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FROM FREE ENERGY
TECHNOLOGY TO
NAZI UFOS

MYTHICAL
MONSTERS

THE WIZARDRY OF
RAY HARRYHAUSEN

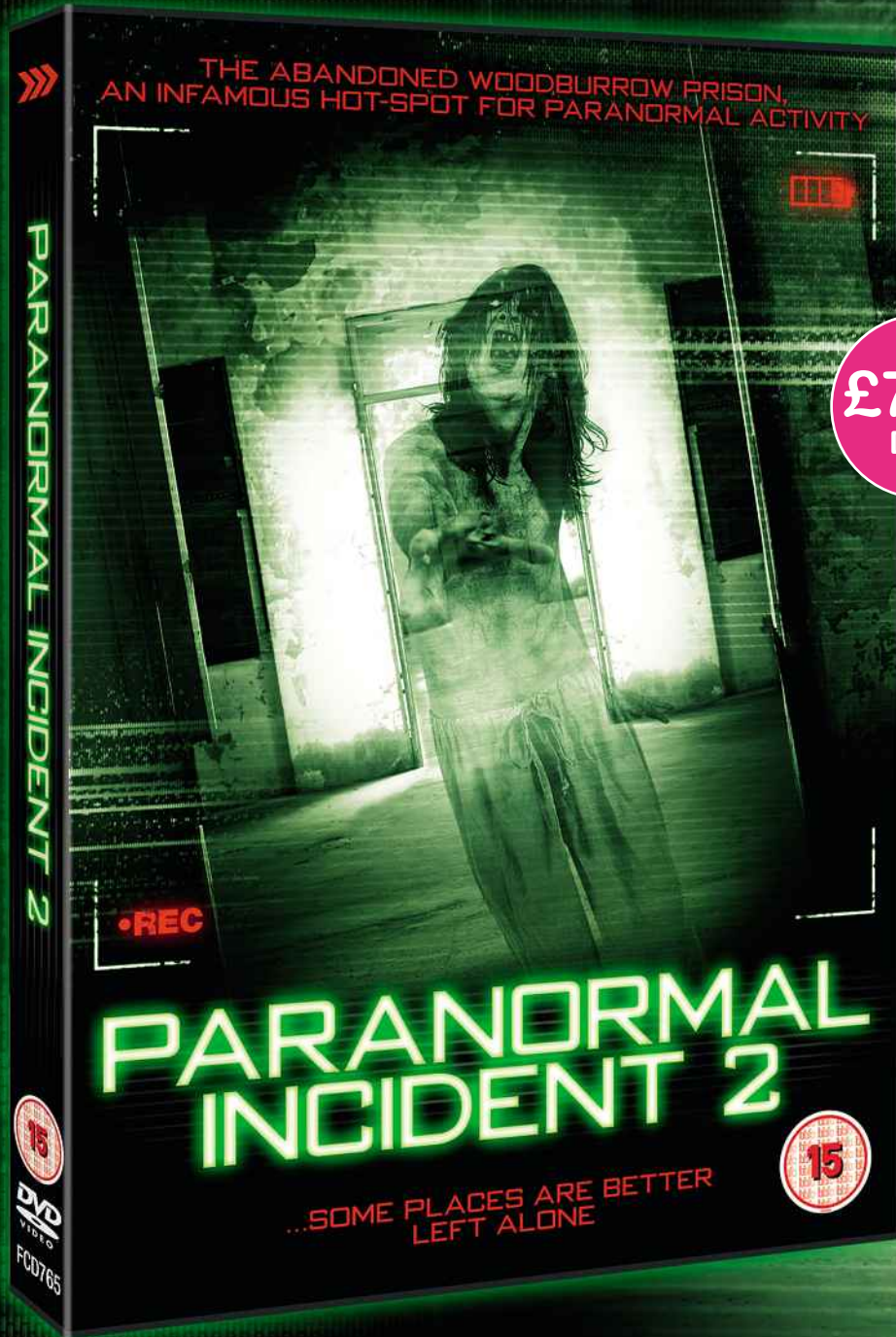
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THE WITCH OF SCRAPFAGGOT GREEN • VRIL SEEKERS • DR PHENE'S HOUSE OF MYSTERY • RAY HARRYHAUSEN REMEMBERED • THE UNCANNY VALLEY

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strange days

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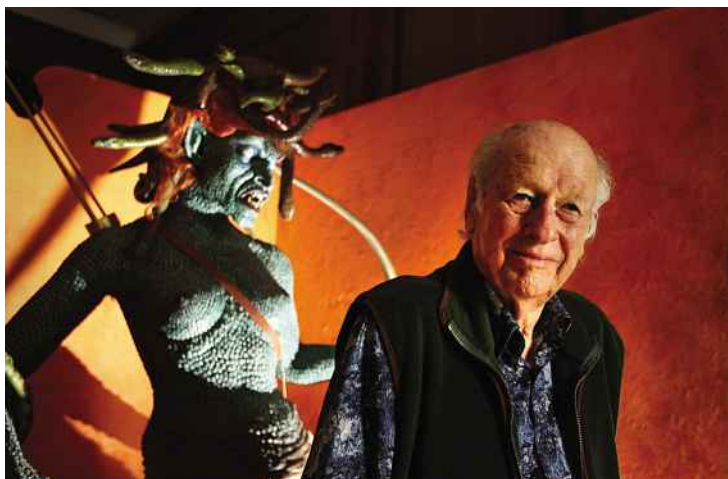
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editorial

As above, so below

CELEBRATING JOHN MICHELL

The late John Michell was a great friend, colleague and contributor to *FT* and we have watched with interest as - since his death in April 2009 - his legacy is assessed and celebrated. Nowhere was this more evident than at the recent John Michell symposium organised by his friend and collaborator Christine Rhone for the Temenos Academy and held in the quaint Art Workers' Guild building in London's Bloomsbury. This event was the second of its kind (the first took place in 2010; see *FT*267:56-57) and took the title 'Dancing with Plato & Fort: Crop Circles, Cosmology & Ancient Metrology'.

The Temenos Academy, of which JM was a Fellow, is a teaching organisation based upon 'the perennial philosophy' as exemplified in the works and principles of the world's great mystical philosophies. JM shared with them a deep appreciation of Plato, the Platonist writers and the more modern Neo-Platonists, to whom number and geometry were regarded as a divine language linking the mundane world to the airy Ideal. JM also recognised the Hermetic principle of "as above, so below" in Charles Fort's idea of the 'continuity' which, in Fort's terms, connected the 'local' to the 'universal'.

