but other commitments caused him to pull out, leaving just the title track; the rest of the music is by Pink Floyd's Roger Waters.

The DVD is packed with extras. There's a fascinating mini-feature on the making of *When the Wind Blows* and an interview with Raymond Briggs, and a far-too-long documentary on the life of director Jimmy T Murakami. Most disturbing of all, there are 20 very short 'Protect and Survive' films from the government's Central Office of Information, each beginning and ending with a mushroom cloud, instructing us how to recognise the sirens warning of nuclear attack, how to set up our shelters, what we'll need to survive for a few weeks, and how to deal with basic hygiene (both toilets and dead bodies). The naivety of Jim and Hilda is scarily echoed in these official films; we're told to "brush off any fall-out dust from your clothes".

When the Wind Blows is

deeply affecting; it should be compulsory viewing.

David V Barrett



The Endless

Dir Justin Benson and Aaron Moorhead, US 2017

On limited UK release from 29 June
and Blu-ray/DVD from 2 July

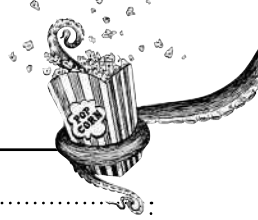
Justin Benson and Aaron Moorhead have been quietly carving out a niche for themselves as reinventors of the indie horror movie in a more cerebral guise; their micro-budget features *Resolution* (2013) and *Spring* (2015) have drawn rave reviews from both genre and mainstream critics, even if not many people outside the festival circuit have actually seen them. Count me in that number: *The Endless*, their latest offering, is my first encounter with the filmmaking duo, and I'll be searching out their earlier efforts – particularly as one scene in *The Endless* ties into the main story of *Resolution*. Meta, or what?

Here, Benson and Moorhead also get in front of the cameras, playing a pair of brothers (called Justin and Aaron) drawn back to the UFO cult they escaped from a decade ago when they receive a video suggesting that their one-time fellow cultists have gone all Heaven's Gate (see p68); there are rumours of mandatory castration and a planned mass suicide. On returning to the Californian commune, however, the brothers find that not only are the beer-brewing tree huggers alive and well, but they haven't aged in 10 years. From there, things get progressively stranger, and an ominous atmosphere settles over the film.

I don't want to give anything away, so will just say that the story takes off in some pretty unpredictable directions, charting a course between Lovecraftian weirdness and something far trickier. While I can't echo the hyperbolic praise the film has received from some quarters (it lacks both effective pacing and common sense), I suspect many readers will embrace its studied weirdness.

David Sutton





SOUNDS PECULIAR BRIAN J ROBB PRESENTS THE FORTEAN TIMES PODCAST COLUMN

As a medium, podcasts have been enjoying something of a boom over the past few years. The democratisation of quality media production through high-specification computer equipment has allowed a plethora of previously marginalised voices their own access to what were once quaintly called ‘the airwaves’.

In the past, broadcasting (reaching a wide audience from a single source) was heavily regulated and controlled, mainly through frequency scarcity: only those authorised or licensed to have access to the airwaves were allowed to broadcast. In UK terms that, initially, meant the BBC, with commercial stations coming along in the 1960s.

In terms of radio, there have been amateurs since the invention of the medium, reaching a crescendo with the offshore ‘pirate’ pop stations of the 1960s that ultimately led to the BBC launching Radio 1. For the longest time, Radio 4 (or NPR in the US) has been the default home of quality ‘spoken word’ content, whether that was drama, current affairs, or documentary radio.

Now, anyone with a microphone and an iPad, laptop, or computer and the right software can produce a decent podcast and launch their work onto a waiting world. Not all of them are good, while many are far better than you might expect, sometimes surpassing the productions of ‘legitimate’ broadcasters like the BBC or NPR. When it comes to fortean topics, there are a host of podcasts out there, ranging from the polished and compelling to the amateurish and downright weird. SOUNDS PECULIAR is your insider guide to the best of the current podcasts dealing with fortean topics: all you have to do is sit back and listen...

Despite being the driving force in establishing the Heaven’s Gate cult, Bonnie Lou Nettles didn’t live to see the group reach its apotheosis. She died of liver cancer in 1985, throwing Applewhite and the cultists into disarray – how could their belief system be true, if their leading light was gone? Episode five, ‘The Tape’, is devoted to the death of Nettles and includes a moving interview with her daughter, Terri.

Other episodes, each in the 40-to-50 minute range, focus on survivors of the cult, such as Frank and Erika, who were very much in love but joined a cult that advocated sexual abstinence. Their lives together were put on pause by their involvement in Heaven’s Gate, and neither of them survived, as episode six, ‘The Choice’, reveals.

Washington identifies three key things needed for a cult to prosper, and Heaven’s Gate had all of them: a charismatic leader; a group of followers made up of ‘seekers’, those looking for something more in life; and an apocalyptic vision of the end of the world. His podcast documentary series brings some humanity to those behind the awful events of 1997; and that includes Marshall Applewhite and Bonnie Lou Nettles, who did so much harm to so many.

Strengths: Professionally produced, crisply presented and edited.

