

**2012  
DOOMSDAY  
SPECIAL**

**SHADOW OVER BUGARACH** HOW ONE VILLAGE IS WAITING FOR THE END  
**PROPHECY FAIL** THE NEW AGE MYTH OF THE MAYAN MELTDOWN  
**POP APOCALYPSE** FROM HP LOVECRAFT TO ROLAND EMMERICH

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# 2012

**THE END  
OF THE WORLD  
OR THE DAWN OF  
A NEW AGE?**



# Write Your Way To A New Career!

## Writers Bureau Celebrates Twenty-three Years of Helping New Writers

by Nick Daws

When distance-learning pioneer Ernest Metcalfe founded The Writers Bureau in the late 1980s, he can hardly have dared hope that twenty-three years on it would be acknowledged as Britain's leading writing school. Yet so it proved, with thousands of Writers Bureau students seeing their work in print for the first time. And, for many of those who persevered with their writing, the dream of becoming a successful writer has turned into reality.

Students such as Tim Skelton. An engineer by profession, he had always harboured an ambition to write, and at the age of 40 signed up with The Writers Bureau. The decision changed his life: "My writing career took off exponentially. In 2005 I started appearing regularly in lifestyle and in-flight magazines. The following year I was commissioned by Bradt Travel Guides to write a guidebook to

*"My writing career took off exponentially."*

Luxembourg. I've appeared in The Times and The Independent, and updated guidebooks for Fodor's, Thomas Cook, and the AA."

Another student who benefited was Hazel McHaffie. Hazel wanted to make her academic work in Medical Ethics more accessible to people, and decided to write the themes into novels. Following her Writers Bureau course, Hazel has had five novels published, and appeared at the Edinburgh International Book Festival in 2008. She also has her own website at [www.hazelmchaffie.com](http://www.hazelmchaffie.com).

Sometimes studying with The Writers Bureau takes students down new and unexpected paths. Patricia Holness originally enrolled on The Writers Bureau's Writing for Children course. However, she soon realised that what she was learning applied to other types of writing as well.

She is now a full-time writer, regularly selling short stories for both



Hazel McHaffie



Tim Skelton

children and adults. She also has a monthly column in Devon Life.

These are just a selection from the inspirational true stories from students of The Writers Bureau. There's no reason why YOU couldn't be their next success story. With a 15-day free trial and money-back guarantee, there is nothing to lose and potentially a whole new career to gain! So why not visit their website at [www.writersbureau.com](http://www.writersbureau.com) or call on Freephone 0800 856 2008 for more information?

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### AWARD WINNING WRITER

Christina Jones, Oxfordshire

"So far, I have had eighteen novels published. The Writers Bureau helped make this possible for me. Within six months of enrolling on my course I was having work commissioned by editors and I still work regularly for magazines."

### Michael Foley, Essex

"Completing The Writers Bureau course has made it possible for me to attain my life-long ambition of becoming a published writer. The level of success I have achieved has far outweighed what I was hoping for when beginning the course. By the end of this year I should have eight books already published and hopefully two more finished."



### Cindy-Lou Dale, Kent

"I thought you'd like to know that seven years since doing my course at WB I've been published in more than 150 magazines around the world. I've now got to the stage where I'm turning down all-inclusive exotic press trips!"

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# CONTENTS

the world of strange phenomena



RICHARD STANLEY

**72 THE SHADOW OVER BUGARACH**  
Adventures in the French village that's getting ready for the End of the World

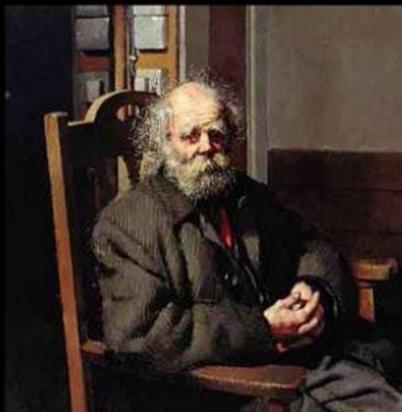


NATIONAL TRUST

**4 ALIEN BIG CAT DNA**  
Could Gloucestershire deer kills provide proof?



**24 NOT SHAKIN' THAT ASS**  
A case of hitting rock bottom



**50 DEATH AND THE MAIDEN**  
The artist and the pickled dead tramp



JULIET LILIENTHAL

**52 LOST ARK**  
Seventies sea monster snaps

## strange days

Exorcism sold online; DNA test for big cat attack; penguin with a heart; beach foam; lake monsters; parrot news; falls of fruit and veg; unlisted ingredients; holy relics – and much more.

- |                     |                      |
|---------------------|----------------------|
| 14 SCIENCE          | 24 MEDICAL BAG       |
| 16 ARCHÆOLOGY       | 25 KONSPIRACY KORNER |
| 17 CLASSICAL CORNER | 26 NECROLOG          |
| 18 GHOSTWATCH       | 27 STRANGE DEATHS    |
| 19 MYTHCONCEPTIONS  | 28 THE UFO FILES     |

## features

### 2012 DOOMSDAY SPECIAL

### 33 DOOMSDAY 2012 INTRODUCTION 34 DOOMSDAY 2012

**TED HARRISON** gets ready for the end of the world as we know it... and wonders just how the Earth might be destroyed come December...

### 38 INDIGENOUS FANTASY

**JOSEPH GELFER** examines the way 2012 prophecies have often hijacked motifs from indigenous cultures to support their claims.

### 40 THE HIDDEN HISTORY OF 2012

**JOHN W HOOPES** explores the origins of the 2012 mythos in the works of hermeticists, hippies and hackers – from Helena Blavatsky and HP Lovecraft to Terence McKenna.

### 44 END OF THE WORLD BUFFET

**KEVIN WHITESIDES** piles his plate high as he looks at the way the 2012 phenomenon has produced such a bewildering array of pop-cultural explanations, interpretations and artefacts.

## reports

### 30 BLASTS FROM THE PAST

No. 36. The fabulous flying men of 1880, Pt 2  
by Theo Pajmans

### 72 FORTEAN TRAVELLER

No. 78. The shadow over Bugarach by Richard Stanley

### 76 STRANGE AND SENSATIONAL STORIES FROM THE ILLUSTRATED POLICE NEWS

No. 10. Postman hermit by Dr Jan Bondeson

## forum

**49 Bomb-proof museum** by Andrew May

**50 Death and the maiden** by Ru Callender

**52 Two monsters for the price of one** by Karl Shuker

## regulars

- |                  |                         |
|------------------|-------------------------|
| 02 EDITORIAL     | 78 READER INFO          |
| 48 SUBSCRIPTIONS | 79 PHENOMENOMIX         |
| 55 REVIEWS       | 80 TALES FROM THE VAULT |
| 67 LETTERS       |                         |

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# editorial

## It's the End, again...

**A**s Ted Harrison notes in his article this special issue (pp34-37), there's something of a sense of *déjà vu* about waiting for the end all over again. After all, 13 years ago (can it really be that long?), we fortians were paying close attention as the planet (or at least some of its more impressionable inhabitants and an excitable media) appeared to be going slightly crazy as we approached the dawn of the 21st century - and, according to some, the end of the world as we knew it.

Despite a number of more or less widely publicised prophecies since then - most notably, Harold Camping's two failed efforts of last year (FT269:11; 277:26) - the Millennium was the last Doomsday date that provoked a worldwide flurry of bizarre prophecies, eschatological speculations and technological anxieties on such a grand scale (as well, indeed, as a special themed issue from us - FT129).

But, here we are again, with a whole new date for the apocalypse/alien invasion/massive paradigm shift in human consciousness, this time supposedly prophesied by proper indigenous types using their ancient wisdom and/or contacts in outer space. Joseph Gelfer takes note (pp38-39) of the ways in which the West projects its fantasies onto indigenous peoples, frequently muddling one culture with another or appropriating their iconography for its own completely different ends.

The whole thing is a bit of a muddle, to say the least, but John Hoopes provides some help (pp40-43), tracing the various antecedents of the whole 2012 mythos - from Lovecraft and Blavatsky to von Däniken and Graham Hancock - and its gradual evolution into what we are currently witnessing. But what might that be, exactly? Should we expect death from outer space, as Planet X makes a beeline for Earth? Will we witness natural catastrophes as our planet's poles shift? Will some of us be raptured or saved by kind-hearted aliens? Or will we witness a massive and positive change in global thinking? As Kevin Whitesides points out (pp44-47), this time around we are faced with such a smörgåsbord of sometimes competing, sometimes seemingly complementary, scenarios - taking in everyone from Armageddon-fearing bunker-builders to

New Agers awaiting the dawning of some kind of new galactic consciousness - that it's tempting to think that we're witnessing, as Terence McKenna once suggested, a "Balkanisation of epistemology", a fracturing of any semblance

of consensual understanding as we approach our much and variously mooted end. 2012, it would seem, can mean 60 different people believing 60 different impossible things before breakfast.

Some of these people - UFO freaks, dubious Native American gurus, channelling 'cults' - have been gathering in the area around the French village of Bugarach ahead of schedule, apparently believing that whatever happens will happen here and that by being in the right place at the right time they might just be saved. While the mayor worries and the French government's cult-buster keeps a beady eye

on the situation (FT272:9), Richard Stanley has been nosing around this funny old neck of the woods for FT and shares his findings in this issue's special Fortean Traveller (pp72-75).

Of course, there's 10 months to go before we reach the date that's causing all the excitement; so, just as we did 13 years ago, we'll be mounting our own Doomsday watch once again. Starting next issue, we'll be counting down the days until 21 December 2012 and bringing you the latest prophecies, predictions and piffle as we approach the final days...



MARTIN ROSS

*David Sutton*  
DAVID SUTTON

*Bob Rickard*  
BOB RICKARD

*Paul Sieveking*  
PAUL SIEVEKING

## Why fortean?



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

SEE PAGE 78



# strangedays

## Attacks blamed on ABC

DNA test could confirm presence of big cat in Gloucestershire after deer carcasses are found

DNA tests on the mutilated carcasses of two roe deer could prove they were brought down by an Alien Big Cat (ABC). Dr Robin Allaby, Associate Professor at the School of Life Sciences at the University of Warwick, visited the kill sites and took saliva samples for DNA testing. The results were due after *FT* went to press – so by the time you read this, it could either be big news... or not.

The first carcass was found near the village of Dursley in Gloucestershire, and the second on 4 January, seven miles (11km) northeast on National Trust land by Selsley Hill near Stroud. A local walker sent photographs of the second carcass to experts. Rick Minter, author of *Big Cats: Facing Britain's Wild Predators*, said the injuries were highly indicative of big cat activity. The deer's abdomen had been torn open and major organs including the heart, kidneys and liver were missing. The snout had been severed clean off – a significant detail because big cats clamp their jaws over the mouth, causing death by suffocation. Tufts of the deer's fur were also found piled by the body – such predators neatly pluck the hair from the body before shearing their teeth into the flesh.

Mr Minter commented: "It is hard to think of anything indigenous that could have done this. It was very fresh when it was found. If it had been several days old we would have been less certain because fox scavengers could have done this." There were also paw prints nearby. "There's a saying with paw prints that 'if it's round it isn't a hound' and these are quite round," said Mr Minter.



LEFT: DNA is taken from the carcass found on National Trust land at Woodchester Park.

BELOW: The damage caused by an unknown assailant on a roe deer.

### Several ABC sightings have been made in the area lately

David Armstrong, National Trust Head Ranger for the Gloucestershire Countryside, said: "The [second] deer was found close to Woodchester Park in an area where there is nice beech woodland sloping down to pastures below. It was close to a footpath popular with dog walkers, but there is plenty of space for wildlife to live relatively undisturbed. There are 120 hectares [300 acres] of woodland nearby at Woodchester and both



areas provide a good habitat for large numbers of deer, both roe and muntjac."

Several ABC sightings had been made in the area recently. A dog walker reported seeing one in a field half a mile from the Woodchester carcass. The unnamed woman said: "It was jet black and at least the size of a German Shepherd, very

powerfully built and with large paws, a long tail and a smallish head." And on the morning of 10 December, Andy Todd saw an ABC sniffing in undergrowth in the town of Nailsworth, a couple of miles south of Woodchester. He said: "It stood there for about a minute or two – I'd say it was larger than an Alsatian. It was pure white – that's what shocked me. It almost looked like a small polar bear." It then strolled out of sight.

On 17 January, a dog walker found another mutilated deer carcass between Whiteway and Rendcomb, near Cirencester – around 10 miles (16km) from Woodchester. She went home to get a camera, but by the time she returned the deer had been stripped down to its spine. As in the Woodchester carcass, its snout was missing, along with its heart, kidney and liver, and tufts of hair were found nearby.

ABCs – most often described as black and Alsatian-sized – have been sighted in almost every county in Britain for the last 50 years, from Cornwall to the tip of Scotland, and carcasses indicating ABC kills are nothing new. *Fortean Times* has covered the phenomenon since before the Dangerous Wild Animals Act of 1976. For a general history of British ABCs, see **FT167:28–37**; for the latest round-up see **FT282:42–46**. *National Trust Press Release, Stroud News and Journal, Independent, D.Mail, 11+17 Jan; [PA] Guardian, 12 Jan; D.Telegraph, 13 Jan 2012.*



**UNHAPPY LANDINGS**  
US spy craft was downed, according to Iranian military  
**PAGE 14**



**PHANTOM HOUND**  
Dambusters mascot returns from grave for photo op  
**PAGE 18**



**PARROT FASHION**  
Life-savers, crime-stoppers, speech teachers and guard birds  
**PAGE 9**

# eBay exorcist

Casting out demons in the Internet age



You can buy spells on eBay for health, wealth or love, from £5 to £50. But now a minister from Minnesota is offering a thorough exorcism for anyone with serious spiritual problems – at a price.

Reverend Dan and an assistant will visit your location, “anywhere in the lower 48 United States”, for \$15,000 (£9,652). It might seem pricey, but it covers travel and accommodation for up to a week for at least two people.

The minister told *Fortean Times* he has been offering this service for about a decade, “sometimes by fighting dark forces where I come across them, and sometimes through outright exorcism rites”. He said: “This eBay thing is an experiment but not our usual zone of comfort.” So far, he admitted, “I have yet to be paid for this service. Ever. I make my living outside of the ministry so as not to be tainted by Mammon within it. I listed this extravagant price to see what would happen. I experiment. I intend to gain no riches.” But he accepted

that “I would certainly profit off of the \$15K and don’t want to give illusions that I wouldn’t.”

Reverend Dan accepts that many cases of supposed demonic possession are actually psychological problems, and states firmly that he cannot “treat, diagnose, or cure any psychological disorders and will not attempt to do so”. Unlike the sometimes violent “deliverance ministry” practised by some churches, he emphasises that he “will not physically restrain any afflicted humans in order to perform the exorcism”.

The eBay listing concludes: “The price is high, but you are getting the help you need and using real and hardened battlers of evil to get results... The price for inaction may be higher. Combat evil. Stop the dark hand from winning and end the harassment from the unwanted elements.”

Sources: <http://bit.ly/Ashwdv> (eBay); email correspondence with Reverend Dan.

David V Barrett

## EXTRA! EXTRA! FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

**Horse herpes outbreak forces rodeo queens to ride stick ponies**

*ksl.com, 26 May 2011.*

**Car worshippers welcomed at church**

*Cheshunt & Waltham Mercury, 12 May 2011.*

**Late-night drivers fall prey to Anubis**

*Evesham Journal, 7 July 2011.*

**Swan warns of a world in turmoil**

*Australian Financial Review, 7 July 2011.*

**Bishop takes step into the unknown**

*Bradford Telegraph and Argus, 22 June 2011.*

**How zombie US consumers menace the world economy**

*Financial Times, 16 June 2011.*

**Dead man had 'tried to break into home'**

*Newcastle Journal, 24 June 2011.*

**Invisibility is closer than you thought**

*Metro, 16 June 2011.*

**NURSERY RUN BY A MONSTER**

*Halifax Courier, 21 June 2011.*

**Police told to stop milking drivers**

*Sunday Telegraph, 26 June 2011.*

## LOVE IN A COLD CLIMATE

This emperor penguin chick has a white heart-shaped patch on his chest. "It's the only one I have ever come across with a bib of this shape," said wildlife photographer Sue Flood, who has been taking pictures in the Antarctic for 20 years. "I took the picture at a time when emperor penguin chicks are gaining their adult plumage and are a mix of grey baby down and 'penguin suit' colours. This one is one in a million. When I saw it, I just couldn't believe it."

*D.Telegraph, 14 Mar 2011.*

PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES / SUE FLOOD



## BESIDE THE SEA SUDS

On 29 December, strange foam covered the promenade at Anchorholme, near Blackpool, and some areas were left buried under a 3ft (90cm) white blanket. It looked like snow or suds from a washing machine, but a local resident said: "It stains clothes and windows. It needs to be investigated." The Environment Agency said initial tests showed no signs of detergents. "We think it could be a combination of decomposing algæ churned with the tide and the westerly wind which is causing the foam," said a spokeswoman. "If this is caused by any kind of polluting material, we need to know. We will be looking into it further."

A foam-drift around Whitby harbour, North Yorkshire, on 29 January 2003 was ascribed to the blowing ashore of a plankton-like creature, *Phaeocystis* [FT170:28], while in July 2003, a foam about 6ft (1.8m) deep that enveloped Pirapora do Bom Jesus in Brazil was caused by detergents dumped in the River Tiete [FT176:6-7]. On 25/26 August 2007 at Yamba in New South Wales, foam covered the entire beach and half the nearby buildings. One minute, surfers were waiting to catch a wave, the next they were swallowed up in a giant bubble bath. The foam was so light they could puff it out of their hands and watch it float away. It stretched for 30 miles (48km) out into the Pacific, and was said to have been created by impurities in the ocean, such as salts, chemicals, dead plants, decomposing fish and excretions from seaweed, churned up by powerful currents [FT229:6-7]. Dramatic photographs accompany all of these reports. *Sun, D.Mail, 30 Dec 2011.*

PHOTOS: MEN MEDIA / BLACKPOOL GAZETTE



## SIDELINES...

### LION DAY

A driver reported seeing a lion and her cub at 3.30pm on 6 November outside the Cask & Spindle pub in Shepley, near Huddersfield, West Yorkshire. Another witness also rang the police. A dozen officers and a helicopter searched the area in vain for two hours, while train passengers were forbidden to alight at Shepley station.

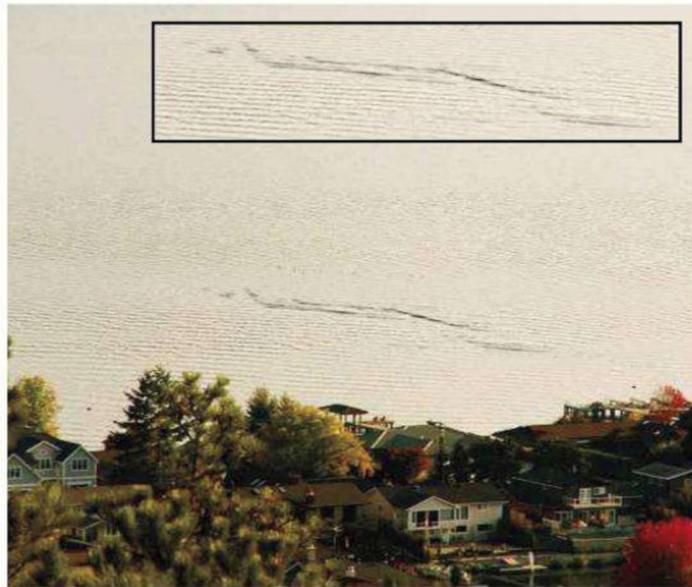
About 9.20pm on the same day Down Under, three carloads of sober people reported seeing a lion walking across the Stuart Highway at Pinelands just south of Darwin in the Northern Territory. The only place where lions are kept in the Territory is at Crocodylus Park, but police said all were accounted for. *BBC News*, 6 Nov; *Metro*, *D.Telegraph*, 7 Nov; *Big Rigs (Australia)*, 25 Nov 2011.

### DEAR LEADER'S EXIT

When Kim Jong-il died on 17 December, waves rose by up to 3m (10ft), layers of ice ruptured with the loudest crack ever heard at Chon Lake on Mount Paektu (the Dear Leader's legendary birthplace) and a snowstorm hit the area, after which Paektu glowed brightly for three days, according to the North Korean news agency. Meanwhile in Hamhung, a Manchurian crane flew three times around a statue of Kim Il-sung before alighting in a tree with head bowed, and weeping owls flew into the Kim family mausoleum in Pyongyang. *D.Telegraph*, 23+29 Dec; *Independent*, 23 Dec 2011.

# What lurks beneath?

## Ogopogo spotted, plus goose-eating monster in River Lea



RICHARD HULS

LEFT: Richard Huls's photo shows a strange disturbance in the water.

took the vehicle to the deepest part of the lake, but no monsters – or bones – were found. Benjamin Radford, Joe Nickell and John Kirk conducted an equally thorough but fruitless investigation in 2005 [FT211:52–58]. Regarding Mr Huls's video, Radford said: "There are no humps, nor head, nor form... Perhaps not coincidentally, Lake Okanagan has tens of thousands of logs harvested by the timber industry floating just under the lake's surface." *Vancouver Sun*, 3 Nov; *whatsonningbo.com/news*, 9 Nov 2011. For more on Ogopogo, see FT46:42–50.

### OLYMPIC MONSTER

An unidentified giant predator is lurking in waters near the Olympic Park in east London. In early November, Mike Wells, a boat-dweller living on the River Lea, was sitting on his barge with a friend, watching a Canada goose 30 yards away when it suddenly disappeared. "It went down vertically," he said. "There wasn't any hesitation, it went straight down. It didn't come back up. My friend and I looked at each other slack-jawed... A Canada goose weighs about 16lb [7.2kg], so whatever took it was also large." He believes it is the same (or similar) creature witnessed dragging a goose beneath the Lea on 10 July 2005 [FT204:5]. Back then, wildlife experts suspected it was an alligator or a giant turtle after finding 8ft (2.4m)-long holes burrowed in the bank. Richard Freeman from the Centre for Fortean Zoology favoured a giant wels catfish as the culprit. Tales of dogs being snatched from the towpaths were doing the rounds among local fishermen. Current suggestions include an escaped pet python, a giant pike or a mink. Ominously, the number of swans on the river and waterways near the Olympic Park is dropping. *Sunday Express*, 6 Nov; *Sun*, 13 Dec; *dailymail.co.uk*, 14 Dec 2011.

### OGOPOGO – POSSIBLY

On 27 October 2011, while visiting a winery overlooking Lake Okanagan in British Columbia – said to be home to the celebrated lake monster known as Ogopogo – local man Richard Huls shot a video of something in the water.

"It looked like two slightly serpentine objects, roughly 30 to 40ft [9–12m] long and about 1.5km [0.9 miles] away," Mr Huls told *Fortean Times*. "What seemed odd was that they slightly changed in shape and moved sideways to the waves, probably 30ft in the 30-second clip. It was hard to keep a steady image when zoomed in from such a distance or even to see if it was holding focus when zooming in and out, which I did to show there were no boats. They drifted behind the trees in the foreground and I never saw them again. The fact that they had angled bends in them that changed slightly ruled out logs in my opinion, and the sideways movement ruled out a sandbar or something stuck on a sandbar. One possibility is what's called a seiche wave, but as it stands what it was is still a mystery."

The Lake Okanagan critter, dubbed 'Ogopogo' in 1926 [FT34:11], has allegedly been

## Ogopogo has allegedly been spotted scores of times

spotted scores of times, resulting in a handful of grainy photographs and films. There were many reports in the 1920s, then a lull in the 1930s and 1940s before things picked up after 1950. The most common description is a 40ft-long sea serpent with humps, but some witnesses describe a scaly greenish creature with flippers, and others a brownish beast with a horse-like head and ridged back. While some sightings have been witnessed by up to 30 people at a time, they have often been dismissed as otters, floating logs – or the venting of natural gas (hence the occasional pong interpreted as Ogopogo's farts).

In 1991, an expedition financed by Japan's Nippon Television searched for the monster using a remotely operated vehicle and a miniature submarine. The pilot



MARTIN ROSS

# We're no bird brains!

## Parrots teach speech, save lives and help catch crooks

**S**am, an 18-year-old African grey parrot, saved the lives of five new-born puppies by jumping on his owner in the middle of the night and squawking in her ear. Suzanna Bolton was roused by Sam shouting "Come on! Come on!" Mrs Bolton, 55, got up to find her four-year-old Pomeranian bitch, Sally, had given birth to the puppies a week early and was in distress on the cold, wet kitchen floor. One had died, but the other five survived after being placed on a heated mat. "Sam's never been in my bedroom before in the eight years I've had him," said Mrs Bolton, from Darwen, Lancashire. "But that night he flew upstairs, climbed on the bed and started talking to me in my own voice. I honestly believe that, if Sam hadn't acted how he did, then the others could have died during the night." The puppies were doing well and were to be found new homes. *Metro*, *D.Telegraph*, 9 Nov 2011.

Naturalists have reported a growing phenomenon of pet parrots that have been taught phrases before escaping from their cages and then passing on the technique to the wild flocks they join. Naturalist Martyn Robinson, based at the Australian Museum in Sydney, said that he had received numerous calls from people "who think they have had something put into their drink" after hearing voices calling to them from trees in their gardens: "Hello there!", "Hello darling!", "What's happening?" and "Who's a pretty boy, then?" It's usually the younger birds in the flock; the older ones are unlikely to start learning. Mr Robinson said that because of a drought in the western regions of New



### Sam the parrot saved the lives of five new-born puppies

South Wales, flocks of wild birds – 'speakers' among them – have been flying to Sydney, where more food is available, and have been hanging around suburban gardens. When chicks are born, they hear the words being spoken by the older birds and grow up repeating them. And so it continues, generation after generation. *D.Mail*, 15 Sept 2011.

Green-winged macaws Elvis and Cilla have been on guard duty at a security company for the past year after learning to imitate barking. Their owner, Trevor Bate, 44, said: "They picked it up when we lived in Spain, where our neighbour had a dog that would bark all the time. Once we returned to the UK, we thought this would be an ideal way of saving money on a guard dog." The parrots stand watch

ABOVE: Sam, an 18-year-old African grey parrot with the puppies he saved.

outside MP Guarding security company in Telford, Shropshire. Besides barking, they also shout "Go away!" at people they do not recognise. They can also be quite affectionate, squawking "Give us a kiss", "Hello", and "Fabulous" whenever they get a treat. *Metro*, *Sun*, 19 Sept 2011.

A parrot helped catch a suspected burglar by squawking a warning to its owner. The bird became agitated after an intruder entered its home in Wallsend, North Tyneside, and woke its owner by calling out. (*Queensland Courier-Mail*, 12 Sept 2011.

Burglar Hu Feng stole a parrot and sold it to a pet shop, which was later visited by the bird's distraught owner. When the parrot saw its master, it "shouted out" and the thief's name and address were handed over by shop staff. Owner Wang Lu, of Beijing, said: "The shop owner hadn't been able to make the bird talk, but as soon as he saw me he wouldn't stop. He even did impressions of the geese on our farm." *Metro*, 6 Sept 2011.

## SIDELINES...

### PORTSMOUTH PENGUIN

Day-trippers on Southsea beach near Portsmouth, Hampshire, were astonished to see what appeared to be a South African jackass penguin frolicking in the shallows on 2 October. It was also spotted earlier, waddling round the harbour. "It certainly looks like a penguin," said a zookeeper from the Isle of Wight, after viewing grainy video footage taken by Joanne Gordon. *Sun*, *telegraph.co.uk*, 4 Oct 2011.

### DRAWN TO ITS NAME

A pet bearded dragon that went missing from its owner's garden turned up two miles (3.2km) away, at the George and Dragon pub in Seaton, Leicestershire. The lizard, called Giz, owned by Tracy Sharp, was on the run for a month. *Metro*, *Sun*, 23 Nov 2011.

### FINDING FINGERS

Playing behind the gymnasium of his school in Chilly-Mazarin, south of Paris, a seven-year-old boy found a half-buried glass jar containing four severed human fingers preserved in alcohol. It turned out they belonged to a local carpenter who lost them in a work accident 30 years ago. The jar must have risen to the surface over time. [*R*] 22 Sept 2011.

### DEMONIC YOGA

Father Gabriele Amorth, 85, the Vatican's chief exorcist since 1986, has declared that yoga is the Devil's work. He also attacked Harry Potter books for encouraging Devil worship. "What Satan desires more than anything," he said, "is for people to believe he does not exist." *D.Telegraph*, 26 Nov 2011.

### NATIVE DISH

Diners at the award-winning Marinas restaurant at the four-star Radisson Blu Hotel in Galway were startled by a strange item on the lunch menu – "Roast Stuffed Aubergine with Coconut & Lemon Grass in Coriander Sauce". It turns out they meant aubergine. *Mail on Sunday*, 4 Sept 2011.



## SIDELINES...

### MOUNTAIN DOG

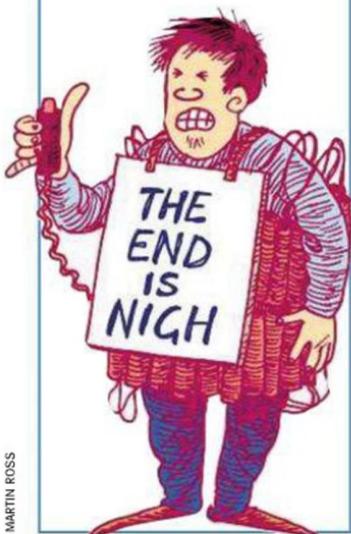
A group of climbers spotted a stray dog scampering round the peak of Kilimanjaro, at 19,340ft (5,895m) Africa's highest mountain. Temperatures on the peak are usually below freezing and there is nothing to eat, so experts were puzzled how the dog had managed to survive – or indeed why it was there. *D.Mail, 1 Sept 2011.*

### LEMUR IN TOOTING

A male ring-tailed lemur was discovered on Tooting Common, south-west London, in sub-zero temperatures on 6 December. The Malagasy primate was diagnosed with hypothermia, severe dehydration and shock at the Blue Cross animal hospital in Victoria, and put on a drip. How it ended up 5,700 miles (9,200km) from its tropical home was a mystery. Lemurs can only be kept with a special licence. *D.Mail, telegraph.co.uk, 10 Dec 2011.*

### DOOMED, I TELL YOU

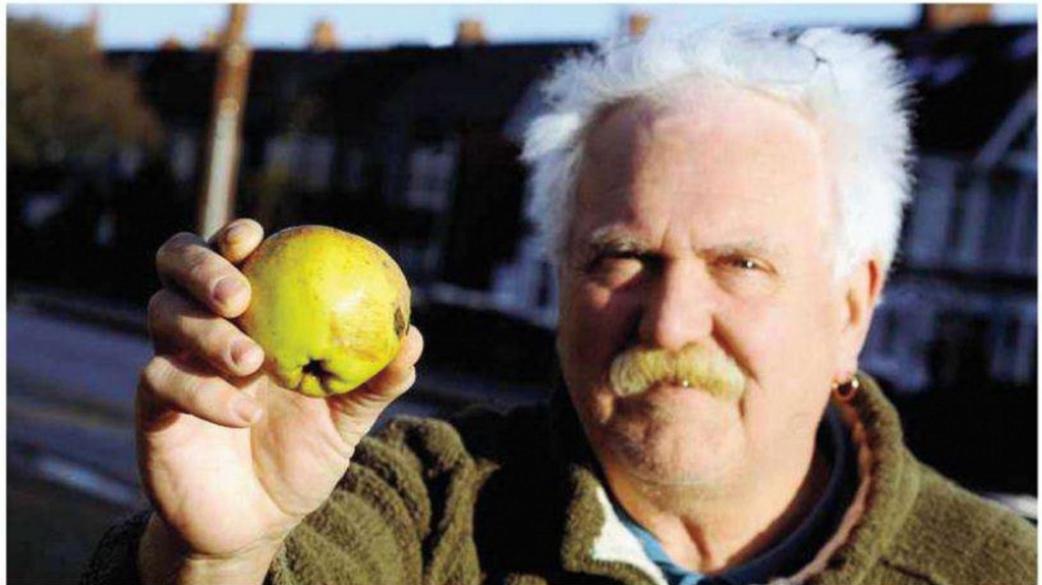
A Chinese man obsessed with the Hollywood doomsday blockbuster *2012* was jailed for two years after threatening to blow up a Shanghai skyscraper unless officials listened to his end-of-the-world predictions. Yin, 23, strapped a fake bomb to his body and threatened to blow up the 88-storey Jin Mao tower. *MX News (Sydney), 22 Nov 2011.*



MARTIN ROSS

## Falling fruit 'n' veg

AERIAL BOMBARDMENTS OF APPLES, ORANGES, PEACHES, HAZELNUTS, ETC.



BPM MEDIA

**M**ore than 100 apples battered car roofs and windscreens before landing in the road in Coundon, Coventry, West Midlands, at 6.45pm on 12 December. The deluge of fruit brought traffic to a standstill at the busy junction of Keresley Road and Kelmescote Road; a 20-yard (18m) stretch of the B4098, as well as gardens and roof gutters, were left strewn with green slush. "The apples fell out of the sky as if out of nowhere," said one driver. "They were small and green and hit the bonnet hard. Everyone had to stop their cars suddenly." Dave (or Brian) Meakins, 63, (above) was stunned when he opened his front door and found his garden full of smashed apples. Keresley parish councillor Sandra Camwell said a freak blackout happened on the same road in 2010. "Strange things do happen in this part of the world," she said. "I think it's highly likely that apples did fall from the sky. We're in an area with a spooky history, where there have been witches for centuries, after all." As usual, a tornado or whirlwind witnessed by no one was conjured up to account for the phenomenon. "I know the area well," said one motorist, "and there are no apple trees around"; so we are to presume that the

### "We're in an area with a spooky history, after all"

putative whirlwind had lifted fallen fruit from an orchard miles away – but would any windfalls be left lying around in mid-December? Although a weather front had passed through the area in the afternoon, the wind and rain were nothing exceptional.

However, Jim Dale, a senior meteorologist from British Weather Services, seemed pretty sure of himself. "Essentially, these events are caused when a vortex of air, kind of like a mini tornado, lifts things off the ground rising up into the atmosphere until the air around it causes them to fall to earth again," he said. "Returning polar maritime air is such an unstable condition and it basically means air returning from the polar regions which is very unstable. We've all heard of fish and frogs falling from the sky, and apples is certainly unusual because they have some weight to them, but it is not out of the realms of possibility." Another

suggestion put forward was that the apples had fallen from an aircraft, though none was either seen or heard. *telegraph.co.uk, 14 Dec; D.Mail, Sun, 15 Dec 2011.*

- During the night of 8/9 November 1984, East Crescent, Accrington, Lancashire, was bombarded with apples – in this case best quality Bramleys and Coxes. Derek and Adrienne Haythornwhite found at least 300 on their back lawn, on the path and in their hedges, and more were found in neighbours' gardens. The couple were woken up during the night "by thundering noises on the roof", and thought at first they were hailstones. Adrienne thought they might be falling from a plane and went out to check. Most of the obvious explanations founder on a single observation. Adrienne said: "They kept on falling for an hour or longer." *D.Mail, 10 Nov 1984 [FT44:20].*

- Camille Flammarion, the great 19th-century populariser of science, author of *L'Astronomie populaire* (1880), relates that on 8 July 1833 a girl working alone in open fields near Naples was bombarded by oranges. By way of explanation, we are told that, miles away in Pausillipo, a waterspout scooped up two baskets of oranges from



the quayside and carried them inland, although there is no mention of a fall of baskets anywhere.

• On 12 July 1961, builders on the roof of a house in Shreveport, Louisiana, had to seek shelter from missiles they took to be golf-balls that someone was chucking at them, although there was no cover for the imagined lobber. As the missiles continued to fall, they noticed they were peaches, unripe and hard, and were coming from the direction of a particularly thick cloud. Later they picked up dozens from the grounds of the house and the neighbouring property – but none was evident further afield. Frank Edwards collected the story in his *Strange World* (1973), adding that the US Weather Bureau looked for evidence of strong updraughts or storms in the vicinity, but failed to find any.

• Returning from church in Westbury Park, Bristol, on 13 March 1977, Alfred Wilson Osborne and his wife were bombarded with hundreds of hazelnuts from a dark cloud. Another person experienced more plummeting hazelnuts in the same area shortly afterwards. Mr Osborne bit into one

and found it “fresh and sweet”. Not only were there no nut trees in the vicinity, but the hazelnut season is much later in the year. “I have thought that a vortex [might have] sucked them up,” he said, “but I don’t know where you suck up hazelnuts in March.” [FT26:48].

• There was a similar great shower of hazelnuts over a small area of Dublin on 9 May 1867. *Symon’s Monthly Meteorological Magazine* described how the nuts fell so hard “that even the police, protected by unusually strong head covering, were obliged to seek shelter.” *Times*, 19 Dec 2011.

• Around 1 June 1971, Salvador Targino, a farmer in northwest Brazil, witnessed a fall of beans from the sky. A state official identified the beans as West African and speculated that they had been lifted by a whirlwind and blown across the Atlantic – although Targino said nothing about them falling during a storm. He boiled some up and said they were too tough to eat. *Chicago Tribune*, 4 June 1971.

• On 7 or 8 April 1980, Trevor Williams witnessed a shower of dried peas in his garden in Dan-y-Bryn,

Glamorgan. “They were bouncing off the greenhouse and house roof in their thousands,” he said. “The storm lasted several minutes and I was able to collect several jam-jars full of peas.” He knew of “nothing in the vicinity, like a market garden or peas stockist, to explain it” [FT37:49]. For further falls of organic matter – particularly the saga of Roland Moody and his Southampton neighbours, bombarded more than 25 times in 1978–79 with mustard and cress seeds in jelly, maize, peas and broad beans – see Bob Rickard & John Michell: *Rough Guide to Unexplained Phenomena* (2nd edition, 2007, pp58–61).

• Gloria Daniels, 68, was working in her garden in Lusby, Maryland, on 25 August 1997 with a young neighbour boy when she was hit by a tomato. Then the boy was hit. More than 30 tomatoes fell all over her yard, appearing to fall straight down from a clear sky. Friends, neighbours and the media investigated, but no one could figure where the plummeting fruit was coming from. The reporter who filed the story was himself struck by a tomato. *Calvert County (MD) Recorder*, 27 Aug 1997.

## SIDELINES...

### SPACE VEGGIES

Chinese scientists have created a range of ‘supercrops’ by blasting seeds into space aboard the Shijian-8 satellite, which spent 15 days in orbit in 2006. Researchers say the seeds, mutated by cosmic radiation, have produced giant cucumbers, tomatoes, and fast-growing sesame, cotton and chrysanthemums. China has already developed a strain of fast-growing space rice which is now planted on more than 40,000 acres (16,200ha). *D.Telegraph*, 24 Oct 2011. See also FT211:28.

### HOOK, LINE & WINKLE

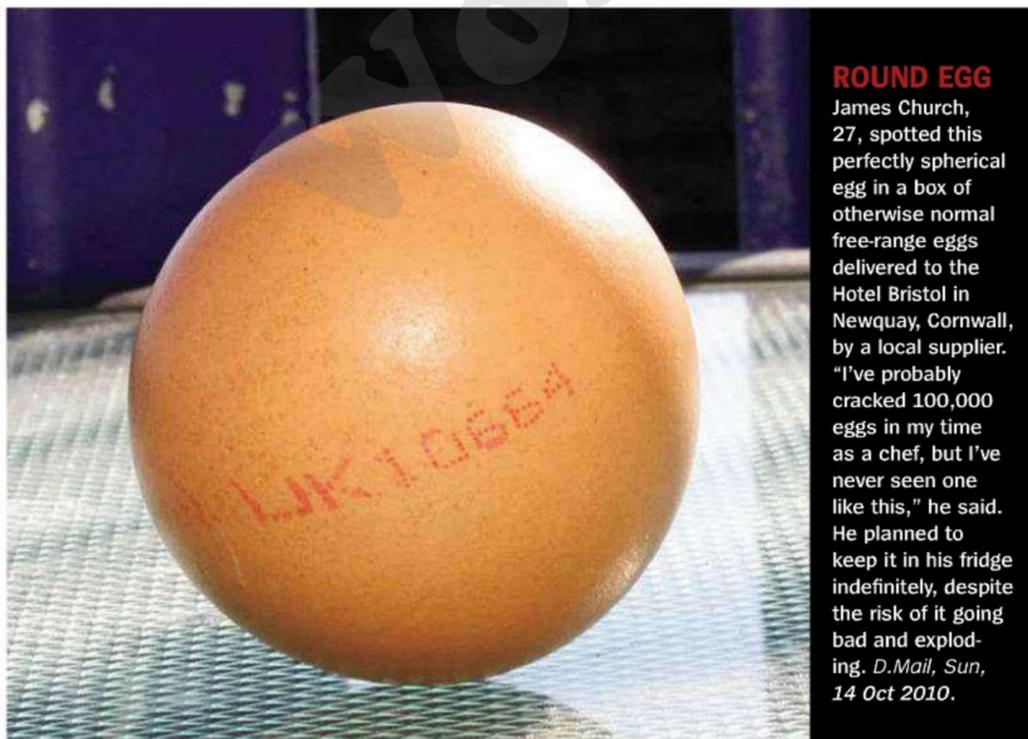
John Goldfinch, 61, fishing for mackerel at Budleigh Salterton, Devon, thought he had landed the catch of his life and spent several minutes wrestling with his line. It turned out he had hooked a scuba diver by the crotch of his wetsuit, about 50ft (15m) offshore. *D.Mirror*, 19 Aug 2011.

### ORIGINS OF LAGER

The origins of a yeast that allows beer to ferment in the cold to create lager have been traced to the beech forests of Patagonia. The microorganism somehow found its way 7,000 miles (11,000km) to Bavaria 500 years ago, where it crossed with the conventional yeast used to make bread and ferment ale. Presumably, it hitchhiked on beech timbers or in the stomach of a gall mite delivered with the timber. *Irish Times*, 23 Aug 2011.

### DOGS REPRIEVED

An annual dog meat festival in eastern China, in which 10,000 dogs are killed and eaten, was banned in September after public outrage. The festival, in Hutou village, Qianxi, marked a 14th-century military victory. Zhu Yuanzhang, the first Ming emperor, laid siege to a site near Jinhua, but every time his forces attacked, dogs barked and gave them away; so they stealthily killed all the dogs and overran the town, after which they feasted on roast dog for three days. *Irish Times*, 16 Sept 2011.



### ROUND EGG

James Church, 27, spotted this perfectly spherical egg in a box of otherwise normal free-range eggs delivered to the Hotel Bristol in Newquay, Cornwall, by a local supplier. “I’ve probably cracked 100,000 eggs in my time as a chef, but I’ve never seen one like this,” he said. He planned to keep it in his fridge indefinitely, despite the risk of it going bad and exploding. *D.Mail*, Sun, 14 Oct 2010.



## SIDELINES...

### FUN DAY OUT

Nissin Foods in Japan has opened a museum dedicated solely to pot noodles. The company said the 108,000 sq ft (10,000 sq m) exhibition in the port city of Yokohama near Tokyo takes fans through the history of the speedy snack and lets them create their own recipes from thousands of combinations in My Cup Noodle Factory. *Metro*, 20 Sept 2011.