Christine Rhone opened the day with a trot through JM's writings and philosophy, taking in sacred geometry, ancient metrology, leys and astro-archæology, forteana, simulacra, UFOs and the Shakespeare authorship controversy - as well as giving a welcome account of the world's only crop-circle making competition organised in 1992 by JM and Rupert Sheldrake.

Next, John Nicholson, author, pamphleteer and one of JM's oldest friends and colleagues, presented a challenging view of JM as a trickster, visionary and fashion icon, whose views shaped the Glastonbury music festival as much as ley-hunting moots and fortean conventions. Apart from his many books and articles, and even a stint as a columnist for the *Daily Mail*, JM was perhaps "our last great correspondent" (as many in the room could personally attest). Nicholson explained JM's 'Flying Saucer Vision' as an appreciation of symbols that lead to greater spiritual and mystical understandings, and asked a startling question: "What path would John have taken if he had followed Isaac Newton instead of William Blake?" It wasn't a preposterous question, said Nicholson, because JM shared many of the interests and characteristics of Newton, including mathematics, geometry and the all-important appreciation of ancient doctrines combining natu-

ral sciences with Hermetic philosophy... not to mention the ability to work non-stop and into the night. Try as he might, Nicholson said he couldn't dissuade JM of his neglect of Newton, portrayed by Blake as a man whose "single vision" lay at the root of scientific materialism.

John Neal's talk emphasised the undying triumph of 'the great geometer' in both harmonising many of the ancient systems of measurement and in the unprecedented identification of the primary unit of measurement upon which nearly all ancient architecture and monuments are

based - the "English Foot". ("I wish it had been something more exotic," said Neal.) Later, a 10-minute video on ancient metrology - *Best Foot Forward* by Jonathan Adams - was premiered.

Another video presentation was a prime example of the creativity inspired by JM's work. John Martineau's *What is the Universe Up To?* begins with the geometry employed by crop-circle makers, and explores Hermetic art and science, from the symbolism of the City of Revelation to star patterns and life forms. And to remind us of JM's trickster side, the Dutch filmmaker Michiel Brongers showed his 10-minute clip of the American veteran of the underground press Bill Levy



"How ever did they come up with these quaint names?"

remiscing about his encounters with JM.

As JM, like Fort, was amused that his greatest fans were cranks and crackpots and abhorred any suggestion that he should become the object of a cult, we think he would have been quietly pleased by these offerings. Poet and Temenos founder Kathleen Raine once described JM as "one of the most brilliant men in England" - but this symposium reminded us that his message had the brilliance of ancient wisdom behind it.



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

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strangedays

Rubble rescues

Woman survives 17 days trapped in prayer room of collapsed building



AFP / GETTY IMAGES

A woman trapped for 17 days beneath the rubble of the collapsed eight-storey building on the outskirts of Dhaka in Bangladesh was discovered alive on the afternoon of 10 May. Rescuers about to demolish a concrete slab surrounding the small air pocket where the woman was trapped saw a pipe moving; it was Reshma Begum, 19, trying to attract attention. “Save me!” they heard her shouting. After 40 minutes she was pulled free, given saline and biscuits, and

rushed to a military hospital. She had apparently been in the basement in a Muslim prayer room, which providentially had oxygen and enough clear space for her to stand up. She spent 408 hours buried with three others whom she had to watch die. She picked through their bags to find biscuits and water to survive. “There was some dried food around me,” she said. “I ate the dried food for 15 days. The last two days I had nothing but water.”

Some of those rescued had to

have limbs amputated to free them. Moshammat Rikta, 25, was clamped for two days between a displaced pillar and a sewing machine. Rescuers had to saw off her right arm to pull her free. Reshma’s salvation came more than a week after the last person found alive. All hope of finding any more survivors had passed and heavy machinery had been brought in to clear the debris more quickly. The death toll had already reached 1,021. More than 3,000 people were believed to be working at five clothing factories

in the building, Rana Plaza in Savar district, when it collapsed on the morning of 24 April in what is now considered the worst disaster in the history of the garment industry.

The rescue brought to mind a similar scene from Haiti in 2010 when Darlene Etienne, 17, was plucked from beneath the rubble of a collapsed house 15 days after an earthquake struck outside Port-au-Prince. She survived because she was having a shower when the quake struck and thus had access to water [FT281:9]. A Haitian man, who was buried in the rubble of a market with some food, was found 27 days after the quake. On 30 July 1990, Pedrito Dy was rescued from the gym of the Hyatt Hotel in Baguio, Philippines, which had collapsed 14 days earlier in a massive quake. He had survived by drinking his urine and a few drops of rain he caught in his mouth [FT56:20].

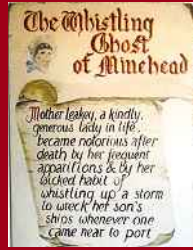
A young road worker survived 40 days’ entombment in 1994 after a landslide in China’s Sichuan province. Zeng Shua, 20, was down to 30kg (66lb). He had had no food and only a trickle of water. In 1995, Park Seung-hyung, 19, was rescued from a collapsed department store in Seoul, South Korea. She had been trapped face down for 16 days under a collapsed lift shaft. She was naked, having peeled off her clothes to survive the heat, and had had no food or water. “A monk appeared in dreams from time to time,” she told her father. “He gave me an apple and thus kept my hope alive” [FT84:7]. The record for survival under rubble is probably Naqsha Bibi, 40, who was buried for 63 days in her collapsed kitchen following an earthquake in Kashmir on 8 October 2005. She had apparently survived on rainwater and rotting food. She had lost half her body weight, but made a full recovery. *Int. Herald Tribune, D.Mirror, 11 May 2013.*



AWAY FROM IT ALL

The folk who live in crypts, woods or holes in the ground

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OLD MOTHER LEAKEY

The Whistling Ghost versus the Bugging Bishop

PAGE 22



SEEKING DISCLOSURE

Washington hosts Citizens' Hearing on UFO cover-ups

PAGE 28

Pope ousts demons?

Did Pope Francis lay on hands and perform an impromptu exorcism?