Weaknesses: None.

Recommended Episodes: The opening instalment, ‘The Seekers’, provides an excellent overview of the main events and lays the groundwork for the rest; Episode four, ‘The Host’, offers some informative personal background; and final episode ‘The Class’ wraps things up in style.

Verdict: A great look behind the curtain at what drives a cult leader and what motivates the ‘followers’ to sign up.



Podcast: Heaven’s Gate
www.heavensgate.show/
Host: Glynn Washington
Episode Count: 10
Format: Documentary
Established: 2017
Frequency: Weekly
Topics: The Heaven’s Gate religious/UFO cult

The Heaven’s Gate religious cult is an ideal topic for a limited-run podcast. Their end is well known: in 1997, 39 people took part in a mass suicide in San Diego, California, in the belief that they would somehow be taken to ‘heaven’ aboard a flying saucer (see **FT99:32, 100:35-43, 103:45, 104:57**).

The group’s leader was the charismatic Marshall Applewhite, who left behind many hours of audio and video recordings that cover much of the background of his own life and beliefs and of the cult’s aims and ambitions. This material forms a solid

backbone to the Heaven’s Gate documentary podcast series.

The Heaven’s Gate story is fascinating. It began with the meeting of two misfits in the early-1970s: Applewhite, an unfocused drifter, and Bonnie Lou Nettles, a nurse who believed she was receiving mental messages from a 19th century monk. Nettles claimed their meeting had been foretold by extraterrestrials and that they had a great destiny together. Believing themselves to be ‘The Two’, the witnesses to the Apocalypse as foretold in the Bible, they travelled the United States gathering followers and running out on unpaid hotel bills. Their promise to their disciples was elevation to ‘the next level’ beyond human.

Across 10 episodes, host Glynn Washington outlines the personal histories of ‘Ti’ (as Nettles called herself) and ‘Do’ (her name for Applewhite), supported by interviews with survivors of the cult, experts in cult indoctrination, and the relatives of those who died in the mass suicide. It’s a gripping tale, well put together, that gets behind the brash headlines that greeted the discovery of the 39 bodies clad in purple robes, one of

which was that of Applewhite.

“The founders, Ti and Do, promised their followers actual salvation where they would be physically taken up into the sky via a UFO that was sent by God,” says Washington. “I’m making this show because I really want to know, did they have to do what they did? Who were these people that were so gentle, so loving towards each other? Did they have to take this dark turn?”

Washington has some very personal reasons for wanting to understand the behaviour of those who run and those who join a cult like Heaven’s Gate: he was raised within one. His parents were members of Herbert W Armstrong’s Worldwide Church of God, an organisation that preached the reality of Biblical prophecies. The fourth episode, entitled ‘The Host’, is given over to an interview with Washington himself, outlining his own experiences, and it serves as a valuable, informative background to the overall approach that the series takes to Applewhite and his devotees. Washington was a firm believer until well into his late teens, and it gives him some insight into what was going on in the minds of those who lost their lives in March 1997.

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David, 9 September

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Clancy, 21 August

"I'm loving my new ride. I would recommend this service to anyone"



Tatiana, 8 September

British wrestling always had a dark side. This magazine explores it. Send SAE for details.

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Baphomet

I enjoyed Christopher Josiffe's article on Baphomet [FT365:28-35], but I would like to make a few comments. Only 74 cards survive from the Visconti-Sforza Tarot, and these do not include a Devil. The card reproduced on page 33 is a modern artist's conception of what it might have looked like (assuming that the pack ever possessed one).

Lévi may have taken the detail of a torch between the Devil's horns from the engraving of the witches' sabbat in Laurent Bordelon, *Histoire des imaginations extravagantes de Monsieur Oufle*, 1710. (This was reproduced in Pennethorne Hughes, *Witchcraft*, where it was wrongly attributed to Spranger; in fact, it was a parody of the engraving that Spranger made for the 1613 edition of Pierre de Lancre's *Tableau de l'inconstance des mauvais anges et demons*.) On page 168 of *Transcendental Magic*, Lévi himself cited another source for his image, the alchemical figure shown in the frontispiece of *Sieur de Nuisement, Traitez du vray Sel*, 1621, from which he took the idea of Baphomet having a caduceus (a wand with intertwined serpents) instead of a phallus.

The general opinion now is that *Ancient Alphabets* was not by Ibn Wahshiyya, but that his name was put on the book by a slightly later author, whose attempts to explain Egyptian hieroglyphs were completely wrong.


'Baphomet' probably began as a cacophemism for Mahomet, in the same way that an early critic of Nostradamus dubbed him 'Monstradamus'. The name may then have incorporated a pun in mediæval Catalan or Provençal whose point is now entirely lost.

Gareth J Medway
London

Washington Wipeout

Regarding "Washington Wipeout" [FT366:11]: there has been more than one instance of timber being felled by wind on the Olympic Peninsula. I lived through one such event in December 2007, which was barely mentioned in the Seattle area media. One weatherman

SIMULACRA CORNER



Moss sheep

This "moss-sheep" was discovered by the eight-year-old son of Alex Thornton-Smith in the woods near the appropriately named "Pont du Diable" at Le Forclaz in the Alps.