### BURROWERS

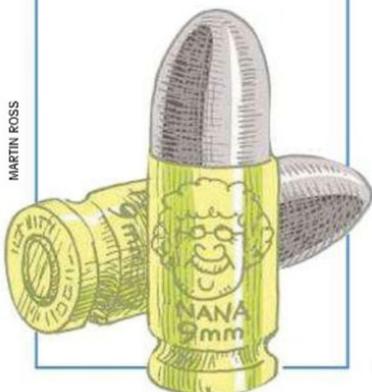
Long before the dinosaurs ruled the Earth, creatures were living underground. Complex tunnels found in Morocco date back 240 million years, while others in South Africa are five million years older. The creatures could have been "a stout, short-bodied, four-legged animal", said researchers in Freiburg, Germany. *Metro*, 15 Sept 2011.

### SNAILS ON RAMPAGE

A plague of African land snails is threatening Miami. The giant molluscs grow to 8in (20cm), can chew through plaster, lay 1,200 eggs a year and carry a parasite that infects humans with a non-lethal meningitis strain. *Sun*, 5 Oct 2011.

### OUT WITH A BANG

Thad Holmes and Clem Parnell, game wardens in Alabama, have launched Holy Smoke, a company to turn cremation ashes into ammunition by placing them in shell cases and rifle cartridges. Their website promises: "Now you can have the peace of mind that you can continue to protect your home and family even after you are gone." *Sunday Times*, 9 Oct 2011.



MARTIN ROSS

## THEY FELL FROM OUTER SPACE...



### SPACEBALL FALLS ON NAMIBIA

A large metallic ball (pictured above) fell out of the sky on remote grassland in Namibia, prompting baffled authorities to contact NASA and the European Space Agency. The hollow ball with a rough surface was made of a "metal alloy known to man", and appeared to consist of "two halves welded together". It had a circumference of 43in (109cm), a diameter of 14in (36cm), and weighed 13lb (6kg). It was found in mid-November, 60ft (18m) from the crater it made, which was 13in (33cm) deep and 12ft 6in (3.8m) wide. This was near a village in the north of the country some 480 miles (770km) from the capital Windhoek. Locals had heard several small explosions a few days before. Rather disappointingly, it is almost certainly a hydrazine tank from an unmanned rocket, commonly used in satellite launches. Several such spheres have dropped in southern Africa, Australia and Latin America in the past 20 years.

Quite a bit of space junk rained from the sky in 2011. In September, for example, NASA's defunct Upper Atmosphere

Research Satellite (UARS) – a 6.5-ton craft that monitored climate from 1991 until 2005 – plunged into the atmosphere over the Pacific Ocean. A month later, Germany's 2.7-ton Roentgen Satellite (ROSAT) fell into the Indian Ocean. On 16 January 2012, fragments of Russia's 14.5-ton *Phobos-Grunt* Mars probe, which got stuck in Earth orbit shortly after its launch on 8 November, plunged into the Pacific. [AFP], *SPACE.com*, 22 Dec; *D.Mail*, 23 Dec; (Sydney) *D.Telegraph*, 27 Dec 2011, 16 Jan 2012.

### MASSACHUSETTS MYSTERY MISSILE

At 11am on 12 December, a 3lb (1.4kg) piece of metal, about 6in (15cm) long, was found lying on the floor of a warehouse in Plymouth, Massachusetts, with a gaping hole directly above it in the roof. The tarnished silvery cylinder, broken at both ends, was the same size and shape as a tall, skinny canned drink. Employees of Michael's Wholesale Furniture Distributors reported their find to the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), which promptly sent an inspector to investigate.

Everyone initially thought that the piece of metal might have fallen off a passing plane, but the FAA later ruled this out. An FAA spokeswoman suggested it came from a piece of heavy machinery, possibly a wood-chipper; but how had it gained sufficient velocity to crash through the roof? Could it have fallen from space? There are about 20,000 bits of manmade space junk in low-Earth orbit that are as big as or bigger than the chunk that landed in Plymouth. These usually burn up during re-entry, but sizable pieces occasionally make it to the ground. *LiveScience.com*, 2 Dec; *NY Post*, 3 Dec 2011.

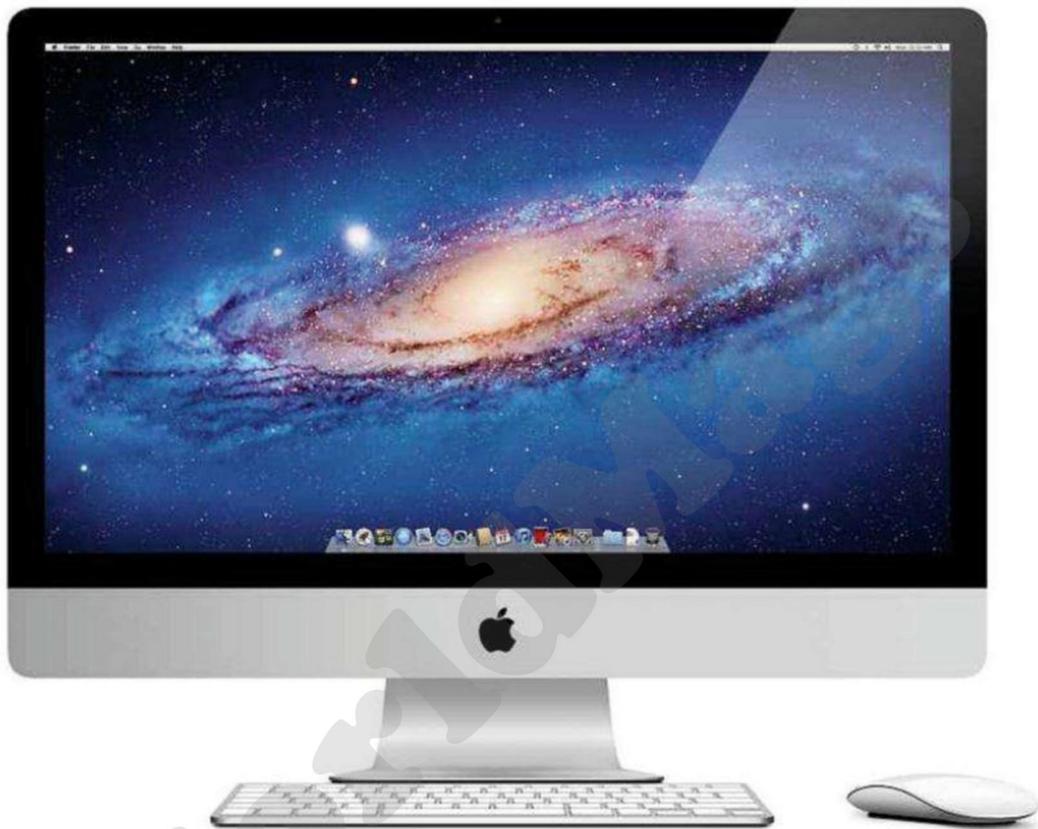
### SPACE JUNK LANDS ON COSMONAUT STREET

Residents of the remote Russian village of Vagaitsevo were surprised when debris from a satellite that had failed to launch properly crashed in their community on 23 December, hitting a house on the aptly named Cosmonaut Street. The owner of the house, Andrei Krivoruchenko, was at home with his wife at the time. They heard a huge noise and a crash as the debris hit the roof. *Independent*, 27 Dec 2011.

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# SENTINEL DOWN

As the propaganda war heats up, **DAVID HAMBLING** reports on a captured US drone: an Iranian triumph, a fake, a 'plant', a disposable item – or was alien tech used to grab it?



On 9 December, Iranian television showed a strange craft captured by their military. This was not quite a flying saucer, but the next best thing: a top-secret American RQ-170 Sentinel drone. And the arguments over whether the object on television was real, how it was brought down and if it could be reverse-engineered to make copies have closely echoed UFO debates – and have involved a similar rash of conspiracy theories.

At the heart of it is the unmanned aircraft first photographed at the US airbase in Kandahar in 2007 and dubbed 'the Beast of Kandahar' by aviation guru Bill Sweetman. The smooth flying-wing configuration indicated a stealth design to minimise radar visibility. But why deploy a stealthy spy against the Taliban, a group with no radar? The obvious answer was the Beast was being flown into neighbouring Iran or Pakistan on covert spy missions.

The US Air Force released minimal information, naming the drone as the RQ-170 Sentinel<sup>1</sup> and saying it has been developed by Lockheed Martin's Skunk Works, makers of the high-altitude U-2 and high-speed SR-71 Blackbird spy planes. The Pakistan theory was validated when US officials confirmed that the Sentinel has provided video coverage during the Bin Laden raid, presumably to avoid being

## The arguments over the drone have echoed UFO debates

spotted by the Pakistani military who might give the game away.

On 4 December, the Iranians claimed to have brought down a Sentinel over their territory by electronic means. This claim was met with scepticism; the Iranians had made similar claims before without evidence. However, the US did note that an unspecified drone had been lost over Afghanistan. "The Iranians have a pile of rubble," one unnamed US official told journalists, and the general view was that a crashed drone would be in thousands of pieces. Even if it landed intact, a self-destruct mechanism would have destroyed it.

Five days later, Iranian television broadcast pictures of what they claimed was the captured Sentinel, displayed in a gymnasium. The undercarriage was concealed with parodies of the US flag, with skulls in place of stars. This provoked further scepticism; a US official declared it was an obvious fibreglass fake. John Pike, a consultant at [GlobalSecurity.org](http://GlobalSecurity.org), said it looked more like a parade float than a real aircraft. Others said the colour was wrong, that the

humps housing communications gear and engine inlets were the wrong shape.

In the following days, there was more detailed analysis of high-resolution images of the televised drone. The colour did match previous images taken in different light, and the shape appeared to be correct. There was even a jet engine behind the inlet screen, which was only visible with image enhancement. The odd 'split slot deflectors' to control airflow corresponded with known designs. If it was a fake, it has been assembled rapidly with great attention to detail. However, the public relations machine probably knows what it's doing: most people will only have seen the initial story with the denials and this is what will be remembered.

On 12 December, President Obama said in a press conference that he had asked the Iranians to return the drone.<sup>2</sup> This effectively admitted that a US drone *had* been lost over Iran and was believed to be in one piece. A poll in the US showed people thought the drone should be destroyed or recaptured.

The CIA put their own spin on events. They briefed the media that rather than being full of top-secret technology, the Sentinel was deliberately designed so as not to give anything away. They had been expecting that one would be lost over enemy territory sooner or later. The loss

of the radar-absorbing stealth coating would not compromise US security.

One conspiracy theory had it that the Iranians had taken control of the drone with an insidious computer virus. This idea was inspired by reports of a virus on computers at Creech Air Force Base, where drones are controlled from, a few months earlier. The USAF belatedly admitted this, but claimed it was a common type and not a real threat.<sup>3</sup> But then, they would say that, wouldn't they?

Another theory was that the captured Sentinel was really a Trojan Horse, a fake which was deliberately allowed to be captured. It is packed with computer viruses and concealed features that will make the aircraft vulnerable if the Iranians (or Russians or Chinese) copy it; or perhaps it will blow up and destroy whatever secret base it is being kept in. This theory, which crops up in every discussion, seems to be based on wishful thinking.

On the other side are stories about Iranian capabilities. An Iranian engineer told the *Christian Science Monitor* that the control signals were jammed, so the Sentinel went into automatic mode and attempted to return to its home base.<sup>4</sup> The Iranians then spoofed the GPS satellite navigation signal, fooling it into landing at an Iranian airfield. If this is true, the Iranians could knock down any number of advanced drones at will; so why would they give away the existence of a war-winning secret weapon on something so trivial?

Meanwhile, Iranian engineer Mehran Tavakoli Keshe says the Sentinel was plucked out of the air and placed safely on the ground with a tractor beam he invented. Keshe has previously claimed to be able to manipulate gravity and says he gave the technology for flying saucers to the Iranian military.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps this last one is a bit far-fetched... but everything else is up for grabs.

### NOTES

1 <http://1.usa.gov/v7gF7f> (af.mil/information)

2 <http://usat.ly/ss3Jui> (usatoday.com)

3 <http://bit.ly/hom6RX> (informationweek.com)

4 <http://bit.ly/tXbXEG> (csmonitor.com)

5 <http://bit.ly/wbWDHI> (keshefoundation.com)



# ALCHEMY

## 1977



ALTERNATIVE LIFESTYLE

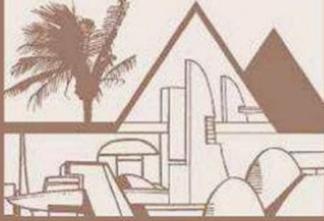
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# ARCHAEOLOGY

**PAUL SIEVEKING** reports on some mysterious markings found in old Jerusalem, and from South Africa the earliest known painter's toolkit and the earliest known sleeping mats.

## GROOVY ENIGMA

Archaeologists excavating a site in the City of David near Jerusalem's Old City are puzzled by strange V-shaped carvings cut into the limestone floor of a room, each approximately 2in (5cm) deep and 20in (50cm) long. Ceramic shards found in the room, located next to the main spring that served the ancient city, indicate it was last used about 800 BC, when Jerusalem was under the rule of Judæan kings.

The markings were discovered in May 2011, and in November a conference was held in Jerusalem attended by more than 200 experts. When no explanations emerged from the gathering, the Israeli Antiquities Authority set up a Facebook page and asked the public.

More than 20,000 suggestions came in from all over the world. "Ideas ranged from mirrors, to signs of ancient scripts to some kind of device for agricultural use, or even



a suggestion from a dentist who said the markings could be the base for an ancient dental chair," said site archaeologist Prof. Roni Reich of Haifa University. Other suggestions

included moulds for smelting iron or drainage for ancient urinals. Prof. Reich believes the most likely explanation is that the V shapes are the remnant of some kind of groove for a

moveable object or a support for a device to produce something. "It's still a mystery and hopefully one day we will come up with an answer." *Metro*, 8 Dec; *Irish Times*, 13 Dec 2011.

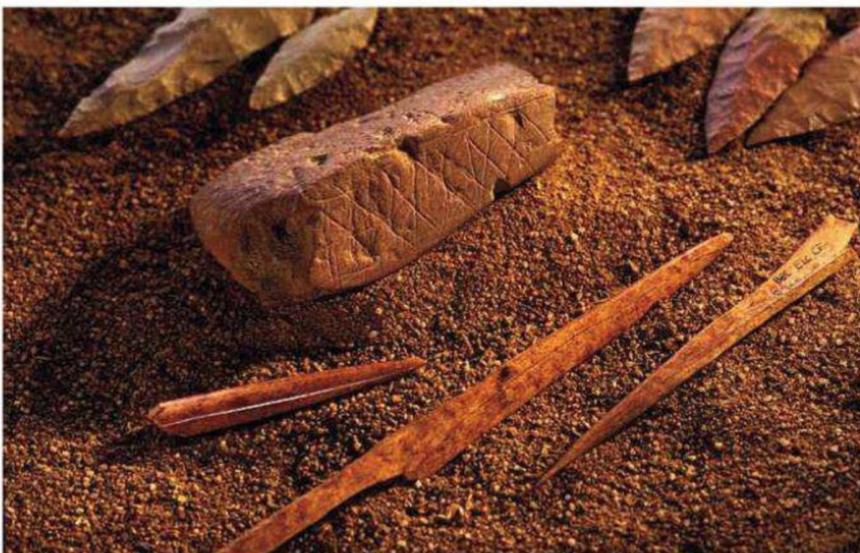
## EARLIEST PAINTERS

The oldest known painting kits, used 100,000 years ago, have been found at the Blombos cave on a cliff facing the Indian Ocean in South Africa, about 200 miles (320km) east of Cape Town. Two sets of implements for preparing red and yellow ochres to decorate animal skins, body parts

or perhaps cave walls were uncovered alongside the giant abalone shells that served as mixing pots. Other bones, including the shoulder blade of a seal, were among the ingredients for making the pigments. The bones were probably heated in a fire and the marrowfat used as a binder for the paint.

"This is the first known instance of deliberate planning and production of a compound," said Christopher Henshilwood from the University of Bergen in Norway, adding that it also marked the first known use of containers. "It's early chemistry. It casts a whole new light on early *Homo sapiens* and tells us they were probably a lot more intelligent than we think, and capable of carrying out quite sophisticated acts at least 40,000 to 50,000 years before any other known example of this kind of basic chemistry," he said.

The artists used small quartzite cobbles to hammer and grind the ochres into a powder, which was then poured into the shell and mixed with charcoal, burnt and broken bone, and an unidentified liquid (probably urine or water). One of the artists' kits came with a slender bone from the front leg of a dog or wolf. One end had been dipped in ochre, suggesting it was used as a primitive paintbrush. *Homo sapiens* occupied the cave from at least 140,000 years ago. The cave's entrance was blocked by sand 70,000 years ago. *BBC News*, 13 Oct; *Science*, *Guardian*, *Int. Herald Tribune*, 14 Oct 2011.



LEFT: Stone and bone tools for ancient painters.

# CLASSICAL CORNER



## WORLD'S OLDEST BEDDING

The oldest known sleeping mats in the world, made 77,000 years ago, have been found at Sibudu, a cave in a sandstone cliff in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. They consist of compacted stems and leaves of sedges, rushes and grasses stacked in at least 15 layers within a chunk of sediment 10ft (3m) thick, and pre-date the previous oldest-known plant bedding by 50,000 years. Many of the plant remains are species of *Cryptocarya*, evergreen plants that are used extensively in traditional medicines. The beds appeared to be mostly composed of river wild-quince (*C. woodii*), whose crushed leaves are an effective mosquito-repellent. "The selection of these leaves for the construction of bedding suggests that the early inhabitants of Sibudu had an intimate knowledge of the plants surrounding the shelter, and were aware of their medicinal uses," said Lyn Wadley, an archaeologist at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg. "Herbal medicines would have provided advantages for human health, and the use of insect-repelling plants adds a new dimension to our understanding of behaviour 77,000 years ago."

Microscopic analysis of the bedding suggested the inhabitants repeatedly refurbished the mats. They apparently also burned the bedding regularly, "possibly as a way to remove pests," said Christopher Miller, a geoarchaeologist at the University of Tübingen in Germany. "This would have prepared the site for future occupation and represents a novel use of fire for the maintenance of an occupation site."

By about 50,000 years ago, modern humans began expanding out of Africa, eventually replacing now-extinct forms of humans in Eurasia, including the Neanderthals. The age of the oldest mats are roughly contemporaneous with other South African evidence of modern human behaviour, such as the use of perforated shell beads, sharpened bone points probably used for hunting, bow and arrow technology, the use of snares and traps and the production of glue for attaching handles onto stone tools. *Science*, *D. Telegraph*, 9 Dec 2011.

FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

## 147. (H)OMERTÀ

Raised a wry smile when I saw a review of *Homer's Secret Odyssey* by Florence and Kenneth Wood [FT283:63], unwelcome sequel to their *Homer's Secret Iliad* (1999), still peddling the line taken by Florence's mother Edna Johnston Leigh (1916–99: one website credits "a Kansas schoolteacher named Mrs Doris Wood") that the two epics are actually a compendium of secret astronomical learning. As conductor Gerhardt Richter snapped at a violinist who fluffed a difficult note: "Your damned nonsense can I stand twice or once but sometimes always By God never!" Such stuff inevitably exhumes John Allegro's (in famous *The Sacred Mushroom and the Cross* (1970), claiming that the New Testament was a secret message to a cult of mushroom worshippers, in the process transmogrifying Christ into a fungus, Peter into an onion, and other semantic hocus-pocus.

An online review-article by Susan Kokinda does the Woods no favours by putting them in the same tradition as Lyndon LaRouche, whose manifold absurdities include Queen Elizabeth as head of an international drug-cartel – must be news in Mexico. As for Mother Leigh's astronomical hypothesis, there had been the equally dubious precedent of India's Bal Gandghar Tilak who "proved" in *Orion, or Researches into the Antiquity of the Vedas* (1893) and *The Arctic Home of the Vedas* (1903) that the Vedic hymns "communicated ancient astronomical and calendrical knowledge metaphorically".

Sample Leighisms: the 45 regiments in Homer's 'Catalogue of Ships' (Iliad 2) represent the 45 constellations; Homeric heroes are equated with individual stars, e.g. Achilles is Sirius in Canis Major, Agamemnon Regulus in Leo, Odysseus Arcturus in Boötes, and so on; battle scenes conform to stellar patterns, thus when Menelaus slays Pandarus, this is actually Sagittarius mutating into Scorpio at the Autumnal Equinox; a ship's log in *Homer's Secret Odyssey* (separately available online) reconstructs Odysseus's ship's log in tandem with lunar phases and solar ecliptics – still with me?

You can play these games *ad infinitum*. What, for instance, should we make of Homer's standard trope (one of many) "starry-sky" when used in daytime contexts?

The 64,000 drachma/euro question: why put all this in code? There was no danger

in openness: occasional prosecutions of philosopher-scientists (e.g. Anaxagoras for 'impiety' and Diagoras for 'atheism'), but no ancient Galileo trials. Leigh based some of her arguments on Aratus's poem *Phaenomena* (c. 270 BC), a straightforward didactic poem variously translated without sensation into Latin by Cicero, Germanicus, and Domitian.

Another Starter for Ten: how come none of Homer's brightest ancient readers (Aristotle, Plato, Thucydides, his Alexandrian editors, etc.) spotted this astronomical secret? Homer was the author most read and written about in Greece and Rome, yet it apparently eluded everyone.

The FT notice complains that the Woods shirk the 'Homeric Question' – Who? Where? When? A debate going at least as far back

as Herodotus. Homer's name in Greek was supposed to mean

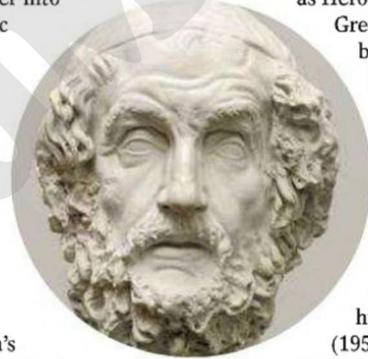
both 'hostage' and 'blind'.

Seven places competed for the honour of being his birthplace, Chios and Smyrna the front-runners. Samuel Butler (1897) believed the *Odyssey* was composed by a woman, a notion taken up (inevitably) by Robert Graves in his novel *Homer's Daughter* (1955) and Andrew Dalby's

*Rediscovering Homer* [FT230:59]. The

Leigh-Woods extravaganza surely demands a single author's written texts. Most (not all) moderns believe the poems were orally composed by a sequence of illiterate bards over several centuries, a notion based on the field work with modern equivalents of Albert Lord (1960), Milman Parry (1971), and Marxist George Thomson (1945). Contradictions and inconsistencies (notably *Iliad* 10), point to multiple authorship. Likewise, theories on their first writing-down range from Barry Powell's (2009) idea that Homer himself invented the Greek alphabet c. 800 BC for this purpose (though only one mention of writing in Homer – *Iliad* 6) to centuries later. I'm a rare bird who thinks the ancient ascription to Athenian tyrant Peisistratus (c.545–527 BC) plausible.

As with Shakespeare, "not written by Homer, but another man with same name". Lucian's narrator (*True Story* 2.24) joins *The Dead Poets' Society* (Step Back, Robin Williams) in the Elysian Fields where Homer asserts that he was a Babylonian, not blind, who, contrary to popular opinion, composed the *Iliad* first and wrote all the verses bracketed/expunged by his Alexandrian critics. Homer Simpson, anyone?





# GHOSTWATCH

**ALAN MURDIE** discusses the shade of a World War II legend – Guy Gibson's pet Labrador.

## GHOST OF DAMBUSTERS DOG

A famous wartime mascot is said to have returned as a phantom. The ghost of the pet black Labrador which belonged to World War II hero Wing Commander Guy Gibson, VC, is being investigated at RAF Scampton in Lincolnshire by the group Paranormal Lincs. Gibson led the Dambusters raids against the Möhne, Eder and Sorpe dams on the Ruhr in Germany, conducted on 16 May 1943. Just hours before, his black Labrador, which he called Nigger, was run over and killed at the base. Before taking off for the Ruhr Dams, Gibson left instructions for his faithful companion to be buried outside his office and his dog's name was used as the code-word for the famous raid.

Sightings of Gibson's dog allegedly date back to the early 1950s. In February 1952, a mess waiter working at RAF Scampton reported seeing a phantom black dog on the base, and there have been sporadic claims of paranormal activity ever since, particularly around the anniversary of the raid.

Paranormal Lincs have been given permission to stake out the operational RAF base, targeting Guy Gibson's office where they claim to have picked up activity on their electronic detection equipment. The office has been empty for more than half a century and is now part of the RAF Scampton Historical Museum on the base, also home to the Red Arrows.

Speaking of the current investigation, the



## It is said that the dog turned up just as the photo was being taken

lead investigator, Paul Drake, 49, a computer engineer and founder of Paranormal Lincs, stated: "There is definitely paranormal activity there... We have been up there on three different occasions. Each time, something different has happened. Something is definitely going on, as there has been no power to the office for years."

Their investigation followed the discovery of a 1987 photograph of a black dog sitting among a school group at a Dambusters Memorial at Woodhall Spa. It is alleged that the dog mysteriously turned up just as the photo was being taken, refusing to be shooed away, and disappeared afterwards. Unfortunately – presuming this story to be accurate – there is no conclusive evidence that the dog in the picture was anything other than a living animal.

Paranormal Lincs has a strong spiritualist orientation, and one of the group, Michelle Clements, stated: "We are looking for the spirit of Guy Gibson, but there have been a lot of things reported about his dog." They claim that the dog's spirit may have tried to contact



**TOP:** The 1987 photo showing the canine visitor.

**ABOVE:** Nigger's grave at RAF Scampton.

**FAR LEFT:** Nigger with members of 617 Squadron.

**LEFT:** Guy Gibson.  
**OPPOSITE:** Delapré Abbey.

# Mythconceptions

by Mat Coward

## 151. COW-TIPPING

### The myth

Cow-tipping is a sport enjoyed by generations of students, rugby club members, and other jolly pranksters. Because cows sleep standing up, with their knees locked, and have slow reactions and a high centre of gravity, it is possible to sneak up on them and push them over. If you are drunk, you will find this amusing.



HUNT EMERSON

### The "truth"

An impressive amount of research has been done on this vital topic. In particular, zoologists at the University of British Columbia studied the physics and mathematics of the matter. They declared that a 4ft 9in (1.45m)-high cow, remaining passive throughout, pushed at an angle of 23.4 degrees, could theoretically be toppled by a minimum of 4.43 people acting in concert. At this point, however, zoology plays its veto. Cows do not sleep standing up, but lying down. Their knees do not lock. Cows will rest on their feet, but as prey animals they will still be alert to danger (whether from lions or Young Conservatives). Amongst vets, and others whose work brings them into daily contact with bovines, there is unanimity: cows are skittish creatures, with good senses of hearing and smell, and trying to sneak up on one is a hopeless task. Everyone who's looked into the subject has come to the same conclusion: cow-tipping is foaflore. No doubt many have tried it, but there seems to be no authenticated case of anyone succeeding at it.

### Sources

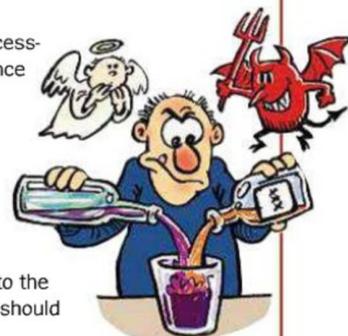
<http://bit.ly/z10tiC> (gazette.uwo.ca); <http://bit.ly/wgLEt> (articles.dailyamerican.com).

### Disclaimer

Debunkers claim that no videos exist of a successful cow-tipping, and that this is powerful evidence that the practice itself is equally nonexistent. Clearly, such a film is the only thing that could rescue tipping from the status of myth; if you know of one, please tell *FT*.

### Mythchaser

*FT* reader Tony Ruben asks if there's any truth to the traditional claim that, when on the booze, one should never mix "grape and grain".



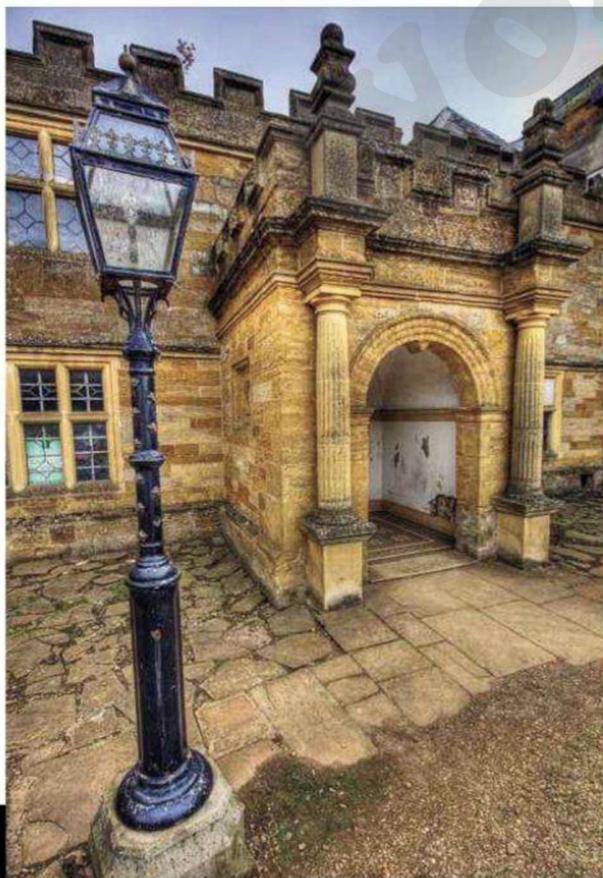
them; at least that is how they interpret activity on their electronic detection equipment; other interpretations are, of course, possible. But more crucially, is any such ghostly dog necessarily that of Gibson's beloved pet? After all, Lincolnshire has a rich and long-standing folklore of ghostly black dogs, pre-dating World War II. Folklorist Ethel Rudkin undertook a study and identified numerous sites across the county where such apparitions manifested, all before 1943.

Coincidentally, another group of ghost-hunters operating in a nearby county also claim to have discovered a phantom Labrador and human ghost which also dates from 1943. Northampton Spiritseekers explored the 12th-century Delapré Abbey building on 29 July, using night vision cameras and heat-seeking meters to try to detect paranormal activity. Andy Britten, 34, leader of the group, said they had seen a woman, believed to be Mary Bouverie, who died in the stable block in 1943.

Mr Britten said: "We picked her up at two different ages. One inside when she was about 20 years old and another outside when she looked a lot older. I could smell her perfume but she did not really want to say too much."

As with Paranormal Lincs at Scampton, Mr Britten said his group had also picked up the spirit of a Labrador dog, believed to have been buried in the pet cemetery behind the tearooms. He said: "People who go into the tea rooms with their dogs find that their pets won't use the back door out towards the garden. This might be because they sense the spirit of the different dogs." Thus, Delapré Abbey seems to have a growing ghostly reputation; formerly, in the 1970s, it possessed only the ghost of a librarian.

Sources: *D.Telegraph*, *D.Mail*, 2 Nov 2011; Ethel H Rudkin: "The Black Dog", *Folklore* 49, 1938: 111-131; *Northampton Chronicle and Echo*, 8 Aug 2011; Joan Forman: *Haunted East Anglia*, 1974.



RICH LEWIS

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## SNACK SURPRISES

MORE EXAMPLES OF SUPERMARKET PACKAGING WHICH FAILED TO MENTION THE SPECIAL INGREDIENTS THAT YOU WEREN'T EXPECTING...



ABOVE LEFT: A live frog was found in a leaf salad, and then became a studio pet at Channel Five. ABOVE RIGHT: A mouse embedded in a loaf of bread ordered online.

Sara Eason, 37, found a live frog in her bag of Tesco Mixed Seasonal Baby Leaf Salad on 8 September 2011. "I thought some of the leaves had gone slimy, so I had a look inside," she said. "I saw a little frog looking out at me, which then croaked. I jumped about a foot in the air." Her husband had bought the salad from a Tesco Metro petrol station in Wimbledon, south-west London, four days earlier and the bag had remained unopened in their fridge since. Mrs Eason was about to eat lunch at home in Morden, Surrey, before heading to work as a script supervisor on Channel Five's *Big Brother* show. "I didn't want the frog jumping around the house when I was out, so I put it in my bag and took it to work," she said. "My production manager gave it some water and it now seems to be the office pet." *D.Mail*, 10 Sept 2011.

About 10 days later, in Örebro, near Stockholm in Sweden, Sofie Isaksson discovered a live toad in a pre-packed salad that had been in her fridge for almost a week. "At first I thought it was a rat so I just screamed and dropped the bag and yelled at my daughter to come and check it out," she said. Instead, she uncovered a toad. "It was pretty still at first, legs folded in and eyes closed, so we thought it was dead. We poked it and it started moving. I guess it was just chilled to the bones." Ted Stenshed, CEO of Sydgrönt,

the company that distributed the salad, said that although unfortunate, the incident was actually a sign that their products grow in a healthy environment, since wildlife is drawn to it. So that's alright then. *The Local (Sweden)*, 20 Sept 2011.

Stephen Forse, of Kidlington, Oxfordshire, bought a loaf of bread online in January 2009. He had already used some of the bread for sandwiches when he noticed "a dark-coloured object embedded in the corner of three or four slices," he said. "As I looked closer, I saw that the object had fur on it." It was a dead mouse. An environmental health officer noticed its tail was missing, which upset Mr Forse even more. "Had it fallen off prior to the bread being wrapped or had any of my family eaten it with another slice of bread on a previous day?" he wondered. This year, Premier Foods, the company that produced the loaf, admitted responsibility and was fined £5,500 and ordered to pay £11,109.47 in costs at Oxford Crown Court. *BBC News*, 27 Sept 2011.

A Baby Leaf and Rocket Salad from Tesco in Burnham-on-Sea, Somerset, contained something a little more worrying – the 4in (10cm) carcass of a "decomposed" bird. While cooking dinner for his family, Paul Streeter had placed the salad in

a bowl before returning to the kitchen. His girlfriend shrieked after finding the carcass among the leaves. *i>*, 19 Nov 2011.

A live frog turned up in a chicken wrap in a Nando's restaurant in Victoria, central London, in November. "I bit into the wrap, but couldn't chew through it," said Ross Dance, 32. "I excused myself and got it out of my mouth. There was a whole frog there. It was still alive. I felt really ill." He took the frog home to Crawley, West Sussex, in a plastic tub. He later realised that the frog – now dead – had been left with only three legs. "I think I might have eaten one," he said. "The thought of chewing on it keeps me awake at night." One could comfort Mr Dance by pointing out that Liu Hai, the Chinese god of prosperity, was always accompanied by his

familiar, the three-legged toad. Anyway, Nando's staff gave him £44 compensation. They said the "only possible" way the frog could have got into the wrap was in its pre-packed salad leaves, which were provided by a supplier washed and ready to eat. *Sun*, 30 Nov 2011.

David Casey, 43, of Bedworth, Warwickshire, was tucking in to his favourite fudge-flavoured yogurt when he bit into a human molar tooth full of fillings. He took it back to the Tesco store to complain and they give him a 68p refund for "inconvenience". The former corporal, who had served in Kosovo in the late 1990s, thought this was unsatisfactory; he was having chemotherapy treatment for a stomach tumour and any infection could have been life-threatening. *Metro*, 29 Nov 2011.



ABOVE: Remains of a decomposed bird showed up in a Baby Leaf and Rocket salad.

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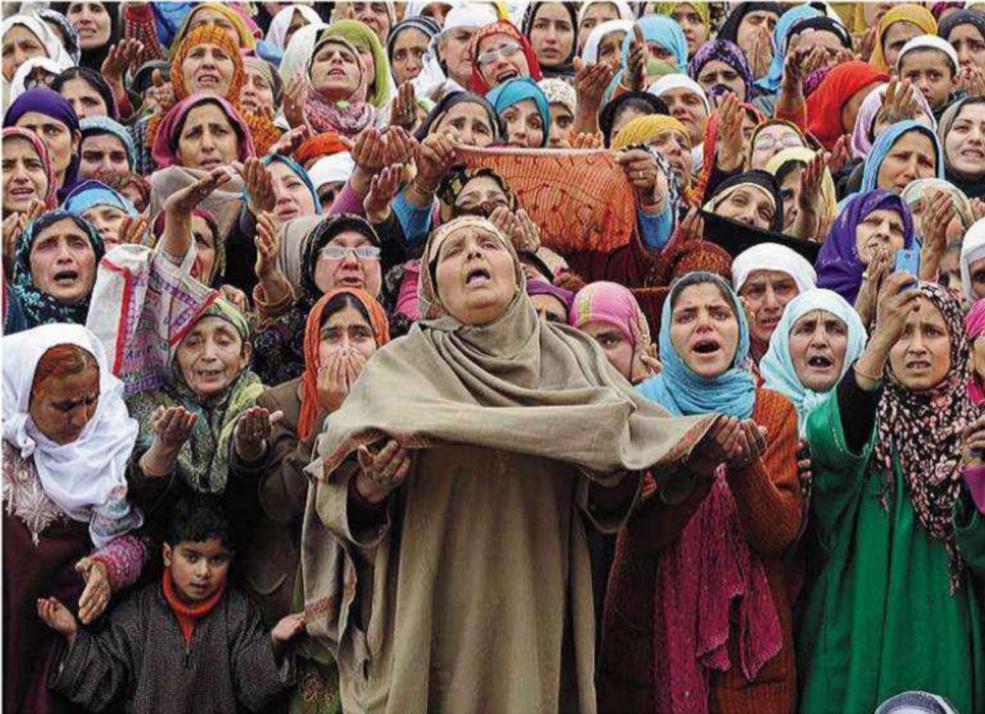
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## RELIC WORSHIP

A HAIR OF THE PROPHET AND THE BLESSED VIRGIN'S BELT GO ON SHOW AND ATTRACT THE DEVOUT AND CURIOUS IN KASHMIR AND RUSSIA



GETTY IMAGES / AFP / TAUSEEF MUSTAFA

### HOMAGE TO THE PROPHET

Devotees pray (above) as an imam displays a holy relic believed to be hair from the beard of the Prophet Muhammad, at the Hazratbal shrine on the outskirts of Srinagar in Kashmir. Kashmir's holiest Muslim shrine is on the left bank of the Dal Lake. It is known by many names including Hazratbal, Assar-e-Sharief, Madinat-us-Sani, or simply Dargah Sharif. *Metro*, 27 May; *Independent*, 9 July 2011.

### BVM'S BELT ON TOUR

Last October, something believed to be part of a belt worn by the Blessed Virgin Mary arrived in St Petersburg, where it was met by Prime Minister Vladimir Putin (right). The holy relic is usually kept in Vatopedi monastery on Mount Athos in Greece, and this was its first ever appearance in Russia. In the month following, it was viewed by more than two million people in 14 Russian cities before it arrived in Moscow, where another half million saw it (according to



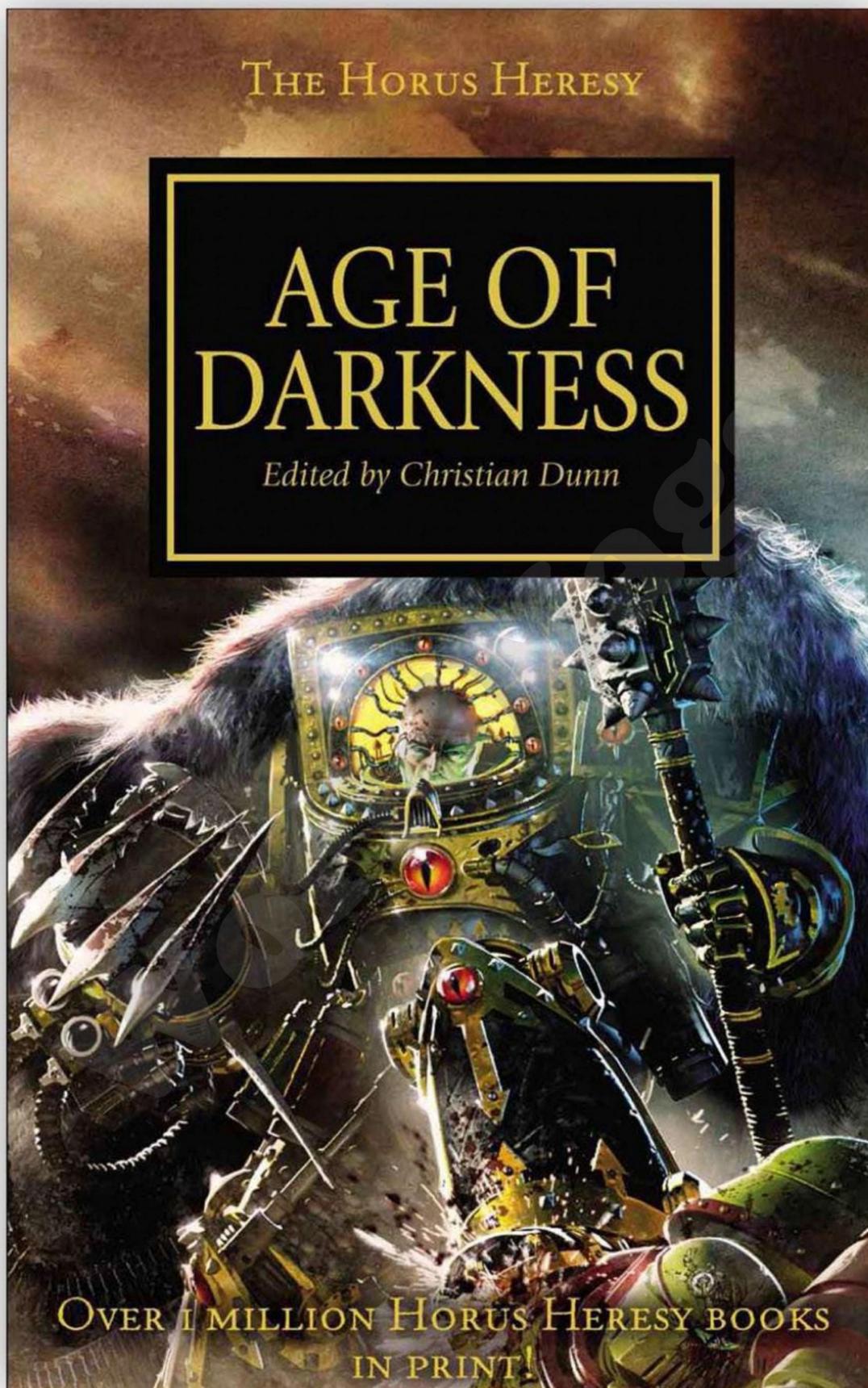
AP PHOTOS / RIA NOVOSTI / ALEXEI NIKOLSKIY

the *Independent* – the *Irish Times* suggests a much higher number). The huge excitement led to suggestions that it might be flown over Moscow in a helicopter to bless the whole city before it returned to Greece on 28 November. Three days before that, police near the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour in central Moscow said the waiting time to see the reliquary was down to around 14 hours, from a peak of 24 hours earlier that week.

Regime insiders and people of middling importance were given special tickets that allowed them to skip the queues and claim their cures ahead of the common herd. However, some commentators suggested that Orthodox belief and the Russian national psyche made people feel that enduring a certain level of “suffering” before touching the ornate silver box in which the relic is held would make its powers all the stronger.

The belt is believed to help women conceive, and cure all sorts of other pains and ailments. We assume its powers to cure barrenness are not normally called into play, as women are banned from Mount Athos. Ironically, a smaller part of the same relic is on permanent display at another church in Moscow, where it draws only a few visitors. The result of the miles-long queues and the bussing-in of pilgrims was a series of mammoth traffic jams, the like of which had not been seen in Moscow since the arrival of the head of Saint Panteleimon the Healer in 2000. The Orthodox Church had a dramatic surge of influence and power following the fall of the atheist Soviet regime in 1991. The Cathedral of Christ the Saviour became the symbol of this change when its replica was built in 1997 on the same site where Stalin blew up the original in 1931, replacing it with a vast open-air heated swimming pool. *telegraph.co.uk*, 24 Nov; *Independent*, 26 Nov; *Irish Times*, 30 Nov 2011.