Pope Francis appears to have performed an exorcism in St Peter's Square after Pentecost Mass on 19 May. Smiling broadly, he initially shook the hand of a wheelchair-bound man, but his expression changed dramatically when Father Juan Rivas from the Legionaries of Christ, a deeply conservative order, leaned in close and spoke a few words to him. With a more serious expression, the Argentine pontiff placed both hands on the man's head for 15 seconds and seemed to be intoning an intense prayer. The pilgrim then convulsed briefly and emitted a long sigh. He body went limp and his mouth



dropped open. "Exorcists who have seen the footage have no doubt that this was a prayer of liberation from evil, an actual exorcism," said a spokesman for TV2000, a television channel owned by the Italian Episcopal Conference.

The Vatican downplayed the incident, although it used

ambiguous language that did not altogether deny that the Pope had tried to rid the man of evil. Its spokesman, Father Federico Lombardi, said: "The Holy Father had no intention of performing an exorcism but simply prayed for a suffering person who was presented to him." Pope Francis has made it clear since his election that he believes the Devil, whom he refers to as "the Enemy" and "the Prince of this World", is a real force and needs to be fought constantly.

Father Gabriel Amorth, 88, head of the International Association of Exorcists – who claims to have personally

carried out 50,000 exorcisms and sent 160,000 demons back to Hell – said the person in the wheelchair was a 43-year-old married man from Mexico called Angelo "who was possessed by four demons". He added that now more than ever there was a need for exorcists to combat people possessed by "sorcerers" and "Satanists", and claimed John Paul II had carried out many exorcisms. He certainly carried out one, on 27 March 1982, according to the published memoir of Cardinal Jacques Martin, former head of the papal household. Benedict XVI performed no exorcisms, instead leaving it to bishops and priests.

The Legion of Christ is facing an uncertain future after its Mexican founder, Father Marcial Maciel (1920-88), was revealed as a serial sex abuser of youngsters, including two of the children he fathered. *D.Telegraph, Independent, 22+23 May 2013.*

EXTRA! EXTRA!

FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

Trains 'will be back on track tomorrow'

Hull Daily Mail, 7 Nov 2012.

Bacon calls for pork talk

Hull Daily Mail, 1 Feb 2013.

Harp and flute combine

Hull Daily Mail, 1 Feb 2013.

Lions thank shop staff

Hull Daily Mail, 1 Feb 2013.

Schoolgirl mugged for her left sock

D.Telegraph, 15 Dec 2012.

Botanists on trail of dragon's blood

Sunday Telegraph, 23 Dec 2012.

Kiwis finger warlord

Canberra Times, 27 Nov 2012.

Plan for bikes to clear up dog mess

Wolverhampton Express & Star, 26 Dec 2012.

Giant fish hit Britain

Sun, 27 Dec 2012.



A griffin, a unicorn and other fabulous creatures on display

CRYPTIDS IN THE MUSEUM

Cryptozoology isn't often the subject for a major exhibition at a mainstream public museum, so we're happy to see that the American Natural History Museum's 'Mythic Creatures' is on at the Frazier History Museum in Louisville, Kentucky. Running until the end of September, it features spectacular large-scale models of Bigfoot, Nessie and various monsters and fabulous beasts, such as dragons, mermaids and unicorns. It explores the origins and truth behind the legends and reports, how they have helped shape modern society, and how they have sparked the human imagination in a multitude of different ways. www.wdrb.com/story/22219095/new-exhibit-at-frazier-history-museum-looks-at-mythic-creatures.

IMAGES © D FINNIN/AMNH

A reconstruction of *Gigantopithecus*, seen by some as the ancestor of manimals such as bigfoot



The mermaid Lasirén on a Vodou banner from Haiti

The giant *Aepyornis* once lived on the island of Madagascar. Now extinct, it was the largest bird ever to have lived.



A dwarf elephant skull that may have fuelled the myth of the Cyclops

A kraken with 12-foot-long tentacles appears to rise out of the floor of the exhibition



SIDELINES...

GHOST GUSTERS

Romanian lawyer Madalin Ciculescu, 34, sued four priests and an Orthodox bishop for failing to exorcise flatulent demons that he claimed were ruining his business. "I still see all sorts of demons in the form of animals – usually crows," he said. "They make foul smells that give me headaches." He was taking his claim to EU judges after losing his case in Pitesti, Romania. *Sunday Sun*, 7 April 2013.

DANGEROUS BEAUTY

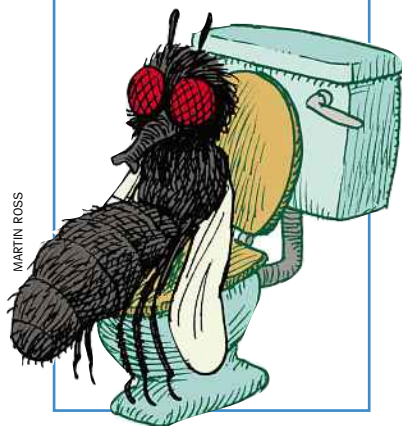
Three men from the United Arab Emirates were deported from Saudi Arabia amid concerns they were "too handsome". Religious police ejected the trio from the Jenadrivah Heritage and Culture Festival in Riyadh for being "too irresistible to women". (Sydney) *D.Telegraph*, 19 April 2013.

DANGEROUS DISH

Owen Durray, 32, from Kent, on holiday in Poland, was perusing the menu at Bee Jays in Poznan when he noticed "cervical cancer with chips, served on beetroot carpaccio". "This was a translation error," said a spokesman for the restaurant. "It should have said crayfish." *Sun*, 4 May 2013.

FLIES TAKE NOTE

A draft law in China stipulates than no more than one fly per cubic metre will be allowed in lavatories within buildings, while in free-standing public loos, three flies per cubic metre will be permitted. *MX News*, 25 Feb 2013.



MARTIN ROSS

Pontfadog Oak felled

The oldest oak in Wales finally succumbs to high winds



COED CADW (THE WOODLAND TRUST)

The Pontfadog Oak, which had been growing in Chirk, near Wrexham in Mid Wales, since at least AD 802, was felled by 55mph (88km/h) winds on the night of 17 April. Dianne Coakley-Williams, the landowner, heard it fall with an "almighty crash and bang". Its massive, hollow bole had crushed a metal gate as it had fallen and the tips of its branches, which had been about to burst into leaf, were resting lightly on a slate roof. This sessile oak (*Quercus petraea*) was the oldest oak in Wales, the third largest in Britain and one of the oldest in Europe. No one knew quite how old it was because it had lost its heartwood, but Michael Lear, a tree expert with the National Trust, said in 1996: "Using Forestry Commission techniques, the youngest it can be is 1,181 years, the oldest 1,628 years. I cannot find a record of an oak tree of any of the 500 species internationally which has a greater girth anywhere in the world." Last year

conservationists had compiled an action plan to preserve it, but the £5,700 funding could not be found.