We are always glad to receive pictures of spontaneous forms and figures, or any curious images. Send them (with your postal address) to Fortean Times, PO Box 2409, London NW5 4NP or to sieveking@forteantimes.com.

openly denied anything had occurred, despite millions of board feet being felled. The most destructive example of this phenomenon on record was "The Great Blowdown" that hit the Washington coast on 29 January 1921. Strange winds appear, seemingly from nowhere, and uproot trees. The Peninsula is between the Pacific and Puget Sound. When warm air from the east meets cold damp air from the west, winds are generated. Nothing mysterious about it.

Rachel Hazard
By email

In reporting the tree fall on the shore of Lake Quinault you reference *Mysterious Universe* (12 Feb) as the source. However, the meteorologist mentioned in the piece, Cliff Mass, received enough information to conclude on his blog (11 Feb) that the cause was

"a high amplitude mountain wave on the upstream ridge, which resulted in a strong rotor that produced powerful reverse flow (northerlies). As in the research work cited above, a very energetic subrotor was probably produced, and that resulted in a localized area of intense winds as it rotated down to the ground." Modelling runs simulated the situation bolstering the now not-so-mysterious, but still amazing, conclusion.

Sharon Hill
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania

Short pigtails

Alistair Moffatt's letter "Cornish 'Ghost Ship'" [FT364:74], with its Edwardian account of a fisherman's sighting of a mystery vessel, picks out certain details that might connect the experience (even if it is only a tall tale) to fairy lore. One of these,

I suspect, is a misreading of the original source. When the unnamed fisherman describes "men in pigtails, like Jonnie Chinaman, only shorter," he surely isn't thinking of diminutive beings who look Chinese. The "only shorter" refers, I'd guess, to the pigtails. In other words, the vision showed ladies in low-cut dresses (hardly a Chinese trope) dancing with gentlemen sporting short pigtails. The latter was an 18th century fashion, particularly affected by naval types, and the scene on the ship sounds like a generalised evocation of high life appropriate to that century. Not so much a fairy experience, then, as a marine time-slip – or the sort of local colour it might well amuse an inhabitant to cook up for the gullible chap who's writing a guide book.

Gail Nina Anderson
Jesmond, Newcastle-upon-Tyne

Kilotonnage

If the Hiroshima atomic bomb was a bang, the Nagasaki bomb was hardly a whimpering [FT365:57]. The bomb dropped on Nagasaki, known as Fat Man, was more powerful, with a yield of 20 kilotons, compared to Little Boy's 15 kilotons dropped on Hiroshima. The latter is of course more famous (infamous?) as it was the first time a nuclear bomb was used against a military (and civilian) target, and it's the site of the Peace Memorial and Atomic Dome.

Richard Eccleston
Fukui, Japan

Virginia Woolf tripping

Bloomsbury's Virginia Woolf [FT366:2] may have been more "out there" than some give her credit for: according to Richard Davenport-Hines, she underwent hallucinations after being prescribed hyoscyamine (*The Pursuit of Oblivion: A Social History of Drugs*, 2001, p.191), and also extolled "that mighty Prince with the moth's eyes and the feathered feet, one of whose names is Chloral". A Mothman-Owlman hybrid, no less!

Richard George
St Albans, Hertfordshire

LETTERS

Full rant mode

"Building a fortean library" #28 described the contents of Hitler's speeches when he was "in full rant mode": "It doesn't make much sense; it's a weird mélange of non-sequiturs, slogans, and praises for the Party, the *volk*, Germany, and by implication himself." [FT362:58-59]. I couldn't help thinking that if you substituted 'citizens' and 'USA' for 'volk' and 'Germany', you could be describing Donald Trump's utterances.

Andy Kelly
Cleveleys, Lancashire

The Skripal poisonings

I think that David Hambling may have missed a point in his article on the Skripal poisonings [FT366:14]. In succeeding paragraphs he states that (a) Novichok is unstable and has a limited shelf life and (b) that Teresa May claims that Russia is "stockpiling" Novichok. Should we not be asking why and how you "stockpile" something that rapidly deteriorates?

I would also point out that there has long been an unwritten agreement between security services that prisoners, once exchanged (including double agents), are immune from reprisals. (This is not a question of morality, but of self-preservation.) We are continually reminded that Vladimir Putin is ex-KGB. What is overlooked is that this would mean that, by his training, he would be inclined not to undertake reprisals against people

like the Skripals.

I have followed the Skripal case largely in the French press, which is inclined to give credence to the reasonable arguments put forward by the Russian government and to Russian willingness to take part in an independent investigation (blocked, of course, by Her Majesty's Government). While normally leaning to the cock-up rather than the conspiracy theory of history, in this case I seriously wonder if what HMG is telling us bears any relationship to the truth.