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## MEDICAL BAG

Surgical misdeeds, miraculous recoveries, traumatic healing, and good news on cancer

FAR LEFT AND LEFT: Oneal Ron Morris faces charges for malpractice.

BELOW: One of her patients.



### ROCK BOTTOM

Oneal Ron Morris, 30, a transgender man who dresses as a woman, was detained in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, on 18 November and charged with practising medicine without a licence and causing serious bodily injury. (S)he had allegedly injected a woman's buttocks with a mixture of cement, mineral oil and Fix-A-Flat tyre inflator and sealant, and used superglue to seal the incisions. The woman, who paid \$700 (£450), later suffered abdominal pain, infected sores and flu-like symptoms. Photographs showed that Morris had apparently done the procedure on her/himself – with grotesque results, as the above photograph shows.

The operation originally took place in a Miami Gardens apartment in May 2010 and investigators had been looking for the suspect ever since. The woman, who wanted to work at a nightclub and who was referred to Morris by a friend, ended up at Tampa General Hospital with life-threatening symptoms,



including pneumonia and an MRSA infection. At the time of the last report, further alleged victims of Morris were coming forward.

In January 2011, Whalesca Castillo, an unlicensed cosmetic surgeon in New York City, was arrested for running an illegal business out of her home injecting women with liquid silicone in the buttocks and breasts; and in 2010, Ana Josefa Sevilla was charged with a similar crime in Miami after one of her clients ended up in the emergency room with complications. Last February, 22-year-old London student Claudia Aderotimi died

following a cosmetic buttocks injection administered in a Philadelphia hotel room. *ABC News*, 19 Nov; *BBC News*, Sun, 21 Nov; (Sydney) *D.Telegraph*, 22 Nov; *Irish Independent*, 25 Nov 2011.

On 5 May 2011, Justin Street, 22, attended a 'pumping-party' at the New Jersey home of Kasia Rivera, 34, to have his penis enlarged with a silicone injection, but the next day he died from a silicone embolism in the lungs. In December, Ms Rivera was charged with manslaughter and unauthorised practice of medicine. *D.Mail*, 11 Dec 2011.

### GETTING BETTER

Lucy Hussey-Bergonzi, from Hackney, east London, was 13 when she collapsed with a brain haemorrhage days after filming a walk-on part in *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*. Her collapse was triggered by a rare condition she had carried since birth, a cluster of abnormal blood vessels that remained undetected until they burst. She had two operations in February

2009 at Great Ormond Street Hospital while in a coma. Doctors told her mother Denise, 41, that it was time to say goodbye to her daughter. Her parents called in a Roman Catholic priest to baptise Lucy. As he put holy water on her forehead, the family saw her arm shoot up in the air. Within 24 hours, she was taken off life support. In the following months, she had to re-learn how to talk, walk, and even eat and drink. In August 2011, she said: "Doctors were saying it was a miracle. People who have brain haemorrhages usually don't survive them." However, she still suffers severe headaches and numbness down her right side. *D.Telegraph*, *Metro*, 10 Aug 2011.

A formerly paralysed Dutch cyclist may represent her country in the Olympics after a bike crash gave her back the use of her legs. Monique van der Vorst, who is now 27, was a sporty child who enjoyed tennis and hockey. At 13, she had just taken up cycling when a routine ankle operation resulted in nerve damage and left one leg paralysed from the hip down. Confined to a wheelchair, she took up hand-cycling and competed nationally and internationally, winning six European and three world championship titles. In 2008, she was hit by a car, which damaged her spinal cord and left her completely paralysed from the waist down. Later that year, she won two silver medals at the Beijing Paralympic Games. In March 2010, while training in Majorca for the 2012 London Paralympics, she was involved in another accident, this time with another cyclist. Her body went into spasm and she had to be hospitalised and treated for severe back pain. However, by June 2010 she began to feel tingling in first one foot and then the other, and by 20 November she was able to walk again for the first time in 14 years. A year later, she was signed by the Dutch Rabobank's women's cycling team, where she will train with some of the world's best. She hopes to participate in the Rio Olympics in 2016. There is no obvious reason for her recovery. Although most people with spinal cord injuries do see some improvement, it is minimal.

A lucky few recover fully, but this usually takes a year or more rather than happening suddenly, as in Ms van der Vorst's case. One theory is that the 2008 accident pushed two vertebrae out of alignment, causing them to compress her spinal cord and leaving her paralysed. The 2010 accident could have realigned the vertebrae, giving her back the power in her legs. *Independent*, 24 Nov; *D.Mail*, 25 Nov 2011.

## SHOCK THERAPY

Seven-year-old Gerhard van der Merwe had worn glasses since the age of nine months and could only see with the aid of strong lenses. "Doctors always thought he had very bad eyesight because I am diabetic and injected myself with insulin during my pregnancy," said his mother Gretha. "He could barely distinguish light and dark with his right eye."

On about 7 June 2011, Gerhard was hit by a taxi in front of his family's house in Potchefstroom, South Africa, and was flung about 40ft (12m) through the air. He escaped with mild concussion and a bruised right eye. "In hospital he kept telling us he could see," said his mother. "He had to get stitches in his right eyelid, and it was swollen. So we thought he meant the swelling was subsiding and that he could distinguish light again. But he kept saying he could see." An eye specialist tested the boy and said he could read "from the largest to the very smallest letter on the chart". It now appears that his bad eyesight might have been due to pinched nerves. *news24.com (South Africa)*, 21 June 2011.

A deaf man shaken in bed by an earthquake last August could hear again when the tremors stopped. Robert Valderzak, 75, lost his hearing in June after a fall, but when the 5.8 magnitude quake rattled the hospital in Virginia where he was being treated for cancer, he said "something happened" in his head. *Sun*, 26 Aug 2011.

Charly Sissons, 15, from Essendene, Rutland, almost drowned while windsurfing in August 2008. She suffered a flashback to a bullying incident 11 years earlier, when she had been held underwater in a swimming pool. In the next few

days, her vision deteriorated until she couldn't see at all. Tests showed there was nothing wrong with her eyes. Then seven months later, in March 2009, Charly was holding the hand of her grandmother Dorothy Stanberry as she died, aged 73. "Nan was my best friend," said Charly. "I felt numb losing her. Then in the car on the way home I suddenly realised I could see again." Later, her mother Gill said: "It sounds weird but doctors are convinced those two shocks caused her to lose her sight and then regain it." *Sun*, 15 June 2011.

## WINK WINK

A woman who winks thousands of times a day said in November 2010 that it was ruining her life. Barbara Watkins, 65, of Halifax, West Yorkshire, began winking with her left eye in March 2010 and had been unable to stop in the subsequent eight months, except when asleep. She was diagnosed with blepharospasm, an incurable condition affecting few people. "If people look at me I have to tell them about it," she said. "It's like I'm winking at them." *Sun*, 26 Nov 2010.

## HOPE OF CANCER CURE

A group of dwarfs living in a remote village on the slopes of the Andes in the Loja province of southern Ecuador could hold the clues to curing cancer. Researchers from the University of Southern California (USC) in Los Angeles closely monitored around 100 members of the group over 23 years and found no cases of cancer or diabetes (apart from one non-lethal cancer), according to a study published in *Science Translational Medicine*. Many of the group had Laron syndrome (or Laron-type dwarfism), caused by a mutated gene, IGF-1, lowering their growth hormone activity and stunting growth, and were no more than 42in (107cm) tall. It was suggested that blocking growth hormone activity in adults of normal stature through prescription drugs or a special diet could unlock cancer's mysteries. If the process worked and only had minor side effects, future societies could live without major illnesses, said cell biologist Valter Longo, who led the USC research team. *NewsCore (Fox News)*, 17 Feb; *Sun*, 18 Feb 2011.

I am rather grateful for the existence of the who-really-wrote-Shakespeare's-plays? controversy, the subject of the 2011 feature film *Anonymous* and of an *FT* cover story last year (**FT280:32-37**). That people hatch conspiracy theories about events that took place over 500 years ago makes being interested in the assassinations of the 1960s seem positively cutting edge!

On 22 October last year on Channel 4, Derren Brown did a fairly close recreation of the assassination of Robert Kennedy, with a member of the public firing a revolver at, and apparently killing Stephen Fry in a theatre while under hypnosis. Brown even had a 'girl in a polka dot dress' take part in the event, shepherding the shooter towards his target, just as 'a girl in a polka dot dress' appeared to be steering Sirhan Sirhan towards Kennedy in 1968.<sup>1</sup>

The assassination of Robert Kennedy was a big technical improvement on the framing of Lee Harvey Oswald; that was so clunky that Oswald had to be killed lest there be a trial and he talk, and a handful of amateur sleuths utterly demolished the official version of the event. Five years later in California, the patsy, Sirhan, was steered into place, pistol in hand, blazing away. The forensic details that demonstrated the presence of a second shooter – more shots fired than Sirhan's gun could contain; shots fired at point blank range behind Kennedy while Sirhan was in front – were washed away by the image of the man firing the gun.<sup>2</sup> And the state's case was never tested: Sirhan's lawyer persuaded him to plead guilty to avoid the death penalty.

Sirhan, now 67, has acquired a new lawyer, Dr William Pepper. Pepper worked on the Martin Luther King murder, and in 1999 won a wrongful death civil case brought by the King family against the late Lloyd Jowers, the owner of a café close to the scene of the shooting, for his minor part in the plot (he hid the rifle after the event). Jowers told the court that the assassination had been financed by local organised crime and that a Memphis policeman, the late Earl Clark, had fired the fatal shot.

You might think this was a big story. Not so in America. James Douglass, author of the excellent *JFK and the Unspeakable* (2008), who attended the trial, reported that a local TV reporter was the only media rep to attend the entire three-and-a-half week trial, which got hardly any mainstream coverage.<sup>3</sup>

What is the new evidence that Pepper will put before an American appeal court on Sirhan's behalf? First, Pepper has found that the bullet offered as evidence in the prosecution case was not the one taken from Kennedy's body by coroner Thomas Noguchi. Second, Pepper presents the new acoustic analysis evidence of the event, which shows more shots were fired than could have been in Sirhan's gun.<sup>4</sup> And third, based on work done by Harvard University psychologist Daniel Brown, Pepper claims that Sirhan was "subjected to sophisticated hypno-programming and memory implantation techniques".<sup>5</sup> It was the feasibility of this which was demonstrated by Derren Brown's TV programme.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The programme is on YouTube, the actual shooting being in part 4 at <http://bit.ly/rQezaf> (YouTube).

<sup>2</sup> The coroner in the case, Thomas Noguchi, discussed the wounds in his *Coroner to the Stars* (Corgi, 1984).

<sup>3</sup> Douglass's comments are at <http://bit.ly/7ifOL> (rational.org). Parts of the trial can be seen on YouTube. Pepper's opening address is at <http://bit.ly/vRBZIX> (YouTube).

<sup>4</sup> See the summary at <http://bit.ly/s4k7qK> (guardian.co.uk).

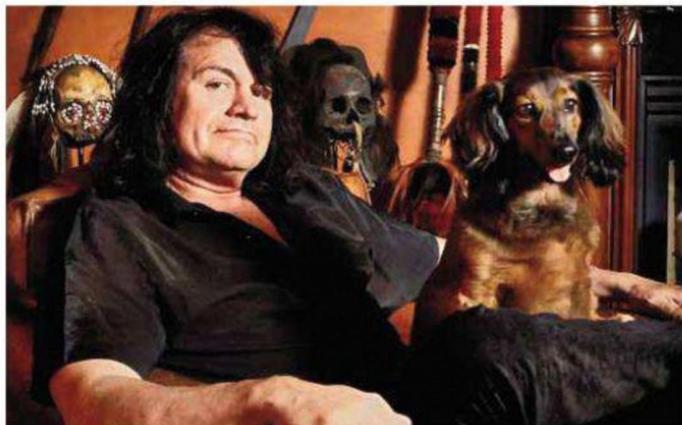
<sup>5</sup> Pepper's 300-page submission is at <http://bit.ly/ssxXqR> (info.publicintelligence.net). A summary is at <http://bit.ly/sciFBQ> (courthousenews.com).



GETTY IMAGES / HULTON ARCHIVE / KEVSTONE

## NECROLOG

We note the passing of a dealer in tribal art and curiosities, an open-minded astrophysicist and a best-selling author of alternative history theories.



### BILLY JAMIESON

Back in May 2011, we reported the sale at auction in Ireland of the supposed skull of St Vitalis of Assisi, patron saint of genital diseases, by “a bidder from Los Angeles” [FT277:9]. From a report in the *Irish Sunday Independent* (23 Oct 2011) we learnt that this was Billy Jamieson, “a TV personality and tribal art collector based in Toronto”, who had paid £3,000 but then died on 3 July, the very day his cheque arrived at the offices of Auctioneer Damien Matthews in Duleek, Co. Meath. It also happened to be his 57th birthday. He was due to front a TV series called *Headhunters* on the History Channel in Canada.

Jamieson first came to the attention of *Fortean Times* in the 1990s as a collector of shrunken heads (“The man with 12 heads”, FT106:40–41). He became enthralled with head-hunting culture after his first visit to the Amazon in June 1995 to sample the hallucinogen *ayahuasca*. Between 1995 and 2001, he financed five expeditions into the jungles of Ecuador and Peru, researching traditional naturopathic healings and related rituals. He focused on the Jivaro (more properly Shuar) tribe of Ecuador, erstwhile head-shrinkers, and amassed the most extensive Shuar library and archival photo collection in existence.

He made several trips to the South Pacific and Indonesia, collecting rare artefacts, oddities and curiosities. He amassed a remarkable archive of ethnographic

material about the native cultures of North and South America, the Dayak of Borneo, the Naga of the Highlands of India and the Batak of Sumatra. He was a member of the Canadian Chapter of the New York Explorers Club since 1997 and his company, Jamieson Tribal Art, had for years catered for the bizarre tastes of rock stars and celebrities. He worked as a consultant for the National Geographical Society on their educational series about head-hunting, human sacrifice and cannibalism.

His sprawling 8,000 sq ft (750 sq m), multi-level condominium in Toronto was stuffed with macabre artefacts. Here he hosted annual Halloween parties that were legendary in Toronto for the manner in which they brought together transvestites, artists, curators, Rosedale collectors, horror film production crews and aficionados, celebrities, historians, lawyers, financiers, real estate moguls, fashionistas, dancers, prostitutes, bikers, and hellraisers, all dressed in elaborate costumes.

In 1998, he bought the contents of the Niagara Falls Museum, which was established in 1827 but had fallen into disrepair. The exhibits included two-headed cows, a five-legged pig, Wild Bill Hickok’s saddle, and a humpback whale skeleton. There was also the 83-object Egyptian collection, including nine coffins, eight mummies and a mummy head. Jamieson sold the mummies to the Michael C Carlos Museum in Atlanta, Georgia, for US \$2m in

May 1999. When it was confirmed that one was that of the pharaoh Ramesses I, founder of the 19th dynasty, it was repatriated to Egypt, where it is on display at the Luxor Museum [FT143:16, 144:66].

*William Jamieson, tribal art and curiosity collector and dealer, born 3 July 1954; died Toronto 3 July 2011, aged 57.*

### Paul Sieveking

### RICHARD STOTHERS

Richard Stothers joined the NASA Goddard Institute for Space Studies in 1961. Within two years, he published four papers in the most prestigious journal, the *Astrophysical Journal*, received his PhD from Harvard and became a permanent staff member of the Goddard Institute, where he worked the rest of his life. He became a world expert on the structure of stars, as well as their origin and evolution. He published almost 200 papers, mostly in astrophysics and solar physics. In the last two decades of his life, he spent much of his time on climate science, especially investigating ancient writings to extract information on climate change throughout recorded history.

Besides his purely scientific projects, Stothers displayed a lifelong interest in classical descriptions of mysterious natural phenomena, as expressed in articles such as “Ancient Auroræ” (1979), “Ancient and Modern Earthquake Lights in Northwestern Turkey” (2004), “Ancient Scientific Basis of the ‘Great Serpent’ from Historical Evidence” (2004), “Unidentified Flying Objects in Classical Antiquity” (2007), and “Ancient Meteorological Optics” (2009).

A “scientist doing history” is often a recipe for disaster, as hardcore scientists seldom seem to realise that the interpretation of ancient literature and artefacts requires a considerable amount of background knowledge, awareness of method and sensitivity to contextual factors. A true interdisciplinary, Stothers distinguished himself for his excellent command of all of these and is therefore an indispensable resource for the *fortean* reader when it

comes to the likes of auroræ, crosses, pillars and rings around the Sun, rainbows, earthquake lights, marine cryptozoology, and ancient UAPs. His last piece, published posthumously last August, appears to have been a letter to *The Observatory* concerning the question of why Babylonian astrologers portrayed the planet Saturn as black when it’s really quite yellow to the naked eye. Months before his passing, Stothers had discussed this question with Peter James and myself. We had invoked Saturn’s giant Phoebe Ring – spanning an area of two full moons and discovered in 2009 (FT258:11) – as a possible explanation.

Io Saturnalia!

*Richard Blair Stothers, astrophysicist, born 1939; died New York 28 June 2011, age 72.*

### Marinus Anthony Vander Sluijs

### ALAN ALFORD

When *Gods of the New Millennium* appeared in 1996, Alan Alford became one of the leading lights of the ‘ancient astronaut’ school of alternative history. The book, originally self-published and distributed online, was bought up and republished by Hodder and Stoughton in 1997, and became a bestseller. Alford left his job as a chartered accountant, and dedicated himself to full-time research, travelling worldwide to investigate ancient sites, and giving talks and lectures.

His introduction to the world of ancient mysteries was via Erich von Däniken. This is probably the case for a large number of people, but Alan Alford was honest enough to





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# Strange deaths

## UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL

admit it; he was also honest enough to see the limitations of his own theorising, and move beyond it, and this marked him out from the herd. It also lost him a lot of readers and supporters, as his ideas matured, and shifted away from the conventional alternative view.

His next book, *The Phoenix Solution*, set him on an entirely new trajectory. He suggested that ancient peoples, particularly the Egyptians, had an essentially catastrophist view of the world; that they used the evidence of, for instance, meteorites, to build a picture of creation, and divinity, which was a form of creative destruction. At this stage, Alford believed that ancient people had seen such catastrophes at first hand.

But as his research progressed, he came to realise that the Egyptians, and others, were in fact referring to a remote past, way beyond historical memory. Our ancestors, the subject of our cosmological speculations, were themselves engaging in speculative ancient cosmology. Meteorites, and the supposed relics of this ancient celestial maelstrom, had a value that was at least as much metaphorical as evidential.

Eventually, through an assiduous and intriguing reading of Plato, he came to the conclusion that this metaphorical schema was almost universal in the ancient world. He also developed an intense personal interest in spiritual progress, and saw himself as a type of spiritual Platonist.

Alan was an unassuming and polite individual, with a ready smile, and a passionate interest in the big questions: who we are, where we come from, and how the world came to be as it is. He was open to new ideas of all kinds, and tolerant even of those critics who had turned their vitriol on him. Well, nearly all: we were fellow members of that exclusive little club of writers who had been threatened with lawsuits by Zechariah Sitchin.

In recent years, Alan had spent an increasing proportion of his time in Kathmandu (his wife, Sumu, is Nepalese) but remained deeply involved in the world of ancient mysteries. His death has cut short a promising and remarkably sincere intellectual journey.

*Alan F Alford, alternative historian, born Southampton 1961; died Kathmandu, Nepal, 14 Nov 2011, aged 50.*

**Noel Rooney**

FISHERMAN OSCAR BARBOSA, 18, BLED TO death in December after jumping out of his canoe into the Yata River in Bolivia, which was teeming with flesh-eating piranha. He suffered dozens of bites to his throat and face. Local police chief Daniel Cayaya believes that the teenager, from Rosario dei Yata in the northeast of the country, committed "suicide by piranha". Barbosa, who was thought to be drunk, knew the river well and would have been aware that it was full of red piranha at that time of year. The 14in (36cm) fish hunt in packs to strip their prey of flesh. They are known to devour large snakes and even jaguars in minutes. Fatal attacks on humans are rare, but swimmers at a river beach in Brazil were attacked by hundreds of piranha in September 2011. *Sun, 8 Dec 2011.*

ROBERT TRIGG, 47, SNUGGLED UP TO HIS girlfriend and accidentally killed her. The ex-chef, who weighed 182lb (82kg), had recently moved in with Susan Nicholson, 52, in Worthing, West Sussex. Last April, she suggested they slept on the sofa. In the morning, Trigg woke up on top of her and found her dead. At the inquest, the coroner said: "There is no evidence whatsoever that this was part of an altercation." Verdict: accident. *Sun, 12 Dec 2011.*

A MONTH-OLD boy was killed when his obese babysitter collapsed and died on top of him. Michael Baldwin III was found smothered on a sofa under 210lb (95kg) Teresa Coffey, 39. It was thought she had suffered a heart attack. The boy's father, Michael Baldwin II – a television newscaster in Long Island, New York – rushed home after Ms Coffey failed to answer his calls. At first he couldn't find his son, but then realised he was under the babysitter. A similar tragedy unfolded later the same month, also in eastern US. Allen McNeil Jr, 53, and his

three-year-old son were found dead in their New Jersey home after he apparently fell on top of the infant and smothered him while having a heart attack. *Sunday Mirror, 4 Sept; Sun, 5 Sept; MX News, 28 Sept 2011.*

ROBERT FORD, 47, WAS SHOPPING WITH A friend in Gravesend, Kent, in June 2011 when his nose started to bleed. He walked into a medical centre for help. The bleeding soon stopped, and doctors advised him to go home and put ice on his nose. His father Michael told an inquest in December that when he phoned him later that day, Robert asked him to dial 999 because blood was beginning to clog his throat and he couldn't breathe. He was soon found dead at his home. His father said: "We found him on the floor with a small pool of blood around his mouth. There was also 10p-sized spots of blood around the house."

Pathologist Olaf Biedrzycki said it was the only fatal nosebleed

he had seen in 4,000 post-mortem examinations. "This was certainly an odd case," he said. "We don't really know how to explain it. I've looked very hard for a source of the blood and could not find it." The coroner recorded a verdict of death by natural causes. *D.Mail, 3 Dec 2011.*

ALLY McCRAE, 23, a cage fighter and expert at Thai boxing and jiu-jitsu from Kilmarnock nicknamed "McCrazy",

was crushed to death by a dead cow at an abattoir in Paisley, Renfrewshire, where he worked. It is thought the one-ton carcass slipped from a hook as it was being moved along a conveyor belt. *Sun, 19 Nov 2011.*

A 17-YEAR-OLD BOY WAS KILLED AT A DAIRY farm in Bearii, northern Queensland, Australia, on 18 August when the cow he was preparing to milk kicked him in the head. *[AAP] 19 Aug 2011.*



TERRY COLON



# the UFO files

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## UFO CASEBOOK

JENNY RANGLES wonders what prime-time television's latest flirtations with ufology tell us about current popular perceptions of the paranormal...

### THE BROWN STUFF

Friday, 11 November 2011 proved an interesting date for UFO research on British TV. That evening, the subject appeared in two very different guises.

One of these reached 10 million people via a prime time serial drama – the biggest audience possible these days, barring Simon Cowell auditioning a 'Grey' for next year's *X-Factor*. Elsewhere, the subject was a trigger for one of the most unusual TV experiments conducted into strange phenomena.

This experiment was a one-hour Channel 4 programme from psychological illusionist Derren Brown. For the past decade, he has courted controversy after playing 'live' Russian Roulette with a gun "loaded with real bullets". Brown's programmes over the years have included 'persuading' seemingly genuine ordinary folk to hold up a security van or fly a doomed airliner (while, unbeknown to them, actually inside a simulator). He uses various techniques such as reinforcement of cues, psychological illusions and old-fashioned magic, but is seriously opposed to the way the 'paranormal' is widely exploited. Brown has frequently shown how mediums, psychics or healers might employ similar methods to his own; but while he always confesses to the complex trickery he employs, they – as he points out – profess to use extraordinary powers (see **FT185:28–32** for an interview with him).

For his new venture, Brown chose to test the nature of luck by planting a rumour into a small community and letting it develop across several weeks. Under the pretext of making a documentary called *The Secret of Luck*, several local people were monitored to see how the experiment unfolded – without the illusionist's involvement being known. Eventually, Brown visited the town, supposedly to follow up the peoples' stories but in reality engineering something more complex.

Brown chose a small statue of a dog in a local park around which to build the rumour that it was 'lucky': rub it and good fortune would be conferred. He covertly sowed the seeds of this yarn around town and cleverly used social media (the dog has its own Twitter site!) plus traditional local media to push the legend. Belief was fostered via such influences and through stories about people who won small sums on the lottery or got new jobs



LEFT: TV presenter Dawn Porter with Gemma Rowbottom, Sally Darlington and Kendall Rowbottom pat the head of the "lucky" dog in Centre Vale Park, Todmorden

OPPOSITE: Brian (Peter Gunn) and Julie (Katy Cavanagh) mount a skywatch in Britain's favourite soap, *Coronation Street*.

where the dice-throwing gamble was to be filmed. Several people in the town were shown footage taken over the past weeks revealing the truth behind their 'lucky' experiences. Some were set up – others were pure chance. A few who felt their luck was improving thanks to embracing the statue were taken to Blackpool and won small sums of money on the arcades. Brown argued that their self-confidence from believing in the dog caused them to take chances that they would otherwise have ignored. And, of course, you only win something if you believe in yourself enough to enter.

This was cleverly juxtaposed with the story of a local butcher who missed multiple opportunities – for instance walking past a £50 note discarded beneath his feet. Eventually, it was this perennial 'loser' who was coaxed to stake his £1,000 savings on a throw of a dice in the town hall. Needless to say he won £5,000 – though one presumes less because of a lucky statue than via some Brown sleight of hand.

I know Tod well – I was born close by, have family in the town and visit often to investigate strange events – so I could follow the way this experiment panned out from the inside.

Ironically, the dog statue was moved to this UFO hot spot after it had suffered considerable bad luck in its prior home, where vandals had tossed it in the canal! There seems no doubt that once enough people came to believe in the statue it developed a life of its own and acted as a symbolic force for injecting confidence. But the number who were affected seems to have been modest and the fuss passed many of the townsfolk by – despite postings from 'Wagtail', the poster who planted stories on local forums in August. In fact, there was little online response before Derren Brown hit town to 'investigate' (in reality, bolster) the claims.

Brown did put on a great show in Tod, ending with a pyrotechnics display beside Burnley Road (perhaps hoping for some accidental UFO sightings), but I feel the results of this experiment, while interesting,

after rubbing the dog.

Reporters, secretly working for Brown, followed up by filming (covertly and openly) as people in the town took the legend forward through the power of belief, and rumour contagion worked via the Internet. Brown wanted to see if people could really be convinced that a mundane artwork could bring luck and ultimately persuaded one citizen to test the conviction by betting his life savings on the roll of a dice.

Deciding where to set up this experiment was vital and Todmorden in West Yorkshire was his choice. Crucial to this were the strange phenomena reported here since the 1970s – most notably the town's status as a UFO window area following such well reported events as the Alan Godfrey abduction (see **FT242:33; 269:44–47; 270:46–49**).

Indeed, the lucky dog statue was located just yards from where Godfrey's patrol car had stopped back in November 1980 and close to other encounters on the adjacent Burnley Road, where alien contacts have been unusually prolific.

It was speculated that this area might be 'primed' by having a weird aura transmitted through a close-knit community that allowed people to interact and discuss unusual local events. Would this fuel a strong belief in the veracity of the planted legendary 'dog'?

Derren Brown revealed his role for the first time in late September to a packed town hall

were a tad inconclusive. I suspect it would have worked in much the same in any small community. Indeed, with no new UFO sightings happening during the filming, as might potentially have happened, this negative result is in itself of note. I found no reason to think the locals believed in the power of the dog to any great degree and the window area status of the valley did not appear to boost any such belief.

However, interviews about the supernatural heritage of the location exposed a somewhat distorted memory, which might, I suppose, support the view that rumours can grow within such a community.

Either way, we should consider the results of this experiment whenever a UFO wave emerges in a small community in future, and perhaps watch how social media help the superstition to proliferate faster than it once would have done.

### UFOS OVER THE STREET

That same Friday also saw the launch of a week-long storyline on the nation's most-watched soap, *Coronation Street*. For the uninitiated, this ITV show has run for over half a century, always airing in prime time and with audiences topping almost every other scripted programme.

Interestingly, *Corrie*, as it is affectionately known, has featured UFOs before – towards the end of 1984 when young refuse collector Curly Watts glimpsed a twinkling light with his telescope. The local paper made it into a sensation with the headline “Binman boffin spots UFO” and Curly received the true-to-life response of genial ribbing from his mates. He also became a hit with the street's ladies as he gained fame from his close encounter, and this only faded when a crackpot UFO buff arrived to glean messages from the aliens that he insisted poor Curly *must* have been receiving.

Seeing a UFO in a Manchester suburb (even the fictional one of Weatherfield) is no surprise. I spent the 1980s and 90s with MUFORA (the Manchester UFO Research Association) chasing real events in the city – though I hope we acted rather more sensibly than the cartoon twerp foisted upon Curly.

So, when *Corrie* decided to return to the UFO mystery 27 years later, it was a good test of how things have changed in terms of social acceptance of the phenomenon. This time there were two witnesses – teacher Brian Packham and his girlfriend Julie Carp. We saw the intrepid couple proceed in the rain to the local ‘Red Rec’ armed with a telescope to skywatch. Brian was apparently one of Manchester's top accredited ufologists and had been teaching UFOs to kids at his school



birthday bashes and festivals. Brian, of course, was just convinced that ‘Chinese lanterns’ were like weather balloons – used by MoD debunkers to hide the truth from the public.

Eventually, the story fizzled out in pure farce as two local car mechanics rigged up a model spaceship with flashing lights, dangled it from a fishing pole at the couple's next skywatch and Brian waddled towards

## Brian waddled towards the ‘UFO’ crying: “I come in peace”

– cue complaints from the natives about the ethics of this.

Curiously, I once really did teach UFOs at a school in this area with not dissimilar concerns resulting – although I tried to show youngsters how to develop investigative skills and identify the misperceptions involved, and I doubt Brian was being similarly restrained. Since I have discussed my teaching experiences in these pages before, perhaps *FT* is now inspiring *Corrie* scripts!

But who uses a telescope to go UFO spotting? Astronomers rarely see UFOs through them because they magnify a very small area of sky, making it less likely that anything would be seen – and tracking a fast object this way would really tax your agility.

It also makes little sense to skywatch in a city beneath a large lamp, drowning out whatever sky might be visible. But I had sympathy for Julie – who was more interested in the amorous possibilities of a November night under the stars. I can recall that being the best part of skywatching in my youth.

As the *Corrie* storyline played out over the week, there were some classic lines. When Brian described the work of the SETI institute, Julie cooed about the sofa shop down the high street that she thought he was referring to. Then she mistook Professor Frank Drake for old-time comedian Charlie Drake!

Inevitably, the daffy duo took some photographs of large orange blobs which readers of this column could rapidly identify without the help of the front page headline on the next day's *Weatherfield Gazette*. The story in town that morning was that a local Chinese restaurant had released some fire lanterns. These orange glows – mimicking UFOs in countless real-life cases over the past decade, as readers will know – have been sent skywards from assorted wedding receptions,

the contraption crying: “I come in peace” before falling over in a heap.

At face value, this reveals the ability of soaps to tap into and use ideas in an exaggerated manner, exposing human life in all its rich absurdity. But on another level, it also shows the widespread belief that UFOs are alien spaceships and illustrates the public perception of the sort of nincompoops interested in the subject.

We have clearly made scant progress in persuading the public that there are serious issues within the UFO mystery that deserve research rather than ridicule. We need to consider how we can alter that perception so that next time *Coronation Street* decides to roll out the UFO nuts we might expect a dash of common sense.

### CODA

William Roache is in the *Guinness Book of World Records* as the longest-serving TV actor to appear continuously in one role. He has played Ken Barlow in *Coronation Street* since the first episode back in December 1960. Despite *Corrie*'s dire track record in dealing with UFOs, William has a deep interest in several areas of the paranormal. Indeed, in the week of this UFO storyline, he appeared on the BBC debating his beliefs about reincarnation.

During the 1980s, when that first *Corrie* UFO plot ran, our MUFORA group was allowed to hold its regular meetings in the Granada Studios where the show is filmed. Through such visits, and my own filming of Granada programmes there, I became aware of William's serious interest in UFOs, and for a time he read some of our published case reports and even attended one of my lectures in the city. He then kindly granted me an interview, during which he offered a sensible counter to the jocularity of the *Corrie* writers.

Discussing press and TV coverage of the paranormal, he told me: “The media cannot handle this subject properly. They just want to make it sensationalist and fun. Yet there is so much more to it than that, if only they could see... They either will not look, or simply are not capable of looking, deeper into what the paranormal stands for and implies.”

After the antics of Brian and Julie, I couldn't agree more.

# BLASTS FROM THE PAST

FORTEAN TIMES BRINGS YOU THE NEWS THAT TIME FORGOT

## 36 THE FABULOUS FLYING MEN OF 1880, PART 2

**THEO PAIJMANS** examines a ballooning tragedy that sparked sightings of aerial anomalies in St Louis skies - and all across America.

In terms of flying anomalies, 1880 was an interesting year. In February, a Pennsylvania newspaper related how a Uniontown citizen passed a deserted, dilapidated house a few miles east of Uniontown: "In the dim light he saw seven apparitions, like unto men, women and children, floating in the air above the ruin. Skeleton arms and bony fingers pointed to the cellar, where, tradition says... bodies are buried." Weird voices filled the air and the man, who was well versed in German, stated that they spoke in the German language.<sup>1</sup>

In March, a large object flew slowly over Galisteo Junction in New Mexico. According to the startled witnesses, loud shouts in an unknown language emanated from the aerial vessel that had a construction "entirely different to anything of the kind ever seen... being in the shape of a fish. The air machine appeared to be entirely under the control of the occupants, and appeared to be guided by a large fanlike apparatus."<sup>2</sup>

One early evening in July, CA Youngman and Ben Flexner were standing at a side window of Haddart's drugstore in Louisville, Kentucky. Looking skyward, they spotted an object high up in the air over the Ohio River bridge. Thinking it at first to be the wreck of a toy balloon, they were amazed as the object got nearer and they saw that it was "a man surrounded by machinery, which he seemed to be working with his feet and hands". The object reached a point just over the city and then disappeared in a southwesterly direction, passing out of sight in the twilight.<sup>3</sup>

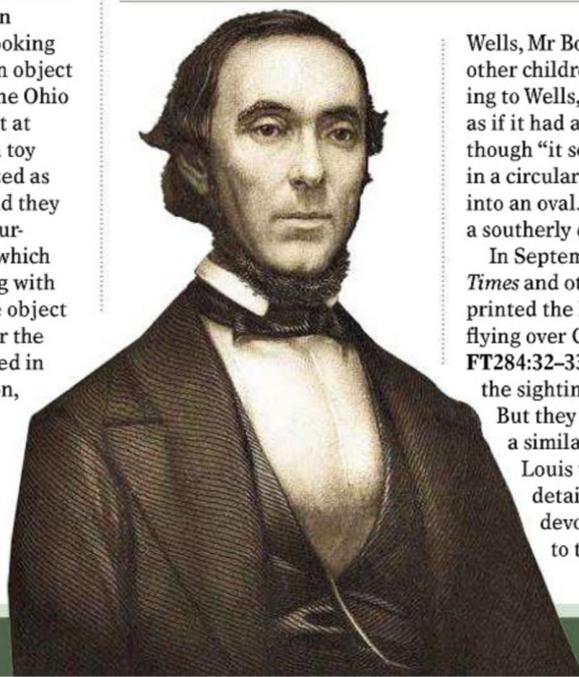
The flying thing was also seen over Madisonville. Alerted by his young son Johannis, Mr



ABOVE: John Wise making the first US airmail delivery from Lafayette, Indiana, on 17 August 1859.

BELOW: John Wise, balloon pioneer.

The construction was "entirely different to anything of the kind ever seen... being in the shape of a fish. The air machine appeared to be guided by the occupants using a large fanlike apparatus."



Wells, Mr Boyster, his wife and other children saw it. According to Wells, the object looked as if it had a ball at each end, though "it sometimes appeared in a circular form and changed into an oval." It disappeared in a southerly direction.<sup>4</sup>

In September, the *New York Times* and other newspapers printed the hoax story of a man flying over Coney Island (see FT284:32-33) and mentioned the sighting over Louisville.

But they also referred to a similar sighting over St Louis without going into details. Charles Fort devoted some space to the Louisville

sighting, but commented that he had had no access to St Louis newspapers, so was unable to shed any light on it.

What had happened in the skies over St Louis? In order to appreciate what the newspapers referred to, we need to look back to the previous year, 1879.

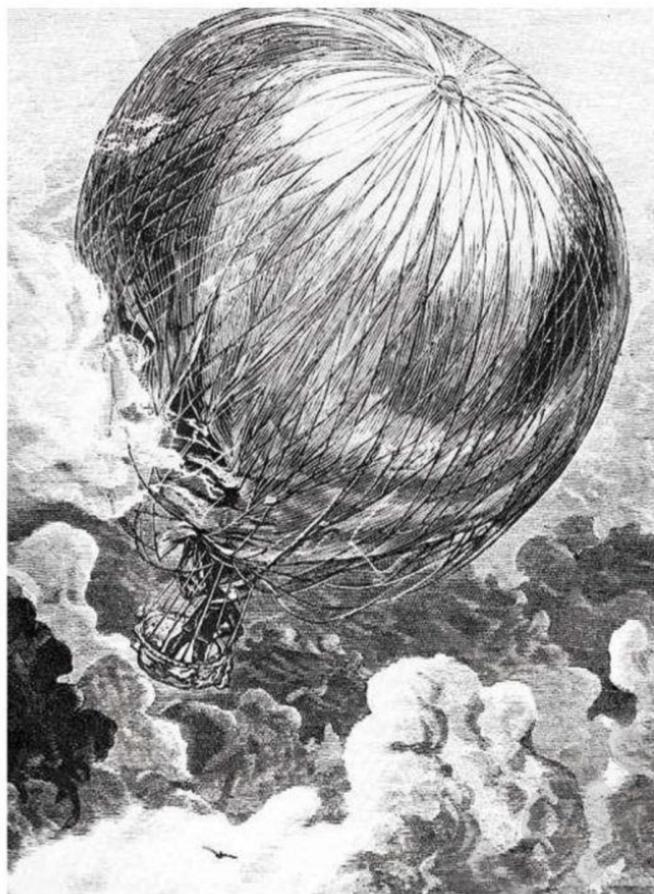
On 28 September that year, early balloon pioneer John Wise and his companion George Burr ascended from St Louis in the balloon *Pathfinder*. Wise had made over 400 ascents during his life and had made the first official airmail delivery for the US Post Office in 1859. What, therefore, should have been a routine ascent went tragically wrong: soon after the ascent, Wise's balloon vanished without a trace. Burr's body was later found in Lake Michigan but not a trace was

ever found of Wise or his balloon. Wise's fateful journey and his mysterious disappearance captured nationwide attention, and as a consequence several sightings of aerial objects thought to be his balloon were reported in Missouri and other states from late September and throughout October 1879. "The airship is reported to have passed over Alton at 5:30pm Sunday, and passed in the midst of a storm cloud. At 6 o'clock it passed over Bunker Hill, Ill. At a fearful speed, flying east of north. At 11:30, Monday night, the ship was seen 20 miles [32km] west of Laporte, Ind., and moving over Lake Michigan. That is the last heard of it," one newspaper reported.<sup>5</sup> "All over northern Indiana and Illinois, and southern Michigan, their frail airship has been seen, every day, sailing through the ether blue – but so far distant that even the best glasses could not discover if the aerial passengers were still riding their lonely journey... From all parts of the country over which the airship was expected to sail, we have received news in regard to it..."

An object flying over Burlington in Iowa was described thus: "It was a balloon, containing two persons. It was so far distant that their forms were merely discernible, but their motions could be seen... It travelled rapidly, but steadily, and appeared to be in a strong current of air, that was wafting it toward south-western Missouri. It was out of sight in less than 10 minutes from the time it was discovered."<sup>6</sup>

An object seen in the neighbourhood of Chicago, at Miller Station, was described as "some dark body high up in the air, which, upon closer scrutiny, they plainly saw was a balloon. It was near midnight at the time, but the moon shone brightly so that the air-ship was distinctly seen."

A Mr Partridge of Pontiac, Michigan, some 30 miles [48km] northwest of Detroit, saw a large balloon passing



ABOVE: illustration of a sticky ballooning moment from John Wise's *Through the Air: Forty Years' Experience as an Aeronaut*, 1873.

the city. "Could see the basket, but could not make out the inmates. He thinks it was the Wise balloon."<sup>7</sup> The sightings lasted well into October. Since it is currently held that Wise crashed into Lake Michigan soon after his ascent, these sightings could not have been of his balloon. It seems, though, that the mystery of Wise's missing balloon triggered a very early flap of sightings of anomalous aerial objects. A contemporary newspaper thought so too, comparing the sightings with those of the Flying Dutchman: "In many parts of the West people have been peering into the skies, looking for Wise's lost balloon, days and weeks after it was impossible that any mortal could direct its course. At a half dozen places men and women have imagined that they saw this balloon. No end to these

extravagant fancies has been reached – they stretch more and more into the preposterous..."<sup>8</sup>

With this remark, the newspaper alluded to the weirdest event during that early UFO flap, that of the dangling man of Owingsville, Kentucky. Owingsville, the scene of a shower of flesh several years previously – as some newspapers pointed out – produced a report that "a man had been seen standing in mid air at a point about six miles [10km] east of town; that he was making gestures of all kinds, and after staying there about half an hour had suddenly ascended until it rose beyond the view of the naked eye."

Mrs Abraham Goodpater was washing and went outdoors. Looking up, she saw "something like a man suspended in mid-air, about 20ft [6m] above

the tops of the trees. The figure was making gestures of all kinds, but spoke not. It would throw its hands wildly, then fold its arms, then clasp its hands, and drawing its knees up assume the attitude of prayer." Her children ran out and together they watched the strange spectacle for about 25 minutes, when the figure began to ascend and vanished from view. James Nealus, a farmer living nearby, saw what he thought of as a balloon, "but saw no man in it". Theories included that Wise or some other balloonist had lowered himself by a rope or that it was a sign from Heaven. The incident was reported nationwide.<sup>9</sup>

It is very likely that the Owingsville incident was what was referred to in the *New York Times* and elsewhere, and the mystery of the St Louis flying man has been caused by the simple fact that that the incident had happened *the year before*.

Having said that, there still may be an 1880 sighting over St Louis yet to come to light, since that city harbours an unusual tradition of things seen in the skies. As in Galisteo Junction's flying anomaly in the shape of a fish, as early as 1873 residents of St Louis saw a "celestial apparition" toward the southwest, "looming forth in the shape of a large fish, with mouth open and fins spread, as if swimming in a denser medium".<sup>10</sup> In 1911, Mrs John Bishop saw a flying snake near St Louis. She and her children were in the yard when they heard a whirring sound overhead. They saw a spotted snake 3ft (90cm) long flying through the air. It remained visible for some 20 minutes. "Mrs Bishop says she could not see what kind of wings the thing had because they moved so fast."<sup>11</sup> St Louis again came into prominence during a flap of giant bird sightings in 1948, in which the creature was described as "about the size of a small pursuit plane"<sup>12</sup> and "as big as an airplane".<sup>13</sup>

## NOTES

1 *Indiana Progress*, Indiana, Pennsylvania, 26 Feb 1880.