Prince Owain Gwynedd rallied his army beneath its branches in 1157, before defeating Henry II at the battle of Crogen, a mere two miles (3.2km) away. Legend has it that the tree was spared when Henry ordered the surrounding Ceiriog Woods to



be felled in 1165. The Williams family archive, which goes back five generations, reports that a missing bull had once spent two days inside the hollow trunk, which was recently found to be 42ft 5in (13m) in circumference (although it was over 53ft/16m in 1881). Two golden chisels were said to have been hidden in it. In 1880, six men sat around a table inside it. It was used by sheep both as a shelter and somewhere to die; children used to play in it; Victorians posed for photographs by it; and generations carved their initials in it.

"It was always a working tree, pollarded or pruned for its wood," said Moray Simpson, Wrexham's tree officer. "It was part of the community. People built houses from it, cooked from it. That's why it lived so long. It always had a role." It's possible that it might be cloned after some of its twigs and buds were taken to try and create a genetic match. *D.Mail*, *D.Telegraph*, 20 April; *Observer*, 28 April; *BBC News*, 29 April 2013.

Multiple organs galore

Recent cases of people with an embarrassment of kidneys



CATERS NEWS AGENCY

ABOVE: At least Jessica Curphey (left), with her best friend Steph Moorghen, doesn't get hangovers as badly as her mates...

Jessica Curphey, 20, a student at Surrey's University of Creative Arts, developed an excruciating pain in her right side. Her best friend took her to St Helier Hospital in Epsom, where she discovered she had been born with four kidneys. When surgeons removed what they thought was a 6.5in (17cm) cyst in her right kidney, they found it was a damaged kidney, which contained 2,000ml of infected fluid because it was unable to drain. They also found a fourth (healthy) kidney.

"I suppose it's weird not knowing what's going on inside your body until something happens like with me," said Ms Curphey, originally from Manchester. "On the upside, I don't get as bad hangovers as my friends, which is perhaps down to my extra kidneys." Robyn Webber, a consultant urological surgeon, said: "Having three kidneys on a single side of the body is exceptionally rare. There are perhaps fewer than 100 cases described in textbooks and papers." *D.Telegraph*, 18 May; *Metro*, 20 May 2013.

Angel Burton suffered painful kidney infections since birth. She was diagnosed with bilateral reflux, which meant that the valves to her bladder weren't working properly and urine was getting into her kidneys, causing infections. In October 2007, when she was five, surgeons at Sheffield Children's Hospital decided they had to give her artificial valves; but after cutting her open, they found two fully formed kidneys growing on top of her old ones. The new organs had taken over the role of the others – Angel, who at the time of the news reports was aged eight and fighting fit, had cured herself.

Her mother Claire, 32, from Louth, Lincolnshire, said: "When I told Angel what they'd found she said, 'God gave me the healthy kidneys and forgot to take the old ones away.'" Consultant urologist Prasad Godbole, who operated on Angel, said that the duplex kidneys (as they are called) were totally independent each with a separate ureter, draining urine to the bladder. "We are stunned that these have never been picked up

on a scan," he said. "She's been having extensive scanning for five years and they've never shown up." Duplex kidneys occur in approximately one per cent of the population, but are rarely fully formed. "Duplex kidney means a kidney made up of two extra units joined together," explained the surgeon. "It rarely comes to light." *D.Mail*, Sun, 18 May 2010.

Carl Jones was diagnosed with Type-1 diabetes as a child, and spent hundreds of hours on a dialysis machine before a kidney and pancreas transplant in 2004; four years later, he had a second round of transplants when the replacements stopped working. Each time, surgeons left all the organs in place to help his body cope with the trauma. Now Mr Jones, 32, a van driver from Carmarthen, South Wales, is living a healthy life with four kidneys and three pancreases. "I've got enough organs for a small family," he said. "The only bad thing is it makes it hard for me to lose weight with all that in front of my stomach." *D.Express*, 22 Mar 2013.

SIDELINES...

RAISING DAD

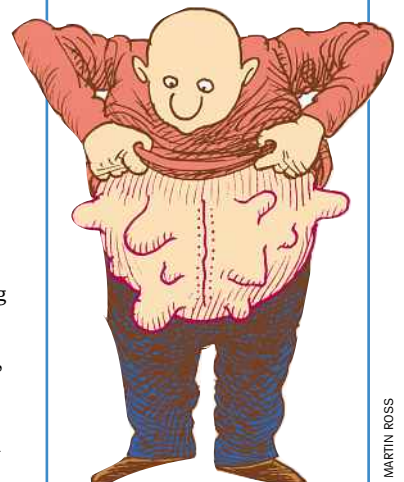
Two brothers, aged 38 and 48, dug up the coffin of their 92-year-old father in the hope of resurrecting him. They were arrested after police responded to a call of a van removing a coffin from a mausoleum at Gethsemane Cemetery in Detroit, Michigan. *MX News* (Sydney), 17 Jan 2013.

WHALE IN THAMES

A dead whale found in the Thames Estuary on 24 March prompted navigation warnings and was towed to Sheerness Docks for examination. A passing tug saw the young female humpback measuring about 36ft (11m) off the Isle of Sheppey. There were no obvious signs as to how it died. Adults can grow to around 60ft (18m). A northern bottlenose whale swam up the Thames to central London in 2006, but died from dehydration and kidney failure. *Metro*, *D.Telegraph*, 25 Mar 2013.

SURGICAL COCK-UP

Dirk Schroeder, 77, was in agony 24 hours after routine prostate surgery in 2009. An X-ray revealed 16 items of medical equipment inside him, including a needle, a 6in (15cm) roll of bandage, a compress, several swabs and a fragment of surgical mask. The German ex-banker died in 2012 and his family are seeking €80,000 in damages from the Henriettenstift hospital in Hannover. *D.Mail*, 15 Jan; *MX News* (Sydney), 16 Jan 2013.



MARTIN ROSS

SIDELINES...