Martin Jenkins
London

David Hambling replies: While swapped agents are generally not targeted, Vladimir Putin has stated in no uncertain terms that traitors will "kick the bucket" and if Skripal was, for example, continuing to co-operate with British security services he would be seen as a valid target. Putin's KGB background might mean he was more likely to order such an assassination rather than less. Novichok does have a shelf-life but can certainly be stockpiled for a few years. It may be safer to produce it in very small batches and stockpile than attempt to produce larger batches. However, May's claim is of course impossible to verify. What HMG are telling us may or may not bear a relationship to the truth, but if we ignore their input we are still left with a case with only one real suspect – a suspect who has previous form with using the same modus operandi. As I said in the article, this case may well have more twists – that the Skripals survived, apparently relatively unharmed, was an unexpected and welcome development – and I remain very much open to new evidence.

Lying in wait

I really enjoyed 'The Baffling Books of Bruno Borges' [FT366:38-43] and the reference to the secretive Cicada 3301 organisation – which I'd

not come across before. But the comment "No one is even clear why they're called Cicada" leapt out. I assume that they call themselves Cicada because, like their namesake insect, they intend to remain underground for many years before surfacing.

Chris Walker
Cardiff

Loop of memory

Regarding Highly Superior Autobiographical Memories (HSAM) ['Total Recall' FT362:14]: I suffer from this. I can recall an incident that took place when I was about two years old. The trouble with these memories is that they clutter up the everyday thoughts – "The past lies heavy on the present," according to my horoscope. A palmist once told me that I have "the Loop of Memory", a formation at the end of the Head Line. It would be interesting if fellow HSAM sufferers have the Loop of Memory.

Paul R Thomas
Easton in Gordano, North Somerset

Giant squid

There is no doubt (contrary to Eric Hoffman's letter, FT366:76) that cryptozoologist Bernard Heuvelmans *did* think the zoologists as a group were sceptical of giant squid in the 19th century rather than just of the giant octopuses advocated by Pierre Denys de Montfort in his book of 1802. Yes, Heuvelmans mentions a number of accounts of scientific accounts of giant squid between 1802 and 1857 (when the giant squid was named), yet despite this abundant evidence available to him, Heuvelmans felt the scientific community as a whole was sceptical of giant cephalopods. In *The Kraken and the Colossal Octopus* (2003), his most complete account of giant squid history, he has an entire chapter entitled "The Inadmissible Squid of the Aleaton" referring to a specimen of giant squid captured in 1861 and how it was received.

In it he first quotes *Matthew XV:14* about the blind leading the blind and then goes onto

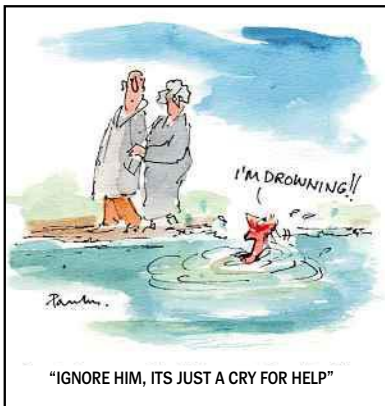
to say: "This time the skepticism of the most reserved scientists was put to a severe test" (page 188)! He refers to, in the context of giant squid not octopodes, the "stubborn incredulity and blindness of some so-called scientific minds" (page 191). Later he says of the Newfoundland giant squid strandings of the 1870s, "the more strandings there were, the more the skepticism of zoologists crumbled" (page 195). If Heuvelmans felt the scientific community were merely sceptical of the giant octopus claims in a book published in 1802, why is he still referring again and again to scientists' scepticism about giant squid specifically in the context of the 1860s and 1870s?

Dr Charles Paxton
University of St Andrews

The Atacama 'humanoid'

Regarding your coverage of the analyses of the Atacama "humanoid" [FT366:4]: I have been bemused and puzzled by the recent press reports, and indeed by the journal article in *Genome Research* that generated it. As an osteoarchaeologist who has worked with thousands of skeletons over the last 15 years, I find quite ludicrous the assertion that the bones of "Ata" are as developed as a six-year-old. The image you provide clearly shows that the bones of the cranium are not fused at all but overlapping, almost certainly as a result of compression from being placed into the pouch in which she was found.

The age estimation was, according to the *Genome Research* paper, provided by an expert in developmental conditions based on the ossification of the distal epiphyses (end plates) of the femora from an X-ray only. Presumably the photos were not available during this assessment. A glance at this X-ray, which was not included as part of the paper but in a linked article that appeared in *Science Magazine*, does indeed show a degree of ossification in this area, but there is no trace of this ossification in the photographs. The accelerated age estimation also takes no account of the absence of any dental





development, which is certainly not consistent with an age of six years but is perfectly consistent with an age of 22 foetal weeks, which corresponds to the size of the individual. Although accelerated bone growth in a foetus was suggested as a possible explanation in the paper, this has been passed over in the press coverage in favour of presenting the more outlandish explanations, which are not supported by even a cursory glance at the photographs.