2 *New Mexican*, Santa Fe, New Mexico, 28 Mar 1880.

3 *Louisville Courier-Journal*, Louisville, Kentucky,

29 July 1880.

4 *Louisville Courier-Journal*, Louisville, Kentucky, 6 Aug 1880.

5 "Lost In The Air", *The Daily Constitution*, Atlanta, Georgia, 5 Oct 1879.

6 *Burlington Daily Hawk-Eye*, Burlington, Iowa,

10 Oct 1879.

7 *St Joseph Herald*, St Joseph, Michigan, 11 Oct 1879.

8 *Titusville Herald*, Titusville, Pennsylvania, 12 Dec 1879.

9 *Wheeling Register*, Wheeling, West Virginia, 20 Nov

1879; *Boston Eve. Journal*, Boston, Massachusetts; *Reno Eve. Gazette*, Reno, Nevada, 4 Dec 1879; *Plain Dealer*, Cleveland, Ohio, 6 Dec 1879.

10 *Cleveland Leader*, Cleveland, Ohio, 9 Oct 1873. Credit: Kay Massingill.

11 *Sioux County Herald*, Orange City, Iowa, 31 Aug 1911; *Rock Rapids Reporter*, Rock Rapids, Iowa, 31 Aug 1911; *Hull Index*, Hull, Iowa, 1 Sept 1911; *San Antonio Light*, San Antonio, Texas, 7 Sept 1911.

12 *Star*, Anniston, Alabama, 11 April 1948. See also: Loren Coleman: *Mothman and other curious encounters*, Paraview Press, 2002, ch4, Thunderbirds.

13 *Camden News*, Camden, Arkansas, 29 April 1948.

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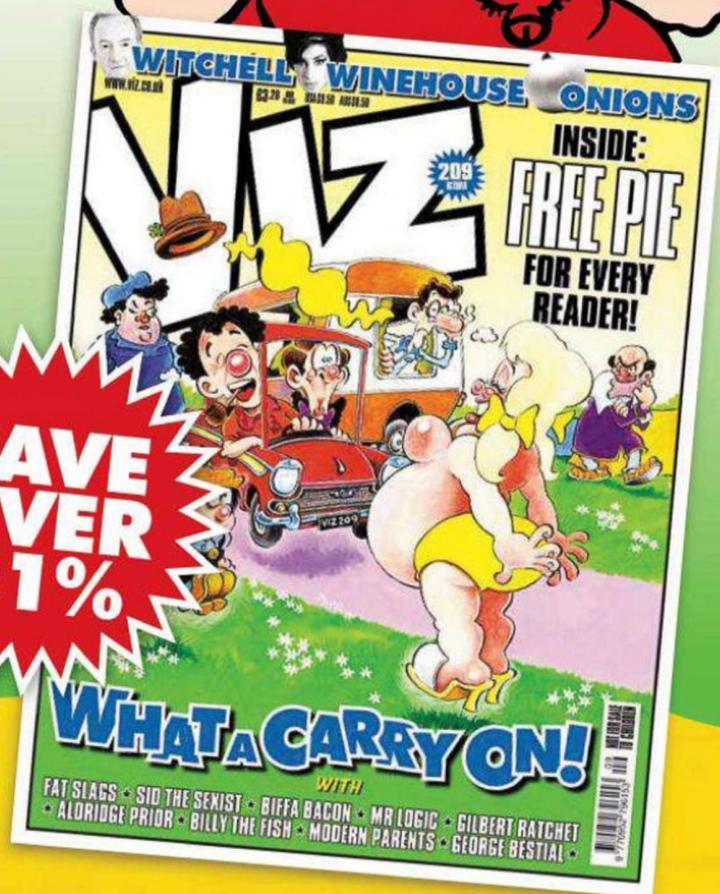
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# 2012

Once again, say the prophets of doom, we're facing the end of the world - this time in the shape of the end of the Maya Long Count Calendar on 21 December 2012.

In this special issue, **TED HARRISON** wonders precisely what form our destruction will take; **JOSEPH GELFER** examines the way 2012 pundits have appropriated materials from indigenous peoples; **JOHN HOOPES** traces the roots of the 2012 mythos in hermetic thought and hippie lore; **KEVIN WHITESIDES** wonders whether the explosion of widely divergent 2012 interpretations points to a "Balkanisation of epistemology"; and - turn to our Fortean Traveller section - **RICHARD STANLEY** reports from the French village of Bugarach, where saucer cults and channellers await the End Times.



# DOOMSDAY 2012

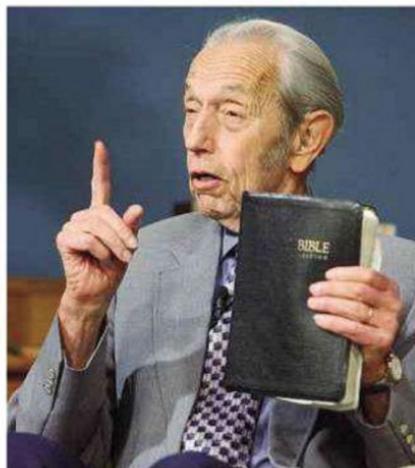
**TED HARRISON** gets ready for the end of the world as we know it... and wonders just how the Earth might be destroyed come December...

It feels like the months of nervousness leading up to 1 January 2000 all over again, but on a much bigger scale. Not just another millennium change this time, with the danger of a few imploding computers, but the most significant Earth-time landmark of all human history – the end of the 13th Bak'tun cycle of the Maya Long Count calendar!

When Roland Emmerich's blockbuster disaster movie *2012* was released, the assorted prophecies concerning the year leapt from being the stuff of specialist interest to the subject of widespread anxiety – an anxiety that has spawned a whole new End Times industry.

"Never before has a date in history been so significant to so many cultures, so many religions, so many scientists and governments," declared the film's producers without a blush of shame at their hyperbole. "2012 is an epic adventure about a global cataclysm that brings an end to the world and tells of the heroic struggle of the survivors."

It certainly struck a chord. It was 2009's fifth most successful film, with global box-office takings of \$750 million. It was spectacular stuff and, although the acting was ham, the special effects were state of the art. Earthquakes and tsunamis devastated the planet and the world's great cities were wiped off the face of the Earth as if by some giant, cosmic J Cloth. There was no



protection for the godfearing either, as St Peter's in Rome came crashing to the ground onto thousands of the faithful!

## THE END OF TIME

Is this really what will happen on 21 December 2012? And is it true that it was all foretold by the Maya, an ancient Central American civilisation whose scholars left a written record of their warnings?

And if the world does end on the date predicted, how will it happen? Will Earth be struck by a stray comet? Will the mystery Planet X arrive? Perhaps an invisible force of radiation will reach out from the Sun; or will an irresistible galactic energy wave sweep away all in its path? Might there be a destabilising pole shift? Will God call time on humanity and instigate Judgement Day?

Or will 2012 simply herald the end of the current world order, with a massive change of human consciousness? Will peace, love and inner awareness replace avarice and out-of-control consumerism? Will investment

bankers and advertising executives decamp *en masse* to rural Wales to restart their lives as organic farmers?

The trouble is, the Maya didn't say what would happen when the current mega-epoch of time, as they calculated it, expired. Perhaps nothing of any significance, just like December switching to January: an excuse for a party before we get on with life – with a few new resolutions – once the hangover clears.

The Maya civilisation was in decline long before the Europeans arrived in the New World. It was an ancient culture that had dominated Central America for many centuries, and was famed for its learning. Following generations of careful observation, Maya astronomers had a detailed understanding of the movements of the heavenly bodies and had calculated and codified cycles of time.

According to the Maya, time was not counted in weeks, months and years. A day was, and remains, of course, one rotation of the Earth; but 20 days make a Uinal, 18 Uinals make a Tun, 20 Tuns make a Katun, 20 Katuns make a Bak'tun and 13 Bak'tuns complete the Long Count of 1,872,000 days.

The current 13-Bak'tun epoch began on 11 August 3114 BC. It is therefore due to end on 21 December 2012.

After that date, Maya time runs out. There is no reference to subsequent events. Does that mean that they believed there would be no more time after that date? Or might it be that once their civilisation went into terminal decline, and their lands were conquered by the Europeans, the Maya astronomers simply never got round to writing the next edition of the Long Count Almanac?

Despite several centuries of contact between Europeans and the indigenous Central American people, little was known in Europe about the Maya time system until

# 2012



FACING: Radio preacher Harold Camping offered two dates for Doomsday in 2011. ABOVE: Roland Emmerich gave us the blockbuster Hollywood movie version of 2012.

just over 100 years ago.

In the 1880s, a friend of Mark Twain called Joseph T Goodman, who had made a fortune in mining investments, turned his mind and curiosity to Maya studies. He became intrigued by the carvings and hieroglyphs left by the culture, and in 1905 published a translation of their calendar from which the Maya and Gregorian calendars could be correlated.<sup>1</sup>

Goodman was a maverick and untrained researcher. Although his work was independently confirmed 20 years later, his findings remained in the realms of obscure scholarship for another 40 years. Current interest in the subject can be dated from 1966 and the publication of Michael Coe's book *The Maya*, which mentioned the Long Count Calendar, even though the author miscalculated the end date by a year.

Since then, a growing number of authors have turned their attention to the Maya calendar, feeding a flurry of speculation which, with the release of the disaster movie, turned into a crescendo of debate. More and more Maya 'experts' and general eschatologists have been leaping on a bandwagon of doom-laden prophecy.

The fascination with the Maya revolves around their image, that of the exotic and mystical lost civilisation whose deep knowledge of the Cosmos enabled them to make astonishing calculations. That these calculations hint at an imminent Apocalypse, at a time of active interest in End Time theories, makes them especially intriguing.

## WILL GOD CALL TIME ON HUMANITY AND INSTIGATE JUDGEMENT DAY?

### PROPHETS OF DOOM

Every generation has had its Doomsday prophets (for a selection, see FT129:34–36; 277:27). In the last 2,000 years, there have been over 300 dates set for the end of the world that have aroused passionate belief in some quarters and then passed by uneventfully. The early Christians were convinced that Christ would return within their own lifetimes. Around AD 1000, there was some belief that the end of the world was about to happen. That date was revised to AD 1033 when some speculated that the end would come 1,000 years after Christ's resurrection and not his birth. It became a common pattern over the centuries for dates to be named and then revised as prophets had to explain away their failures. One classic case of shifting the Doomsday goal posts was that of William Miller, who attracted tens of thousands of followers by naming 21 March 1843 as the Earth's last day. When his recalculated date of 22 October 1844 also passed safely

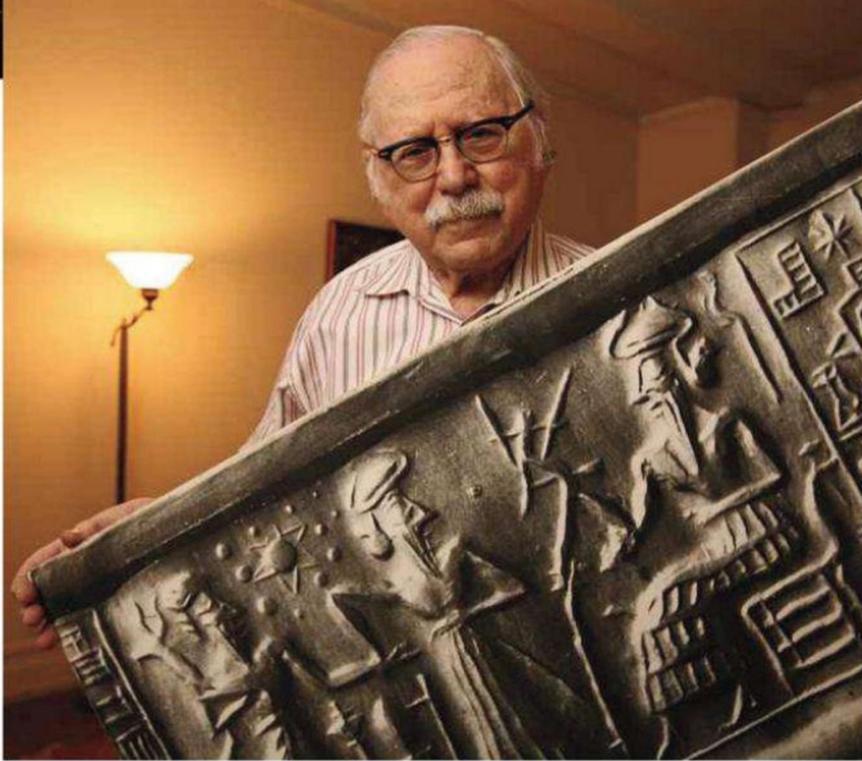
into history, his followers left him in droves, experiencing what came to be known as 'The Great Disappointment' (FT253:46; 277:27).

The most widely broadcast Bible-based date of recent times was that calculated by the 90-year-old American radio evangelist Harold Camping (see FT269:11; 274:55; 277:26). In 2011, Camping hogged the end-time stage, pushing the Maya aside for a while. When his predicted date of 21 May for the Rapture and the return of Jesus came and went, he didn't backtrack. So convinced was he that his interpretation of the Bible dates was correct that he announced that Judgement Day *had* arrived, but on a spiritual plane; the physical destruction of the world had just been rescheduled for 21 October. Again, nothing untoward happened. Undaunted, one of Camping's fellow-believers has set a new date for 2012.

Christian interest in Judgement Day is tracked by The Rapture Index ([www.rapture-ready.com](http://www.rapture-ready.com)), described as the Dow Jones Index of End Time activity. It peaked at an all-time high in 2011 and appears to have weakened since last summer; but, if the Maya were right, it will pick up substantially as 2012 progresses.

### DEATH FROM SPACE

The Maya are not the only ancient civilisation to be cited in the current debate. The claim that the Sumerians discovered a mysterious planet which is now heading towards the Earth has its supporters.



LEFT: Zecariah Sitchin believed that a '10th planet' called Nibiru is headed for Earth.

OPPOSITE PAGE: A crop circle at Silbury Hill in 2009 was one of a number to use a Maya design.

Planet X, also known as Nibiru, will arrive on 15 September, or so its believers claim (see FT173:40–41; 265:38–39).

"It was first Zecharia Sitchin, a scholar who studied ancient Sumerian legends, who hinted at the existence of a 10th planet in our Solar System," wrote American journalist Steffan Ilemann. "According to legend, and its various interpretations, the Earth was populated by a people from planet Nibiru that arrived on spaceships to mine gold. The human race was genetically engineered by cloning monkeys and god material to work as slaves and worship their creators. According to conspiracy theorists, NASA, the US Government and others know about the planet that intrudes into our Solar System every 3,600 years, but cover it up to prevent panic or for other ulterior motives."<sup>2</sup>

Nibiru is said to be over twice the size of the Earth. If it gets too close, its strong gravitational pull could tilt our planet's axis, causing horrendous tsunamis, earthquakes and volcanic eruptions. Believers say Nibiru is now due to return, a theory supported, they say, by ancient writings or legends on both sides of the Atlantic, from the Egyptians to the Hopi Indians. Nibiru has also been described as the 'Death Star' and identified with the 'Wormwood' of the Book of Revelation.<sup>3</sup> It might not be a planet, according to one theory, but a brown dwarf star that is the companion of the Sun (FT165:38–39).

The American space agency NASA is, of course, sceptical and describes the Planet X theory as an Internet hoax: "If Planet X were real and headed for an encounter with the Earth in 2012, astronomers would have been tracking it for at least the past decade, and it would be visible by now to the naked eye. Obviously, it does not exist."<sup>4</sup>

According to one set of Planet X believers, the fly-past should have already happened: 26 September 2011 was to have been the day of "the shaking", as foreseen by Hopi Prophecy, when the Earth was due to bow to Nibiru's "awesome power". As the northern

hemisphere did not experience days of darkness with the southern hemisphere simultaneously being bathed in constant sunlight, it can be assumed Nibiru did not visit, or if it did, it was a lot smaller than anticipated.

Days of darkness and light in the two hemispheres describes what would happen if the Earth's pole shifted from its current 23-degree axial tilt and was to point straight at the Sun. If this happened for any length of time it would certainly bring about the end of most current life on Earth. Again, NASA pooh-poohs the idea and says that a polar shift should not be confused with a shifting of the magnetic polarity of the planet, which can happen, although even if navigational compasses one day started to point south and not north the impact on life on Earth would be relatively slight.

"Many of the disaster websites pull a bait-and-shift to fool people," suggests NASA. "They claim a relationship between the rotation and the magnetic polarity of Earth, which does change irregularly, with a magnetic reversal taking place every 400,000 years on average. As far as we know, such a magnetic reversal doesn't cause any harm to life on Earth. A magnetic reversal is very unlikely to happen in the next few millennia, anyway."<sup>5</sup>

There are two planetary disaster theories, which NASA considers more credible; one concerns flares of solar radiation and the other meteor impact.

Solar activity takes place over a regular cycle, with peaks happening about every 11 years during which solar flares can potentially cause damage to satellite communications. The next solar maximum will occur in the two years, starting in 2012, but is not predicted to be especially destructive or intense. "Average" is NASA's verdict.

What can be said with absolute certainty is that in 2012 the Earth will be hit by some kind of space object: a comet perhaps or a meteor. Indeed, thousands of meteors of

varying kinds will hit the Earth during the year. What matters is the size of the largest one. The last big impact was 65 million years ago, and that, so one theory goes, led to the extinction of the dinosaurs.

According to the Spaceguard Survey, which keeps a watch for anything large that might hit the Earth, nothing of any size is predicted for 2012.

## SOMETHING'S COMING...

And yet, the believers insist, something monumental is due to happen in 2012, and the Maya foretold it. They even invented a ball game which, it is claimed, they played every winter to act out their creation and end-time myths. According to researcher John Major Jenkins, there is a rare heavenly event due on the Winter Solstice 2012: a once-in-25,771-years alignment of the rising Sun and the centre of the galaxy. If this is the case, it could be said to be not just the end of the Long Count Calendar, but the end of a cycle of five such calendars – an even more significant event than previously supposed. But there is a problem: the heavenly bodies move so imperceptibly in relation to the Earth, year by year, that there is no way this alignment can be accurately discerned. And certainly not by Maya astronomers viewing the stars with the naked eye.

And even suppose there *was* an alignment of rarity and importance, what possible effect would that have on events on Earth?

However, introducing a galactic dimension to the 2012 debate offers a whole new set of disaster scenarios. One of these involves the theory of the galactic superwave. Dr Paul LaViolette suggests that an explosion from within the galaxy is a likely event. The consequences for the Solar System would be huge, and no warning would be given. Major changes to Earth's climate would be triggered. LaViolette's Starburst Foundation describes a galactic superwave as "intense cosmic ray particle barrage that can last for periods of up to several thousand years", and adds that "astronomical and geological evidence indicates that the last major superwave impacted our Solar System around 12,000 to 16,000 years ago. It is estimated that approximately one or two superwaves strong enough to trigger an Ice Age are presently on their way to us from their birthplace 23,000 light years away."<sup>6</sup>

LaViolette's theory does not link the supposed galactic alignment to the timing of the next galactic superwave. "There is a finite chance that one such event could arrive within the next few decades. There is an over 90 per cent likelihood that a superwave will arrive in the next 400 years, with a finite chance that one could arrive in the next decade." But there is nothing to suggest 21 December 2012 as being a likely date.

Nothing bad will happen to the Earth in

2012, says NASA unequivocally: "There are no planetary alignments in the next few decades, Earth will not cross the galactic plane in 2012, and, even if these alignments were to occur, their effects on the Earth would be negligible. Each December the Earth and Sun align with the approximate center of the Milky Way Galaxy, but that is an annual event of no consequence... Our planet has been getting along just fine for more than four billion years, and credible scientists worldwide know of no threat associated with 2012."<sup>7</sup>

They would say that, wouldn't they? According to the Maya, Hopi Indians, Sumerians, Cathars, ancient Egyptians, Essenes, Kabbalists, Qero elders of Peru, Navajo, Cherokee, Apache, Iroquois confederacy, Dogon, Aborigines, the crop circle makers, aliens and, no doubt, Nostradamus himself, something is afoot on the cosmic plane. Or so someone somewhere believes.

The Mexican ufologist Jaime Maussan

believes that a crop circle from 2005 that he has studied predicts a major world event for 20 May 2012. A circle made in a field at Avebury Manor in 2008 is said to predict the arrival of the mystery planet Nibiru. British crop patterns from August 2005 and July 2009 contain explicit references to Maya design and culture.

"The shift of the ages is symbolised... by the masters of celestial knowledge, time keepers of ancient times, the Maya, who had deep knowledge and understanding of the natural cycles of time in which life evolves... This knowledge is coming back to us now, in the form of Sacred Art in the fields we know as Crop Circles, nudging us to awaken to the spiritual transformation underway... here and now."<sup>8</sup>

Or – as seems more likely – are our crop circle artists having great fun by reading up on the 2012 conspiracy theories online and turning them into patterns in the fields of southern England?

'Apocalypse', the recent exhibition at London's Tate Britain of the work of the Victorian artist John Martin (see FT281:34–39) shows that fascination with the End of Time is nothing new. Indeed, apocalypse fever as a kind of public entertainment has been popular for centuries. There is also a correlation to be studied between widespread interest in the end of the world and economic hardship – do fear and uncertainty about the fate of the planet surface when life generally is unusually fearful and uncertain?

There are some people who revel in predicting disasters to come. "We're doomed," they pronounce with relish, like John Laurie's dour Private Frazer in *Dad's Army*. Or they rush around like Chicken Licken from the children's fable, convinced the sky is about to fall in.

Some of those giving the warnings enjoy, for a short while at least, the kudos and celebrity of being prophets with supposed special knowledge of that which is to come.

But why do they attract believers and followers? Perhaps the explanation lies in the inescapable fact that everyone is mortal, and death is the unavoidable end to life. Contemplating one's end can be depressing and lonely, but a good End Time scare turns a private preoccupation into a community activity.

And there's always the comforting thought – shared by large numbers of the New Age community – that if 21 December 2012 does turn out to be 'the end of the world as we know it', what comes next might be a lot better.

*"It is foretold that the completion of the Mayan Calendar brings regeneration of Earth, offering an awakening to all with open hearts and minds. According to the Maya, the 'future' which lies beyond this end date is literally a new world age – a new creation – an Apocalypse."<sup>9</sup> **T***

## NOTES

- 1 Joseph T Goodman: "Maya Dates", published in *American Anthropologist*, 1905. Some scholars doubt the accuracy of the link between the Maya Long Count and modern calendar (FT269:11).
- 2 Steffan Ileman: [www.digitaljournal.com](http://www.digitaljournal.com), 30 Aug 2011.
- 3 Revelation 8:11.
- 4 <http://1.usa.gov/1MnMW6> (NASA).
- 5 *Ibid.*
- 6 [starburstfound.org](http://starburstfound.org).
- 7 NASA, *op. cit.*
- 8 [psychedelicadventure.blogspot.com](http://psychedelicadventure.blogspot.com).
- 9 [2012apocalypse.net](http://2012apocalypse.net).

## AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



**TED HARRISON** is a writer, artist, broadcaster and former BBC Religious Affairs Correspondent. He has a PhD in theology for his work on modern-day stigmata. He has researched both the Elvis Presley and the Princess Diana religious movements and is currently writing a book on contemporary 'End of the World' scares.



# INDIGENOUS FANTASY

**JOSEPH GELFER** examines the way 2012 prophecies have often hijacked motifs from indigenous cultures to support their claims.

Most people who have heard of the 2012 phenomenon know it is “something to do with the Mayan calendar”. There is an element of truth to this, as the date of 21 December 2012 is derived from the closing of the 13th *bak'tun* of the Maya Long Count calendar. However, 2012 speculation begins in earnest when various indigenous ‘prophecies’ are cited that suggest what will actually happen on or around 21 December this year. Indeed, the use and abuse of allegedly indigenous knowledge is a key 2012 theme, as indicated in the title of one of the first cultural academic critiques, Robert Sitler’s 2006 paper *The 2012 Phenomenon: New Age Appropriation of an Ancient Mayan Calendar*.<sup>1</sup>

Appropriation of indigenous knowledge is a highly contentious issue. In a world where all indigenous cultures have had their land and resources pillaged, maintaining control of identity and traditional knowledge is one of their last remaining assets. If non-indigenous people come along and misrepresent and profit from that identity and traditional knowledge, a real injustice is often experienced.

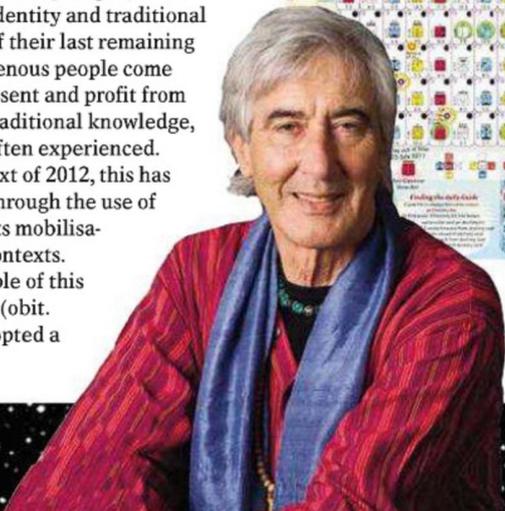
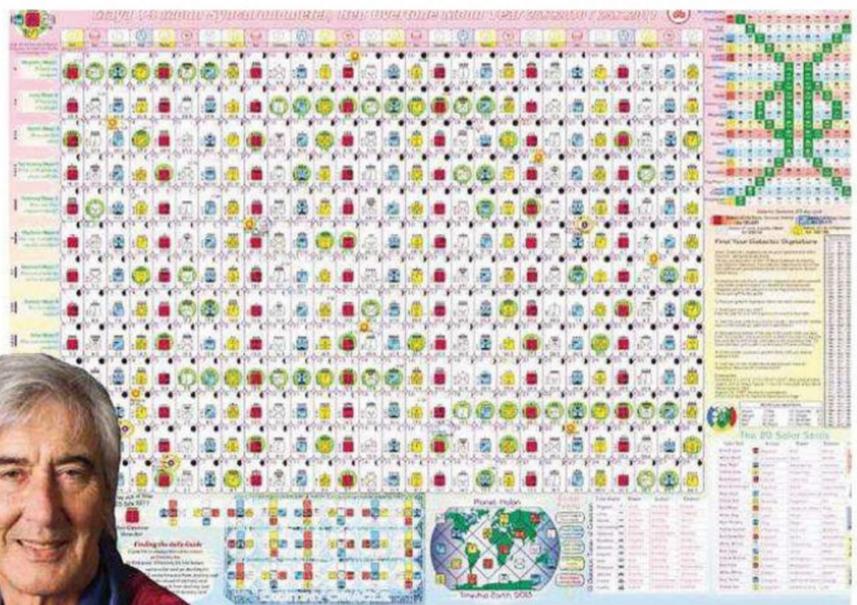
Within the context of 2012, this has chiefly happened through the use of Maya culture and its mobilisation in non-Maya contexts. The primary example of this was José Argüelles (obit. FT277:28), who adopted a

mythical rendering of the Maya calendar that he called the “Dreamspell calendar”. Argüelles made much of Maya culture, but the Dreamspell calendar was largely a product of his imagination and inspired by generic Maya aesthetics rather than anything genuinely Maya. Nonetheless, Argüelles constructed a substantial career and movement based around this adoption and adaptation of Maya indigenous culture.

He was certainly aware of the dangers of this process, and spoke of taking inspiration from the “Galactic Maya”, who are of a more cosmological nature rather than the more mundane “real Maya”, thus distancing himself from the uncomfortable political realities of cultural appropriation.

The Dreamspell calendar was just the

first of an almost endless string of 2012 books and products that draw inspiration from allegedly indigenous culture. One of the key outcomes of this process is the way 2012 has conflated numerous cultures, suggesting they have a singular message when it comes to 2012. It is common, for example, to see a lot of slippage between Maya and Aztec artefacts (the Aztec Sun Stone has become one of the main 2012 images) in 2012 writings. North American indigenous cultures are also drawn upon, particularly that of the Hopi, with any number of supposedly ‘initiated’ individuals passing comment on how Native Americans also have their own 2012 prophecies. It’s significant, too, that some 2012 gurus have written themselves crucial roles in



LEFT AND ABOVE: José Argüelles and a version of his ‘Dreamspell Calendar’, supposedly based on that of the Maya. FACING PAGE: The Aztec ‘Sun Stone’: nothing to do with the Maya.

the manifestation of indigenous 2012 prophecies, in effect robbing indigenous peoples of having any hero figures of their own.

The use of indigenous culture in 2012 is by no means exclusive to the Americas: the 2012 narrative also extends as far as New Zealand. One example is self-styled 'spiritual teacher' Drunvalo Melchizedek's book *Serpent of Light: Beyond 2012*, in which the author (born Bernard Perona) suggests that all the indigenous people of the world are somehow working together in order for a cosmic serpent to settle in the high Andes of Chile. The book concludes with a grandiose visit to New Zealand. Melchizedek tells us he received an invitation from the Maori Queen before going on to share secret knowledge of the Waitaha people about the next "serpentine movement".

It's significant that Melchizedek doesn't just trade upon Maori identity, but an amplified presentation of indigeneity in New Zealand; for the Waitaha are not 'regular' Maori, but largely mythical Maori. In his book *Song of Waitaha: The Histories of a Nation*, Barry Brailsford argues that the Waitaha people were not simply an early Maori tribe, but an ancient tribe who lived in New Zealand many centuries before recognised settlement, and that their history has been suppressed. Iconic New Zealand historian Michael King dismissed Brailsford's historical claims, arguing "there was not a skerrick of evidence" that the Waitaha people existed before modern settlement. On his website, Melchizedek went on to sell costly tours with the Waitaha people, acting as a kind of travel agent/knowledge broker.

Melchizedek here combines a number of elements of the 2012 use of indigenous culture in both North America and Australasia: the singular indigenous worldview; the outsider who rolls up to an indigenous community and shares in their secrets; the glossing over of 'real' indigenous cultures by referring to some crypto-historic or non-terrestrial culture; the monetising of indigenous knowledge.

While it's clear that indigenous motifs are routinely hijacked in the 2012 discourse, it is equally clear that this is not necessarily the intention of the hijackers. Many of the individuals who use indigenous themes on their quest for meaning around 2012



## MANY INDIGENOUS 'PROPHECIES' ARE CITED TO SUGGEST WHAT WILL HAPPEN ON 21 DECEMBER 2012

would be horrified to be charged with theft or even racism. For many seekers, their mobilisation of indigenous knowledge comes from a deep respect and appreciation for indigenous culture: there is a clear disconnect between intention and effect.

The challenge for these individuals is how to do justice both to their perception of indigenous culture and to how indigenous cultures perceive themselves. This is a difficult task, and one made significantly more complex in the colonised world: non-indigenous residents of North America, Australia and New Zealand, for example, can never really claim to honour indigenous culture without first genuinely admitting that they are living on stolen land.

Such a realisation requires extraordinary political will and deep soul-searching, and has yet to happen anywhere in the world at a genuinely national level.

There are other more modest steps that

can be taken that move towards getting the balance right. A good first step is to understand that indigenous cultures – even within a single country – are vastly different, and their true identities lie in their cultural specificities, not some singular pan-indigenous worldview.

Equally important is to be more critical of the source of supposedly indigenous knowledge. Information passed on from a weekend shamanic initiation in Peru, for example, is likely to be flaky at best: genuine indigenous knowledge is guarded fiercely, and must be earned.

Learning about indigenous knowledge in a culturally appropriate context requires actually getting to know indigenous people: this is not as elusive a goal as you might imagine, but it does take some time.

Once such relationships begin to form, the political realities facing indigenous cultures are likely to surface, personal alliances are likely to emerge, and genuine indigenous knowledge is likely to inspire the rest of the world. And then, just maybe, the 2012 message will finally begin to manifest. **TI**

### NOTE

**1** Robert K Sittler: "The 2012 Phenomenon: New Age Appropriation of an Ancient Mayan Calendar", *Novo Religio: the Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 2006, 9 (3): 24–38.



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# THE HIDDEN HISTORY OF 2012

**JOHN W HOOPES** explores the long development of the 2012 myths in the works of hermeticists, hippies and hackers - from Helena Blavatsky and HP Lovecraft to Terence McKenna.

*"The Atlantean zodiacal records cannot err, as they were compiled under the guidance of those who first taught Astronomy, among other things, to mankind." HP Blavatsky: "Kalpas and Vedas," The Secret Doctrine*

*"There had been æons when other Things ruled on the earth, and They had had great cities... They all died vast epochs of time before men came, but there were arts which could revive Them when the stars had come round again to the right positions in the cycle of eternity." HP Lovecraft: "The Call of Cthulhu"*

**W**hen the stars come round again to the right positions in 2012, what will happen? Adepts schooled in Hermetic wisdom assert the Ancients had a far better grasp on the Cosmos, history, and destiny than we do. Truths have been concealed from time immemorial by an occult tradition whose methods include mystical revelation. Return to archaic tradition will bring a New Age of spiritual enlightenment. But first, a purge.

The world as we know it will be destroyed by earthquakes, floods, volcanoes, a rogue comet or planet, the flipping of the Earth's poles and Armageddon - the nuclear holocaust at the end of time. It's a scenario of sacrifice and rebirth: the Apocalypse and the Second Coming, or a rebirth after the union of Father Sun and Mother Earth (or



LEFT: Helena Blavatsky, who linked early ideas about the Maya with the myths of Atlantis.

## BRASSEUR BELIEVED THE MAYA HAD REACHED EGYPT BY WAY OF ATLANTIS

Mother Cosmos), a great conception in the sky as the solstice Sun's rays penetrate the dark rift in the Milky Way. As the story goes, it was the ancient Maya who preserved the ancient wisdom of the Old Ones from Lemuria, Atlantis, and "new lands" beyond the stars, in whose pyramids and hieroglyphic texts our destiny has been revealed.

How did 2012 become the year of the Maya Apocalypse? The natives of Central America were associated with End Times in the instant they were "discovered."

Columbus loved astrology and prophecy. Reviving late mediæval attempts to predict the Apocalypse, he compiled a *Book of Prophecies* around 1500. Quoting classical works and the Bible, Columbus argued his discovery of "most distant lands" had been foretold and that gold from the Americas would finance the reconquest of Jerusalem, setting in motion events of the Book of Revelation that he calculated would unfold in the 1700s. He was wrong, but this was just the beginning.

The "return of Quetzalcoatl" - claimed by some to have been a bearded, white-skinned culture hero - echoes William Blake's vision of Glastonbury, where Jesus Christ would return at the dawn of what Blake called a "New Age". In contemporary lore, the returning Messiah has morphed into the return of the ancient alien, a *deus ex machina* whose appearance will confirm that we are not alone and usher in an Aquarian transformation of consciousness, a Theosophical synthesis of science, religion, and philosophy. DH Lawrence explored the idea of a new religion based on Quetzalcoatl's return in his novel *The Feathered Serpent* (1926). Truth has become stranger than fiction.

### THE BIRTH OF A MYTH

The workings of the Long Count calendar were rediscovered in the late 19th century when American journalist Joseph Goodman, working from photos taken by British archaeologist Alfred Maudslay, defined a Maya "count of days" based on units of increasingly larger size: the *k'in* (1 day), *winal* (20 days), *tun* (360 days), *k'atun* (7200 days), and *bak'tun* (144,000 days). Goodman postulated a larger Great Cycle of 13 bak'tuns (1,872,000 days) and determined the present one started on 13.0.0.0.0 4 Ajaw 8 Cumk'u, whose Gregorian equivalent

is 11 August 3114 BC. The next day was 0.0.0.0.1, with each day clicking another unit in the count. According to Goodman, the current Great Cycle will conclude on 13.0.0.0.0 4 Ajaw 3 K'an'k'in, or 21 December 2012 (or possibly 23 December, or some other date, since experts disagree).

In 1901, German scholar Ernst Förstemann interpreted images on the last page of the Maya Dresden Codex as a cataclysmic flood destroying the world. His ideas were repeated by American archæologist Sylvanus Morley in 1915, who affirmed "a final all-engulfing cataclysm". This was repeated in Morley's *The Ancient Maya* (1946) and cited by Joseph Campbell, who remarked on the prophecy as archetype in *The Hero with A Thousand Faces* (1949).

The current 2012 hype is most clearly attributed to Yale archæologist Michael Coe, who wrote:

"The idea of cyclical creations and destruction is a typical feature of Mesoamerican religions, as it is of the Oriental. The Aztec, for instance, thought that the universe had passed through four such ages, and that we were now in the fifth, to be destroyed by earthquakes. The Maya thought along the same lines, in terms of eras of great length, like the Hindu kalpas. There is a suggestion that each of these measured 13 baktuns, or something less than 5,200 years, and that Armageddon would overtake the degenerate peoples of the world and all creation on the final day of the thirteenth. Thus, following the Thompson correlation, our present universe would have been created in 3113 BC, to be annihilated on December 24, AD 2011, when the Great Cycle of the Long Count reaches completion." (From *The Maya*, 1966, p149).

Coe thought creation/destruction events in the Maya *Popol Vuh*, the Aztec *Leyenda de los soles*, and the Aztec "Sun Stone" had a common basis in mythology. However, details of Coe's argument have never been clearly articulated. Both Maya and Aztec references to destructions, including floods, come from documents dating to the 1550s, long after the arrival of Spanish missionaries and Christian eschatology. Coe's choice of the term "Armageddon" came from his desire to grab the interest of a Cold War audience, but his passage also echoed Lovecraft. Suspicious, I asked Coe whether he had ever read Lovecraft. He confessed he'd been an avid fan since high school and explained that he'd

purchased an ancient farmhouse in upstate Massachusetts precisely because of its Lovecraftian setting. "I wonder whether what I wrote... was influenced by Lovecraft's kalpas? Maybe so!"

As Jason Colavito has pointed out in *The Cult of the Alien Gods: HP Lovecraft and Extraterrestrial Pop Culture* (2005), Erich von Däniken's "ancient astronaut" theory can be traced to Lovecraft's "Old Ones". It was filtered through the work of Louis Pauwels and Jacques Bergier, whose *The Dawn of Magic* (1960) conjoined ufology with the occult and conspiracy theory. Lovecraft's play on Helena Blavatsky's kalpas and root races fuelled a new

mythology. The Lovecraftian tone of Coe's words provoked in others an association with extraterrestrials. The success of *Chariots of the Gods?* (1969) and its German film version inspired John Landsburg to produce *In Search of Ancient Astronauts* (1973), *In Search of Ancient Mysteries* (1975), and *The Outer Space Connection* (1975), which suggested the Maya had been in contact with extraterrestrials who had started a colony

in the Yucatan, undertaken cloning experiments, and would return to Earth on Coe's date: 24 December 2011. A modern myth was born, melding 19th-century Theosophy with ETs through Lovecraft and Coe.

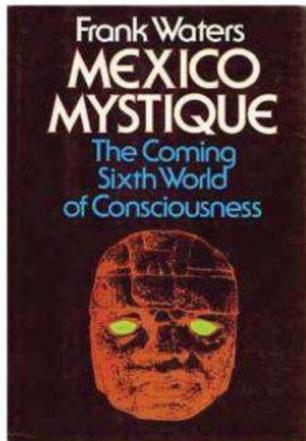
## 19TH-CENTURY ROOTS

The myth's roots run deep. At the beginning of the 19th century, Alexander von Humboldt had suggested in *Vue des cordilleres* (1810) that the wisdom of ancient Aztec and Maya priests may have been brought by refugees from the destruction of Babel. His ideas influenced Joseph Smith, Jr, led by an angel to discover a cache of golden plates in upstate New York. Magical translation of hieroglyphic texts yielded the *Book of Mormon* (1830), a sacred text that placed both the Lost Tribes of Israel and Jesus in America. They also inspired Lord Kingsborough's monumental *Antiquities of Mexico* (1831-48), a compilation of primary evidence in support of the Lost Tribes theory. For readers of Godfrey Higgins's *Anacalypsis* (1835), connections with mysteries of the Saitic Isis were clear.

Charles Brasseur de Bourbourg, a Jesuit priest who discovered the K'iche' *Popol Vuh* as well as Bishop Landa's *Relación de las cosas de Yucatán*, sustained a fascination with Plato's myth of lost Atlantis. He saw Maya social structure in the utopian narrative and became convinced that their mythology had originated on Atlantis. His theories were ridiculed by most of his colleagues, but not by Augustus Le Plongeon, an eccentric explorer who undertook the excavations in the Yucatan in the 1870s and 1880s. Le Plongeon was convinced that the origins of Masonic tradition had begun in Mexico, not Egypt, and that sacred traditions of the Maya had reached Egypt by way of Atlantis. Brasseur and Le Plongeon were both cited favourably by Mme Blavatsky in *The Secret Doctrine* (1888), which also drew heavily upon Ignatius Donnelly's *Atlantis: The Antediluvian World* (1882), a major backdrop to the disaster scenarios that follow. He had been inspired in turn by Edward Bulwer's *The Last Days of Pompeii* (1834), which made it clear that the fire raining down on the Romans was divine retribution for their debauchery, clearing the way for Christianity. The 2012 Apocalypse is the Atlantis myth remade.

## MEXICO MYSTIQUE

Fast forward to 1973, when Comet Kohoutek (which proved to be a dud), Carlos Castaneda (who proved to be a charlatan), and von Däniken contributed to a spate of speculation about Doomsday, Native mysticism, and ancient UFOs. Coe's passage was especially significant for novelist Frank



LEFT: The page of the Dresden Codex showing the 'Great Flood'.

ABOVE: Frank Waters's influential book.

# MEL GIBSON'S APOCALYPTO

Waters. In *Mexico Mystique: The Coming Sixth World of Consciousness* (1975), Waters recounted stories of lost Atlantis and myths of the return of Quetzalcoatl (emphasising that he was rumoured to be white and bearded). Following Coe's conflation of Maya and Aztec stories, he suggested that a sequence of five "World Ages" of 5,200 years each punctuated a roughly 26,000-year precession of the equinoxes. The end of each had been accompanied by destruction and rebirth, the destruction of Atlantis having been an example. Waters devoted several chapters to discussing the Long Count, cosmic catastrophism, and an end that would presage a new beginning. He commissioned an astrological chart for Coe's erroneous date, and predicted the end of the Fifth World on 24 December 2011. He also asserted that the Maya, Aztecs, and Hopi had prophesied that our corrupt world would be destroyed except for "only those people who return to their original teachings". A "True White Brother" would herald a coming Day of Purification accompanied by earthquakes and volcanoes. At the end, flying saucers would arrive from another planet. In fact, according to Waters, some Hopi had already seen ones piloted by *kachinas*.

His book was ignored by academic scholars but was popular in the New Age community (several copies appear on a bookshelf in a scene from Shirley MacLaine's 1987 TV miniseries *Out on a Limb*). Most of our present 2012 lore can be traced to *Mexico Mystique*, though books published the same year by the McKenna brothers, Tony Shearer, and José Argüelles (obit. FT277:28) created a rich context.