UNHOLY CRISPS

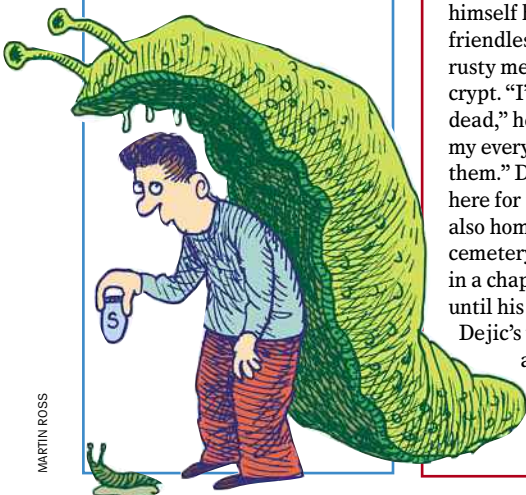
Pret à Manger removed its 'Virgin Mary' crisps from sale after complaints from Christian groups. The sandwich shop chain introduced the new brand of spicy tomato crisps, playing on the name of the non-alcoholic version of a Bloody Mary cocktail. *BBC News*, 4 Feb 2013.

HIS NUMBER'S UP

When Tennessee maintenance worker Walter Slonopas, 52, saw his income tax form stamped with the number 666, he quit his job to avoid condemning his soul to Hell. A spokesman for his employer, Contech Casting LLC, said the number merely meant that the form was the 666th mailed out, and that the firm was willing to send him a new tax form, but Slonopas's cryptic comment was: "God is worth more than money". *Metro*, 8 Feb; *D.Telegraph*, 9 Feb 2013.

SLIMY INTRUDER

Millions of killer slugs that grow up to 5in (13cm) are poised to invade UK gardens. The species, *Arion vulgaris*, was first identified in East Anglia late last year, and has been found eating dead mice, dog turds and each other. It is believed to have arrived with imports of salad leaves from Spain. A similar species feasts on road kill in Scandinavia, creating so much slime that it has become a road hazard. *D.Mail*, *D.Telegraph*, 10 Jan 2013.



MARTIN ROSS

Away from it all

THE SERBIANS WHO LIVE IN A CEMETERY, AND OTHERS WHO HAVE DROPPED BELOW THE RADAR



AFP / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: Homeless Bratislav Jovanovic has lived in a derelict tomb in Serbia ever since his house burned down in a fire.

Bratislav Jovanovic, 43, and his friend Aleksandar Dejic, 53, are the only living tenants of a derelict cemetery in the southern Serbian city of Nis, once known for its intricately carved tombstones, which have long since vanished. "I have never stolen anything," said Jovanovic. "I did not even desecrate the grave I live in. It was already open." He has lived in the grave for more than a decade. When his father died in a fire that also destroyed his house, Jovanovic found himself homeless, jobless and friendless. He has covered up the rusty metal coffins in his freezing crypt. "I'm not afraid of the dead," he said, "I just don't want my every glance to shift towards them." Dejic has been living here for two decades. His father, also homeless, bought him to the cemetery and they lived together in a chapel-like vault built in 1929, until his father fell ill and died.

Dejic's worldly possessions are a few jars filled with a dark liquid, scraps of leftover food and some old clothes. Neither man

"I did not even desecrate the grave I live in. It was open"

receives welfare, as (cruelly) they are regarded as having no fixed abode – and cannot get identity cards. *Irish Examiner*, 4 Feb 2013.

- Christopher Knight, 47, was arrested with a backpack full of stolen food when he tripped a motion-sensor alarm at Pine Tee Camp, a holiday park for people with special needs, situated near the small town of Rome in the far north-eastern state of Maine. (Game warden Sergeant Terry Hughes, who had been trying to nab Knight for years, had set up the surveillance alarm.) On 9 April, authorities found the campsite where they believe Knight, known as the North Pond Hermit in local lore, lived for the last 27 years. The living

quarters included a tent covered by tarpaulins suspended between trees, a bed, propane cooking stoves and a battery-run radio. Knight also had a makeshift shower, was clean-shaven and had his hair cut short. He said that the last verbal contact he had with another person was during the 1990s. "He passed somebody on a trail and just exchanged a common greeting of hello and that was the only conversation or human contact he's had since he went into the woods in 1986," said state trooper Diane Vance. He was so well known to some summer cottage owners that they left food out for him so he wouldn't break in during the colder months – although others believed he was just a mythical figure.

Since vanishing from his Maine home for no apparent reason and setting up camp when he was about 19, Knight sustained himself on food stolen from dozens of cottages. He was thought to have been responsible for more than 1,000 burglaries. He would meditate on an upturned bucket while staring at the night

sky, and knew all the eagles that nested nearby. Despite Maine's harsh winters, during which temperatures sometimes struggle to get above -12.2C (10F) for a week at a time, Knight stayed at his encampment and avoided making campfires so he wouldn't be detected, and he used propane he had nicked only for cooking. To stay warm he would bundle himself in multiple sleeping bags.

At the time of the reports, Knight was being held at Kennebec County Jail on \$5,000 bail for burglary and theft. No relatives had been traced. In the days following his arrest, a woman called the jail to offer him a proposal of marriage, while a stranger offered to pay his bail. These unsolicited approaches prompted the authorities to increase his bond to \$250,000 amid fears he could be exploited. *Guardian, Irish Times, 11 April; [AP] Los Angeles Times, D.Telegraph, 12 April 2013.*

- Last year, an elderly man was found living in a hole on Blackheath Common in south-east London, which had been his home for four years. The human mole, of Middle Eastern appearance, had been spotted only on rare occasions. He covered his den



ABOVE: Brenda Heist before she walked away from her life and 11 years later

with straw and a tarpaulin, so that even people working at a nearby tea hut saw little sign of him. Lewisham Council said he had refused all offers of conventional accommodation. FT wonders if he is still there. *Metro, 22 Mar 2012.*

- After Brenda Heist dropped off her two children at school in Lititz, Pennsylvania, in 2002, she vanished for 11 years. She was going through an amicable divorce at the time, but had been turned down for housing assistance, and sat crying in a park when three homeless people – two women and a man – befriended her and invited her to join them on a month-long hitchhiking journey to

south Florida. Despite a thorough investigation lasting months by state and federal police, no sign of the missing woman was found. She was living under bridges, surviving on scraps of food discarded by restaurants and staying off the radar by panhandling. Her husband collected on a life insurance policy after declaring her legally dead, and has remarried. Mrs Heist, now aged 54 and with health problems, turned herself in to police in Florida at the beginning of May, mistakenly believing there was a warrant for her arrest in another district of the state. *D.Telegraph, 3 May; (Sydney) D.Telegraph, 4 May 2013.*



LEFT: Knight, the North Pond Hermit ABOVE: The camp where he has lived since he was 19.

SIDELINES...