The publication of the genomic analysis has also generated a furore in Chile and elsewhere over the ethical issues with extracting and analysing samples from an individual that was almost certainly laid to rest in the last 50 years (with a chance that Ata's mother may still be alive), and that was acquired in dubious circumstances and sold and exploited as a "humanoid specimen" rather than treated with respect as the remains of a human foetus. The debate generated by the analysis of Ata has ramifications, quite rightly in my opinion, for the recent explosion of "hard scientific" destructive analyses of human remains that sometimes seem to disregard ethical considerations and meaningful research questions in a policy of "we can so we will".

Dr Katie White

Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Berlin

Jackie Gleason

In his article about Jackie Gleason's alleged alien body sighting [FT366:30-36], Brian Robb asks in exasperation "Why does this tale persist?" I must admit I was left wondering why it shouldn't persist or even exactly what the tale is that shouldn't be persisting. Is it (a) that Gleason saw alien bodies; or (b) simply that he claimed to have seen them?

The evidence is that two people say that he claimed to have seen them and that Gleason himself, with ample reason and opportunity, refused to deny it. Decent enough evidence to at least believe option (b).

However, Robb casts doubt on the veracity and motives of all concerned and comes up sadly



Tree ring

I photographed this strange circular tree growth on the Coal Creek Falls track in Runanga on New Zealand's South Island in March 2017. **Jo Johnson**, *Ashford, Kent*

short. He tells us that recently divorced wife Beverly "supposedly" tells the *Enquirer* the story because it was "the only way she could deal with the divorce". How Robb knows this is unclear; neither does it make any actual sense. Indeed, it would seem logical that someone would not want to say anything that could potentially jeopardise any lucrative divorce settlement. He then tells us that Jackie refused to deny it because he hoped it would be regarded as "the ravings of a woman scorned". Again, Robb seems to have an almost telepathic insight into the minds of his subjects. So we are asked to believe that Jackie is quite happy to go along with someone telling outright lies about him.

Can Robb offer any further insights into his motives? Apparently, it's because "he knew a good story when he saw one and decided to say nothing and thereby fuel the mystery", a statement that flies in the face of the evidence that Robb himself presents of a man dedicated to finding the truth about UFOs,

one who is so angry about Gray Barker's *Men in Black* claims (surely a good story if ever there was one) that he lays into him on the John Nebel show. Larry Warren, who also claimed to have met Jackie, is just "notorious" and "adds saucer wreckage... for good measure". Except he doesn't because this is clearly mentioned in the original *Enquirer* article.

The reason the story persists is because of straightforward

witness evidence and nothing to do with the "need to believe" or pop psychology.

Paul Button
Chesterfield, Derbyshire

Brian J Robb writes: I can assure Paul Button that there was no "exasperation" in my asking why the

"alien bodies" tale persists – the entire article was an exploration of that very fact. I was interested in how the story mutated and evolved into its present form, and I'd hoped that was what the piece outlined. Surely questioning the "veracity and motives" of those involved is inherently fortian? When dealing with something

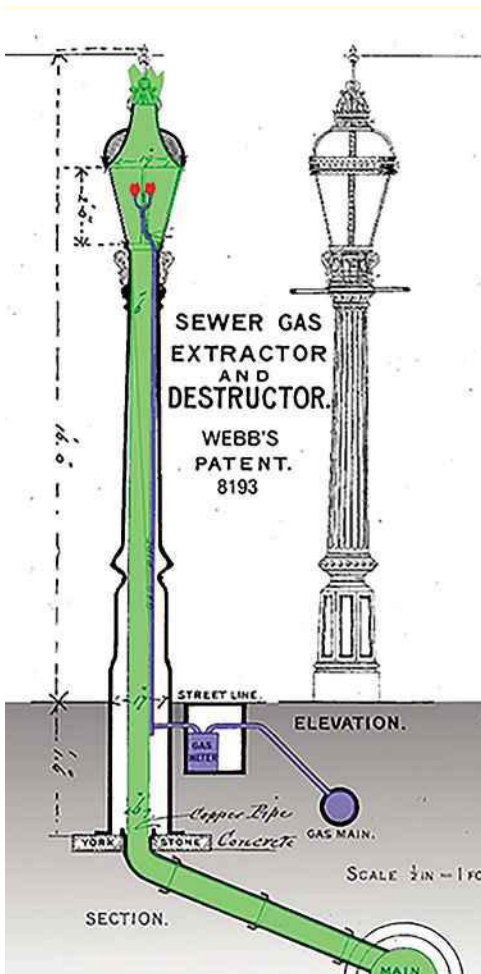
at more than one remove, it is beyond either myself or Paul to genuinely "know" anything about it for sure; all we can do is assess the evidence and come to conclusions. Of course, my conclusions may differ from those reached by anyone else looking at the same evidence.

Thermodynamics of SHC

"Phew! What a scorcher!" [FT364:56-57] is interesting, in that it describes cases of Spontaneous Human Combustion (SHC) in which almost the entire body has been consumed by fire – to the point that the internal organs are gone and the bones have disintegrated. While I can't comment on the biological potential of malfunctioning mitochondria to energetically self-destruct, there are more fundamental thermodynamic considerations: is it by any means physically possible to completely destroy a human body using only the combustible elements of that body?