Terence McKenna (obit. FT243:23), a student at the University of California-Berkeley during the height of the late 1960s, found revelation in powerful psychedelics. After an intense experience with psilocybin in the tropical forest of eastern Colombia in 1971, Terence and his brother Dennis replicated mathematical patterns of the *I-Ching* using software to predict historical cycles of increasing "novelty" and the end of a 4,300-year cycle that culminated in an "eschaton" in 2012. They introduced the concept of "Timewave Zero" in *The Invisible Landscape* (1975). Although they made no mention of the ancient Maya, their reading of *Hamlet's Mill* (1969) led them to hint at the significance of the heliacal rising of Sagittarius near the "crossroads" of the ecliptic and the Milky Way galaxy for the dawning of the Age of Aquarius and "a new world-age". They arrived at 2012 by applying a

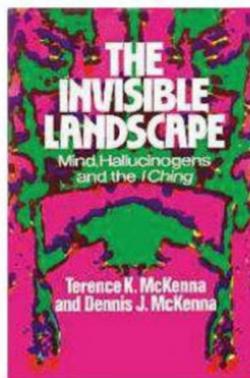


## SHAMANS JOURNEYED TO THE CENTRE OF THE MILKY WAY GALAXY

67-year cycle to the use of atomic bombs on Japan in 1945. However, the Timewave programme only worked with a great deal of tweaking and fudging and McKenna was the only one who could explain it.

José Argüelles dropped acid before working on a PhD in art history from the University of Chicago. He specialised in "visionary" works, teaching at Princeton and UC-Davis before losing a tenure-track job amidst his devotion to the first Whole Earth Festival in 1970. Shearer had directed him to consider the Quetzalcoatl myth and Mexican prophecies, leading to a mention of 2012 in *The Transformative Vision* (1975). Argüelles hit bottom with alcoholism in 1980. His recovery included concentrating his energy on art and spiritual matters, culminating in *Earth Ascending* (1984), a confounding synthesis with artwork of the Maya 260-day calendar, the *I-Ching* 64-hexagram sequence, and DNA. In April 1985 during a

conference at the Ojai Institute, Argüelles met Terence McKenna, who reminded him of the end of the 13th bak'tun and its association with the 2012 Winter Solstice. Further study compelled Argüelles to write



LEFT: The Maya go mainstream in Mel Gibson's 2010 film.

BELOW: ... and countercultural in the work of Terence McKenna.

*The Mayan Factor* (1987) and organise the Harmonic Convergence, a New Age celebration on 16–17 August 1987 (dates calculated by Shearer). He began articulating a theory of Galactic Maya, intelligent beings from outer space who gave the ancient Maya esoteric wisdom. He also promoted the corrected date of 21 December 2012. In 1989, Argüelles – who styled himself Valum Votan, Closer of the Cycle and President of the Foundation for the Law of Time – concluded that the ills of mankind stem from slavish adherence to a 12:60 rather than a 13:20 time system. That is, by using units of time based on 13 and 20 – as did the ancient Maya – humankind could bring about a New Age of heightened consciousness. He invented the Dreamspell, a Maya-inspired calendar based on a new form of astrology.

## FROM THE 1990S TO Y2K

The work of McKenna and Argüelles took off with the Internet. Hippies and hackers had been part of the same community from the birth of personal computing. Just before his death in 1996, psychedelic icon Timothy Leary became a booster for the Web, entreating new heads and psychonauts to network online. This occurred as financing for Y2K preparedness fuelled the dotcom bubble of 1995–99, but fringe subculture already knew that 2012, not Y2K, was the prophesied date for major changes. In *The Mayan Prophecies* (1995), Adrian Gilbert and Maurice Cotterell suggested that 2012 would bring a sudden reversal of the Earth's magnetic poles. Graham Hancock's *Fingerprints of the Gods* (1995) cited prophecies for 23 December 2012 as well as Michael Coe's epilogue to *Breaking the Maya Code* (1992), an otherwise excellent book on the decipherment of Maya hieroglyphic writing, to spin a tale of a future Great Flood that director Roland Emmerich later cited as inspiration for the main theme of his blockbuster film *2012* (2009).

In the second edition of *The Invisible Landscape* (1993), the McKennas wrote: "Half an hour before the winter solstice of December 21, 2012, the sun will rise at La Chorrera (73° west 41° south) in a position that will eclipse the galactic centre. The rising sun is caught in the crosshairs of the intersection of the plane of the ecliptic with the ecliptical plane of our galaxy."

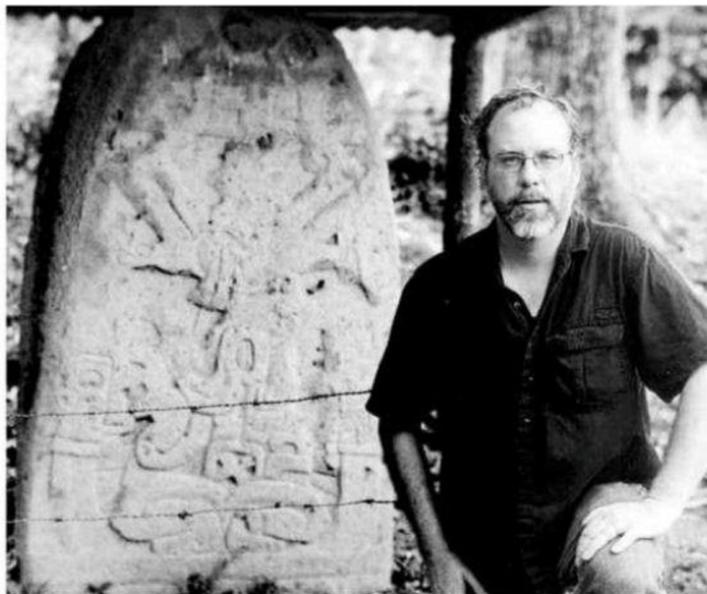
After reading the McKennas and David Freidel, Linda Schele and Joy Parker's *Maya Cosmos: Three Thousand Years on the Shaman's Path* (1993), autodidact John Major Jenkins became convinced that the Sun's location relative to the galactic centre in 2012 was the basis for the invention of

the Long Count itself. *Maya Cosmogogenesis 2012* (1998), with an introduction by McKenna, introduced his theory that ancient Maya shamans used psychedelics to make journeys to the centre of the Milky Way galaxy and gain insight into the Cosmos. Their experiences led them to invent the Long Count calendar, calculating backwards from 21 December 2012, a Winter Solstice when the Sun was in conjunction with the “dark rift”, a concentration of interstellar dust at the location of the galactic centre. This conjunction represented a union of Father Sun with the Great Mother, a symbol of cosmic conception. Suffice it to say that Jenkins has been utterly unable to persuade professional Mayanists that the Maya calendar focused on a galactic vagina. Jenkins’s philosophical arguments, based on Hermeticism and Perennial philosophy, have been fundamentally astrological, asserting events happening in the Cosmos will – if we acknowledge and embrace them – bring about a transformation of consciousness.

The turn of Y2K shifted more attention to 2012. There had already been buzz that 2000 was an artificial date and that the “real” End Times/transformation date was in 2012. Geoff Stray’s *Dire Gnosis 2012* website ([www.diagnosis2012.co.uk](http://www.diagnosis2012.co.uk)) became a central database for 2102 news and lore and his book *Beyond 2012* (2005) offered a range of possibilities. Daniel Pinchbeck gained a following with *Breaking Open the Head* (2002), a narrative about his discovery of the potent effects of iboga, ayahuasca, and DMT (see FT168:24–25). He presented ideas about 2012 inspired by McKenna and Argüelles in a talk at the Burning Man festival in 2003.

In February 2006, Robert Sittler published the first scholarly article on 2012 in *Nova Religio*. It was followed in May by Pinchbeck’s *2012: The Return of Quetzalcoatl* with a cover on the US edition inspired by the July 1996 “Julia Set” crop circle near Stonehenge. December 2006 saw the much-anticipated release of Mel Gibson’s film *Apocalypto*, filmed in a Mayan language.

In January 2007, Lawrence Joseph’s book *Apocalypse 2012* (whose subtitle in the US was *A Scientific Investigation into Civilization’s End* with a black and ominous cover, but in the UK was *An Optimist Investigates the End of Civilization* with a cheerful cover)



LEFT: John Major Jenkins, one of a number of contemporary fringe writers on 2012.

provided a long list of “scientific” disaster scenarios. That July, the *New York Times* magazine featured a profile of Jenkins as a proficient amateur, spurring on his own speaking schedule and work on his subsequent book *The 2012 Story* (2009). The meme had tipped.

## CONCLUSION

One could argue that the spirit of Charles Fort lives on in the anti-science and anti-establishment rhetoric of the promoters of 2012 mythology. Evidence for the coming Apocalypse is to be found in the parade of the damned, the endless bits of evidence for alien abductions, psi phenomena, telepathy, crop circles, orbs, and out-of-place-artefacts. Scientists, especially professional Mayanists, can’t be trusted to evaluate this evidence without ingrained blindness or bias, or so the claims go. They have neglected the signs and intentionally suppressed and denied the evidence, from hieroglyphic texts to crystal skulls. However, we should not reject any theories about 2012 just because they were conceived under the influence of psychedelics. Nor should we reject theories just because some authors are former Nazis and

pædophiles. We should question them because they’re bizarre and incredible. In all of the Maya writing that has been deciphered, there is only one reference to 13.0.0.0.0 4 Ajaw 3 K’ank’in. According to some experts, it says that on that day a deity will be dressed and displayed, with implications of a huge party with lots of drinking. Furthermore, the latest scholarship suggests the last page of the Dresden Codex represents a seasonal rainstorm, not a world-ending flood. The suppressed

secret? There is no Maya doomsday prophecy.

2012 mythology appeals to people frustrated by science’s impotence in providing definitive answers. Science is mute on truth, so it is rejected. The mythology also appeals to those who are frustrated by what science chooses not to investigate. It has a deep history in esoteric lore, including Hermeticism and Theosophy, which attempts (unsuccessfully) the fusion of Enlightenment science with mysticism; today, 2012 proponents such as John Major Jenkins rail against the establishment for ignoring their insights.

2012 has become a vehicle for new mythologies, from the liberation of information to the Occupy movement. There are serious problems in the world, from global warming to revolution, but the idea that the ancient Maya prophesied change in our times is ludicrous.

Lovecraft was a lifelong sceptic who detested ignorance and gullibility. What few appreciated is that he spun fiction to mock the most bizarre notions of his time. Ironically, his legacy includes writers who can’t distinguish truth from fiction. It’s essential to study occult knowledge to understand the effects it has had on contemporary culture. It’s important to know what’s been hidden in order to evaluate mainstream trends. Fantasy enthralled and stimulates our imaginations, alleviating boredom and provoking creativity. 2012 is rich with allusion and allegory. It’s not the end of the world... **FT**

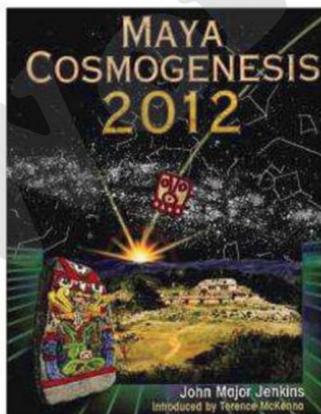
*“Then in the slow creeping course of eternity, the utmost cycle of the cosmos churned itself into another futile completion, and all things became as they were unreckoned kalpas before. Matter and light were born anew as space once had known them; and comets, suns and worlds sprang flaming into life, though nothing survived to tell that they had been and gone, been and gone, always and always, back to no first beginning.”* HP Lovecraft: “The Dream Quest of Unknown Kadath”

## AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



**JOHN HOOPES** is an associate professor of anthropology at the University of Kansas, teaching and researching ancient civilisations of Central and South America. He has researched “fringe”

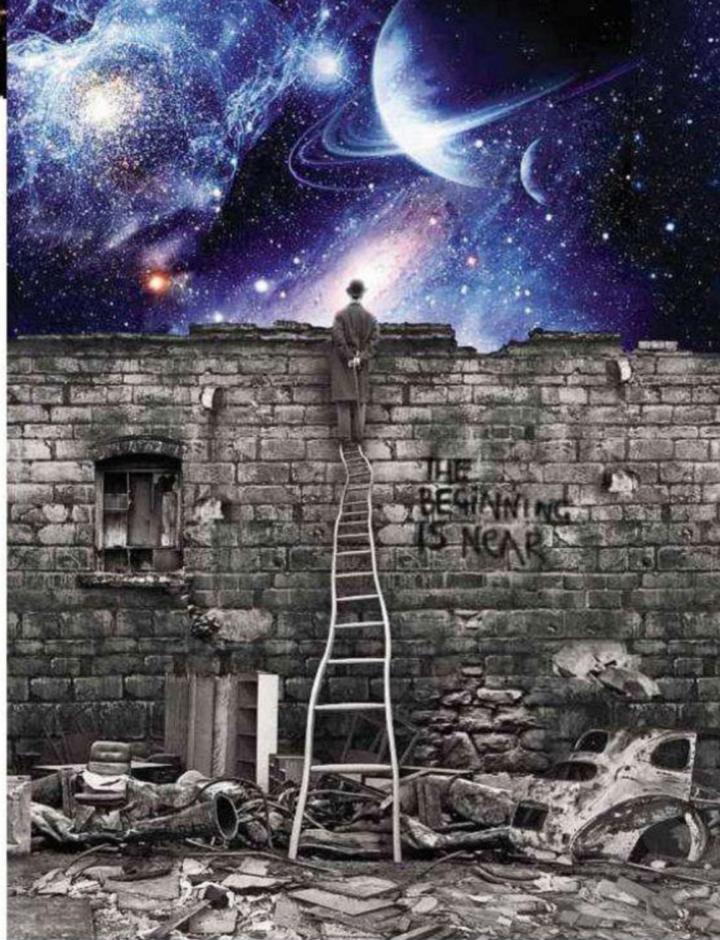
archæology since the 1970s and has published several articles on 2012. His blog “Reality Check” is on the *Psychology Today* website <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/reality-check>.





others have left to offer. The phenomenon, on the whole, resists cohesion and evades consensus. 2012 is not a religion or a movement. It is not even a unique set of precariously erected mythology-stacking pieces. It is an adaptive trope built up independently in each mind that encounters it, whether apocalyptic, utopian, sceptical, agnostic, or otherwise, orienting thought to the Winter Solstice of 2012 and its relationship to the Maya Long Count calendar. Every time an idea about 2012 is encountered, it is translated (not copied) into a unique – and already densely populated – mental ecology. When it comes to the significance of 2012, mileage may vary.

Will the Winter Solstice bring enlightenment resulting from the Earth's movement into an incoming frequency from the centre of the galaxy or will utopia result, rather, from the conclusion of our passage through a beam emanating from the galactic centre? If you believe Shirley MacLaine's address to an audience of the *Oprah Winfrey Show*, the former is true. If you are persuaded by Jose Argüelles's argument in *The Mayan Factor*, it will be the latter. Will a massive solar flare cause the Earth's core to flip and displace its crust as during the flooding of Atlantis, or will it cause electrical grids to fail, resulting in a domino effect leading to global anarchy? Patrick Geryl professes 100 per cent confidence in the former scenario, while Lawrence Joseph has implied the inevitable likelihood of the latter. Will we discover time-travel and thereby erase linear history or achieve functional immortality by uploading our consciousnesses to computers? Terence McKenna occasionally considered both of these scenarios (and many others) as possibilities for the culmination of his Timewave in 2012. Does Denver International Airport serve to hide underground bases where the selected elite of the New World Order will wait out the Apocalypse with their multi-dimensional reptilian overlords? David Icke has suggested as much. Was 28 October 2011 the peak of universal evolution? Carl Calleman's numerological metahistory indicates that it was. Does getting light-headed mean that you are shedding your material layers in a process of ascension? Darren Daulton will tell you so. Will a rogue planet known to the Babylonians return proffering Earthly doom or the arrival of advanced extraterrestrials? Commander X, Jason Martell, and many others are awaiting its arrival even as NASA claims its non-existence. Or, as many sceptics believe, are all of these scenarios the products of uncritical minds polluted by New Age



LEFT: One of many online images positioning 2012 as the start of a New Age rather than the End Times.

the frame of a specific religion (Christian millennialism, Jewish Messianism, and so on). Improvisational millennialism, he says, results from an “open marketplace of apocalyptic ideas... wherein disparate elements are drawn together in new combinations... [C]onstituent elements... can appear simultaneously in a broad range of belief systems, having slightly different significance in each, depending on the other elements with which they are combined... and each moves among different audiences.”

Whereas Michael Coe's original assertion, in 1966, that the Classic Maya expected the conclusion of the 13th Bak'tun of their Long Count calendar to result in “Armageddon” was based on scholarly suppos-

ition, his suggestion was soon appropriated to suit the needs of other narratives. Astrologer Roberta Sklower, hired by Frank Waters to draw up the astrological charts for the expected day, determined that the particular planetary configuration on 24 December 2011 was so unique that it would only occur once every 45,200 years. Waters made elaborate justifications for why this particular orientation of the heavens was uniquely appropriate to the metaphysical significance of the conclusion of the 13th Bak'tun, the end of one world age and the beginning of a new one. Ultimately, Coe's proposed date of 24 December 2011 was realised to be an incorrect correlation, and, when the focus of attention was shifted to the Winter Solstice of 2012, a new heavenly orientation (between the Earth, the Sun, and the general area of the centre of the galaxy) was, again, determined to be uniquely appropriate to the conclusion of the so-called Great Cycle.<sup>2</sup> This “galactic alignment” is said to occur in cycles of nearly 26,000 years. Many do not realise that this basic alignment occurs once every year as the path of the Sun intersects the galactic equator. The timeframe during the year when this occurs is what shifts in a 26,000-year cycle and the alignment has been occurring annually on the Winter Solstice for more than three decades. No matter how you slice it, this is not unique to 2012. In recent years, the “galactic alignment” has become one of the central tropes of the 2012 phenomenon and has been used to support an inconsistent array of both Domsday and enlightenment scenarios depending on the background and intent of the individual utilising it. Where John Major Jenkins sees the Winter Solstice alignment<sup>3</sup> as a cosmological representation of a perennial wisdom

## WILL WE ACHIEVE IMMORTALITY BY UPLOADING OUR CONSCIOUSNESSES TO COMPUTERS?

thinking and too much experimentation with illicit substances? These options, of course, come nowhere near exhausting the range of expectations for what 2012 represents. As Kenneth Roemer has suggested of all utopian information (in his insightful book *Utopian Audiences*), whatever your feelings about 2012, they are sure to be “constrained, guided and encouraged by powerful cultural, historical and personal situations and forces”. Given the availability of more than 2,000 books, endless thousands of websites, and scores of films, albums, magazine and newspaper articles, mobile applications, comic strips, consumer products, conferences, and cruises, nobody who attends the buffet that is the 2012 phenomenon returns to their table with exactly the same items on their plate. Balkanisation of epistemology, indeed.<sup>1</sup>

### TO EACH HIS OWN

Michael Barkun, in his book *A Culture of Conspiracy*, refers to this process of picking and choosing from disparate cultural elements to form an apocalyptic or utopian expectation as “improvisational millennialism” in contrast with more traditional millenarian beliefs typically embedded within

## ASCENSION SYMPTOMS

Many enthusiasts see 2012 in a seemingly more positive light than those expecting Doomsday, viewing the lead-up to 2012 as an opportunity for humanity to free the "light beings" that are trapped within each of us in the gross matter of our physical bodies (a throwback to both Gnostic and yogic themes). Long lists of the symptoms of this so-called ascension process are widely circulated online. They claim that the more of the symptoms you display, the further you are along the path to ultimate enlightenment. One individual who has noted these symptoms in himself is former Philadelphia Phillies catcher and World Series MVP Darren Daulton. By looking at online ascension symptom lists,<sup>1</sup> Daulton has determined that symptoms he has experienced since retiring from baseball are

signs of a spiritual awakening. As described in his book, *If They Only Knew*, he considers ascension to be "an evolutionary process of the Universe that enables you to raise your level of consciousness higher and to tap into higher dimensions" and "escape the physical plane of existence". His "symptoms" include such seemingly normal experiences as getting light-headed when standing up or stretching, hearing ringing in his ears, night sweats (which he interprets as "meaning that [his] body is burning more density away"), and occasional sensitivity to "stimuli that otherwise wouldn't have bothered [him], like the noise of crowds", as well as more alarming physical and mental manifestations such as memory loss, loss of identity, seeing lines on the floor which he interprets as planetary grids,



cardiopulmonary problems ("problems breathing, feeling out of breath and a rapid heart rate"), and feelings of insanity. One of the most disturbing side-effects of the ascension mythos that Daulton has incorporated into his life is the distancing from family and friends who don't share his spiritual vision: "[O]ne shouldn't feel bad because of a lesser

desire to no longer hold the bond that was once held with a biological family... rest assured, it is part of the process and you will find your soul family members." While many may consider Daulton credulous for accepting the interpretation of his symptoms as signs of his impending evolutionary advance into higher dimensional realms, it may be worth considering the cognitive dissonance that might be provoked by such adverse effects in an individual who has spent his life receiving accolades for his physical prowess. Daulton's case is not unique but representative. Many others have preferred to interpret experiences otherwise appearing to have negative implications within a materialist worldview as signs of a positive manifestation of spiritual growth.

### NOTE

1 One such list used by Daulton is Karen Bishop's at <http://bit.ly/2nlxNS> (namastecafe.com).

focusing on transformation and renewal, Brent Miller, host of the Horizon Project video series, claims that the event is likely to cause the crust of the Earth to separate from the mantle, causing the type of cataclysmic upheavals portrayed in Roland Emmerich's 2009 film *2012*.

But it is not only the theorists and creators of 2012 mythology who actively promote their versions of the significance of the date in the books and websites that make up the 2012 phenomenon. It is also composed of followers of the major proponents, producers of products (including television programmes and other media productions) who are simply trying to cash in on a fad, and their customers, satirists who mock the hype (often by unwittingly perpetuating false information), journalists who report on the phenomenon, scientists and academics who attempt to debunk it, and average people who simply discuss it at the pub with their mates. 2012 would not be a phenomenon were it not for the tenacity of its propagation through culture at large. Whoever contributes to the spread of attention to the date, including me writing this article (and you reading it), is complicit in the persistence of the 2012 phenomenon.

As John Hoopes's article (pp40-43) demonstrates, the roots of 2012 thought have a fairly clear and specific history of transmission; but the modern phenomenon is anything but clear and far from specific. I often tell people, with little feeling

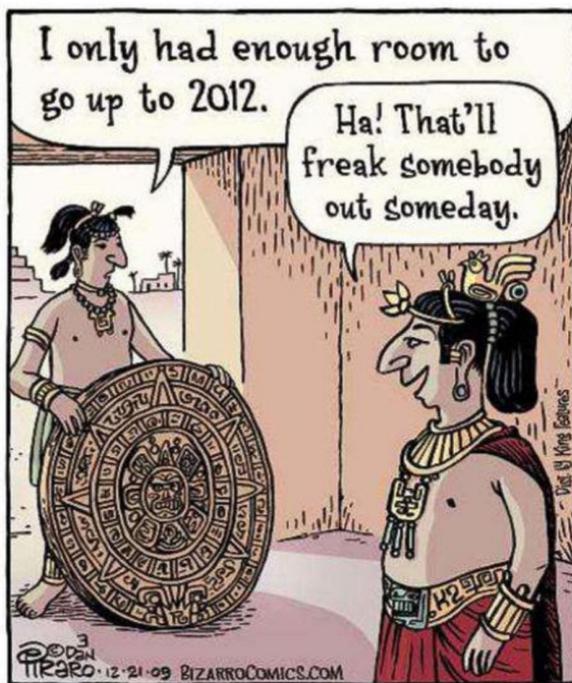
of having exaggerated, that any possible apocalyptic or utopian scenario that they have ever encountered (and many that they could never have imagined) now has a 2012 version. The film *Doomsday 2012* recasts the supposed Maya prophecy as a prophecy of pre-Columbian Christians in the New World where 21 December 2012 is the date of the rapture. Dovid Krafchow, the Jewish Bohemian, has developed a rendition of 2012 that utilises Kabbalistic numerology (or *gematria*).<sup>4</sup> *The X-Files* projected 2012 as the date of the final invasion and colonisation

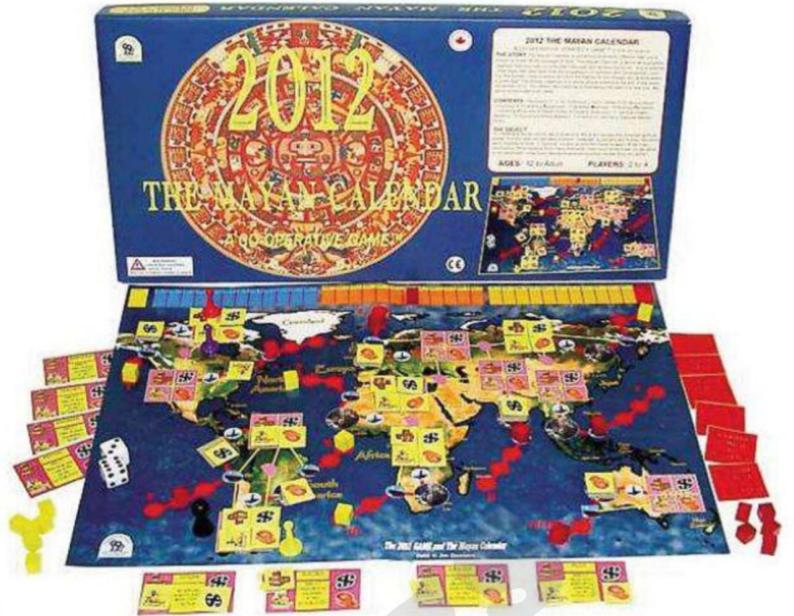
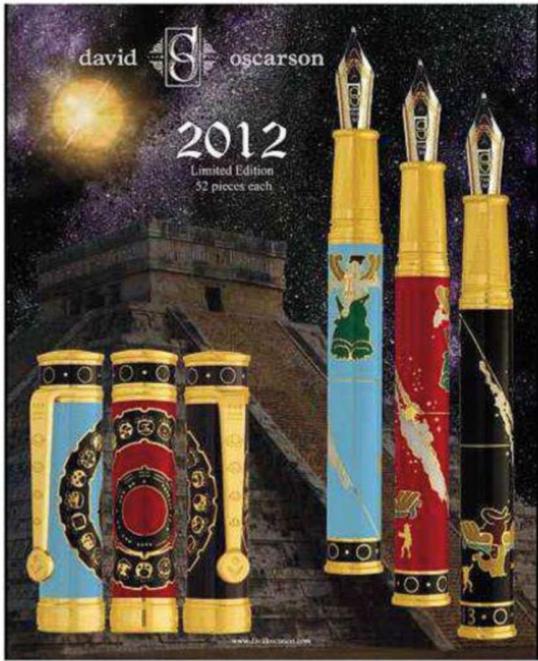
of Earth by hostile extraterrestrials. Terence McKenna believed it would bring a transhumanist singularity as the successful culmination of human technological ingenuity. Jose Argüelles, on the contrary, thought it would see the dismantling of the human "technosphere" and a return to nature and telepathic galactic communality. More recently, Carl Calleman has gone completely against the grain and ventured out with his own, unique, date of 28 October 2011 for the "true" end of the Maya calendar, signalling the culmination of the entire

16.4-billion-year process of universal evolution.<sup>5</sup> According to his calculations, humanity should now have achieved Unity Consciousness, the highest apex of evolution of consciousness achievable. If you don't feel particularly enlightened and worry that you have missed the ascension boat, fear not – the alternative variations of expectation for 2012 are functionally endless.

## THIS IS NOT THE MAYA CALENDAR!

Several images in this article display a stylised disc consisting of interlocking circles with a face in the centre sticking out its tongue. If you have paid any attention to the 2012 phenomenon, you have undoubtedly seen this image repeatedly portrayed as a representation of the Maya calendar. It is not; and it is certainly is not the "Mayan calendar"!<sup>6</sup> This is the Aztec Sun Stone and is partly





OPPOSITE PAGE: Dan Piraro's 2012 cartoon has circulated widely. ABOVE: Limited edition pens and board games are just some of the many 2012 products available.

used because it is one of the most readily familiar icons of Mesoamerican culture used as the primary representation of Mexican culture for public relations during the Mexico City Summer Olympic Games in 1968. Also, since there is no available pictorial representation of the Maya Long Count (only monuments with specific dates), it is useful for those who prefer an image onto which to attach their hopes and fears. Though this Aztec artefact does contain calendrical glyphs (day names), it is not a calendar in any traditional sense and its exact function is still disputed among scholars. At best, we can use its persistent misapplication as a means of weeding out individuals who are unable to differentiate between Mesoamerican cultures and thus probably know little about the civilisation that they are intending to represent. Even sceptical and satirical commentators who attempt to make light of the 2012 milieu persist in this common misattribution, thus perpetuating its misuse. One of the most widely spread Internet memes about 2012 shows two Mayas in a temple complex. One is holding the Aztec Sun Stone and says: "I only had enough room to go up to 2012." The other replies, "Ha! That'll freak somebody out some day." As amusing as this alternate theory for why the calendar "ends" is, it is based on the same inaccurate understandings of the Maya that it is mocking. The Maya were not the Aztecs, and the Long Count, as a perpetual calendar, does not end any more than does our calendar when it reaches 31 December.

### END-TIMES COMMODITIES

As a widely consumed artefact of popular culture, 2012 is also rife for commercial exploitation. Those with metaphysical or psychological inclinations seeking divinatory aids to enhance personal practice may be inclined toward Peter Balin's 1970s

*Kultun Tarot* deck or the more recent *2012 Oracle* deck. Others with a more mundane or frivolous interest may enjoy a few rounds of *2012: The Mayan Calendar Co-Operative Board Game*. Younger partygoers will appreciate the olfactory titillation of Lynx 2012 Final Edition Bodyspray as they throw on a Mayan Calendar hoodie and head out on the town to see Britney Spears sing 'Till the World Ends' or Jay Sean perform '2012'. Alternatively, more solitary individuals can stay home and listen to the electronic stylings of Blue Lunar Monkey on Mayan Calendar MP3 speakers connected to a Mayan Calendar-cased iPhone while keeping track of the days until the Apocalypse with the *Mayan 2012* app. Those individuals of a more entrepreneurial mindset will enjoy reading a copy of Martin Stevens's *2012: Profiting from the End of the World* while drinking a hot cup of chai out of a 2012 "Happy New Evolution of Consciousness!!!" mug while scribbling notes on a 'Mayan Calendar Stone' Spiral Notebook with a

David Oscarson 2012 Collection luxury pen and counting the days until December on a girls of 2012 Mayan Calendar published by Heaven Fine Cigars.

So, forget that the artefact typically depicted in almost all illustrations of the so-called "Mayan calendar" is actually the Aztec Sun Stone and not a calendar of the Maya and grab your Mystic Mayan Power Cloak... the end of the Long Count approaches! **F**

### AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



**KEVIN WHITESIDES** is currently completing a master's thesis on 2012 spirituality in the Religious Studies department at the University of Edinburgh's School of Divinity. He has contributed articles on the 2012 phenomenon to *Archæoastronomy* and *Zeitschrift für Anomalistik* and is finishing two book chapters for edited volumes on apocalyptic culture.

### NOTES

- 1 "Balkanisation of epistemology": the ways in which we interpret reality or suspect that knowledge can be gleaned from the world are becoming increasingly fragmented and divided.
- 2 In *Fingerprints of the Gods*, Graham Hancock exploited this change of focus on dates by applying Sklower's astrological analysis of 24 December 2011 to the date 23 December 2012 that he used for the closing of the 13th Bak'tun without telling his audience that the once-every-45,200-year alignment applied to a date a year prior to the one he was promoting. Hancock has more recently abandoned both of these dates and jumped on the Winter

Solstice 2012 bandwagon.

- 3 In an engaging and optimistic essay entitled *Towards 2013*, Teafaerie, an essayist for the online library of psychoactivity Erowid.org suggests an important reminder to those who hook their 2012 myths on the symbolism of the Winter Solstice and the return of the light: "Remember that the Winter Solstice in America is the Summer Solstice in Australia." Northern Hemisphere chauvinism is rampant in 2012 thought.
- 4 There are also Buddhist, Hindu, and Muslim versions of 2012.
- 5 Calleman's mathematics necessitate a 16.4-billion-year-old Universe, which is several

billion years longer than the 13.7 billion year lifespan measured by the instruments of academic cosmologists. Calleman, of course, suggests that science has yet to catch up with prophecy.

6 The word Maya refers to the group of people and can be used to refer, possessively, to any product of their culture (e.g. the Maya calendrical system, Maya pyramids, Maya codices). The word Mayan refers only to the language group. This is one further method of determining if someone professing to understand Maya culture is actually familiar with the scholarship on this rampantly misrepresented culture.



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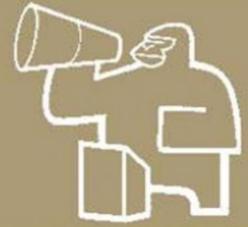
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# forum



## A bomb-proof museum

ANDREW MAY uncovers the story behind a mysterious cuneiform inscription and a Top Secret wartime art collection.



ANDREW MAY is a former scientist living in South-West England. He has a lifelong interest in fortiana, pulp fiction, metaphysics and the weird or mysterious.

Carved out of the solid rock 80ft (25m) below the Wiltshire countryside, there is a huge underground chamber bearing an inscription written in the cuneiform script of ancient Mesopotamia. The inscription, when translated into modern English, reads: "In the year of our Lord 1942, the sixth year of George, king of all lands, in that year everything precious, the works of all the craftsmen which from palaces and temples were sent out, in order that by fire or attack by an evil enemy they might not be lost, into this cave under the earth a place of security, an abode of peace, we brought them down and set them."

The subterranean chamber – all 2,150 sq m (23,140 sq ft) of it – lies at the heart of the disused mine workings at Westwood Quarry. The inscription on the wall was put there in 1942 by one CJ Gadd, who chose to write in one of the earliest known written scripts for the perfectly good reason that he was the keeper of Egyptian and Assyrian statuary at the British Museum. But what was Mr Gadd doing in a disused stone mine? The answer is simple: between 1942 and 1945, this underground chamber – about as safe a place from German bombs as you could find – was the British Museum.

The complex and occasionally surreal story of the wartime evacuation of London's art treasures has been pieced together by author and researcher Nick McCamley.<sup>1</sup> Only a few of the heaviest objects, such as the Elgin Marbles, remained in the city: they were carefully crated up and stored in a disused tube tunnel on the Aldwych branch of the Piccadilly Line. Thousands of paintings from the National Gallery were sent by the trainload to an old slate mine in a remote part of Wales. But almost everything else went to the



Westwood Quarry: not just the contents of the British Museum, but also those of the V&A and the National Portrait Gallery, as well as some of the most valuable items from the Tate, Wallace and Kenwood Collections. Even the Wright Brothers' first aircraft – which was only 40 years old at the time – was stored there; it had been on temporary display in the Science Museum when the war broke out.

Westwood was part of a larger network of mines, in the general area of Corsham, that had been appropriated

by the government at the start of World War II.<sup>2</sup> The intention had been to turn the mines into huge factories and ammunition depots... and for the most part, this is what they were used for. As for art treasures, the original plan had been to evacuate them to large houses in the countryside – but it soon became apparent that nowhere would be safe from bombing raids. So the underground museum was something of an afterthought... and an expensive one, since it required a continuously operating, fail-safe air-conditioning system to maintain the storage chamber at a constant 18°C (64°F) and 60 per cent humidity.

Needless to say, the Westwood 'museum' was never opened to the public – its very existence remained a closely guarded secret – although it did have at least one VIP visitor: Queen Mary (mother of George VI) was given a guided tour in March 1943. For most of the time, however, the museum staff just got on with their day-to-day business of cataloguing and conservation. As soon as the war ended, the laborious process of moving everything back to London began. It was 1948 before everything was finally back in its rightful place. Despite the years of upheaval, the evacuation proved to be worth the effort: many of the London museums had suffered bomb damage, including the British Museum, which was hit by incendiary bombs in May 1941.

You might imagine that, with the end of World War II, the story of the Bomb-Proof Museum would be over. But it wasn't. The government hung on to Westwood Quarry for almost 40 years, keeping it in a state of readiness to receive Britain's most valuable art treasures in the event of World War III. After all, the government's own bunker was just a few miles away in Corsham – and if a Wiltshire stone mine was safe enough for them, it was certainly safe enough for tapestries, statues, mummies and manuscripts! It was not until July 1978 that the air conditioning system was finally switched off; and then in 1985 the lease on the mine was allowed to lapse. Government policy had changed, and by this time the only official concern in the event of nuclear war was "continuity of government". Historical artefacts, like the general population, had to look after themselves. **FI**

ABOVE: Treasures from the Victoria and Albert Museum arrive at their new underground home at Westwood Quarry.

LEFT: A cuneiform inscription records the storage of museum exhibits to escape the dangers of the Blitz.

### NOTES

1 N McCamley: *Saving Britain's Art Treasures*, Pen & Sword Books, 2003.

2 N McCamley: *Second World War Secret Bunkers*, Folly Books, 2010.

# Death and the Maiden

**RU CALLENDER** pays a last visit to Edwin Mackenzie, a 'pickled tramp' who at the hands of artist Robert Lenkiewicz was transformed from a dead down-and-out to an enduring memento mori.



**RU CALLENDER** and his wife Claire have been Gonzo undertakers for 11 years, as The Green Funeral Company. The 5th edition of *The Natural Death Handbook*, which Ru has had a hand in, is out now, from Strange Attractor Press.

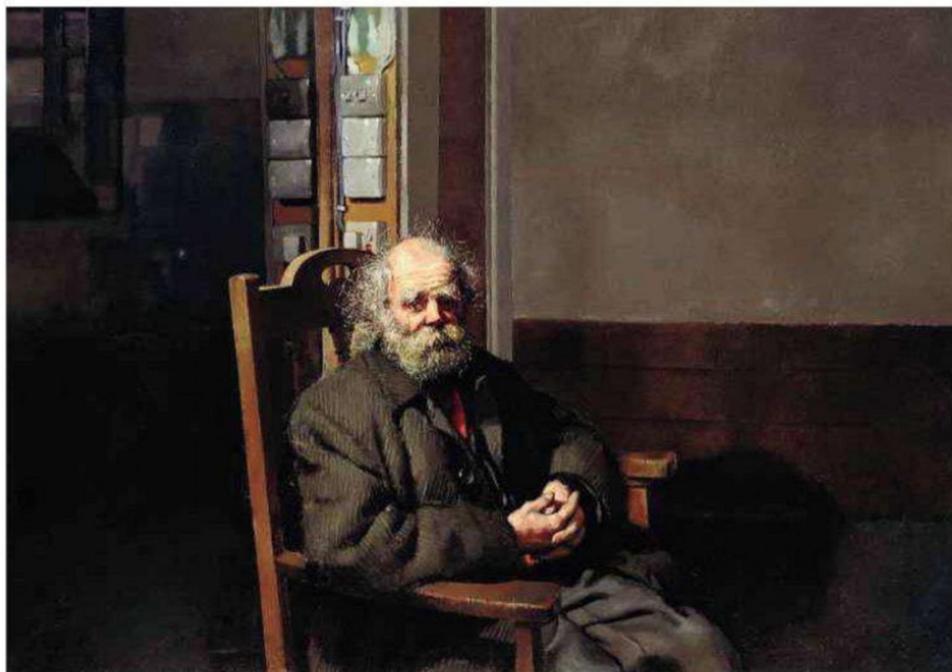
I spent the last day of August 2011 at Torre Abbey on the sea-front at Torquay, seeing an exhibition called 'Death and the Maiden', featuring the work of the painter Robert Lenkiewicz (FT50:56–57; 166:21; 167:14; 278:18).

To the uninitiated, Robert was a flamboyant Plymouth-based artist, instantly recognisable by his clichéd, spattered smock and leonine mane of hair and beard – a look, it has to be said, he carried off rather well.

A chronic self-mythologiser and an equally chronic womaniser – Plymouth is populated by swathes of his ethereal, largely unacknowledged children – Robert died in 2002, penniless due to his refusal to ever actually sell any of his work. Sometimes he gave the odd painting away, but it usually managed to find its way back home. Despite being nearly always destitute, he somehow accumulated one of the finest, if darkest, libraries in the world. Whole shelves were devoted to subjects such as suicide or masturbation, volumes bound with human skin jostled with mediæval grimoires, which he obtained through all sorts of suitably nefarious means. Needless to say, death dominated.

Robert operated from a series of warehouses that he rented for next to nothing, right on the harbour front in the Barbican, the only part of Plymouth to escape the Nazi bombers, and it was here he could reliably be found, bathed in a hanging pool of light with a beauty draped across his lap, not quite swathed in scarlet, always seemingly his own muse, the model a mere accessory. Frequently pretentious, endlessly priapic, sometimes fascinating and brilliant, but often deeply predictable and annoying: an artist, in other words. His main talent seemed to be survival through infamy.

Having been raised in what amounted to a hostel for survivors of the holocaust, Robert was always drawn to the



disenfranchised, and during the 1970s he turned one of the warehouses he rented into a functioning doss house, offering the homeless and mad of Plymouth shelter in return for immortalisation by painting. He formed many deep friendships with these down-and-outs, mainly men, most of them professional post-war gentlemen of the roads; seasonal, travelling alcoholics, not the teenage crack whore runaways that horrify our own age. At times, there were up to 200 in there. It was a place of simmering violence and laughter, drink and dance,

TOP: Robert Lenkiewicz's 1977 painting of Edwin Mackenzie, *Studio Window*.

ABOVE: Edwin Mackenzie stands before a painting of himself and others in 1973.

skillfully lorded over by Lenkiewicz.

One of these down-and-outs, Edwin Mackenzie – who Robert christened Diogenes after finding him living in a concrete pipe at Plymouth dump – became a close friend, and he painted him over and over again. When Edwin died in 1984, he bequeathed his body to Robert to do with as he saw fit. He saw fit to have him thoroughly embalmed in the style of Lenin, and due to some typically slippery evasiveness on his part – when asked by the registrar whether he was due to be buried or cremated, he replied “He is not to be buried” – managed to keep him quietly for a while somewhere in his studio.

After a month or two, the authorities turned up asking why he had not been cremated.

There followed a grand stand-off involving the police, public health officials and, of course, the media, and a lengthy examination of some very interesting and pertinent questions, such as: who owns a corpse, is it a 'thing' or a 'possession', and does a body actually have to be disposed of at all?

The answer was no – as long as it causes no health issues – and, yes, it is

a possession, in this case belonging to Robert. He successfully argued that there are somewhere in the region of 1,500 corpses of varying antiquity exhibited around the UK in various museums; was it the freshness of Edwin that made him a body and not a mummy? Good question – art at its best, you might say – but it infuriated Plymouth City Council, whose history of dour Puritanism had already had to deal with Robert's louche image, not to mention the irritation caused by him faking his own death in 1981 and his highlighting of uncomfortable civic issues with projects on things such as vagrancy, suicide, addiction and death.

Robert stubbornly hung onto Edwin's body until his own untimely death aged 60 in 2002 (obit. **FT166:21**). It is a small irony that Edwin actually lived 11 years longer than Robert, seemingly on little more than air.

When Robert died, he had £12 in his possession, and owed his creditors over two million pounds. Seven years later, lawyers valued his possessions at just under seven million. In the ensuing tidy-up, literal and metaphorical, of his affairs, Edwin Mackenzie's corpse was found in an artist's drawer, still in remarkably good nick. And it was to see what the receptionist had nervously described on the phone as "a pickled tramp" that we had come, rather than to look at Robert's somewhat predictable sexual paintings: skeletons humping girls from behind like dogs; bony fingers piercing amniotic bags of life; grinning skulls performing cunnilingus; wombs and breasts and ribcages.