MACABRE GIFTS

Gift-wrapped human skulls have been found on the streets of Sao Paulo, Brazil. The first, in cherry-red wrapping, was found in a planter near an apartment building on 20 February. Since then, seven others were found near Mormon temples or consulates, including those for Russia, the Czech Republic and South Africa. Security cameras captured images of a woman in an ankle-length skirt leaving the skulls, which seem old, with traces of earth. *[AP] 7 Mar 2013.*

DISHING THE DIRT

A Tokyo restaurant has started serving up a unique meal of earth, taken from the mountains and tested. "Soil Surprise" contains a dirt-covered potato ball with a truffle centre. *MX News (Sydney), 11 Feb 2013*

CINEMA VERITÉ

A video apparently made by North Korea – which surfaced on Chinese website Ifeng – claims US citizens live off snow and have eaten the country's entire population of birds. It shows streets piled with body bags and filled with homeless drug addicts. Most Americans are forced to live in tents and buy guns to kill each other, especially children. North Koreans are shown doling out cakes and blankets. *MX News (Sydney), 14 Mar 2013.*

SALTY INVASION

Native roadside plants in the UK are being wiped out by winter gritting, and verges taken over by Danish scurvy grass (a white-flowered member of the cabbage family), which is spreading quickly due to its high tolerance of the salt used in road grit. It is often spread from its coastal and marsh habitats in the tyre treads of cars. *D.Telegraph, 26 Jan 2013.*

HELLO, IS THAT ADOLF?

Hitler's phone number – Berlin 11 6191 – appeared in *Who's Who* until 1945. *D.Telegraph, 23 Mar 2013.*



SIDELINES...

HOW COOL IS THAT?

The village of Oymyakon in far eastern Russia (pop: 500) is the coldest permanently inhabited settlement in the world, with an average January temperature of -50°C (-58°F); -71.2°C (-96.2°F) has been recorded. Common problems include ink freezing and glasses freezing to faces. People leave their cars running all day for fear of not being able to restart them. To bury bodies, the ground must first be thawed with a bonfire for up to three days. *MX News (Sydney)*, 23 Jan 2013.

THE HEAT OF PASSION

Henry, a male tortoise, awoke from hibernation on 2 March and knocked over a heater as he pursued his mate, Alice, setting fire to wood shavings. The blaze destroyed the conservatory of Alf and Gayner Clayton from Thornaby, Stockton-on-Tees, who had to run out of the house to escape the flames. The tortoises were found dead afterwards. The couple had tried to save them, but the blaze was too fierce. Mr Clayton said: "Henry always was a bit of a one." *Middlesbrough Eve. Gazette*, 6 Mar 2013.

TAKING THE PISS

Herbal healers have been swamped by demand for tincture of distilled heifer urine, said to cure everything from kidney diseases to piles and high cholesterol. "It tastes slightly salty but is very light and has been produced for centuries," said Santhosh Kumar, who helps make the potion in Pajeer, south India. *Metro*, 26 Feb 2013.

CARDIFF MENACED

A giant, asbestos-infected tarantula was feared to be on the loose in Cardiff after a team of asbestos-removal experts found its recently shed skin in an abandoned 19th century house in the Roath area on 19 March. Experts believed it could have doubled its size to 7in (18cm), with its exposure to asbestos making it potentially even more dangerous. *Metro*, 22 Mar 2013.

STONED SMOKERS



A chunk of rock can smoke a cigarette in five minutes, its proud owner claims. Luo Yuanshui found the head-shaped rock in the mountains of southeast China and said his first instinct was to place a cigarette in what looked like a mouth. To his amazement, it inhaled the smoke. He now shows the 2.2kg (4.9lb) marvel to visitors, with an ashtray close by so it can indulge its vice. *MX News (Sydney)*, 22 Feb 2013.

• During the Indian Mutiny, Captain Frederick Wale took command of the First Sikh Lancers and served in the siege and capture of Lucknow, during which he was fatally shot at the age of 36. Kaptan Shah Baba, as he was known to his Sikh soldiers, has now been made a god, and believers tend his grave in Musa Bagh cemetery. One devotee said: "We leave him food and cigarettes as tribute. The cigarettes glow like

somebody is inhaling them. We know Shah Baba smoked, so there can only be one answer – he is smoking the cigarettes."

The claims have baffled cemetery officials. One said: "It is rare for people to pray to a foreigner, especially someone British from that period in our history, but people know what they see and they believe it. So who is to say it's wrong?" *Sunday Express*, 17 Mar 2013.

BRIAN DE PALMA'S CLASSIC ARRIVES IN ITS ORIGINAL UN-CUT FORM FOR THE FIRST TIME IN THE UK ON



DRESSED TO KILL



DVD TALK

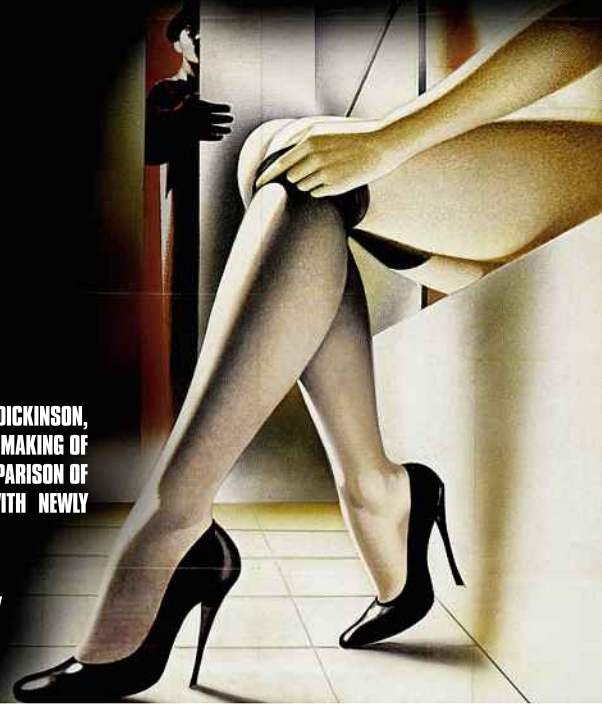


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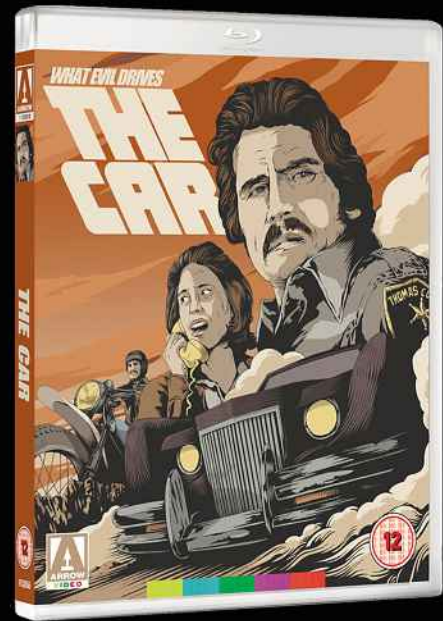


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MAZED AND CONFUSED

Millennia-old petroglyphs of what Virgil called the Game of Troy have been found in Spanish caves. **DAVID HAMBLING** looks at the history of labyrinths since Neolithic times

Labyrinths confuse and bewilder those who wander into them. They start simply, but their baffling nature soon reveals itself. The same applies to the history of labyrinths, which has led archaeologists through a series of sharp reversals and up blind alleys.