Dædalus (the late, great David EH Jones – obit FT359:28) defines a material as 'combustible' if "its organic content is more than sufficient to vaporize





Sewer gas lamps

Regarding the Mythconceptions query about Victorian sewer gas lamps [FT364:23]: as it happens I have made a special study of the subject. The Webb sewer gas extractor and destructor lamp was invented in 1894 by Joseph Edmund Webb (1862-1936) and was installed by more than 100 local authorities in Britain and abroad; the most famous still working example is in Carting Lane, Westminster.

The lamps did *not* operate on sewer gas – Webb’s patent states: “The object of the invention is to extract the obnoxious gases and vapour collected or generated from a sewer and at the same time to effectually destroy all germs and noxious qualities prior to their passing into the atmosphere. For this purpose I propose to utilise ordinary lighting gas which may at the same time be used for street or other lighting purposes.”

The accompanying diagram makes it clear that the burners were supplied with normal town gas, and sewer gas was drawn through the burners incinerating and sterilising it.

See my article at www.xenophon.org.uk/webbsewerlamp.html

Roger J Morgan, London

There’s still a JE Webb patented Sewer Gas Destructor Lamp in Carting Lane,



London (unsurprisingly known as Farting Lane because of this lamp). The lamp is outside a service entrance to the Savoy Hotel and is still gas-powered.

Joe Blunden, West Sussex

A sewer gas lamp is still going strong in Alton, Hampshire. I spoke to an engineer who was servicing it once and he said there are still a few around – east London, Leeds and Bradford came to mind. See ‘Sewer lamps get new lease of life’ <www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-south-yorkshire-39409984>

Martin Judkins, By email

its water content” (*Nature*, 25 Feb 1988 – he was discussing dog excrement). Various sources give the heat of combustion of tallow (i.e. rendered animal fat) as being of the order of 35 kJ/kg. e.g. Gravalos et al. (*Tarim Makinalan Bilimi Dergisi* (Journal of Agricultural Machinery Science) 2008, 4 (1), 69 - 74) report a figure of 39.693 kJ/kg for pork fat.

So, a quick back-of-an-envelope calculation: An obese human has ~30% body fat by weight. Let’s assume all of this is combustible fuel. The skeleton’s mineral content is non-combustible calcium phosphate, but water accounts for the overwhelming bulk of the remaining mass. For a 100kg (220lb) human, with 30% body fat then, the ‘tallow’ content is 30kg (66lb), while the remaining 70kg (154lb) is mostly water. The total energy that can be produced by combustion of the fat content is 30kg x 39.693 kJ = 1190.79 kJ.

How much energy is required to eliminate the body’s water content by vaporisation? The specific heat capacity of water is 4.186 kJ/kg/degree C. Assuming the body is initially at human body temperature (~38 degrees), and that water boils at 100 degrees (this is mostly true), the total energy requirement is 4.186 kJ/kg/degree C x 70kg x (100 - 38) degrees C = 18167.24 kJ (a ~15 fold difference just to break even).

We might be able to reduce this requirement down somewhat by assuming that a fair proportion of the water content is merely aerosolised rather than converted to steam, but even so, it is difficult to believe that almost the entire water content of the body could be eliminated by the energy produced from combustion of the fat content. Indeed crematoria apparently allow ~100 MJ to incinerate one corpse, and even then the bones sometimes have to be crushed.

To credit either the ‘wick effect’ or a novel biological process for these phenomena seems to me to be stretching credibility. Not that I have any better explanation.

Ian l’Anson
By email

Thunderstones

Further to earlier comments on Phenomenomix – Thunderstones [FT362:79]: whilst there are references to the stones being called ‘axes’ in various parts of the world, no mention is made of a likely candidate for their origin, namely Palaeolithic biface handaxes. These were not recognised in England as human artefacts until 1797, when antiquarian John Frere published a report on a cache discovered by clay diggers at Hoxne in Suffolk. As his unusual conclusion (and his comments on their stratigraphy suggesting immense age)

clashed with current church-based thinking on Creation, his report was largely ignored for a good few years. The very existence of the Ice Age wasn’t acknowledged until some decades later, when academics stopped attributing glacial landforms and the discovery of mega-fauna bones to the impact of the Biblical Flood. Handaxes were sometimes used for processing the carcasses of hunted animals where they fell, and could be fabricated by skilled flint knappers in just a few minutes, so they may well have been treated as single use disposable tools and simply discarded once the job was done. Prior to the wider adoption of Frere’s thinking, it’s easy to imagine how such items turning up in pre-industrial plough soil might be attributed to supernatural or meteorological agencies.

Dave Trevor
Davenham, Cheshire

IT HAPPENED TO ME...

First-hand accounts from *FT* readers and browsers of www.forteantimes.com

Stocksbridge weirdness

I was driving from Huddersfield to Leicestershire this morning [4 April 2018] and was conscious of the time, as I was running a little late. At 10:59 I looked at the digital clock on my car radio and saw it trip to “11:00” – only to see it go back to “10:59” again. I couldn’t quite believe my eyes for a second, then I saw it (quite a few moments later) jump straight to “11:01”.