What Robert himself said about Edwin's body is what has struck anyone who has spent time with one: "the total presence of the corpse and the total absence of the person", the reason that as an undertaker I encourage people to return again and again to the bodies of those they love, to get it to sink in: they are not there. Somewhere, nowhere, everywhere maybe, but definitely not here.

Robert saw Edwin as the ultimate *memento mori*; and now, here, in a former monastery on the English Riviera, we had the extremely rare chance to see the old boy as the rather low-key centrepiece to the exhibition.

He has been dead a while now, but the embalming was done thoroughly. He was a small, undernourished, withered tramp to begin with; Edwin said his life on the road began at three and a half,



ABOVE: Robert Lenkiewicz in his studio, with the preserved body of his 'Diogenes', Edwin Mackenzie.

## His yellowing, emaciated, hairy body can still provoke awe

but his yellowing, emaciated, hairy body still fascinates and provokes awe, even for people like us who spend our days with the dead.

We don't embalm. Partly for environmental reasons (though I fear more for the embalmers than the water table), but really for psychological reasons. We think that the natural changes that a body goes through – the drawing back of the features, the sinking eyes, the thinning and discoloration of the fingertips – are things that the family can deal with, and if told honestly about what they

are to see it not only fails to horrify, but actually helps.

People unfurl in the presence of the truth, and the truth of what happens to a body in the liminal time between death and disposal is not always what horror films have led us to believe. It is gentler, and perhaps, in Walt Whitman's words, even "luckier". Refrigeration between visits is, of course, essential, but the unstoppable, inevitable series of small changes that accompany most bodies' early move from alive to dead are slight but profound, and are what can take the living to the brink of the furnace or the grave. It is a chance to say, again and again, "OK, I get it. They really are gone. Let's do what needs to be done."

So, despite the fact that he was embalmed, Edwin to us was a familiar if exaggerated sight; withered, cracked like the canvas upon which he was so often portrayed, each hair standing erect. And as he has now been dead well over 20 years, the absence of the personality was more pronounced than I have ever seen; but the thought that struck me as I gazed at his naked body was how much of his humanity still clung to him, in a way which doesn't happen with Gunther Von Hagens's 'plastinated' mannequins (see **FT146:7**).

But why? Both have been chemically preserved in a way I instinctively reject, yet one was filled with a fragile beauty which made me feel part of a bigger picture, and the other made me feel afraid for the road we have taken in the name of infotainment.

Von Hagens's plastinated people are undoubtedly educating, titillating and clever too, there of their own free will and most definitely art. In the light of Von Hagens's own *hæmophilia*, maybe they are even an unconscious attempt at sympathetic magic; but are they still in any way remotely human?

Something, perhaps not even in the technique but in the intention, has stripped them of more than their skin. They are Ridley Scott's replicants awaiting animation, viscera bizarrely frozen in time, whereas Edwin, all creases and stitching and patina, is absolutely human. He is our future, what our outside bodies could look like when what was once within has gone.

Age continues to wither him, as it should, as it does us all, but he strangely lives on, not posed as an athlete, or jauntily holding his entrails, or stripping off his muscles like body armour, but dead, dignified, still. **FT**

# Two sea monster tales

**KARL SHUKER** examines a rare beaching from the Seventies, with seemingly contradictory aspects, and suggests a possible explanation...



**KARL SHUKER** is a regular *FT* contributor and the author of many books on cryptozoology and other fortan topics. His *Encyclopædia of New and Rediscovered Animals* is out now from Coachwhip Publications.

**S**ea monsters can be very deceiving, even when dead. For example, it is well known, especially in cryptozoological circles, that the decomposing carcass of a beached basking shark *Cetorhinus maximus* often transforms very dramatically, and deceptively, to yield what on first sight looks remarkably like a long-necked, four-flippered, slender-tailed, hairy plesiosaur-like creature. This is the so-called pseudo-plesiosaur effect, in which the jaw and sizeable gill apparatus fall away, revealing a lengthy portion of vertebral column that superficially resembles an elongate neck, coupled with the shark's dried-out pectoral and pelvic fins looking like flippers, its lower tail fin dropping off, and its skin's exposed collagenous connective fibres gaining the appearance of thick fur.

Similarly, when a sperm whale *Physeter macrocephalus* dies at sea and its carcass gradually rots, its heavy skull and skeleton eventually sink down to the ocean floor, but sometimes a very sizeable skin-sac of rotting blubber, surfaced externally with exposed connective tissue fibres, will remain afloat – encasing a thick matrix of collagen and often not only the substantial spermaceti organ but also a few isolated ribs with fibrous flesh still attached. If subsequently washed ashore, becoming what is popularly dubbed a globster, this hairy, bulky gelatinous mass, with the ribs protruding like tentacles, is sometimes mistaken for the mortal remains of a gargantuan octopus – an extraordinary metamorphosis just as radical as the pseudo-plesiosaur effect, and one, therefore, that a few years ago I christened the quasi-octopus effect.

Obviously, however, as a pseudo-plesiosaur only arises with decomposing sharks whereas a quasi-octopus only arises with decomposing whales, there is no mechanism by which both of these artefacts – these charlatan sea monsters



JULIET LILIENTHAL



JULIET LILIENTHAL

– could result from the same carcass. Or at least that is what I had always assumed – until the following case was brought to my attention.

On 6 February 1996, Roger C Reeves from Brisbane in Queensland wrote informing me of what he referred to as a mysterious rotting sea creature that

had been seen – and photographed – lying on a beach in Kent, England, in 1976 by his secretary, Mrs Juliet Lilienthal, who lived there at the time. I wrote to Mrs Lilienthal, and she sent me four excellent close-up photos of the carcass, three of which are reproduced here (the fourth was merely a paler duplicate of the photo shown above).

“The enclosed photographs,” she wrote, “were taken in 1976 and I was wondering if the creature was a form of shark. It was washed up on the beach, it had a form of scales on the body and seemed like feathers on the neck – the head was only bone and gristle, the tail was long, similar to a crocodile with (what seemed) elephant hair at the base of the tail. It must have been damaged by a boat because the lungs were spread out on the beach (as seen in photo). It had flippers and feet, and was pregnant.”

Combined with the above description, the photos depict a classic pseudo-plesiosaur, from the cartilaginous (gristle) skull or chondrocranium possessed by sharks, and the long neck created by the jaw and gill apparatus falling away, to the flippers, and the long crocodile-like tail, resulting from the breaking off during decomposition of the lower fin, leaving behind only the upper fin (into which a shark's backbone runs).

The scales were the rough, tooth-like



JULIET LILIENTHAL

dermal denticles borne in the skin of sharks, and the neck 'feathers' were strands of exposed connective tissue, as were the 'elephant hair' at the tail base. So far, so good.

As can be clearly seen in the photos, however, also present was what looked for all the world like a mini-globster, lying on the beach a little way apart from the rest of the carcass (i.e. the pseudo-plesiosaur portion), and possibly placed there specifically by one or more of the various interested onlookers (of which there were many, judging from the photos), but still physically linked to it by tissue. In her note, Mrs Lilienthal presumed that this peculiar object was the creature's lungs, but as the creature was a shark it obviously did not possess lungs, respiring via gills instead. So just what was the mini-globster?

As it was part of the shark carcass, it was evidently not a true globster, i.e. a quasi-octopus, composed of whale blubber and collagen. Instead, it was undoubtedly an organ of some kind, but in view of its very large size in relation to the main, pseudo-plesiosaur portion of the carcass it was no ordinary one.

Looking at the photos shown, the mini-globster appeared to be connected to the pseudo-plesiosaur portion via a series of white, bony-looking arches, which I assumed were the gill apparatus component of the gill apparatus. As for the mini-globster itself, the only organ in sharks that attains such a size is the liver. In some species, this massive



## The head was only bone and gristle and the tail was long

bilobate, oil-storing mass can account for as much as 25 per cent of the shark's total body weight, and can occupy up to 90 per cent of the total space present within its body cavity! Moreover, with regard to the basking shark, the liver is so substantial that in a 2,072lb (940kg) individual, it can yield as much as 549 gallons (2,270

litres) of shark liver oil.

Keen to receive some independent opinions, however, I showed the photos to two colleagues. One was German cryptozoological researcher Markus Hemmler, with whom in September 2010 I had uncovered the identity of a uniquely perplexing sea monster – the enigmatic Trunko (see FT275:42–47). The other was British palaeontologist Dr Darren Naish, who has surveyed a number of classic sea monster corpses online in his Tetrapod Zoology blog at <http://bit.ly/pwGKOR> (blogs.scientificamerican.com), as, indeed, has Markus in his own blog at <http://bit.ly/sftiWo>.

Markus agreed that the white arches were probably the gill arches, and he prepared a version of one photo (left) in which he ringed these in red (below). As for the mini-globster itself, he wondered whether this might constitute some remains from the shark's pectoral girdle. Conversely, noting that the mini-globster seemed to lack any vertical bars, which should still be present if it was part of the gill apparatus, and also that it looked much too solid in form to be the latter, Darren leaned towards it being the liver, confirming that the liver of sharks is indeed huge, extending for much of the body's length. Moreover, the texture of the mini-globster is somewhat liverish in appearance.

Although I wrote back to Mrs Lilienthal requesting any further information, particularly the precise location where the carcass had turned up, she didn't reply – and I don't know whether any samples were taken for scientific analysis. Even so, the photos (which are among the best that I have seen of a supposed sea monster carcass) and her description are sufficiently informative for me to state with an unexpected degree of confidence that the Kent 'two for the price of one' carcass was a highly decomposed shark, probably a basking shark in view of its large size (using the onlookers surrounding it as a scale), with the mini-globster most probably either a portion of its gill apparatus or (the identity I personally favour) the shark's liver.

If any reader happened to be among those onlookers who in 1976 viewed the Kent sea monster carcass, and can provide additional information, we would love to hear from you!

My thanks to Robert C Reeves and Juliet Lilienthal for bringing this very noteworthy case to my attention, and to Markus Hemmler and Dr Darren Naish for their much valued opinions. **FT**

TOP & FACING: The remains washed up on a Kent beach in 1976.

ABOVE: Red outline shows the probable gill arches shown in top picture.

# More tales of the unexpected...



The faceless figure  
that stepped out  
of the fog

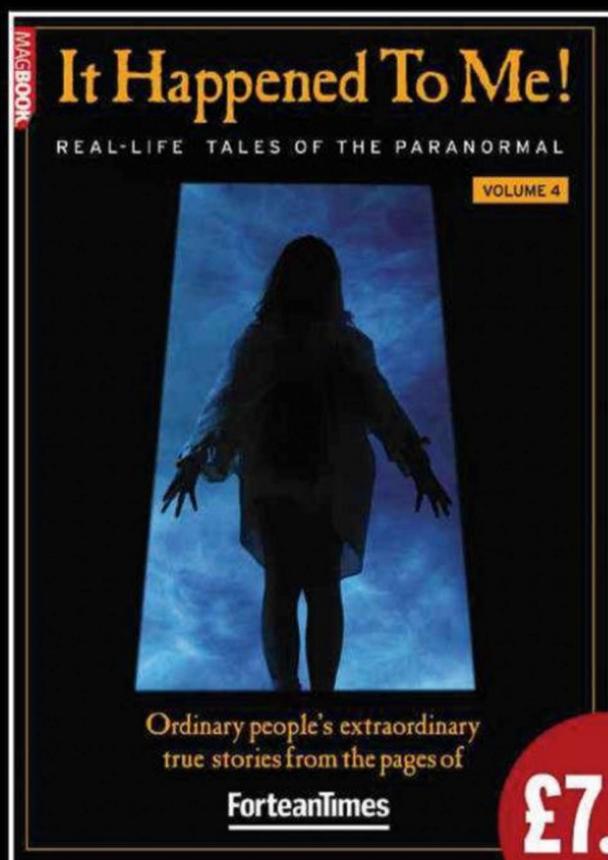


The ouija session  
that summoned a  
shadow man



The ghostly  
children who  
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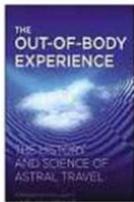
This month's books, films and games

# reviews



## Within you and without you

The 'Cheating the Ferryman' theory combines quantum physics and neurological understanding to explore how consciousness deals with what we think of as reality



### The Out-of-Body Experience

Anthony Peake

Watkins Publishing 2011

Pb, 222pp, notes, ind., £10.99, ISBN 9781780280219

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £9.89

Anthony Peake established a revolutionary theory about out-of-body experiences (OBEs) and near-death experiences (NDEs) with *Is There Life after Death? The Extraordinary Science of What Happens When We Die* (2006), and *The Dæmon: A Guide to Your Extraordinary Secret Self* (2008). Peake's model also embraces the mysteries of 'lucid dreaming' and how our consciousness deals with reality or creates the impression of 'reality'. With this book, he strikes out in a different direction for a fresh look at ancient notions that consciousness is separate from the body, the excursions of which create the near-death and out-of-the-body experiences.

His novel theory, which he calls 'Cheating the Ferryman', draws upon ideas from the philosophical fringes of quantum physics and from the latest neurological understanding of the nature of a consciousness split across two hemispheres of the brain. Peake goes further and argues that at the point of death (or near-death), consciousness splits into two very different modes: one, which he terms the Eidolon, appears to re-experience the life it has lived; the other (which he terms the

Dæmon) hold the entirety of that life's experiences. Information leaks between them, accounting for *déjà vu*, precognition, 'remote viewing' and other forms of paranormal 'knowing', including the classic feeling of being outside one's body.

In a real analogy, Peake says, the self re-living its life would be like a fragment of a shattered hologram which retains a replica of the image within the intact hologram. Peake's books also liken the Eidolon's experience to a 'dream within a dream', much like that represented by *Star Trek's* holodeck, or in the *Matrix* movies in which the shamanic hero moves between the waking world and a computer-created 'virtual reality'. He might just as well have cited the most famous fable of the fourth century BC Daoist philosopher Chuang Tzu (Zhuangzi in pinyin): "Once upon a time, Chuang Tzu dreamed that he was a butterfly, flying about enjoying itself. It did not know that it was Chuang Tzu. Suddenly he awoke, and veritably was Chuang Tzu again. He did not know whether it was Chuang Tzu dreaming that he was a butterfly, or whether it was the butterfly dreaming that it was Chuang Tzu."

Peake visited two Austrian scientists who had invented a stroboscopic device that affected a subject's brainwaves (simulating patterns recorded from subjects in deep meditation), sometimes stimulating experiences that resembled NDEs and other transcendental states. What Peake experienced – suddenly hovering above a surreal (alien?) landscape and a disturbing 'return' to his chair-bound body – confirmed his opinion that OBEs take place in

### "OBEs take place in an altered state of consciousness and are not 'merely' hallucinations"

an altered state of consciousness and are not 'merely' hallucinations. His sense of 'being there' was a real neurological transaction between his perceptions, brain and mind.

This book is his account of trying to make sense of that experience, and the OBE in particular, in terms of what the great religions and others (in part 1), and neurologists and physicists (in part 2) have to say about consciousness and reality, including altered states and other realities. He finds a surprising unanimity between shamanism and most religions that what we 'mistake' for everyday reality is simply a great illusion. To quote Chuang Tzu again: "Only after we are awake do we know that we have dreamed. But there comes a great awakening, and then we know that life is a great dream." Western mysticism might refer to the idea of God being omnipresent and indivisible yet present in every part of Creation.

Peake's examples from those who experiment with lucid dreaming, remote viewing and 'astral projection' seem to corroborate his thesis. While this may not be new to some readers, Peake imbues the subject matter with freshness and vigour; and when he moves on to more scientific data from research into hypnagogic imagery, unusual perceptions

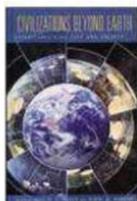
of 'body', and psychedelics, he folds them into our consideration with ease and clarity. Having placed before us new scientific information about the 'escomatic' experience – displacements of awareness and location beyond the body – Peake guides us on a journey through some very difficult physics. He shows how seemingly conflicting theories within quantum physics – David Bohm's 'Implicate Order', Hugh Everett's 'Many-Worlds', Niels Bohr's 'Copenhagen Interpretation', and the 'Anthropic Principle' of Brandon Carter – are in agreement about the paradoxical nature of reality and the mysterious way in which we perceive it and live in it. 'Here' and 'there' become relative terms that are determined only by our habitual state of mind; other ways of knowing, such as the escomatic or out-of-body experience, therefore precipitate different kinds of realities in which 'matter', 'time' and 'space' also behave differently.

Some of this material is reminiscent of the 'Tao of Physics' discussion of the links between quantum physics and Eastern mysticism back in the 1970s. But where that discussion focused on the idea that the pronouncements of (then) modern physics seemed more like mysticism, Peake seeks to find some ground within physics and quantum science with which to underpin his theory of escomatic projection. Actually, while 'projection' may be the subjective feeling of dislocating consciousness from its addictive bodily perceptions and shooting it out of the body, the Japanese model may be more valid. Our higher consciousness may be

Continued on page 58

# Aliens and us

A concise but fascinating look at how humanity might react to a first contact



## Civilizations Beyond Earth

Extraterrestrial Life and Society

Eds Douglas A Vokoch & Albert A Harrison

Berghan Books 2011

Hb, 250pp, illus, bib, ind, \$70.00/£42.00, ISBN 9780857452115

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £42.00

We are almost certainly not alone in our Solar System, let alone within a 52 light-year radius. Most extraterrestrial life will probably be closer to bacteria than to Barsoom. However, the potential impact of first contact with an extraterrestrial intelligence has taxed the minds of politicians, anthropologists and sociologists since before Project Ozma, a microwave radio SETI, started in 1960.

I doubt ET will touch down on the White House lawn. It's more likely that SETI will detect – and this time confirm – a 'wow' signal. Nevertheless, a radio message from another world could have profound implications for human society and our appreciation of our place in the Cosmos.

Against this background, *Civilizations Beyond Earth* is a fascinating collection of essays examining how humanity might react to extraterrestrials. Will first contact move society onto a 'higher', more peaceful, trajectory or stimulate demands for planetary defences? Will we, as the Brookings Report worried in 1961, suffer the disadvantages that usually follow in the wake of interactions with more technologically advanced civilisations? What are the religious implications? Will first contact provoke a general existential

crisis?

The book is thought-provoking whether you're a hard-core ufologist who believes ET is alive and well and living underground in New Mexico, an academic xenobiologist or just interested in the implications of, finally, detecting extraterrestrial intelligence.

*Civilizations Beyond Earth* covers a smörgåsbord of views, research and perspectives. I can't do justice to them all, so I'll mention just a handful: the editors open with a superlative survey of the history of the area. Paul Watson's chapter on insights from cognitive archaeology and the extrapolations from encounters between Neanderthals and Cro-Magnon man is an excellent summary of this compelling field – and is essential reading (even setting SETI aside) for anyone interested in hominid development. Harry Letaw examines the practicalities of communication: what symbolism could act as an interstellar Rosetta Stone?

Finally, several papers offer fascinating psychological insights into the nature of belief, such as quantifying the role of education, culture and religion on attitudes, belief and concerns in the USA about extraterrestrial life. Hopefully, these chapters will inspire researchers to repeat such studies in the UK and ascertain the extent to which such attitudes are culturally determined.

While *Civilizations Beyond Earth* is academically rigorous, it's also accessible. But I had one quibble: it is a relatively slim volume that covers a vast landscape. The book could have easily been two or three times longer, without losing focus. Nevertheless, it remains an essential introduction for anyone interested in SETI, xenobiology and UFOs.

Mark Greener

### Fortean Times Verdict

AN ESSENTIAL AND ACCESSIBLE INTRODUCTION

8

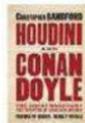
## Houdini and Conan Doyle

Christopher Sandford

Duckworth Overlook 2011

Hb, 320pp, £20.00, ISBN 9780715641460

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £18.00



There have been numerous – and excellent – biographies of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and Harry Houdini in recent years, so anyone wanting to write about them has to work hard to justify the effort.

Christopher Sandford has no background in research into magic, Spiritualism or the period. He is, though, an accomplished biographer, with a number of books about celebrities to his name, and while he has moved away from familiar territory, he brings psychological insight doubtless drawn from his exposure to the rich and famous.

He is quick to declare that this is not a full biographical study. Their lives before they met in 1920, and matters that are irrelevant to a consideration of them jointly, are passed over lightly. (This focus is indicated more clearly by the US title: *Masters of Mystery: The Strange Friendship of Arthur Conan Doyle and Harry Houdini*.) Those wanting an extensive treatment of their careers should look elsewhere. The book will probably be of most value to those whose primary interest is Houdini, as Conan Doyle biographies tend to contain more on Houdini than vice versa.

Where Sandford is strongest is in drawing out parallels to indicate similarities and differences between Houdini and Conan Doyle, from their relationships with their respective parents and wives, to their attitudes to the evidence for the survival of death as conveyed by mediums.

He is good on analysis of their motivations, their strengths and weaknesses. The portrait of Houdini is particularly telling, demonstrating how his showy confidence was mixed with an outsider's desire to please which often led him to say what he thought people wanted to hear. The treatment of Jean Leckie, Sir Arthur's second wife, is more charitable than that given by recent Conan Doyle biographers.

Sandford is not the first to have attempted a joint profile. Bernard Ernst and Hereward Carrington wrote on Conan Doyle and Houdini's "strange friendship" as long ago as 1932, and Massimo Polidoro's book, with a similar title, appeared in 2001.

He has, however, used previously unpublished material, mainly the British Library's Conan Doyle acquisitions and the Richard Lancelyn Green bequest to Portsmouth City Council, plus a range of other primary material, including Houdini's diaries. The result, told in an assured manner, is a useful account of the sad deterioration of a promising if unlikely friendship that could not survive Conan Doyle's narrow-minded naivety, Houdini's manipulative ego, and the missionary zeal of both.

Even though the general outline of their relationship is already well established, Sandford brings together some unfamiliar details that help to round out the picture. He does not hesitate to highlight their flaws, but this is a humane and generous assessment, and a useful supplement to the growing literature on the two men.

Tom Ruffles

### Fortean Times Verdict

BALANCED PORTRAIT OF A DOOMED RELATIONSHIP

7

## Tracking the Chupacabra

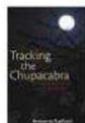
The Vampire Beast in Fact, Fiction, and Folklore

Benjamin Radford

University of New Mexico Press 2011

Pb, 202pp, illus, appxs, notes, refs, ind, £22.50, ISBN 9780826350152

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £22.50



Few cryptids have risen to international celebrity as quickly as the *chupacabra*, or goatsucker. Before the 1990s, it was a Hispanic oddity; now it is a byword for entities of the dark and sinister kind.

Since it hit the headlines in Latin America, eyewitnesses have described just about everything from a spiky-backed bipedal pseudo-kangaroo with wings and hypnotic eyes to a hairless blue dog with savage jaws. Speculation

about its origin has been equally dramatic: it is a freak of nature, a scientific experiment gone wrong, even an extraterrestrial visitor.

It was high time that this paranormal Proteus received an in-depth, critical, scientific examination. Radford has stripped away the glamour, hearsay, folklore and hype to reveal what he believes to be the truth behind the cryptolegend, the reality at the heart of this unlikeliest of contemporary icons.

Along the way, there are surprising revelations. Radford dismembers the eyewitness report which almost single-handedly launched the chupacabra phenomenon upon an unsuspecting world. He explains why supposed chupacabra victims are often described as being entirely drained of blood – I won't give away the details.

He mentions that another perplexing entity, the reptilian humanoid of Thetis Lake in British Columbia, Canada, was exposed as a hoax, though this did not receive widespread coverage. He reveals the identity of those pesky blue dogs sans hair reported from Texas and elsewhere and even represented in the flesh by one or two preserved corpses. (It is intriguing but less outstanding than media reports suggest.)

Radford comments upon the remarkable similarities between the chupacabra and the alien star of a science fiction film released just before the first eyewitness report of *el chupa* to attract major media attention. Judging from Radford's evidence, the former shaped the latter, and it has influenced everything written about the chupacabra since then.

After spending too many years in the headlines as a bloodthirsty monster with a rapacious appetite, the chupacabra has met its match. If you like your goatsucker served with a generous dollop of mystery and spiced with unsubstantiated rumours, you will not enjoy this book. If you prefer scientific detachment and common sense, it should be a feast.

Karl Shuker

### Fortean Times Verdict

A CALM LOOK AT THAT CRYPTO CELEB, THE GOATSUCKER

8

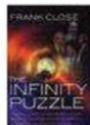
## The Infinity Puzzle

Frank Close

Oxford University Press 2011

Hb, 416pp, illus, notes, bib, ind, £16.99, ISBN 9780199593507

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £15.29



Everyone in the world of particle physics is talking about the Higgs boson. Everyone except Peter Higgs, who talks about "the boson that has been named after me". But what is it, and how does it fit into the elaborate model of sub-atomic physics developed over the last 60 years? Who is Higgs, and why does the particle bear his name? Many have attempted to answer these questions for a general audience, but few have succeeded as well as Frank Close does in this book.

Close has an uncanny ability to make difficult concepts sound easy. He's a particle physicist, so he describes the history of the subject as an insider. His own recollections are supplemented by recent interviews and email exchanges with various colleagues – many of them well past retirement age. Close had to construct the book from faltering memories of what were truly momentous events in the history of science. If he hadn't captured the information when he did, it might have been lost to history.

If there is anything negative to say about this book, it is inherent in the subject matter. Particle physics is remote from everyday experience, and most readers will have difficulty identifying with the issues involved. *The Infinity Puzzle* is a catchy title, but it refers to a problem encountered in solving mathematical equations, not any tangible notion of infinity. And it's not just the abstract ideas that are difficult: it's the people as well! Few characters in the book are genuinely engaging. There are displays of rivalry, ambition and even mild paranoia... but there are no really big conflicts or human dramas. But reality often has more to do with hard, slow work than high drama. To learn about the reality of modern particle physics, this is the book to read.

Andrew May

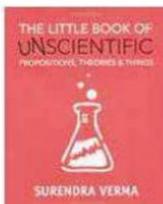
### Fortean Times Verdict

A CLEAR ACCOUNT OF AN OBSCURE SUBJECT

9

# For skeptics

'Skepticism' is a one-way street and reserved only for the usual suspects



## The Little Book of Unscientific Propositions, Theories and Ideas

Surendra Verma

New Holland 2011

Pb, 250pp, illus, notes, ind, £8.99, ISBN 9781742570778

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £8.54

There's sceptical and 'skeptical', and there's Surendra Verma, who is *really* 'skeptical'. Having produced 'Little Books' of maths theorems and scientific principles, he now turns to stuff he considers unscientific and boy! There's a lot of stuff he doesn't like.

Verma boils his thoughts on a topic down to a couple of pages; sums up the basic idea, and why he thinks it is, at least to an extent, hooey; then briskly moves on to the next. He's confident, it seems, that the unscientific takes little effort to debunk. He dumps on the usual (and demonstrably rubbish) skeptical targets such as Flat Earth, intelligent design, the Bible Code, astrology, homoeopathy and the Face on Mars. He does the same with those that forteans might take more issue with – cryptozoology, ESP, aliens, SHC, NDE and OOBES, but also lays into stuff with at least a moderately respectable scientific pedigree – he doesn't like

tachyons, evolutionary psychology, wormholes, placebos, the Drake equation or the word 'paradigm', among other things. Oddly enough, he doesn't mention Dark Matter, Dark Energy or String Theory, which strike me as being of more dubious provenance.

While he's not as jeering as many of the skeptics who see print, he is pretty smug and self-satisfied, and when he can't discredit an idea head-on, he's happy enough to do so by association. He can't muster evidence to refute Thomas Gold's proposal that oil is not a fossil fuel, but continually produced by deep, subterranean bacteria, so resorts to reminding readers that Gold also suggested that life could have arisen from rubbish left here by alien visitors, suggesting by association that the two ideas are equally ludicrous. However, in common with many hardcore skeptics, his scepticism points only one way: when dodgy evidence supports their position, no problem, they credulously swallow it whole. So, when it comes to Roswell, his position is essentially: "The military says it was dummies. There we are! Must have been, then – job done." A sceptical approach needs to be applied equally to all evidence, not just the things that suit your preconceptions.

While this book is sporadically interesting, it is deeply flawed and is unlikely to appeal beyond those in whom skepticism is already ingrained.

Ian Simmons

### Fortean Times Verdict

SKEPTICISM THAT THROWS THE BABY OUT WITH THE BATHWATER

5

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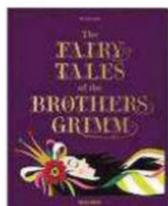
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## A wee bit grim

Victorian family values for the modern world, though maybe not for its children



### The Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm

Ed Noel Daniel, tr Matthew P Price

Taschen 2011  
Hb, 319pp, illus, ind, £24.99, ISBN 9783836526722  
**FORTEAN TIMES BOOKCLUB PRICE £22.49**

Nobody knows what childhood is like: by the time we are ready to ask, it's already too late to remember.

But we do know that children are both fascinated and frightened by fairytales, and that their imaginations feed best when those things are intertwined. All the loveliness in these old stories, all the loyalty and compassion, are remembered in dark counterpoint to their loss and jealousy and killing and dying.

That is why the Grimms' Fairytales are still going strong after two centuries, when the worthy efforts of their more well-meaning contemporaries lie dead on the shelf.

Now along comes a bicentenary volume, lavishly produced in purple and gold, and drawing on the work of 26 illustrators who worked between 1823 and 1959. The best-loved stories are here, in a new translation by Matthew Price. What's more, the introduction assures us that Grimms' Fairytales have now been put on Unesco's Memory of the World register.

Well, that's a relief; we can all sleep sound in our beds now. Throw out the tattered old family Grimm, parents, and save up for a new Taschen copy.

Or maybe not.

This edition isn't for the use

of children, it's a collector's item (i.e., nice but useless). The rapid shifts from one illustrator to another take away any sense of consistency, and the original *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* were a bit of a ragbag anyway, taken down from different storytellers and dealing in animal fables and religious exempla as well as the fairytale proper.

The worst edition, for anyone who values folktales, is the seventh and last (faithfully followed here), the one rewritten by Jacob and Wilhelm to suit Victorian family values. Which is why Rapunzel, having admitted a young man into her room, appears shortly afterwards as an abandoned single mother, with no hint that the two things might possibly be connected.

But for all that, the tales still keep their troubling, mysterious beauty, if you will let them. That's where pictures do the magic, especially if they're by someone like Mervyn Peake, probably the greatest Grimm illustrator of all time. He's not represented here, but a lot of the worst ones are. Their princesses are pretty rather than beautiful; their witches are ugly, but not terrifying; the other characters are either sentimental or ridiculous.

Matthew Price's translation has the same reverence for the Grimm literary tradition, rather than the stories themselves, and his misplaced faithfulness to the original results in some very ponderous diction.

Anyone who lets a character introduce herself with 'For Mother Holle am I' shouldn't be allowed near children's books. In short, the text is disappointing and the pictures aren't much better.

Nice binding, though.  
Jeremy Harte

#### Fortean Times Verdict

FOR IMPRESSED FAIRYTALE READER HE IS NOT **4**

Continued from page 55

everywhere already and we simply become aware in another place without the need to travel there. A common misconception, says Peake, is our perceptual conviction that our everyday reality is the main or only one; however, its very tangibility is a powerful illusion. When we have hunches, or the feeling we know what will happen next, or find ourselves away from our body, these experiences usually have a dream-like surreality; could this be simply our intuition that a different set of physics is in play?

There could be myriad versions of each of us, Peake says, each representing a different formulation of the events that precipitated each of us into being. Each version creates a life for itself, each experiencing circumstances differing perhaps only in a minute detail. These lives would be encoded in your 'totality' being (Dæmon) and each is capable of being experienced as its own reality (by your Eidolon). Peake calls this theory of multiple-virtual-realities the 'Bohman IMA'; and because every one of these lives is created and experienced within you, he describes them as 'intrasomatic'.

Anthony Peake is leading this discussion into brave new regions of outer and inner space.

Bob Rickard

#### Fortean Times Verdict

INTRIGUING EXAMINATION OF BASIC FORTEAN PUZZLES **9**

### A Kingdom of Stargazers

Astrology and Authority in the Late Medieval Crown of Aragon

Michael A Ryan

Cornell University Press 2011  
Hb, 232pp, bib, index, \$45.00/£27.95, ISBN 9780801449840  
**FORTEAN TIMES BOOKCLUB PRICE £27.95**



Mediæval Spain, before the expulsion of its Muslim and Jewish populations, was a powerhouse of both scientific and magical scholarship, with cities such as Toledo providing a conduit for the translation and dissemination of Arab manuscripts that preserved much of the

lost learning of the classical world as well as more recent thought.

Ryan's book, mainly concentrating on astrology but straying into fields such as alchemy and other varieties of occultism, examines the role of such learning in the royal court of the kingdom of Aragon, in the south-east of the country, in a period when the Antichrist and the Apocalypse were both feared and expected, almost daily.

The first half of the book is mainly scene-setting, discussing the hostile theological attitudes to astrology represented by such as Augustine of Hippo and Thomas Aquinas, the historical context, and so forth, before we get to the more specific discussion centred on the reign of three 14th-century kings of Aragon. Pere III was a powerful king whose strength allowed him to indulge his passion for astrologers and astrological texts without fear of criticism; his son Joan I was a weak playboy who, while sharing his father's interests, received much criticism; lastly, Marti I would have nothing to do with the subject and returned the kingdom to a state of strict religious orthodoxy.

While Ryan is good on the background, the theological condemnation and the relationship of the royal court with astrologers and their books, we never really hear much (perhaps because the sources are lacking?) about the actual use of astrology by these kings: there are no case histories, no predictions (successful or otherwise), no day-to-day records of the astrologers' work, which leaves one with the feeling that these monarchs were more bibliomaniac dilettantes, rather than committed, practical patrons of the stellar arts. This sort of detail would certainly have rounded out the book.

The writing is thankfully free of academic jargon, but frankly sloppy: mixed tenses and references to "contemporary social contemporaries" set this reviewer's few remaining teeth on edge. One expects better editorial control from a university press.  
Steve Moore

#### Fortean Times Verdict

PRETTY GOOD, BUT SHOULD HAVE BEEN STELLAR **7**

### ALSO RECEIVED

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

#### A BRIEF GUIDE TO SECRET RELIGIONS

David V Barrett

Robinson, 2011

Pb, pp320, £8.99

ISBN 9781849015950

It's always a pleasure to see a new book from our very own doctor of the sociology of religion, and this 'brief guide' stands with his other studies – the well received *The New Believers* (2001), a detailed survey of modern alternative religions and 'cults', and the companion to this work, *A Brief History of Secret Societies* (2007). 'Secret' religions? Well, while many of those included here have websites and a 'public face' and are hardly secret any more, Barrett argues that many of them still have 'higher' or 'hidden' teachings available only to devotees and acolytes. Nineteen key movements and their founders (from Theosophy, I AM and Subud to Findhorn, Emin and Aetherius, for example); 21 hermetic and magic groups (from Golden Dawn to Chaos Magic); and 10 entries for a variety of Neo-Pagan outfits (including modern Wicca, Isis and Northern Traditions). An introductory essay examines why they should have a thriving appeal in the 21st century; an appeal reflected in rising membership in the face of falling figures for congregations of conventional religions. The whole is very clearly written and excellent for browsing as well as for reference.

#### VISIONS OF THE MULTIVERSE

Steven Manly

New Page Books, 2011

Pb, pp270, index, bib, notes, illus, £13.99

ISBN: 9781601631299

One of the most exciting and exotic notions in modern physics and cosmology is that our Universe might well be one of many, and discussion of the subject is powering "a new Copernican revolution". Manly takes us on a tour of a number of different and still-evolving theories about 'the multiverse' and then explores the

especially potent idea of 'parallel realities' and how we might be able to tell if our Universe is 'one of many'. In his blurb, Manly – who teaches introductory physics at Rochester University, NY – says he "terrorises" his students. If his teaching is anything like his writing – clear, precise and even humorous in places – it is not him that is intimidating but the scale of the implications. Manly has a huge number of scientific publications under his belt and gives the reader confidence that he knows what he is talking about.

#### THE GHOST DETECTIVES' GUIDE TO HAUNTED SAN FRANCISCO

Loyd Auerbach & Annette Martin

Linden Publishing, 2011

Pb, pp136, illus, £9.99

ISBN: 9781610350075

If you are visiting San Francisco any time soon, this little book may come in handy, being a guide to the main haunted streets and locations around the city. Auerbach is a parapsychology researcher and writer of some renown and Martin is a well-known psychic who, it is claimed, not only sees ghosts but talks to them. The pair have been in a research partnership for 15 years and hold vigils in Alcatraz, Chinatown and the Presidio among other places. Their accounts include transcripts of Martin's spooky conversations and photographs.

#### NEWSLORE: CONTEMPORARY FOLKLORE ON THE INTERNET

Russell Frank

University of Mississippi, 2011

Hb, pp280, index, refs, notes, £34.00

ISBN: 9781604739282

By his own admission, Frank – an associate professor of communications at Penn State University – is a reluctant folklorist. He signed up to study mythology in order to write great poetry but found himself studying modern folklore, which in turn led to an examination of the way today's means of publishing

and communicating have generated and shaped new types of narrative that spread like rumours. 'Newslore', he says, is modern folklore that relies on and exploits an awareness of current events. It takes the form of jokes, urban legends, altered photographs, and faked documentaries, adverts, news stories and press releases, which then – in that useful contemporary phrase – "go viral". His well illustrated, chapter-long studies are fresh and dissect the mockery and scandal about such figures as George Bush, the Clintons, Dick Cheney, Osama bin Laden, Michael Jackson or Saddam Hussein and the 'shock' events of the Twin Towers attack.

A prime example is the notorious photo of 'the Tourist Guy' (TG)

atop one of the towers showing the doomed plane heading straight for the building. It was disseminated across the world within hours of the actual event while most people were still in shock and therefore less critical or sceptical than usual. Frank, drawing on such essential sites as snopes.com, analyses why the image should have raised doubts; but – and this seems typical of Newslore – within days, other variations appeared: the Towers being attacked by the Marshmallow Man (from *Ghostbusters*), TG at the assassination of Kennedy or the crash of the Hindenberg. Well written (though probably too dense for a casual reader), this is a valuable illumination of a cultural trend playing out on computer screens in front of each of us right now.

### FORTEAN FICTION

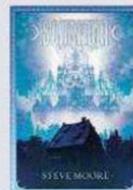
#### Somnium

Steve Moore

Somnium Press/Strange Attractor Press, 2011

Hb, pp288, £20/£30 (Ltd Edition); Ebook (nthposition) £4.79

ISBN 9781907222061



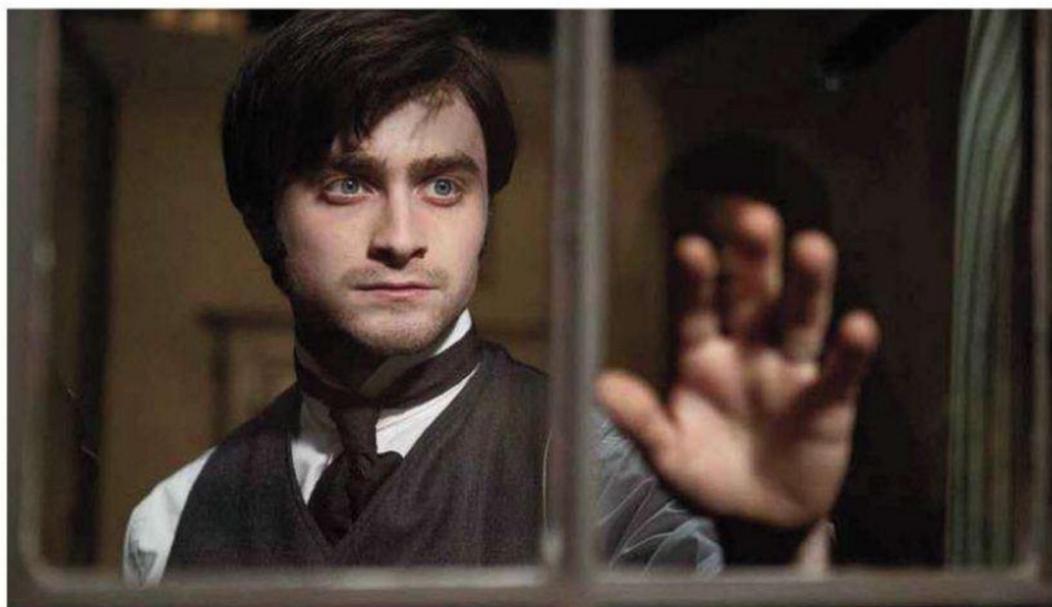
*Somnium* is a hymn of devotion to the Moon, by all her names, based on the Greek myth of the love between the sleeping mortal Endymion and the goddess Selene.

In September 1803, 20-year-old Kit Morley moves into an inn on Shooter's Hill, south of London, where he plans to write the story of Endymion Lee, an Elizabethan knight. The connecting structure of the book is Kit's journal, interspersed with episodes from the story he's writing, "Somnium". Endymion, Kit writes, is drawn deep beneath Shooter's Hill into the palace of Somnium, the realm of Diana Regina. She shows him a library of all the books ever written on love for the Moon, and also lost and unfinished works and books by himself not yet written; an excellent blank verse play is included in this book. Kit falls for the charms of his landlady Cynthia – another Moon goddess persona. Plied with her kisses and copious amounts of claret, he dreams of Somnium and wakes each day to write down his story. But are his sensuous encounters with Cynthia real or are they dreams? The book becomes yet more metafictional as Kit becomes aware of another writer in Shooter's Hill 200 years in the future; in an echo of Christopher Priest's novel *The Affirmation*, which of them is writing the other?

Kit writes of the world not as it is but "as it should be, as it is in dreams of glory". In an Afterword, magician and comics writer Alan Moore (no relation) relates how *Somnium* grew from his old friend and veteran fortean Steve Moore's lifetime records of his dreams. The result is often strange, always erotic, ultimately rewarding, a shout of pagan joy in sensuality.

David V Barrett

SEND REVIEW COPIES OF DVDS AND GAMES TO:  
THE EDITOR, FORTEAN TIMES, DENNIS CONSUMER DIVISION,  
30 CLEVELAND STREET, LONDON W1T 4JD, UK.



### The Woman in Black

Dir James Watkins, UK 2012  
On UK release from 10 February

What this film adaptation of Susan Hill's short novel of the same name achieves in its opening moments is an ambiance of implacable emotional claustrophobia. The lack of a precise setting in time (late Victorian?), is not as important as the Gothic atmosphere of superstitious inklings, desolate misty causeways and fusty interiors. It's an atmosphere that bodes ill for the still bereaved widower Arthur Kipps (Daniel Radcliffe) but well for any audience wishing its blood to be curdled by a new offering from the revived Hammer Productions.

As a story, *The Woman in Black* plays upon the fears of every parent: the terrifying knowledge that they can never fully protect their precious offspring. Leaving his son behind with their nanny in the pea soup of London, Kipps, a solicitor, travels to the east coast of England to wind up the affairs of the recently deceased Mrs Alice Drablow, where the welcome he gets from the locals fondly recalls the taciturn villagers of many a Dracula or Frankenstein outing from the original Hammer stable.