Labyrinths and mazes are common throughout Europe, from Ireland to Greece and from Italy to Scandinavia. A distinction is sometimes, but not always, made between a maze, with its many false turns, and a labyrinth, with only one path winding its way through. Some are cut out of rock or turf; others are made from hedges, or built as underground structures.

We know that they were used in rituals, with dancers or players moving along a pattern laid out on the ground, an activity documented by Virgil in the *Aeneid* in the first century BC. It has been suggested that the Nazca lines in Peru were used for similar ritual processions. Virgil calls this the 'Game of Troy' in which the participants, on horseback or on foot, follow the convolutions of a labyrinth. The name comes from the legend that the city of Troy had defences that forced attackers down an intricately winding route between the walls before they could enter.

In England, turf mazes were known as Troy Towns, and were used for similar "games of Troy". At least eight ancient examples still survive, including one on St Agnes in the Scillies and one near Dalby in North Yorkshire. There are many rock and boulder labyrinths in Scandinavia whose names (Trojaborg, Tröborg and others) also translate as "Troy Town".

There are also many rock carvings or petroglyphs with a labyrinth pattern, especially in Spain. These patterns take some care to construct, as something like the Classical Seven Circuit Labyrinth can only be made by following a specific set of steps and by starting with the right "seed" pattern.¹



We know that labyrinths were used in rituals, with dancers moving along a pattern laid out on the ground

The technique of laying out labyrinths seems to have been passed down through the generations for thousands of years, and may have had esoteric significance. However, it seems to have been used simply as a doodle in later times.

Dating labyrinths has turned out to be more difficult than expected. There is no good way of establishing the age of a turf maze, and the dates of stone labyrinths have had to be revised. The labyrinth pattern on the Hollywood Stone in County Wicklow was once thought to date from 2000 BC, but is now considered to date from AD 500 or later. The Rocky Valley carvings in Cornwall, once thought to be Bronze Age, turned out to be from the 18th century. A rock tomb at

Luzzanas, on Sardinia, includes a carving that was thought to be one of the oldest labyrinth patterns, but is now considered to be a later Roman addition.²

New techniques are now becoming available for dating structures carved into rock. These include lichenometry, measuring how lichen has grown over a rock feature. Lichenometry has been used to date some of the dozens of labyrinths around the Scandinavian coastline. These are sometimes called trollcirklar (troll circles) from their traditional role as traps for evil spirits: you walked the labyrinth before going on a fishing expedition, and the malevolent forces following you were caught in the maze while you escaped. Others suggest that walking the maze brought luck or calmed the winds. In the last decade, lichenometry showed that some of the Scandinavian labyrinths were not thousands of years old as expected, but dated from the 13th to the early 20th century – though a few of them may be much older.³

Another recent technique based on historical sea levels dates a stone labyrinth at Umba on the Russian coast to the first century AD.⁴

Of course the original idea of the labyrinth comes from Greek mythology. King Minos, ruler of Knossos, had it constructed as a lair for the Minotaur, a carnivorous half-man, half-bull, which he believed to be his son. (An understandable mistake: Minos's father Zeus adopted the form of a bull to abduct his mother Europa). The archaeological site at Knossos is the obvious place for a labyrinth, and early researchers strained to fit findings to myth. They did at least discover frescoes with labyrinthine designs dating back before 1400 BC.⁵ Similar frescoes have been found at sites colonised by the Minoans. This would appear to give the Minoans precedence as inventors of the labyrinth.

However, there has been a reappraisal of some Spanish cave petroglyphs, such as those at Chan do Lagoa in Galicia. An analysis of the distinctive tools and weapons on rock art which overlays the petroglyphs, and which can be dated by comparison to actual artefacts (such as spearheads of a particular design), has led to them being assigned to a much earlier date than originally thought. The current estimate pushes the Spanish labyrinths back to the period of between about 2500 BC and 1800 BC.⁶ The vagueness of this estimate shows how approximate the dating is at this stage, so the game is still open. And traces of other Neolithic labyrinths continue to be found.

We don't know exactly why the labyrinths were made. In Scandinavia, walking one correctly was supposed to attract the favourable powers or confound evil ones, and they were later adopted by the Christian church for symbolic pilgrimages.

We are at least a little closer to finding out when and where the cult of labyrinths began – unless there is another twist.

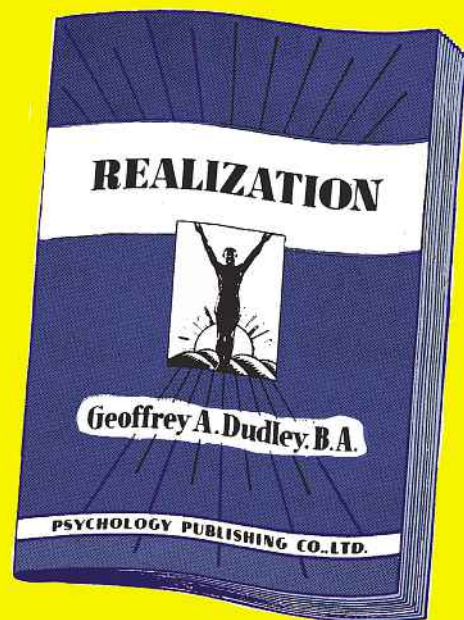
NOTES

- [1 http://labyrinthociety.org/make-a-labyrinth](http://labyrinthociety.org/make-a-labyrinth)
- [2 www.labyrinthos.net/firstlabs.html](http://www.labyrinthos.net/firstlabs.html)
- [3 www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00293652.1990.9965501#.UZ99zBVwaid](http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00293652.1990.9965501#.UZ99zBVwaid)
- [4 www.vestnik.mstu.edu.ru/v15_2_n48/articles/349_356_kolka.pdf](http://www.vestnik.mstu.edu.ru/v15_2_n48/articles/349_356_kolka.pdf)
- [5 http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayAbstract?fromPage=online&aid=8785116](http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayAbstract?fromPage=online&aid=8785116)
- [6 www.labyrinthos.net/news.html](http://www.labyrinthos.net/news.html)