Three points make this interesting. (1) I have driven this car (a Vauxhall Antara) for the last 47,000 miles and have not seen anything like this happen before to the car radio clock (the same one has been in situ throughout). (2) This time-change occurred as I was driving under the pylons at Stocksbridge Bypass (A616), renowned of course for its pylons and strange happenings (I have driven this route countless times before, by the way). (3) I of course checked to see if it recurred at “11:59” (when I was nearly home) but there was no repeat performance. My one regret is that I didn’t “cross-reference” the time on my sat nav with the clock radio, to see if that ‘played up’ in a similar fashion.

Dr Mick Stephenson
Sileby, Leicestershire

A phantom passenger?

Irene Allen-Block hosts Paranormal UK Radio. She reports having had numerous psychic experiences throughout her life. On 14 February of this year, she and her husband Brian had an experience that may fall into that category. I’m grateful to her for the following details.

The case is reminiscent of some of those reported by Rob Gandy in his article ‘The Old Man of Halsall Moss’ [FT328:32-39]. However, the phantom figures described by Gandy didn’t speak, whereas the elderly man



who features in this report did.

Irene and her husband were driving from their Welsh home to Bristol Airport, to get a flight to Scotland to attend a funeral. Somewhere in the countryside, their satellite navigation system started malfunctioning. They noticed an elderly pedestrian, which surprised them, given the early hour (about 4am). They stopped to ask him for directions. The man said that it would be easier if he accompanied them, to show them the way. Without waiting for an invitation, he got into the car! He explained that he liked to go for early morning walks of about 15 miles (24km). But apart from giving directions, he said little or nothing else. Irene estimates that he was with them for about 25 minutes, although it felt longer.

When they reached the airport, he got out of the vehicle, just outside the short stay car park. Irene reports that he then disappeared, although she doesn’t recall seeing him literally vanish before her eyes. She explains that her husband looked away very briefly, to pull a ticket out of the machine at the barrier, and that when he looked back the man was gone. Perhaps he somehow slipped out of view in little more than a blink of an eye.

Otherwise, we might surmise that he was an apparition, not a flesh-and-blood person.

Irene and Brian’s recollections of the man’s appearance differed. Brian noticed spectacles, a rucksack and a torch, but Irene doesn’t recall seeing those items. Brian thought that he was wearing a dark jacket, whereas Irene recalls the colour as a silvery grey. To Irene, the man’s hair was sticking up everywhere, as if he’d been dragged through a bush backwards, but Brian recalled that his hair had been very thick, but well kempt.

Peter A McCue
By email

Floating banknotes

Here’s an oddity: I came downstairs this morning [8 March 2018] at 7am. In the downstairs lavatory I found – after I opened the lid, but before I flushed – four £20 notes, floating there, in clean water. After I had fished them out, I asked my wife about them. She said that she had had the notes in her trouser rear pocket, and they might have dropped out when she used the lavatory on going up to bed the previous night. The puzzle is that

the lavatory had been flushed, because I found the notes in clear water – so, are £20 notes designed to float, when all else is flushed away? Is anyone wealthy or extravagant enough to experiment?

Viv Hobbs
Caerphilly

Poets’ Corner

I had a remarkable coincidence yesterday [14 April 2018]. I had been active in the performance poetry scene in the Merseyside area, but gave it up rather abruptly about 20 years ago and had little contact afterwards with anyone involved.

Yesterday I was present at a celebration of the opening of a new bar in a busy area just outside Liverpool city centre. There were about 20 people in the small, oddly shaped underground bar. I got talking to a couple I’d never met before. The man was currently running poetry events, so we talked about people who I’d known who were still active.

I said: “My favourite Liverpool poet was a guy called Liam Brayde – do you know him, a hypnotic performer?”

He didn’t, and hadn’t heard of him. I described some of his style and subject matter. A moment or two later, I caught the look from a man in the shadows in the far corner of the room. He came over a little uncertainly.

“Is your name Graeme?”

“Hello Liam, we’ve just been talking about you.”

I hadn’t seen or talked about him for many years. And there was more. He said: “I’ve been looking for you for 20 years! I’ve got a cheque for £15 you earned for Poetry Week in 1999 – I’d traced all the other 19 recipients and couldn’t find you.” The witness quickly decided that Liam and I were Tulpas, called into being by each other’s thoughts, and invited us to his poetry night.

Graeme Kenna
Wirral

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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.

Besides being a journal of record, **FT** is also a forum for the discussion of observations and ideas, however absurd or unpopular, and maintains a position of benevolent scepticism towards both the orthodox and unorthodox.

FT toes no party line.