Director James Watkins knows a thing or two about delivering scares on screen (*My Little Eye*, *Eden Lake*) but somehow the film loses its way when atmospheric chills and portents of darkness are overtaken by outright manifestations and kinetic shocks. The

monster barely glimpsed in the closet of the mind is far more frightening than when it finally breaks out. Watkins's forte is the very real horrors of which human beings are capable – stripping away the veneer of a couple of self-satisfied young metrosexuals forced to kill to survive, for example. Here, one gets a sense of his lack of belief in the whole supernatural outing, attempting to mask it by ratcheting up the noise and the incidence of apparitions flying at Kipps and us (in its early stages of production there was talk of the film being made in 3D). It all becomes rather silly, and it's hard to forgive straight-faced horror for doing that. The climax of this silliness is an absurd late-night swim in the black and boggy marshes to make everything right again, an action that the screenplay of Jane Goldman (*Stardust*, *Kick-Ass*), does nothing to fully justify, let alone coherently lay the groundwork for.

The script gives Daniel Radcliffe little chance to be proactive. In his thankless quest to lay the ghost of Harry Potter, he skulks around dark nooks and crannies in search of another one, simply reacting to events and being rationed lines of dialogue for the entirety of the film. When Ciarán Hinds (as a wealthy and friendly local) is on screen, the film achieves a gravitas that no number of close-ups of Radcliffe merely being reactive can manage. Both the TV adaptation and the stage play played fast and loose with the book's ending, and

it could be argued that this one is closer to that of the novel; that's if you excise the coda (Watkins didn't). Don't look now, but this supernatural horror is not even half as scary as it thinks it is, or could have been.

**Nick Ćirković**

#### Fortean Times Verdict

NOT BAD, BUT A PALE SHADOW OF HAMMER'S GLORY DAYS **6**

### Don't Be Afraid of the Dark

Dir Troy Nixey, US 2011  
Studio Canal, £12.99/£17.99

It's fairly easy not to be afraid of the dark in this frustrating remake of a scary TV movie from 1973. Architect Alex and his girlfriend Kim (played by Guy Pearce and a bored-looking Katie Holmes) move into a grand Gothic mansion which Alex is restoring to its former glory. His ex-wife has insisted he look after his 11-year-old daughter Sally (Bailee Madison) for a while, so she's staying there too.

Let's just say Sally has issues. Her divorced parents see her as an inconvenience. They dope her up with medication, but things get really intense when she opens up a bolted fireplace in the old house and unleashes hundreds of cruel little creatures that mock her, terrorise her and ultimately want to drag her into their hole so they can eat her teeth. Of course, nobody will believe her.

First timer Troy Nixey directs, while Guillermo del Toro co-writes and produces. Yet despite the Mexican maestro not being in the director's chair, his fingerprints are all over this. Think how Spielberg stamped himself on Tobe Hooper's *Poltergeist* and you get the idea. For example, the creatures themselves are classic del Toro. Spindly little imps leap, giggle and scuttle across the floor in some pretty convincing CGI. Add the fact that the central focus is on a young, black-haired girl who is the target for evil and it's no surprise that the *Guardian* called this "a B-Side to *Pan's Labyrinth*".

You'd think that, with such a pedigree, this remake would work. The set design is certainly good, some of the camerawork is effective and Bailee Madison proves herself once again to be an excellent young actress. In particular, the monster effects are a huge leap up from the men in monkey costumes from the 1973 original. So why does the first one feel so much scarier?

Perhaps the remake is just too slick, too self-aware. These days, horror remakes seem to believe that the key to making a film more frightening is to offer us more information than the original did. So, del Toro gives the creatures a little backstory and adds various plot ideas in the hope of deepening and darkening the brew. He ends up doing the opposite, and his additions merely fill the story with a dizzying parade of plot holes.

The creatures maul a handyman in the cellar and slash his face, but the parents say ho-hum and carry on living there without attempting to find out who or what did it. Huh? Sally takes photographs of the creatures and even squashes one with a book. She's now got evidence, right? Forget it; the film does, and everyone just goes to bed. The creatures are terrified of light, but they conveniently overcome their phobia to invade a brightly lit dinner party. Is this really the same guy who was nominated for an Oscar for his scriptwriting? Del Toro even adds intriguing ideas about the tooth fairy that just never seem to go anywhere, and the ending is confusing and lacks the gut-wrenching punch of the original. What we're left with is *Pan's Labyrinth* without the charm, *Gremlins* without the fun (at one point a Polaroid camera is used

as a defensive weapon, just as in Dante's 1980s classic). And more importantly we have *Don't Be Afraid of the Dark* without the fear.

Rev. Peter Laws

### Fortean Times Verdict

YOU WON'T BE AFRAID OF THIS POINTLESS REMAKE

5

## Children of the Stones

Dir Peter Graham Scott, UK 1977

Network, £14.99

Shot on location in Avebury during the summer of 1976, the now legendary *Children of the Stones* was screened by ITV as a seven-part series in early 1977. It was repeated only once, yet an astonishing number of people still recall being terrified by it as children, due partly to Sidney Sager's stunning music score, with its dissonant vocal harmonies and pagan chanting.

The film's powerful atmosphere, and its sense of dark and brooding mystery lurking within the ancient stones, obviously impacted deeply on some young minds, as many of Avebury's regular visitors – including pagans, druids and some leading archaeologists – acknowledge that it was watching *Children of the Stones* that first got them interested in the place.

For a children's drama, the plot is surprisingly adult. Astrophysicist Adam Brake and teenage son Matthew arrive in the village of 'Milbury', which sits inside a stone circle. Brake, whose wife has recently died, plans to research the natural magnetism of the stones. They are befriended by two other recent incomers, the newly widowed Margaret, Director of the Milbury Museum, and her teenage daughter Sandra, who both add more than a hint of sexual tension. Adam Brake is played by Gareth Thomas, who later starred in *Blake's Seven*; probably seen as sexy by 1970s standards, he has a bizarre, frizzy hairdo, not unlike the one sported by Moss in *The IT Crowd*.

The paranoia experienced by outsiders coming into a closed, rural community is quite justified in Milbury, as almost all the villagers are 'Happy Ones', brainwashed by the piece's villain. Played by Iain Cuthbertson, of *Budgie* fame, the unctuous Hendrick has

harnessed the mystical power of a black hole – once a supernova witnessed in Neolithic times – and turned it to his own evil ends, using the magnetism of the stones. Hendrick eventually reveals his state-of-the-art 'computer', which is about the size of my house and controlled by huge rolls of magnetic tape. Several real aspects of Avebury are cleverly incorporated into the plot: Silbury is featured and Dai, a Welsh poacher played by the wonderful Freddie Jones, actually lives inside the West Kennet long barrow.

In the most memorable scene, Adam Brake is persuaded to touch one of the stones. This results in a prolonged and violent electric shock; after much writhing about, Brake pulls away his hand and is thrown to the ground, unconscious. This was so memorable that for years after the series was shown, concerned parents would ask Avebury staff if it was safe for their children to touch the stones. Even today, a good deal of fun can be had by re-enacting the scene on a busy Sunday afternoon.

*Children of the Stones* is a great story, extremely well told, but it is particularly fascinating to anyone familiar with Avebury – spot the extra polystyrene stones added for filming! There is considerable appeal for anyone nostalgic about the 1970s, from flares and tank-tops to the dreadful Austin Maxi. As this was a children's programme the usual smoking is absent, but none of the adults eat food – they survive only on vast amounts of whisky and reach for the bottle at the first sign of stress. The picture quality is also of its time, with an enormous difference between the exteriors shot on 16mm film and the interiors shot on video in HTV's Bristol studios.

Although it has appeared before on DVD, this new release comes in a handsome package, with a second disc featuring other alleged 'cult' children's TV shows of the 70s. I remember none of them, but that's probably because I'm too old. There is also a booklet containing far more detailed information about 1970s television than anyone could possibly need.

Steve Marshall

### Fortean Times Verdict

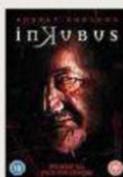
HIGHLY RECOMMENDED RELEASE OF A 1970S CLASSIC

9

## SHORTS

### INKUBUS

(Trinity X, £12.99)



A skeleton crew works the final shift at a police station that's about to be decommissioned, when horror 'legend' Robert Englund turns up holding a girl's severed head. Turns out he's a centuries-old demon with a grudge against one of the cops. Think *Assault on Precinct 13* with a supernatural twist.

The production values feel amateurish and my interest started to wane as the film went on. Still, at least it's inventive, and there's a good sense of tension in the early scenes of psychological warfare between demon and police. Shoot me now though, because I never really saw the big deal about Robert Englund anyway. Rev. PL 4/10

### DEAD HEADS

(G2 Films, £19.99/£15.99)



And the zombies keep on coming; well at least the glut of movies shows no sign of abating. Thankfully, brothers and writer/director team Brett and Drew Pierce have *Evil Dead* special effects photographer Bart Pierce for a father and his blood-spattered DNA is alive and undead in this dope-smoking zombies road-movie – the title's the giveaway here. Knowing and postmodern (stoned zombies with the

munchies sit around watching *Evil Dead*), it's propelled by uniformly strong performances, especially from Markus Taylor as 'Cheese', a sort of Sloth/Nick Frost hybrid. It's pretty funny, with numerous references to Pierce Snr's work and 1980s classics *Back to the Future* and *Goonies*; throw in elements of *Scooby Doo* and the humour of *Beetlejuice* and this modest gem can hold its head high within its genre. Tim Weinberg 7/10

### STAKE LAND

(Metrodome, £24.99/£19.99)



While its basic premise – *Zombieland* but with vampires – is initially disappointing, *Stake Land* goes on to redeem itself in many ways. This vision of a post-apocalyptic, empty America doesn't depend on effects (which is good, as the vampires look crap), choosing instead to focus on storytelling and acting

in a road movie (on the way to sanctuary at New Eden) with strong anti-Christian touches (fundamentalists drop vampires from helicopters to hasten the Apocalypse, while Aryan supremacists rape nuns.) With nods to contemporary politics (the Middle-East is now 'Vamp-land') and unsexy as hell, it's a welcome antidote to the cutesy, soft-porn of *Twilight* and its ilk. TW 7/10

### BLOOD RUNS COLD

(Chelsea Films, £19.99/£15.99)



With Scandinavian thrillers all the rage, this suitably wintry and almost dialogue-free slasher movie should find an appreciative audience. Following the template of the aforementioned genre with utter predictability and not a little gusto, this is either ridiculously derivative or pares to the bone clichés and tropes in a way that's beyond criticism. Though beautifully shot and featuring one memorable decapitation, it loses a point for utterly ignoring any sort of motivation for the \*spoiler alert!\* cannibalism at the centre of this average and averagely competent horror. TW 5/10



### Batman: Arkham City

Xbox 360, PS3 £39.99, PC £29.99 WB Games/Rocksteady

"I'm Batman!"

Come on, admit it; your nerdy comic gene has made you dream of saying that, dream of being the gadget- and bicep-laden caped crusader, chasing Catwoman's elusive tail, hanging from some vertiginously placed gargoyle as you survey the streets and alleyways of the sprawling metropolis that is Gotham City, a city riddled with vice and corruption... and hordes of brutal criminals to bludgeon senseless with your dazzling combo moves.

Despite the host of infamous characters you'll battle with, in many ways it's Gotham, (or rather the walled-off slums of Arkham City within it, created to house the worst of the worst, *Escape from New York*-style), which is perhaps the greatest character of them all. I make no secret of the fact that I'm a die-hard PC gamer and if ever there was a game crying out to be played on a half-decent PC rig, this is it. The level of detail in the rendering of the snow-spattered and puddle-stained city is astonishing. You really do just often perch up there on those rooftops admiring the view of the citadel and the depth of field amid the garish neon signage and the world of shadows that has been created by developers Rocksteady.

One year after the events in *Batman: Arkham Asylum*, Quincy Sharp is now the mayor of Gotham, herding all the nastiest crooks

together in Arkham hoping they'll just kill each other. Instead, they form formidable criminal factions, all vying for supremacy and a way to get back into Gotham. There's also the little matter of having the annoying Bruce Wayne arrested for interfering in city politics: your first task is to escape from the beating of an angry Penguin's loons in Arkham City. Once up in the safe heights of those skyscrapers, a call to Alfred with a hidden com-set and batsuit and gadgetry are forthcoming. Then it's time to clean up those mean streets – although an encounter with the Joker, who injects Batman with a deadly blood disease, leaves you with only hours to live. There's motivation for you!

As well as Batman's main mission to find the cure and to uncover who or what is behind Mayor Sharp and deranged prison warden Strange's nefarious plans, there are side missions galore; so what you get is an action adventure game with a bit of RPG thrown in for good measure. That goes for the gadgetry, trophies to collect and the levelling up, too. These are not mere afterthoughts, but integral elements of the overall game experience and they blend smoothly with one another. On PC, the game begins with Catwoman, about to be stripped of her nine lives by an angry Two-Face. Ever the chivalrous avenger, Batman leaps to the rescue, for all the gratitude the feline felon offers him. There is a

genuine thrill in invoking the spirit of Bruce Lee (never mind Wayne) when surrounded by a dozen thugs and proceeding to dispatch them all with a flurry of combination moves and gadget hurling (the remote-controlled batarang and smoke bomb pellets are favourites). Once again, this is a game that cries out to be played with a PC keyboard and hotkeys, festooned as it is with a dizzying array of Batman's box of tricks to utilise in your fight against the wave of crime spreading through Arkham City back towards Gotham. That's not to say that developers Rocksteady haven't covered all their bases; it's also been voted Xbox Game of the Year.

The cutaways are superb, with a genuine attention to the detail of the Batman world myths of villainy. When a game gives you all this and Mark Hamill returning to the dark side with his brilliantly voiced Joker, *Batman: Arkham City* must be reckoned a gaming blinder, every bit as fine as its award-winning predecessor.

Quibbles? Only a couple, the boss battles aren't that taxing (which also means that they aren't as tedious as so many others) and for all that exhilarating hurling yourself around the rooftops and skyscrapers of the city, it is virtually impossible to fall to your death unless your health meter is dangerously low. Memories of playing the original *Tomb Raider* and suffering the effects of virtual vertigo, just adding to the exhilaration, are absent here. But these are minor complaints in what is simply a great game. You'll return to it again and again, gliding from rooftop to rooftop with your batcape, swinging Spidey-like from one skyscraper gargoyle to another with your nifty batclaw and dive-bombing unsuspecting psychos on the seedy streets below.

Rocksteady had already raised the action adventure bar with *Arkham Asylum* and you'll find yourself still swinging merrily on high from it in *Batman: Arkham City*.

Nick Ćirković

#### Fortean Times Verdict

ABOUT AS MUCH FUN AS A CAPE CRUSADER COULD HAVE

9

### Assassin's Creed: Revelations

Xbox 360, PS3 £39.99, PC £29.99 Ubisoft Montreal



The last game in the saga of Master Assassin Ezio Auditore da Firenze, this sets out to answer many of the questions fans have been

asking: what are the pieces of Eden? Was there a lost civilisation? And how does a 50-something-year-old manage to leap from rooftop to rooftop so easily? Must be that Mediterranean diet.

Set in Constantinople (*not* Istanbul), this instalment sees Ezio in search of the hidden keys to open Altair's library and learn the secrets within. The game cleverly brings together our three heroic assassins, and you will occasionally get to play as Altair (in settings familiar to anyone who played the first game). The *Assassin's Creed* franchise has always built on the foundations of good design, adding more gadgets (bombs and hook blade) and meta-games ('Tower defence' hideout protection) with each instalment. With such a wealth of possible choices, it borders on overkill and would be daunting for a first-time player, but this is obviously aimed at followers of the Creed already skilled in its meta-gaming arsenal.

The trademark faithful recreation of historic cities and architecture once again impresses in its scale. Constantinople is a wonderful city and rendered with the same careful attention apparent in the last few games, though perhaps with less obvious districts and landmarks as Rome, which means navigating it can feel a little repetitive. The series's strong narrative and conspiracy plot, cleverly woven into real world history, kept me hooked and eager to know where they will take *Assassin's Creed III*. There is life in the series yet, even though one story draws to a close here.

*Requiescat in pace, Ezio.*

Alexander Norman

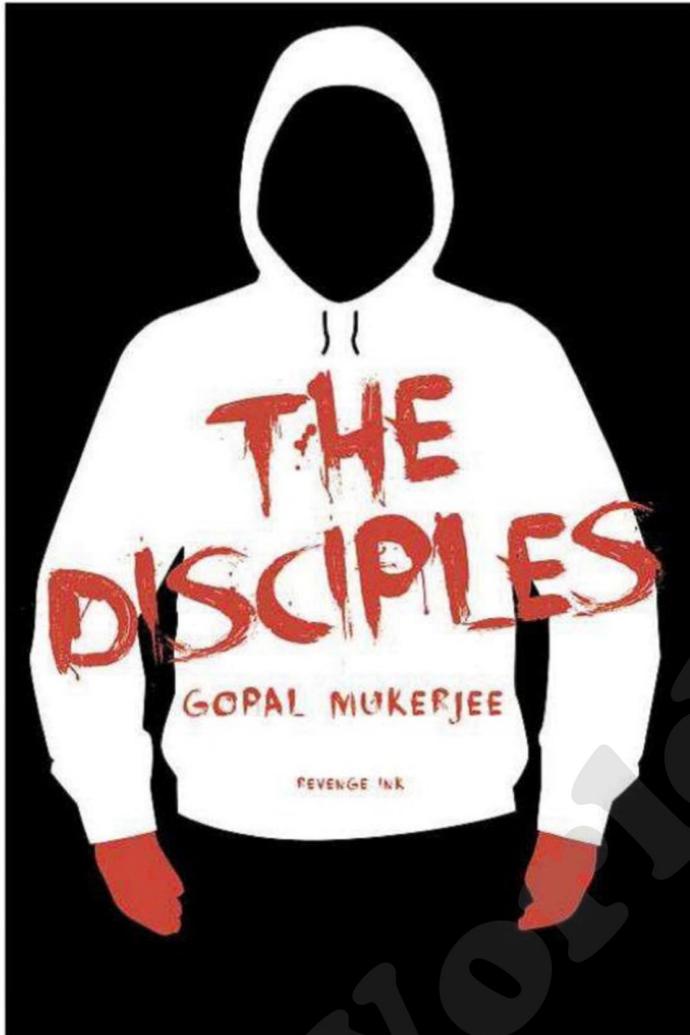
#### Fortean Times Verdict

GREAT SERIES SHOWS NO SIGN OF RUNNING OUT OF STEAM YET

8

# REVENGE INK

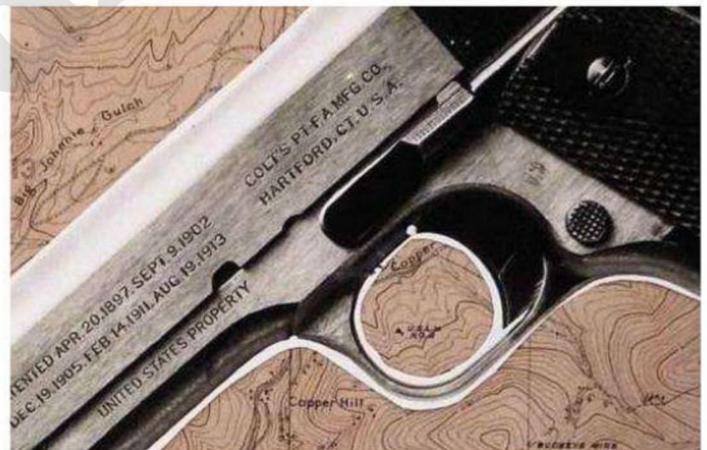
THIS HALLOWEEN, READ  
YOUR WAY TO THE DARKSIDE



## THE DISCIPLES: A NOVEL FOR THE APOCALYPSE, GOPAL MUKERJEE (CO-FOUNDER REVENGE INK)

ISBN 978-0-9565119-5-9  
RELEASE: OCTOBER 31, 2011 PRICE: £7.99

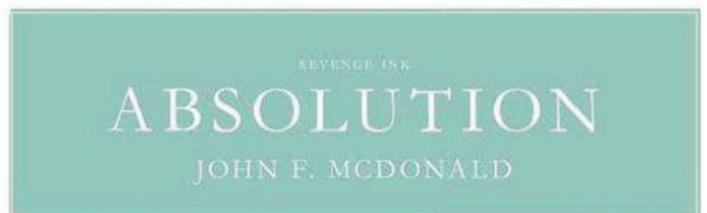
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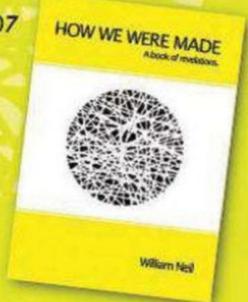
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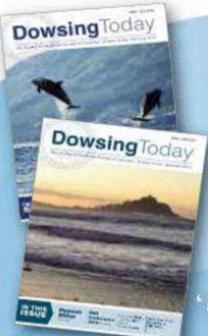
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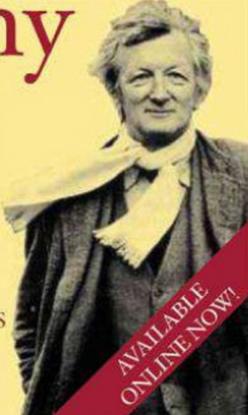
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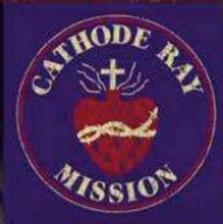


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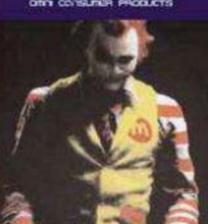
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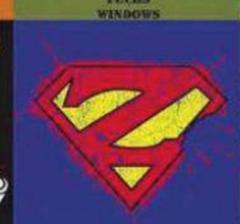
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# letters



## Sky-rot

One day in 1937, when I was nine and living in Pembrokeshire, I was playing in a field where, about three yards [2.7m] from a hedge, I came across a dome-shaped object, translucent and about a foot [30cm] across, looking rather like a stranded jellyfish and of the same consistency. It was marked by concentric light and dark brown bands like a bullseye. When touched, it seemed to buzz slightly and I was convinced it was alive, so I ran away. The next day it was gone.

My grandfather suggested it was "sky-rot" [or star jelly – see FT283:22] and did not seem disturbed. He said he had come across it "once or twice". His children hadn't a clue. I am a biologist and have read medicine, but equally have no idea what it was. Just a very clear memory.

**Patrick F James**  
Salisbury, Wiltshire

## Our believing brains

If Lawrence Samuel [FT284:54] asked William of Occam why human beings persist in believing in the supernatural, he would get the answer: "Because it exists".

Occam's Razor famously asserts that the answer involving the fewest assumptions is most likely to be correct. Samuel's article rests on making at least one unnecessary assumption, namely, that the supernatural falls into the category of things that are open to investigation or proof using the "scientific method". A further assumption is that, since the scientific method has not proved the existence of the supernatural, the supernatural does not exist and therefore some other explanation for belief in it must be sought.

I have never visited the Smithsonian Institution or met anyone who claims to have done so. This doesn't prevent my believing in its existence; I will even accept, on FT's assurance, that Lawrence Samuel is a fellow of this body for the existence of which I have no scientific proof. I will further accept that a battle was fought at Waterloo

in 1815 and that at that battle Wellington defeated Napoleon, although no one living was present as a witness and the evidence would not meet the requirements of the scientific method.

So, if I can believe in places I have never visited and events that happened before I was born, why should I not believe in the supernatural? Especially when, however anecdotal and "unscientific" it may seem, I have evidence from myself and others who claim to have experienced it directly.

Maybe the best argument for the supernatural is the near-universality, in both space and time, of human belief in it; and maybe, when 90 per cent of Americans believe despite the lack of "scientific" proof, we should be looking at the brains, not of the 90 per cent, but of the 10 per cent and asking: Why do they *not* believe? The majority is not always right; but when it's 90 per cent, you have to ask whether they've got something after all.

**Martin Jenkins**  
London

## Live rails?

The report of people in Indonesia lying on electrified railway lines in the belief that the current cures illness [FT280:10] is accompanied by a photograph of people lying on lines with overhead power lines, indicating that the tracks are not live. Can you explain this?

**Chris Aicken**  
By email

**Editor's note:** Good point, Chris. Perhaps the people pictured assumed the tracks were electrified, not understanding the function of the overhead wires. We just don't know.

## Intriguing 'clues'

Robin Ramsay's review of Susan Williams's book *Who Killed Hammarskjöld?* [FT282:62] doesn't specify the two oddest 'clues' about his death: the immediate report that the UN Secretary General had the ace of spades death-card in one pocket and Nevil Shute's 1948

## Simulacra Corner



This calf with a heart on its head – perfect for Valentine's Day – belongs to Peter Sparks of Grand Island, New York. The photo was sent to us by G Ladouceur.

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plane-crash novel *No Highway* in another, and Major-General Egge's insistence that he found the corpse outside the aircraft with a hole in the head. There is no mention of the Soviet interest in replacing Hammarskjöld with a troika, but then the liberal media could always be relied upon to think well of Communists and the worst of 'white supremacy'.

**Jason Robertson**  
Sheringham, Norfolk

## Ghost storms

Whoever coined the ugly word "meteotsunami" [it has a Wikipedia entry, and was listed on the 2008 UNESCO Intergovernmental Commission tsunami glossary cited there – Ed.] was not only devoid of sensitivity to language, but also ignorant of the fact that the phenomenon, described by Jenny Randles [FT280:30–31], already has a perfectly good English name – ghost storm. There is a long history of such waves observed in the English Channel,

going back at least as far as 1759 – see the list in a paper by Dawson and others, *Marine Geology*, vol.170, pp59–68. They have often been assumed to be tsunamis from unknown earthquakes, but this can be discounted for four reasons. Firstly, an earthquake occurring in a region of the North Atlantic where tsunamis originate (e.g. off the coast of Portugal) would be known from other sources. Secondly, earthquakes in the mid-Atlantic (which would not be recorded before the instrumental era) are of a type that does not produce tsunamis. That leaves the possibility of a large submarine slump on the edge of the continental shelf west of Ireland – but the seabed has been mapped well enough that we would know of such an event. Lastly, the waves in ghost storms last too long to be consistent with a tsunami.

I was not aware of the 1929 case mentioned by Jenny; fatalities for such events are unusual.  
**Roger Musson**  
Edinburgh



## Baffling mysteries

Having just read Martyn P Jackson's excellent and well-researched article, where he puts forward a possible explanation for the 1958 Wetzel reptoid sighting [FT283:54-55], I am inclined to think he is on the right track with his hypothesis.

However, I should point out that a 'Gill Man' had entered the popular memory a few years before *The Creature from the Black Lagoon's*

1954 release; the cover of the March 1952 edition of *Baffling Mysteries* comic (Ace Comics, USA) features a green, underwater being with webbed fingers and crests or 'fins', giving it an appearance very similar to TCFTBL. Even the pose with the menaced 'dame in a swimsuit' bears more than a passing resemblance to the later film posters for TCFTBL. Interestingly – as the final panels of the seven-page *Baffling Mysteries* story show – one of the characters



suggests the underwater creature may simply be part of an elaborate publicity stunt which ties in neatly

with Greg May's suggestion that the Wetzel sighting could have been a stunt to support a science fiction/horror movie [FT275:68].

The next issue of *Baffling Mysteries* featured scaly, crested 'lizard men' on the cover which were also quite similar in appearance to TCFTBL – so it's quite possible that these comic book images were an influence on the makers of the film.

**Alistair Moffatt**  
Halifax, West Yorkshire

## Disingenuous

Gordon Rutter's Forum piece "Double Standards?" [FT284:53] strikes me as somewhat disingenuous. Firstly, "Sue" is not the only person who claimed to have overheard the voice relaying information to Sally Morgan; perhaps he will accept this as the "plural of anecdote" he desires? Secondly, does he really think that "Sue's" claim of catching an already discredited "psychic" cheating is *a priori* comparable in likelihood to a hypothetical Nessie sighting? (I say "discredited" as Sally Morgan claimed not to know Brian Dowling when doing a "reading" for him, when in fact she had known him for several years.) Thirdly, actually reading the email exchange between Simon Singh

and Sally Morgan's lawyers gives quite a different impression of the supposed "harassment" from that which Mr Rutter implies. In my view, any harassment was in the opposite direction. Perhaps Mr Rutter ought to pick more defensible subjects to defend.

**Mark Wolstenholme**  
Leeds, West Yorkshire

## Mice as food

The suggestion that rats are afraid of mice [Mythchaser, FT283:17] is daft: mice are rats' favourite food! In fact, if you have an infestation of mice you will soon have an army of rats as well. If you want to trap a rat, then a mouse is one of the best baits.

**Andrew Munro**  
Conna, Co. Cork

## Glowing gravestone

I was recently reading an old *FT* article from February 1978, about a cross-shaped monument in a graveyard in New South Wales, Australia, which was seen to glow weirdly at night [FT26:40-41]. The article instantly made me recall a classic episode of *Only Fools & Horses* from November 1982 (see Wikipedia entry on 'The Yellow Peril'), which culminates in a glowing graveyard monument.

Is this pure coincidence, or did the writers of *Only Fools & Horses* see the source articles/news? Or did *Fortean Times* provide the inspiration? I would like to think the answer is the latter.

**Paul Jackson**  
By email

## Saint versus 'Nessie'

Following Jeffrey Vallance's mention of St Columba's encounter with 'Nessie' [FT284:40], I thought readers might be interested to see the original account, as told by Adamnan, the saint's biographer and successor as abbot of the Iona community. Columba (or Columcille, AD 521-597) was an Irish missionary who founded a monastic community on the Isle of Iona, which he used as a base for converting the mainland Picts to Christianity. In Adamnan's *Latin Vita*, the Saint has to cross the "River Ness" (*habuit fluvium transire Nessam*) – not the Loch itself – where he learns that a certain "aquatic monster" is terrorising the locals. The *Lugneus Mocumin* mentioned in the text, by the way,

is said to have been miraculously cured of a persistent nosebleed by Columba, which may or may not account for his surprising loyalty to the saint.

"[A]fter [Columba] had approached its bank, he saw some of the locals burying a wretched little man, whom, as the burial party themselves recounted, a short while previously as he was swimming, a certain aquatic beast snatched and bit into him with a most savage bite; whose miserable corpse, some of them coming to his aid seized with long hooks, although too late. The saint on the contrary, hearing this, ordered one of his companions to swim out and sail back to him a small boat which was standing on the other bank. Having heard this order of the praiseworthy holy man, Lugneus Mocumin, obeying without delay, and having taken off his clothes with the exception of his undergarments, threw himself into the water. But the monster, which earlier had not been satiated as much as stirred up against its prey, was lurking in the depths of the river.

"Perceiving that the water above had been disturbed by his swimming, the marine creature suddenly emerging rushed towards the man swimming in the middle of the channel with a huge roar and with gaping mouth. The saint seeing this, while all who were there, both the heathens and even the brothers, were stricken by excessive fear, after he had drawn with his index finger, having raised his holy hand, the sign of the cross in the empty air, having invoked the name of God, commanded the ferocious beast, saying, 'Approach no further, nor touch the man; quickly turn backwards.'

"Then indeed the beast, having heard the voice of the saint, and as if he were being dragged by ropes, with a speedier retreat he fled back trembling; the beast which previously had approached right up to the swimming Lugneus, so that there was not between man and beast more than the length of one little pole. Then the brothers, seeing that the beast had retreated, and that Lugneus their comrade had returned to them safe and

unharmful in the little boat, with great astonishment they glorified God in the saint. And also the native heathens, who were there at hand, compelled by the magnitude of this same miracle, which they themselves had seen, praised the God of the Christians."

(*Vita Sancti Columbæ*, II.27.

My translation from the Latin original.)

**Mark Walker**

*Hyde Heath, Buckinghamshire*

## A mere shadow?

The 'ghost' in Mick Brown's photograph [FT282:73] is easily explained. Regard the position of the figure's hips and legs. What you have there is a shadow of the person standing in the doorway. You can even see that the lower legs are crossed.

**Helen Wood**

*Didcot, Oxfordshire*

**Editor's note:** This would of course be the most obvious explanation, but we're not convinced. The supposed shadow does not follow the contours of wall and floor and no obvious light source for it is apparent in the uncropped photograph supplied by Mr Brown.

## Laughing epidemic

An intriguing episode of contagious "mass hysteria" was reported in 1962 from north-western Tanganyika (now Tanzania).<sup>1</sup> This epidemic took the form of laughter associated with crying and restlessness. Symptoms began a few hours to a few days after contact with a sufferer and lasted between several hours and 16 days. Cases were first reported in a school for girls aged 12–18, affecting 95 out of the 159 pupils and causing its closure. Subsequent cases (including male and female adults) occurred in villages to which girls had returned, and in other schools. One outbreak occurred 100 miles (160km) away in Uganda, affecting about 60 pupils in a primary school. At the original school, 57 further cases were reported when it reopened. Investigation failed to identify an infective or toxic cause. The authors found no evidence of poisoning with the delirium-inducing

weed *Datura* and concluded this was probably a case of culturally determined mass hysteria. There appears to be no recent investigation to examine retrospectively the beliefs of those affected.

### NOTE

<sup>1</sup> A Rankin & P Philip: "An epidemic of laughing in the Bukoba district in Tanganyika", *The Central African Journal of Medicine*, 1963; 9(5):167–170.

**Max Cooper**

*Kings Lynn, Norfolk*

**Bob Rickard comments:** the Tanganyikan laughing epidemic (with the Rankin & Philip reference) forms a good part of a chapter in the book I'm doing with Dr Bob Bartholomew (no title as yet). It continued in sporadic outbreaks in the Lake Victoria region until 1966. A local belief said it was because of the H-bomb tests then going on in the South Pacific. It was overtaken in severity by outbreaks in Uganda (1964) and Ghana (1967), during which the laughter changed to violence against others and themselves. Common to most was the feeling that their blood or brains were boiling and heart burning and terrible headaches. Some would climb trees, others strip naked and dress in flowers or feathers, throw rocks at people, and obsess about food. Something very similar occurs in Nicaragua, called the 'grizi siknis' (crazy sickness – see FT181:10, 266:24).

## Radiation and climate change

Point taken about the radiation emitted from the Fleischmann-Pons apparatus in the cold fusion experiments ("Levels of credulity", FT281:69). I confess it is beyond me to work out the radiation flux one would expect from the reported temperature rise. I was thinking of the sad fate of Madam Curie, who paid a high price for her experiments with radioactivity, and of the way I recall seeing one of the scientists apparently demonstrating cold fusion apparatus on an episode of *Horizon* without any protective gear. It is worth mentioning that neutron radiation is especially dangerous

to living tissue, possibly more so than the gamma rays used in an X-ray or the alpha from radon gas produced by granite. I also recall the stern safety instructions on the radioactive sources we used in the physics lab. The last injunction in particular has stuck in my mind: "Do not introduce Radioactive Source into any Bodily Orifice." (!)

My point about the Mpemba Effect was not to claim it is contrary to science (it happens, so it clearly is not), but to indicate how people react to a new fact that does not fit into their established belief or value system. By far the most important matter of this kind, for all of us, is Climate Change. To state the blindingly obvious, people's desires, beliefs and politics tend to have a huge effect on how they react to the science involved. I would like to apply Occam's Razor: if one follows the 'sceptic' arguments through to their logical conclusion, one soon has to postulate a global conspiracy that dominates science, media and government, that is more powerful and influential than the oil/coal/gas/automobile industries, and that has a vague goal of returning to the Stone Age. On the other hand, one merely needs a fossil fuel industry that lobbies in its own interest, a world that does not generally like to spend money or restrict its lifestyle, and a realisation that people on both sides are liable to fight dirty. I find one of those alternatives much more credible than the other.

**James A Tucker**

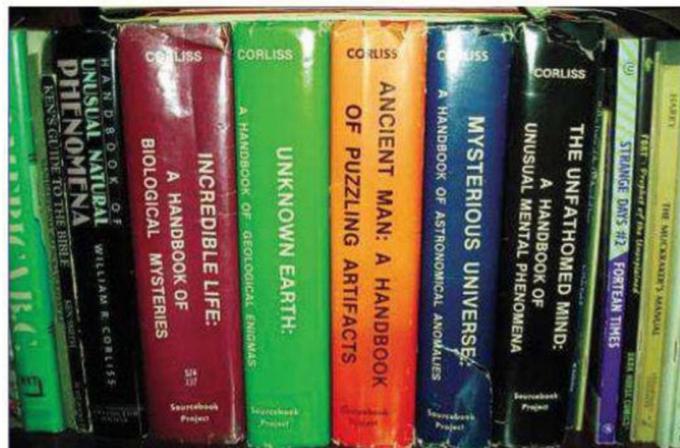
*Newcastle*

**Editor's note:** Not Mr Toker, as we called him last time; he missed the c out of his name when he first wrote to FT.



"I'm going to climb Everest from the inside..."

TONY HUSBAND



## Corliss coincidence

As I was reading the obituary for William Corliss, I was particularly drawn to the photo of his sourcebooks [FT280:24]. I have been collecting his sourcebooks going on 20 years and have only found six of them readily available in bookstores here and there. Of all the permutations of the many sourcebooks that could have been assembled in that picture, I realised that the photo contained exactly the same six sourcebooks as the ones I own (see picture). My roommates suggested I arrange them in the order they appear in your photo, but that seemed like bad mojo.

**Jeff Moore, Milwaukee, Wisconsin**

## Not a ghost town

The power of television has never failed to amaze me, but wiping a town off the map of Devon is going too far.

Over the Christmas period a rerun of *Celebrity Ghost Stories* (Bio channel) featured Daniel Stern (star of *Home Alone*) telling the tale of his 1980 English honeymoon. He and his new wife were spending a few days touring England. On their way to Tavistock, they arrived in a small town identified as Widecombe in the Moor. He described how the townsfolk were all dressed in black and avoided eye contact; everything was totally silent. The couple claim the only person they tried to talk to – an old woman – turned to them with blank white eyes. This took place in the vicinity of the church. They compared the whole episode to a scene from *Night of the Living Dead*.

The couple claim they were so disturbed by the incident that they travelled 10 miles (16km) to their bed and breakfast with a flat tyre as they were too frightened to return to the town for help.

Upon their arrival at their booked bed and breakfast, the owner informed them that Widecombe was a ghost town that no one visited following a devastating church fire that took place around 1638. I can only presume that the bed and breakfast owner had rivals in Widecombe.

Widecombe in the Moor lies within the 368 sq miles (953 sq km) of Dartmoor, which has seen human habitation for the last 12,000 years. Widecombe's 14th-century church did indeed experience a lightning strike during a terrible thunderstorm on 21 October 1638, one of the four church pinnacles crashing through the church roof. Four people were killed, with other possible victims succumbing to their injuries over the following days. The victims are interred near the roodscreen in the church and a display within the church describes the accident. Widecombe, however, is not a ghost town.

Whatever Daniel Stern and his wife experienced, maybe a time-slip, it obviously left a deep impression on them.

**Sue Perks**  
Garelochhead, Argyll & Bute

## Quantum musings

The issue as to whether findings of precognition are valid [FT274:56–57] bears some relation to a recent *Scientific American* article “Living in a Quantum World” (June 2011, p38). Is the Universe sufficiently strange to safely presume that information could travel backwards in time as readily as, by similar token, traverse space telepathically without the aid of photons, as many persons attest from their own experience?

Concepts presented in the *FT* article, such as “the intellectual challenge is determining whether weird quantum effects have equivalents on the human scale, within the brain” are echoed in *Scientific American* – “The division between the quantum and classical worlds appears not to be fundamental,” or “Space and time... are fundamental classical concepts [that] according to quantum mechanics are secondary. The entanglements are primary. They interconnect quantum systems without reference to space and time.” Thus: “The implications of macroscopic objects such as us being in quantum limbo is mind-blowing enough that we physicists are still in an entangled state of confusion and wonderment.”

For people such as myself, this issue matters for a classically Darwinian reason – namely, fear. That fear is of a “brave new world” where a scientific materialist philosophy might combine with pharmaceutical means like “happy pills” and repression of spiritual or paranormal beliefs (as in China’s squelching the Falun Gong) to impose a secularist “new world order” with any rebellious thoughts suppressed with the help of drugs. Something similar was indeed predicted by Rudolph Steiner, for one, in a long series of coming ages that, according to author Richard Seddons, Steiner envisioned. Thus, said fear can inspire hopes that views of bemused physicists who might willingly cut some slack for the Twilight Zone may prevail over the constricted mind set promoted by atheistic explanatarians and intellectuals loath to admit anything of the kind.

Meanwhile, a clear test of

prophecy was reported. A gentleman identified on his website, CEG.com, as “The Man Christ Jesus (666)” issued in December 2010 a dire prediction. “Jesu Christo Hombre” foresaw a disastrous global heatwave in summer 2011 that would kill many people. But although that did not happen, whoever is proven wrong can find an easy out. Should God change Her/His mind, even divinely inspired prophecies can fail. And should such predictions materialise, sceptics can argue that severe heat waves were not unheard of even before today’s apparent warming trend.

As I have previously tried, perhaps in vain, to show [FT256:75], it is biology rather than physics that yields the best evidence of our Universe being “queerer than we can suppose”, hence unspeakably bigger and hairier than many dedicated scientific materialists and their ilk would prefer – Bigfoot versus Barbie Doll. That point is driven home in books like Lyall Watson’s *Lifetide*, and in a key passage I quoted from the late Loren Eiseley regarding the Tarantula Hawk and similar predatory wasps (such as the “cicada killers” he observed in Pennsylvania) – “I know that these creatures were shaped in the cellars of Time [i.e. did evolve]. It is the method that troubles me.” In other words, Darwin was partly right but not enough, even with modern amendments, to explain the whole shebang – and pity those who rigidly condemn that open-ended view as anti-science heresy.

Yet it might be easy to resolve many such issues if scientists could only get the Universe to talk – although if they did, it might simply respond: “I’m queerer than you can suppose, so get used to it.” Then again, its message might instead be reminiscent of a favourite expression of the Roman emperor Commodus, as portrayed in a film from long ago – “I can hear the gods laughing” – also his dying words after being mortally wounded in a duel. Thus the Universe – perhaps over the sound system of some research team’s computer – might decline to make any better sense than a thunderous peal of laughter.

**Richard Porter**  
Denver, Colorado

First-hand accounts from *FT* readers and browsers of [www.forteantimes.com](http://www.forteantimes.com)

## Three ravens

On the weekend of 14 February 1997, I made a surprise visit to my parents, 200 miles (320km) from home, with my baby daughter. There was no particular reason for the trip, other than it had been my parents' 55th wedding anniversary the previous week and my husband was (unusually) 'up for' the long and hideous drive there.

On the Saturday morning after our arrival, my cousin rang and asked for my mother. I knew it was a death as that would be the only reason for a call from this particular branch of the family. It was my paternal uncle's widow who had died, at a good age from a heart condition. I handed the phone to my mum and sat looking out through the French windows into the garden at our 'fairy ring'. Three ravens were circling the ring in a clockwise direction. It really did look strange. The ring has been there for years and my friends and I used to dance round it as schoolgirls. I remember thinking that this must be a sign of death, even then.

Then on 13 April, my sister rang to say my mum had died. Within the week, my father's first cousin died too. All three shared the same surname. So, three ravens and three family deaths within eight weeks. There were no further family deaths for three years after, and indeed hadn't been for eight years before.

**Anon**  
*Fortean Times Message Board*

## The three knocks

There is a piece of pretty universally acknowledged Irish folklore (like a downmarket version of the banshee) which states that hearing three inexplicable knocks presages a death in the family or house. My dad and his brothers used to tease my grandfather by hanging weighted fishing rods out of the bedroom window and banging the weights against the living room window below, with predictable results. In the 1920s, in large Irish families – 60 first cousins in a generation were not uncommon – there was usually, statistically, someone fairly near to dying, thus reinforcing the superstition. Trees in storms also played a part.