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FORTEAN TIMES 369

ON SALE 19 JULY 2018

STRANGE DEATHS

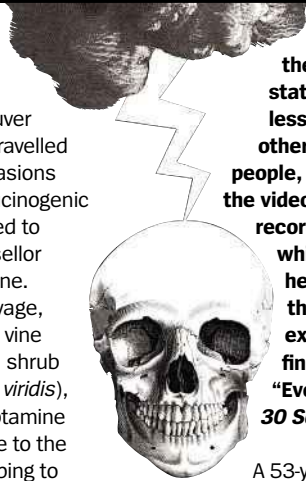
UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL

Sebastian Woodroffe, 41, a Canadian from Courtenay on the east coast of Vancouver Island in British Columbia, travelled to Peru on a number of occasions to experiment with the hallucinogenic drug ayahuasca. He intended to become an addiction counsellor using hallucinogenic medicine. Ayahuasca, also known as yage, is a blend of the ayahuasca vine (*Banisteriopsis caapi*) and a shrub called chacruna (*Psychotria viridis*), which contains dimethyltryptamine (DMT). He had recently gone to the Ucayali rainforest region hoping to do an apprenticeship with Olivia Arévalo Lomas, 81, a female shaman from the Shipibo-Conibo indigenous group. The Shipibo have been using ayahuasca for centuries as part of their healing ceremonies. Ms Arévalo had been working with traditional plant medicine since she was 15, and came from a long line of healers, according to the Temple of the Way of Light centre where she worked.

Police launched a search for Woodroffe after a camera phone recording emerged on social media showing him lying in a puddle groaning while another man puts a rope around his neck and drags him along. A group of locals stands by and watches while Woodroffe appears to go limp. On 21 April, his body was found buried in a shallow unmarked grave. He had been strangled and there were several blows across his body. Half a mile away, Ms Arévalo had been found shot dead outside her home on 19 April. It wasn't clear why the locals' anger focused on the Canadian, as other indigenous activists had in the past been murdered by landowners because of their efforts to keep illegal loggers and oil palm growers off their native land. However, locals claimed that witnesses had seen Woodroffe shoot the medicine woman after she sang an *ikaro*, or curing song. "A foreigner can come and kill us, day after day, like dogs or cats, and nothing happens, the state does nothing," one local woman told a Peruvian official on television. In fact, there was an unconfirmed report that Ms Arévalo's killer was a gang member looking to collect a debt from her son. *BBC News, Guardian online, 23 April; D.Telegraph, 24 April 2018.*

This was not the first time a lynching in the Peruvian Amazon basin was filmed on a mobile phone. On 20 September 2016, Rosa Villar Jarionaca, aged 65 or 73, was accused of using witchcraft to make members of the Yánesha tribe sick, and was burnt alive in Palcazú district. In

the video, a man can be heard stating: "We are teaching her a lesson. It is an example to the other peoples. We do justice for the people, burn the witches." Besides the video, there were tribal documents recording a democratic vote in which 40 people chose to execute her. She reportedly burned for three days. "When we went to examine the corpse, we couldn't find anything," said an official. "Everything was ash." *Breitbart, 30 Sept 2016.*



A 53-year-old Kansas man missing for eight months was found dead inside his truck at Kansas City International Airport on 12 September. Relatives of Randy Potter believe the former T-Mobile manager died shortly after leaving his home in Lenexa on 17 January, the last day he was seen alive. Police in Kansas City found his body after a foul smell coming from his white 2014 Dodge Ram pickup truck was reported at the busy airport. It was parked on the street level in front of the airport's Terminal B, which travellers can use for both short- and long-term parking. Potter's body, which was found in the driver's seat, was so badly decomposed that investigators couldn't initially determine the gender or race, but he was later identified and apparently died by suicide. *nypost.com, 18 Sept 2017.* For cases of dead drivers getting parking tickets, see **FT48:23,59:13, 71:14, 176:28, 275:10.**

A man was out celebrating beating cancer last July when he drunkenly fell down a cliff. Adam Fenton, 31, a roofer from Newquay in Cornwall, got the all-clear from B-cell lymphoma after nine months of gruelling chemotherapy. Three weeks later, his body was found at the foot of a 50ft (15m) rockface on Towan Beach. He coroner thought it likely he had been trying to find a quiet spot to sleep off the alcohol. *Sun, Metro, 24 Nov 2017.*

Christopher Nagle, 51, wanting fish for his pond, bought an illegal stunner online – a control box wired to two metal poles. Two days after his girlfriend reported him missing, his body was discovered half submerged in a stream on Dartmoor near Peter Tavy, 25 miles (40km) from his home in Moretonhampstead in Devon. As wires were seen coming out of his backpack, a bomb disposal team was called before his body was removed. Burns were found on his hand, indicating electrocution. *Sun, 15 Mar 2018.*

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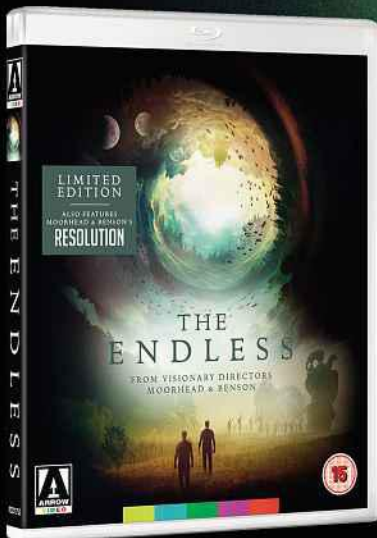
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