However, two incidents



concerning my own mother make me less sceptical. In 1919, my mother (aged three months) was in the kitchen of a hotel in Dublin Street, Liverpool. Originally a Georgian house, it had a completely inaccessible skylight over the kitchen extension. The Irish maid was feeding her when the three knocks sounded. The maid ran out and left her so she could tell my Irish grandmother about the three knocks. My grandmother was angry that my mother had been left alone in her high chair, and went to investigate, leaving her sick four-year-old daughter in order to do so. When she got back, the toddler was dead.

On the night of 12 April 1997, I went to bed at 10pm. I live in a typical London semi-detached house, and at 10.26pm I heard three knocks from the corner cupboard. I assumed it was my next-door neighbour putting her clothes in the cupboard on the other side of the wall, although it spooked me a bit, as there were just the three knocks together, but no further faffing about. 10.26 is the time of night I was born, so, having glanced at the clock, I remembered it. I turned off the light and thought nothing more of it.

The next day was a Sunday, and my mother (who was breathless, but not known to be seriously ill) unexpectedly died on her own at some point between when my dad had left for church (10.20 am) and when he came back (11.30).

Later, I mentioned the three knocks to my neighbour, and she told me the built-in wardrobes in her house were actually on the outside wall and that she had gone to bed much earlier than 10.26 – so there was no possibility that noise had come from her side.

**Maria Nina**  
*By email*

When I was a young teenager we lived in one of the best-known "haunted" houses in the town we had just moved to. The history of the house was kept from my sister and me because my parents did not believe it was haunted and didn't want our already active young imaginations running away with us, so I had no idea at all about the house. I had many frightening experiences in the house during the year and a half that we lived in it, and only later on did I feel somewhat angry about the way my parents handled the fears that I shared with them. They refused to give

any credence to my tales, so after a while I just quit talking about the things that were happening to me.

One afternoon, I was in the bathroom taking a shower after a long day at school. My sister and I were latchkey kids and were almost always alone in the house for a few hours after school until my parents arrived home. My sister was outside playing with a friend at the time of my shower. I had just put shampoo in my hair and begun to clean it when I heard three sharp knocks on the door to the immediate left of the shower. The bathroom was quite small so there was no mistaking where the knocks came from. I really thought nothing of it, as I believed it was my sister playing a game with her friend. I shouted out to her, "What do you want Nicole? I'm in the shower!" as I continued to wash my hair. My sister did not reply. Once again, three sharp knocks shook the bathroom door. This time I stopped what I was doing and shouted out immediately: "Leave me alone! I am taking a shower!" I listened for the telltale giggles of my sister and her friend outside the bathroom door and heard nothing. I quickly rinsed the shampoo from my hair and stood ready to reach out through the shower curtain and whip open the bathroom door in an effort to catch my sister in the act of annoying me... just as I began to relax and figure my sister had given up on bugging me, three more heavy knocks slammed against the door. Before the final knock was even complete, I had thrown the door open. To my absolute shock and horror, there was no one there. I grabbed a towel and raced out of the bathroom and down the steps to the main part of the house. There was no way in hell I was staying upstairs alone. I waited for my parents to arrive home that day, wrapped in a blanket and sitting on the porch. It turned out my sister had never even been in the house that afternoon and had been watching a television programme at her buddy's house.

I can still remember clearly how those three knocks sounded, how they made the door vibrate and the way my heart was pounding as I was flying down the steps to the living room. Thankfully though, they didn't foretell the death of anyone near or dear to me.

**Kim —**  
*By email*

# FORTEAN TRAVELLER

## 78. The shadow over Bugarach

**RICHARD STANLEY** reports from the tiny French village that's waiting for the End of the World to come later this year.



THIERRY STRUB

"Look out, it's coming back!" Miss Scarlett drew herself closer to the rock face as the black helicopter wheeled around the summit of the dormant volcano, fuselage glinting in the late afternoon Sun.

"Get down," I hissed, the pulse of the rotors quickening in my ears.

We had seen the chopper before, but at this distance it was impossible to tell whether it was of civilian or military origin. Judging by the metal box mounted on its nose, it was probably taking pictures of whatever was going on within the crater. Ordinarily, this wouldn't have provoked our interest, had it not been for the posse of Army brass we had seen a little earlier sitting in a civilian car parked in the village square, apparently directing the helicopter with a walkie-talkie as it hovered over Mount Bugarach, tasting the air like a black metal dragonfly. Presumably, it was just some sort of mondo-bizarro training exercise but, given the peculiar tensions in the area, I couldn't help but feel a little paranoid.

The curiously shaped mountain that stands sentinel over Galamus gorge and the Corbières in south-western France has recently become the focus of a growing number of American UFO

enthusiasts, who believe the area may offer a 'safe haven' from the upcoming Armageddon of 2012. Word has been spreading for some years, over the Internet and via the usual offbeat frequencies whence esoteric gossip and popular folklore circulate, that the dormant volcano harbours a subterranean UFO base. Furthermore, a great many folk seem to believe that the extraterrestrials, who have apparently been here since the dawn of time, guiding mankind's destiny, may be inclined towards taking a few lucky human beings with them when they return to their home world on, or immediately before, the date decreed by the end of the Mayan calendar: the Winter Solstice of 2012. Despite the lack of any concrete evidence to support these claims, an increasing number of foreigners, New Agers, conspiracy theorists and professional paranoids have been flocking to the area, much to the chagrin of villagers, who feel outnumbered and increasingly at odds with these strange invaders.

"This is no laughing matter. Many come and pray on the mountainside. I've even seen one man doing some ritual totally nude up there," Mayor Jean-Pierre Delord told the *Daily*

ABOVE: The brooding peak of Mount Bugarach has provoked all kinds of bizarre stories over the centuries.

*Telegraph*. "If tomorrow 10,000 people turn up, as a village of 200 we will not be able to cope. I have informed the regional authorities of our concerns and want the Army to be at hand if necessary come December 2012."

### ENTRANCE TO AGHARTA

The brooding cone of Mount Bugarach, known in bygone times as the Pech de Thauze or the "crossroads of the four winds", has provoked any number of bizarre and fantastical stories over the course of the centuries. The ruins of ancient temples and bridges surrounding the mountain bear mute witness to successive waves of habitation by Cathars, Gauls, Visigoths, Tectosages and Romans. According to mythology, the 'upside down' mountain's impressive outline was formed by two "giant dwarves", named Bug and Arach, who were turned to stone after insulting the god Jupiter. Others believe the peak derives its name from the Bogomils, or 'beloved of God', a long-vanished branch of heretical Christianity whose beliefs influenced and informed the Cathar faith. Catharism itself is said to have survived for hundreds of years longer in the densely wooded hill country surrounding Bugarach than it did in any other part of France. There are even some who believe that the treasures of their heretical faith were hidden there, including the mythical *grande grimoire* known as the *Book of the Seven Seals* that, according to tradition, will not be opened until Judgement Day. The cave system that honeycombs the mountain is rumoured to be the domain of the so-called 'White Lady' of the Pyrenees – a figure identified as the Queen of the Faeries, the immortal guardian of the sacred treasure who is herself but another veiled face of the ancient tradition of goddess worship and the all-but-vanished cults of Artemis, Minerva and the Ibero-Celtic deity Belisama who once held sway in the region (see FT222:32–38). These folkloric echoes of the Bronze Age have become intertwined with latter-day shaggy dog stories of unwary rambblers losing their way in the labyrinthine tunnels beneath the mountain, wandering for days or weeks before returning to the surface with their memories a blank, their heads aspin and their skin and hair bleached white or even blonde.

Over the course of the 20th century, the tales of faeries, will-o'-the-wisps and woodland elementals gave way to phantom airship sightings as the mountain's smouldering internal fires continued to fuel both the hot springs of Rennes-les-Bains and the imaginations of countless visitors to the area. Allusions to Bugarach and the fabled entrance to the worlds within can be found in the work of Gaston Leroux, George Sand, Maurice Leblanc, André Malraux, Louis Fédicé, Daniel Réju, the

Abbé Henri Boudet and the father of popular science fiction, Jules Verne, who is said to have holidayed on the volcano's flanks. The mysterious peak even lends its name to one of Verne's characters, the flamboyant Captain Bugarach, the "master of the quartering winds", in his cryptic maritime opus *Clovis Dardentor*, as well as possibly providing the inspiration for the subterranean kingdoms of *Journey to the Centre of the Earth* and *The Black Indies*, not to mention the 'eagle's nest' in *Master of the World* – the mountainous redoubt whence Robur the mad aeronaut bellows forth his wildly overamplified prognostications of the coming Apocalypse. To this day, there are those who believe the volcano conceals the entrance to the Hollow Earth, Agartha, and a lost world of Shaverian deros, Lemurians and vampiric pseudolamias.

The vague rumours surrounding the mountain took on a more sinister bent following the mysterious death of Daniel Bettex in 1988. Bettex was a former security officer at Geneva airport who became fascinated by the story of the Cathars, embarking on a long-running correspondence with Deodat Roche – Rudolph Steiner's principal disciple in the south of France and a leading light behind the modern neo-Cathar movement. When Bettex asked whether there were any hitherto unexplored areas where he might carry on his own research, Roche pointed him in the direction of the 'magic mountain' that he believed played an important role in the survival of the all-but-vanished faith. After Roche's death, Bettex became a close confidant of Lucienne Julien, who succeeded him as Secretary General of the Société du Souvenir et des Études Cathares – the Society of Cathar Research – whose local standing enabled the Swiss investigator to gain access to records and archives that might otherwise have remained closed to him.

After conducting an excavation of the old castle of Bugarach and studying registers of mining activity in the area, Bettex embarked on a methodical search for an entrance to the hidden galleries beneath the mountain. Working in isolation, he uncovered hitherto unknown tunnel systems, documenting what he claimed were secret signs and markings left behind on the cave walls by 13th-century Cathars. According to his notes, Bettex came across an apparently manmade tunnel leading to the shores of a subterranean river and an ancient stone quay whence he believed it might be possible to penetrate further into the mountain.

Local gossip maintains that Bettex's work was funded by a shadowy secret society or possibly even the Israeli intelligence services. Unsubstantiated accounts later appeared on the Net that he was on the trail of the Ark of the Covenant and reported directly to General Moshe Dayan himself. The last time Julien met Bettex, in the summer of 1988, the normally taciturn pot-holer and amateur archæologist seemed unusually excited, insisting he was only four or five



GETTY IMAGES / AFP / PASCAL PAVANI

## By the 1980s the region was seen as a 'window area'

days away from his goal and that they would soon both be rich.

Three days later, the former security officer's body was recovered from a field on the outskirts of the village of Bugarach. According to contemporary reports, Bettex's remains were inexplicably dehydrated, although – typically – the exact cause of death was never established. Some say he was caught in a subterranean subsidence but managed to escape and drag himself back to the

ABOVE: Bugarach's mayor, Jean-Pierre Delord, has expressed concern over the influx of UFO nuts and New Agers to the area.

BELOW: Various New Age groups have been holding open-air seminars around Bugarach.

village in search of help. Others believe his body was carried out of the cave system after he was already lifeless or that he was simply struck down where he stood. He was no longer a young man, and it's possible his exertions in the hot Pyrenean sunshine took an undue toll on his heart. After his death, rumours began to circulate that, shortly before his demise, Bettex had been visited by three Men In Black who warned him to say nothing of what he had found.

### SAUCERS AND SHAMANS

By the late Eighties, the region had come to be viewed as a prominent 'window area' and a 24-hour skywatch was established on Laval Dieu, a jagged spine of rocks facing the slumbering volcano. When I first visited the area in 1992, I was advised to speak to the occupant of an isolated farmhouse near the headwaters of the River Sals, an individual named Jean de Rignies whose wild eyes and impressive mane of white hair made him resemble a landlocked version of the ancient mariner. Samples of saline water allegedly drawn from the stream near de Rignies's remote cottage contained unusually high levels of radiation, and the bearded farmer nursed the stubborn conviction that the mountain harboured an underground 'saucer base', producing countless audio recordings of curious humming and droning sounds that he insisted were caused by extraterrestrials moving about beneath his floorboards.

Subsequent authors and researchers such as British surveyor David Wood





– who projected his carto-erotic fixations onto the landscape during the early 1990s, concluding that Mount Bugarach represented the apex of the vast pentagram that he winningly described as the “Vagina of Nut” – and Elizabeth van Buren – who suggested that the area might conceal a portal to another world in her book *Refuge of the Apocalypse: Doorways to Other Dimensions* – further added to the myth complex that began to crystallise in the popular unconscious after de Rignies’s fuzzy recordings were played on French national television. Warming to his growing celebrity, de Rignies claimed to have seen a huge triangular craft hovering above his cabin and insisted that another saucer had made a landing in a field near the neighbouring village of Sougraigne, producing photographs of a charred, circular patch in the grass, and of gendarmes who had fenced off the landing site with curious, multi-coloured tape and collected soil samples. Apparently, there were several other witnesses to the landing, including a group of Canadian and Belgian tourists, but de Rignies hinted darkly that these unfortunate bystanders had been intimidated into keeping their silence by the Prefecture of Carcassonne.

Over the years, Jean de Rignies continued to elaborate on his story, maintaining that he and his son had found a deep shaft cut into the mountainside not far from his cabin that they estimated to be over 100m (330ft) deep. When they dropped a stone into the shaft, they heard it strike a metallic surface far below. However, when de Rignies returned with professional speleologists to explore the shaft, they found that all trace of the opening had disappeared. On another occasion, he maintained that he had been caught in a time slip after emerging from

ABOVE: The author in the churchyard at Bugarach.

BELOW: A curious wall painting of the Lamb of God in the Bugarach village church.



one of the tunnels and that only his “presence of mind” had prevented him from becoming trapped in another time period or slipping into a parallel quantum world. Since de Rignies’s passing, his abandoned cottage has been fenced off, but the spring behind the house is still accessible to hikers and has become a popular destination with the various New Age pilgrims who continue to flock to the area.

Most of these newcomers can be dismissed as harmless cranks, although others, such as the self-proclaimed Native American shaman ‘Blue Eagle’, would seem to be in it for the money. This former native of Saskatchewan has been holding conferences in the area, charging up to 400 euros for seminars on crystal healing and the coming 2012 global crisis. He has recently attracted further controversy after claiming that he requires 100 women in order to complete his “sacred fire sanctuary”. Such Canadian mountebanks, however, are just one more colourful element among the influx of outsiders rumoured to be buying up land in the region at increasingly extravagant prices as they await what some describe as either an impending holocaust or a new evolution in human consciousness. Chief among these newcomers is a secretive organisation known as Ramtha’s School of Enlightenment, a US-based outfit headed by Judy Zebra Knight (born Judith Darlene Hampton in Roswell, New Mexico), who claims to be channelling the disembodied spirit of a 35,000-year-old Lemurian warlord named Ramtha. Knight – who was described by *Time* magazine as “probably the most celebrated of all current channellers” – is a regular guest on *Coast to Coast AM* and has appeared on the Larry King and Merv Griffin shows as well as playing a starring role in the 2004 film *What the Bleep Do We Know?*, produced and directed by former Ramtha students. She is no stranger to apocalyptic discourse, having previously predicted a global cataclysm in 1985.

Despite Miss Zebra Knight’s claims that the organisation is “not a cult”, her movement’s presence in the area has drawn the attention of the individual put in overall charge of the situation by the French Army since Mayor Delord’s request for help. Georges Fenech is the head of an obscure French government body named MIVILUDES (*Mission interministérielle de vigilance et de lutte contre les dérives sectaires* or “Inter-ministerial Mission for Monitoring and Combatting Cultic Deviance”). Fenech rose to prominence following his investigation of the assassination of judge François Renaud (known as ‘le sherif’ in the Lyons underworld), but has been dogged by accusations of financial irregularities and anti-Semitism. He has written several books on ‘Zero Tolerance Policy’ and reports

directly to President Sarkozy, having apparently been given carte blanche to deal with the situation in Bugarach as he sees fit. This ambitious cult-busting politico's statements to the press have thus far been disconcertingly alarmist, warning of a Waco-type situation in the making, and widely seen as a transparent bid to publicise both himself and MIVILUDES. Whatever Fenech's true motives, his professed desire to protect the locals from marauding 'UFO cults' by whatever means necessary, including the possible use of force to cordon off the volcano, have left him locked in a potential collision course with Miss Knight and the other New Agers.

### ON THE MAGIC MOUNTAIN

Miss Scarlett and I waited until the helicopter had completed its circuit of the mountain before shouldering our packs and continuing upwards in the dying light. It was dark by the time we emerged from the treeline, glimpsing the village lights far below. The Moon was already out, and as we made our way steadily higher we could feel the hum of static electricity in the air. Finally, we made it to the lip of the crater and sat down to enjoy the view. This was some of the most spectacular and unsettlingly atmospheric countryside we had ever seen, a dreamlike vista seemingly drawn from the imagination of HP Lovecraft or Clark Ashton Smith.

"Who knows? Maybe Lovecraft's *Necronomicon* really was based on the Cathar *Book of the Seven Seals*," I mused, taking in the curious crags and rock formations that surrounded us in the moonlight. In the half-light, the landscape seemed to belong to some other world entirely, a world light years from our own.

"That's a fairly gargantuan leap in logic."

I narrowed my eyes, my thoughts returning to the curious murals and bas reliefs we had seen on the walls of the local church – among them the slain Lamb of God lying sprawled across a book prominently adorned with seven seals and positioned beneath a jagged mass that surely represented the volcanic caldera itself.

"All that stuff about the gateways of the four winds corresponds pretty neatly to the 'inner court' in the cabbalistic 'cube of space'. Besides, what better place for a portal to another dimension than here? The whole area seems to be some sort of black hole in consensus reality, a slide area between fact and fiction, where the wildest ideas of Verne, Lovecraft and Shaver can take root and prosper without the slightest shred of substantiating evidence. I



haven't seen a single photograph of a UFO since we got here, despite the fact that everyone seems to tacitly believe in the darned things..."

"Aw, c'mon," groaned Miss Scarlett, massaging her foot. "We're talking Teflon here! What magical tradition doesn't the 'cube of space' connect to? And the 'gate of the four winds' is one of the most basic rituals in the book! I admit this is a pretty strange place, but I don't think the Mother Ship will be landing any time soon."

"Shhh!" I stiffened, the hairs rising on the back of my neck. "There's something moving over there!"

We turned, staring into the darkness, realising that someone or something was watching us from the far side of the crater. I took a half step closer, trying to focus on the shadowy figure only to pause on the brink of the abyss. Odd, low noises were coming from the crater, like a great engine turning over somewhere deep within the mountain. I levelled my flashlight but the darkness was so thick that it seemed to resist the beam.

"Look out!"

I ducked as something seemed to fly directly over our heads. I couldn't see a damn thing, but I could hear an odd electrical whirring accompanied by a series of high-pitched mechanical shrills and clicks that sounded for all the world like someone testing the Dolby surround sound in a cinema auditorium, moving from left to right speaker and back again.

"What was that?"

"I don't know. It sounded like some sort of insect."

I cringed, hearing the whirl of chitinous wings as the unseen critter made another pass, the curious stream of electronic beeps ranging up and down the audio spectrum. Casting about myself with the flashlight, I



TOP: Government cult-buster Georges Fenech, determined to fight deviance with any means necessary.

ABOVE: The late Jean de Rignies, who helped put Bugarach on the ufological map.

LEFT: Aigle Bleu, or Blue Eagle, just one of the New Age figures who have been spotted in the area.

tried in vain to figure out what kind of infernal bug could be flying around us at such an altitude where there seemed to be no other readily discernable signs of life. Besides, what sort of insect, no matter how large, could make this racket?

There seemed to be more than one figure standing on the far side of the crater now, their grey outlines swaying in the moonlight.

"Let's get out of here. Okay?"

Down proved trickier than up, and I'm not convinced that some of the steep trails that we slid and stumbled down weren't goat paths or run-off from the recent rains. The flashlight's battery began to falter, giving out in pretty much the darkest part of the woods, but somehow we managed to retrace our steps. Just as we came in sight of the car, our unseen companions, who had seemingly been pacing us ever since we left the mountaintop, decided to make their presence felt and we were abruptly assaulted by those weird, electronic buzzing sounds again. There was something slightly sinister, and yet at the same time oddly mischievous about their stereophonic trilling and beeping, as if they had deliberately come to see us off – scaring us just enough to put the hook in and make certain we would come back for more. We turned the car headlights onto full beam and stood staring into the night in amazement, trying without success to catch a glimpse of the invisible creatures that swooped and circled above us.

By morning, I had rationalised the situation, telling myself we'd been spooked by a bunch of oversized flying beetles, but my best attempts to describe the sounds to our village hosts proved fruitless, soliciting only blank incomprehension. I wanted to be able to convince myself that what we had experienced was commonplace, and that there was a perfectly reasonable explanation for the curious electronic cacophony that had dogged us through the darkened woods, but none presented itself. Since coming here, I had made up my mind that the entire 2012 flap was another storm in a teacup, a series of baseless allegations hopelessly exaggerated into something larger and stranger than life.

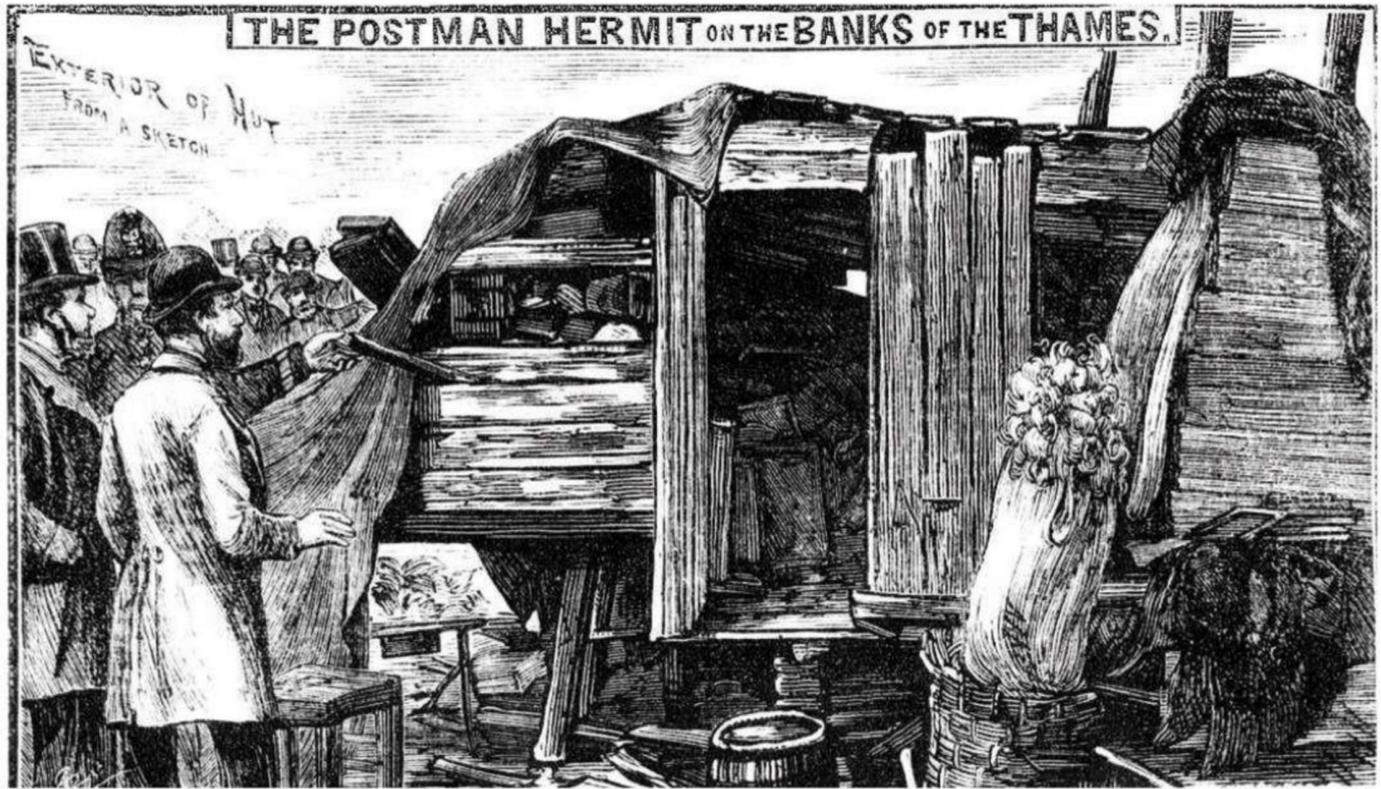
Now, all I know for sure is that I want to be on the magic mountain on 21 December, to see what really happens as the Winter Solstice and the appointed hour approaches. I suspect that whatever the truth may be behind the hysterical stories in the popular press, we have yet to perceive the true outline of the otherworldly shadow that lies over the tiny village of Bugarach. **FT**



RICHARD STANLEY is a filmmaker, anthropologist and author. His latest ebook, *Shadow of the Grail*, is available from Amazon: <http://amzn.to/dNlac8>.

For more on Bugarach, see "Last place on Earth", **FT272:9**.

JAN BONDESON presents more sensational stories and startling Victorian images from the "worst newspaper in England"



## 10. THE POSTMAN HERMIT

In early May 1880, an elderly man was observed carrying some boards and scaffolding-poles away from a Hammersmith building site. When hailed by a police constable, he dropped the boards and tried to run off, but the constable pursued and captured him. A furtive-looking cove, about 60 years old, he seemed to have seen better days. He was very reluctant to tell the police who he was, or where he lived. The Hammersmith police had ways of making him more talkative, however; after a night in the cells, he gave his name as Lawrence Gilbert, a former postman, who had no address. When the exasperated constables expressed incredulity on the latter point, he offered to show them where he lived.

The police constables were astounded when he led them on a long and meandering walk into the Fulham marshes, where he seemed to know every ditch and footpath. Near the bank of the Thames, opposite Watney's distillery and not far from Wandsworth Bridge, they encountered what seemed almost like a moat, surrounding a very odd-looking cabin. After Gilbert had put a hidden drawbridge over the moat, and appeased a fierce dog he had left behind to guard his belongings, the police examined the large wooden cabin, which had

**HE ASTOUNDED THE POLICE BY LEADING THEM ON A LONG, MEANDERING WALK INTO THE FULHAM MARSHES, WHERE HE SEEMED TO KNOW EVERY DITCH AND FOOTPATH.**

been erected on poles just above the level of high water. Just outside the hermitage were 200 egg-boxes, some containing worthless rubbish, others silver-plated knives and forks, watches, a collection of books, a dining-room clock, 40 tall hats with wigs in proportion, and several post office uniforms. Covered up with tarpaulin, there were a number of sewing machines, furniture, carpets, three wagon-loads of timber, and an enormous quantity of old newspapers and magazines.

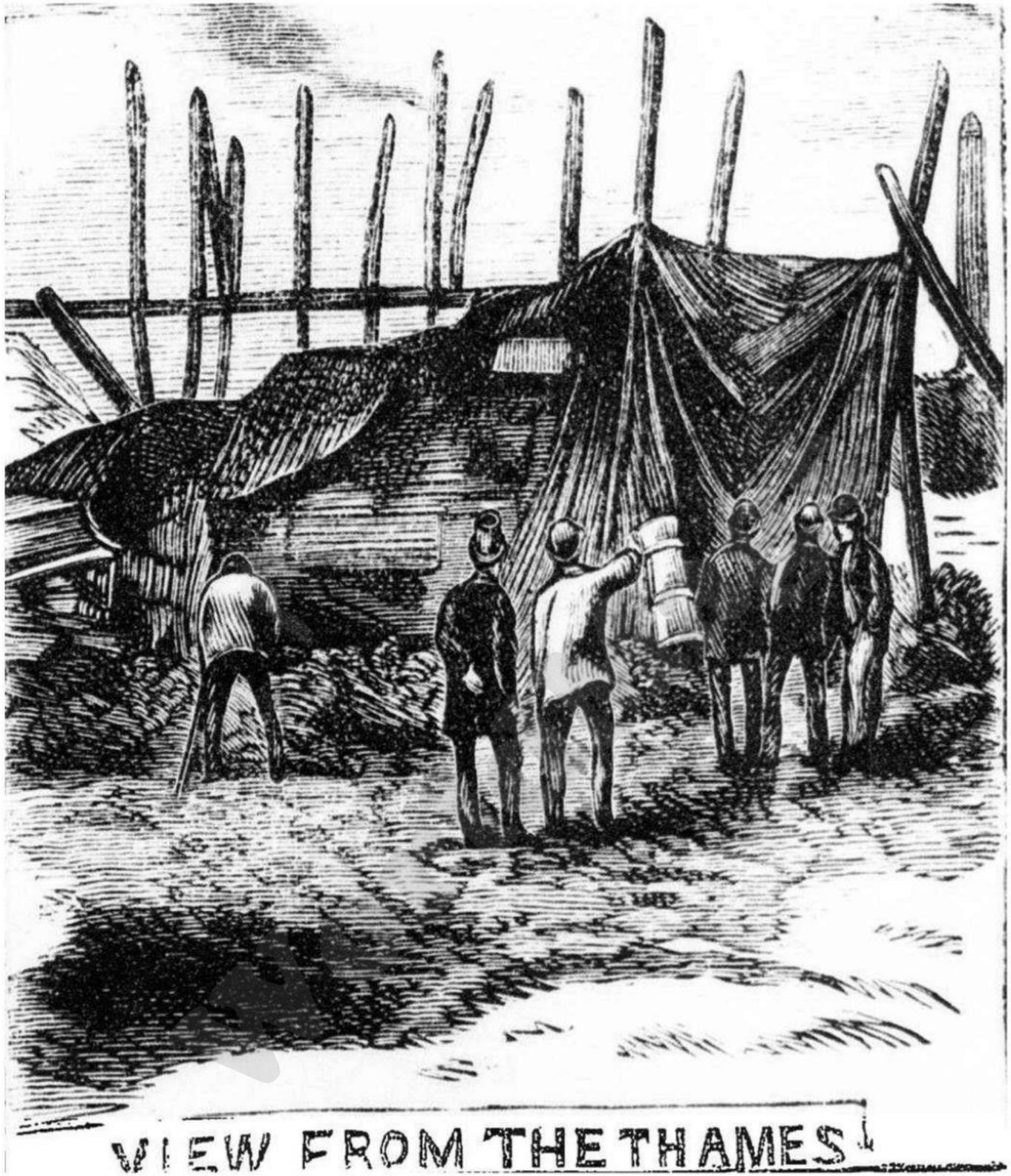
The constables were even more amazed when they saw the hermit's hoard inside the cabin. There were 60 large mailbags, all of them full of undelivered letters, and a quantity of parcels and packages. One bag alone

ABOVE: The cabin of the Postman Hermit, with some of his hoard, from the *Illustrated Police News* of 15 May 1880.

FACING PAGE: Two views of the Hermit's barge.

contained 2,000 circulars from the controversial politician Sir Charles Dilke, issued but never delivered before the 1874 election. It turned out that Lawrence Gilbert had been employed as a letter-carrier from 1862 until pensioned off in 1879. Throughout this period, he had stolen thousands of letters, circulars, parcels and newspapers. There were two cheques, one for £360 and the other for £120, and a five-pound note, neither of which had been touched by this weird postman hermit. A large quantity of milk-bottles found on the premises suggested that Gilbert had been in the habit of refreshing himself with some stolen milk while on his rounds, and that he had jealously hoarded the bottles. A more sinister discovery was a box containing 40 old rifles, and a quantity of gunpowder; indicating that the hermit had intended to defend his hoard with every means at his disposal. The fierce dog found guarding the hermitage was handed over to the Dogs' Home at Wandsworth.

Tracking down the antecedents of the "Postman Hermit on the Banks of the



VIEW FROM THE THAMES

Thames", as the *Illustrated Police News* called him, the police found that Gilbert had once occupied a house in Marlborough Road, Chelsea, where he had lived in an eccentric manner. He had also owned another house, in Hampstead, which he sold for £350. The police presumed that he had once stored his hoard in his Chelsea house, where he had lived for at least 40 years. Much of the hoard consisted of objects Gilbert had transferred to his hermitage from this house, bringing it down from Chelsea Bridge using a barge. The Postman Hermit had "a mania for possession", as the newspapers expressed it, collecting the various items in his 'Fulham Marshes Museum'



without regard to profit.

Still, the authorities decided to teach Lawrence Gilbert a hard lesson, to dissuade London's many postmen from similar displays of dishonesty. The Postman Hermit was brought before the Hammersmith Police Court, where he was harshly spoken to by the magistrate, Mr Snell. Part of his hoard was exhibited in court, particularly the cheques and the many letters he had stolen. On 25 May 1880, at the Central Criminal Court, he pleaded guilty to the charge of theft and neglecting to deliver mail entrusted to him, and was sentenced to 18 months in prison, with hard labour. His later activities cannot be traced.

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To minimise the time spent on preparing clippings for a Fort Sort, we ask that you cut them out and not fold them too small. Mark each clip (on the front, where possible) with the source, date and your name, so that we can credit you in the listing (right) when we use the material. For UK local and overseas clips, please give the town of publication. For foreign language clips, we appreciate brief translations. To avoid confusion over day and month, please write the date in this form: 8 Feb 2012. If you send photocopies, copy on one side of the paper only.

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# Why Fortean?



**F**ortean Times is a monthly magazine of news, reviews and research on strange phenomena and experiences, curiosities, prodigies and portents. It was founded by Bob Rickard in 1973 to continue the work of Charles Fort (1874–1932).

Born of Dutch stock in Albany, New York, Fort spent many years researching scientific literature in the New York Public Library and the British Museum Library. He marshalled his evidence and set forth his philosophy in *The Book of the Damned* (1919), *New Lands* (1923), *Lo!* (1931), and *Wild Talents* (1932).

He was sceptical of scientific explanations, observing how scientists argued according to their own beliefs rather than the rules of evidence and that inconvenient data were ignored, suppressed, discredited or explained away. He criticised modern science for its reductionism, its attempts to define, divide and separate. Fort's dictum "One measures a circle beginning anywhere" expresses instead his philosophy of Continuity in which everything is in an intermediate and transient state between extremes.

He had ideas of the Universe-as-organism and the transient nature

of all apparent phenomena, coined the term 'teleportation', and was perhaps the first to speculate that mysterious lights seen in the sky might be craft from outer space. However, he cut at the very roots of credulity: "I conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while."

Fort was by no means the first person to collect anomalies and oddities – such collections have abounded from Greece to China since ancient times. **Fortean Times** keeps alive this ancient task of dispassionate weird-watching, exploring the wild frontiers between the known and the unknown.

From the viewpoint of mainstream science, its function is elegantly stated in a line from Enid Welsford's book on the mediæval fool: "The Fool does not lead a revolt against the Law; he lures us into a region of the spirit where... the writ does not run."

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

FT toes no party line.

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# PHENOMENOMIX.

Great Occultists:  
GERALD GARDNER • HUNT EMERSON & KEVIN JACKSON  
& WICCA - part 1

GERALD GARDNER (1884-1964) WAS THE MAN WHO LED THE 20TH CENTURY REVIVAL OF WITCHCRAFT - OR, AS HE CALLED IT...

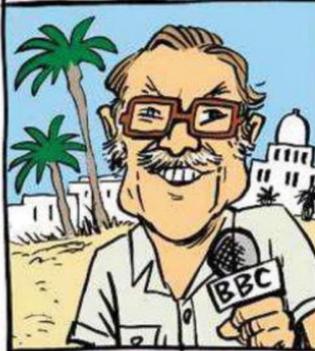


NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH WICKER...



-A TYPE OF BASKET WEAVING...

...OR WHICKER...



-ALAN WHICKER, POPULAR BBC BROADCASTER OF THE 1960S...

...OR, INDEED, WHICKER!



-THE NOISE A HORSE MAKES WHEN YOU GIVE HIM A TOFFEE.

GARDNER DID NOT BECOME A WITCH UNTIL HIS FIFTIES, BUT MAGIC AND THE OCCULT RAN IN HIS FAMILY! HIS SCOTTISH ANCESTOR GRISSELL GARDNER WAS BURNED FOR WITCHCRAFT IN 1610!



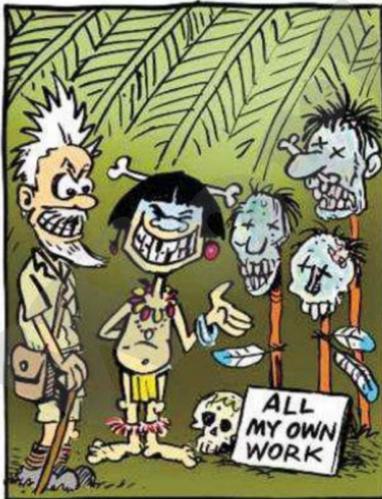
HIS GRANDFATHER JOSEPH WAS ALSO A PRACTISING WITCH...



...AND HIS UNCLE CLAIMED TO HAVE FAIRIES AT THE BOTTOM OF HIS GARDEN...



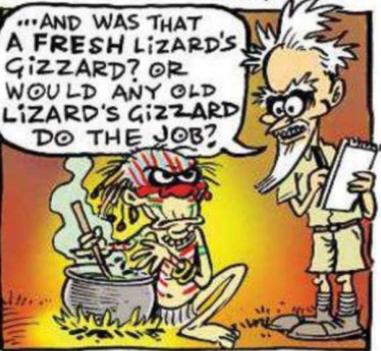
GARDNER LIVED AN ADVENTUROUS LIFE, AND TRAVELLED WIDELY... IN BORNEO HE BEFRIENDED A TRIBE OF DYAKS - HEAD HUNTERS!



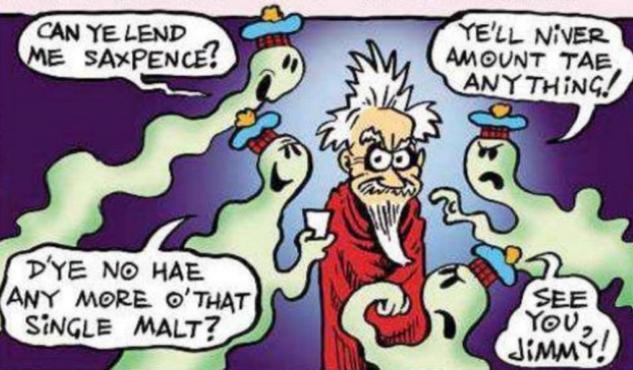
...AND IN MALAYA HE CHUMMED UP WITH THE SAKI, A TRIBE OF PYGMIES...



EVERYWHERE GG TRAVELLED, HE STUDIED LOCAL FORMS OF MAGIC...



IN 1927, ON A TRIP BACK TO ENGLAND, HE TOOK UP SPIRITUALISM AND "MET" MANY OF HIS DEAD ANCESTORS...



...AND ON A TRIP TO GREECE IN 1938, HE HAD A VISION OF ONE OF HIS OWN PREVIOUS LIVES!



NEXT TIME... GG BECOMES A WITCH... ...PUTS A CURSE ON HITLER...

...AND MEETS SOMEONE VERY FAMILIAR...



# COMING NEXT MONTH



**DOG-HEADED MEN**  
FROM SAINT CHRISTOPHER  
TO SKINWALKER RANCH



**THE PALAIS IDÉAL**  
HOW A POSTMAN'S INNER LIFE  
WAS EXPRESSED IN STONE



**MULTI-FORM  
APPARITIONS,  
WIRED FOR GOD,  
CRYPTOSCATOLOGY  
AND MUCH MORE...**

# FORTEAN TIMES 286

ON SALE 1 MARCH



HUGO PIETTE

## TALES FROM THE VAULT

EACH MONTH WE SEND *FORTEAN TIMES* FOUNDER BOB RICKARD DOWN INTO THE DARKEST, COBWEB-RIDDEN DEPTHS OF THE VAULTS OF FORTEAN TOWERS IN SEARCH OF STORIES FROM *FT*'S PAST.

### MARCH 1982

This month, we learned of a young ecstatic in Tropeço, northern Portugal: 17-year-old Maria Rosalina Viera. In 1974, at the age of 10, Rosalina saw an apparition of the Virgin Mary in her 'Fátima' manifestation. She became paralysed and has remained bedridden ever since – the third such 'post-Fátima' case known to us. Three years after her vision, she stopped eating and is widely believed to have taken only the Eucharistic Host ever since. This long fast has been tested by sceptics and medics over the years and no one has disproved it; upon being told that Rosalina produced just 50cc of urine a week, one urologist declared "I can see no explanation for this woman being alive, if her claims are true." Rosalina also suffers the agony of Christ's crucifixion every Friday and is said to bear the stigmata at times. Our last glimpse of her was in 2004, when Richard Salbato – on the *UnityPublishing.com* website – wrote an account of visiting her. Apparently, she was still bedridden and taking nothing but the Eucharist wafer and wine. Then aged 40, she looked quite youthful, said Sabato. **FT37:42-43**

A party gathering wood in a forest on the eastern shore of Lake Victoria, about 175 miles (280km) northwest of Nairobi, spotted a young man carrying a tattered blanket. His behaviour was odd – quick monkey-like movements, sleeping while squatting, eating bananas skin and all, and communicated with grunts and animal-like gestures. He was thought to be about 26, and some of his attempts at words were close to the dialects of two local tribes. 'John', as they called him, was taken to the nearest hospital where one doctor thought that it was not impossible that he had been abandoned as a child and raised by monkeys. **FT45:44**

### MARCH 1992

This month, in the *American Meteorological Society Bulletin*, two oceanographers published a paper in which they demonstrated the meteorological conditions that would allow the Red Sea to be parted in the biblical fashion. As Exodus (14:21) describes it: "And the Lord caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided." This has always sounded so improbable that scholars sought to explain the

passage by other means; however, Doron Nof and Nathan Paldor claim that a wind of 40 knots – about 46 mph (74km/h) – blowing steadily for 10-12 hours could push enough water south to drop the level at the Gulf end of the Sea by 10ft (3m), thereby exposing large stretches of the sea bed. If they are right, there are no known records of the phenomenon happening since; and we still face the extraordinary 'coincidence' of this singular occurrence just at the moment the fleeing Israelites needed to make the crossing. **FT65:7**

A fascinating story reached us of Turkish archaeologists thrown into confusion by the discovery of a mummy of the upper half of a boy joined to the lower half of a crocodile. It was found while unwrapping some of the many unidentified mummies in the collection of the Topkapi Palace in Istanbul. The mystery boy-croc's mummification seems to be authentically Egyptian, as was the wooden sarcophagus in which it was discovered. Usually, the hybrid form of Egyptian gods was an animal head on a human body – as demonstrated by this film prop offered on eBay: (<http://bit.ly/wfjtT8>). One explanation for this unique combo is that it was commissioned by parents to commemorate the fate of their unfortunate child. **FT64:19**

### MARCH 2002

These days any employment of magic (as opposed to the stage kind) and the supernatural for our entertainment – especially in children's literature – gets quite a bashing from over-earnest Christians, lay and clergy; so it was refreshing to hear of an appeal to the Pope to make St John Bosco (1815-1888) a patron saint of magicians, conjurers and wizards. An Italian farmer's son, Bosco was an accomplished magician and juggler at an early age. As a Roman Catholic priest, he is particularly revered for tireless attempts to educate poor and homeless children; and for founding the Salesians, a religious organisation that applies the spiritual philosophy of St Francis de Sales in ministering to disadvantaged youths. This month, John Paul II was said to be considering the petition presented to him by hundreds of illusionists and wizards in their stage finery. It was organised by Fr Silvio Mantelli, a Salesian and a magician who performs under the name 'Mago Sales' (Magician Sales) and was a big Harry Potter fan. Sales is famous for wearing a clown's red nose while celebrating Mass. **FT161:8**

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