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LEGENDS COME TO LIFE

Ferrets on steroids sold as poodles, Good Samaritans killed and sewer gators in NYC



THE ARGENTINIAN PET

An unnamed pensioner from Catamarca in Argentina thought he had bought a pair of toy poodle pups at the La Salada outdoor market in Buenos Aires for a bargain price of \$150 each. Later, suspecting he had bought what Argentines call 'Brazilian rats', he took the two animals to his local veterinarian to be vaccinated and discovered they were actually fluffed-up ferrets on steroids. Following an investigation, the local press realised that the man was not alone; a woman had been told that she was buying a Chihuahua, but ended up with a ferret. Neither victim had filed complaints.

The 'toy' poodle is the smallest of the three varieties of the dog – the others being 'standard' and 'miniature'. Typically, toy poodle puppies cost upwards of £500 while a ferret will usually set someone back around £50. Toy poodles typically grow to around 10in (25cm) tall and weigh around 9lb (4kg). They have been known to live as long as 20 years. Ferrets are around 20in (51cm) in length – including a 5in (13cm) tail. They weigh around 3lb (1.4kg) and have a lifespan of seven to 10 years. When happy, ferrets may perform a routine known as the weasel war dance – characterised by a series of hops and frenzied attempts to bump into things. This is often accompanied by a soft clucking

The toy poodles were fluffed-up ferrets on steroids

noise called dooking. When upset, ferrets make a hissing noise. *dailymail.co.uk*, 7 April; *Independent*, 8 April 2013.

The sale of ferrets as dogs at La Salada market has long been considered an urban legend in Argentina. It's a version of *The Mexican Pet*, the title of a 1986 book of contemporary folklore by Jan Harold Brunvand. He first heard the story in 1983, in Utah and several other US states. The supposed 'dog', found or acquired in Mexico and often specifically said to be a Chihuahua or Mexican Hairless, turns out to be a sewer rat, sometimes with rabies.

THE GOOD SAMARITAN

In October 2012, Andrew Connan, 78, was waiting for a bus in Bromley, Kent, at about midnight when he saw a car driving towards him erratically and without headlights. The Good Samaritan waved to alert the motorist and the vehicle stopped sharply. Christopher Graney and his passenger, Samantha Fenton,

both 19, got out and pushed the pensioner to the ground before repeatedly kicking and punching him until his face was unrecognisable. In April the pair were sentenced at Croydon Crown Court to two and a half years each for assault. Two months earlier, an inquest heard how Dr Anthony Owen was killed by a single punch outside his home in Cheshire when he tried to remonstrate with a 16-year-old riding without lights on his bicycle. According to the report in the *Daily Telegraph*, the attack on Mr Connan "led to concerns that it could be a part of a sinister new trend among teenage gang members. A similar craze was reported recently in the United States where gangs would demand that new members drive with their headlights out and then attack the first person who tried to warn them."

This sounds like Chinese whispers of an urban legend first noted in a Memphis newspaper in August 1993 (FT77:14), about a new initiation rite in which prospective gang members drive around with their headlights off. Kindly motorists flash their high beams to alert the drivers to put on their lights, after which they are followed and killed. Exit one motorist, enter one gang member. In the following weeks, the legend spread right across the US. Memos warning employees were circulated in corporations and

posted in public buildings. Police tried desperately to calm public fears. As far as we can ascertain, no actual gang killing triggered by a headlight warning has ever been reported. *D.Telegraph*, 18 Mar; *D.Mail*, 10 April 2013.

THE NY SEWER GATORS

New York's most enduring urban legend began with a *New York Times* story on 10 February 1935 about an event in Harlem. The headline claimed: "Alligator Found In Uptown Sewer". A group of teenagers from East 123rd Street, led by Salvatore Condulucci, 16, was shovelling fresh snow into a manhole when they spotted the beast and hoisted it up with a clothesline before bashing it to death with their shovels. The 7ft (2m) alligator was sickly and exhausted. The locals at the time speculated that it had fallen off a boat from the Florida Everglades, chugging along the nearby Harlem River, and had swum up a storm conduit. There were other similar reports in that decade. In 1932 two boys found a dead 3ft (90cm) croc – later identified as an escaped pet – and claimed the Bronx River was 'swarming' with them. In March 1935, a 3ft gator was caught alive in North Yonkers, while a 6ft (1.8m) gator was found dead beside the Grass Sprain reservoir. In 1937 a barge captain on the East River captured a 4ft (1.2m) specimen; five days later a commuter bagged a two-footer at the Brooklyn Museum subway station. A mythical backstory soon emerged: the gators were originally tiny critters found in Florida by rich Manhattanites on holiday and brought back as pets for their children. When they grew inconveniently large they were flushed down the lavatory. The legend had legs, jumping from children's book to horror film, from Thomas Pynchon's first novel *V* (1963) to a bronze sculpture in a 14th Street and Eighth Avenue subway station of a happy gator clambering out of a manhole to chomp on a baby.

A^Z ALIEN ZOO

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

The earliest published reference to this scenario can be found in Robert Daley's *The World Beneath the City* (1959). Daley's source was retired sewer superintendent Teddy May, who claimed that during the 1930s he personally investigated workers' reports of subterranean saurians and saw a colony of them with his own eyes. He said he ordered the gators exterminated and in a few months they were all gone – or so he thought. However, in 1938 five gators were caught in New Rochelle, NY, and sightings of others in New York City sewers were reported in 1948 and again in 1966. Herpetologists discount the very idea of gators thriving in the New York City sewer system. They point out it's cold down there most of the time – freezing during the winter – and gators require a warm environment to survive, let alone reproduce. If the cold didn't kill them, the polluted sewer water would.

Nevertheless, wayward gators, assumed to be escaped or abandoned pets, continue to turn up in the Big Apple. Municipal officials found a small gator in the Kensico reservoir in August 1982; it was taken to the Bronx Zoo. In June 2001 a caiman was spotted and eventually captured in Central Park, and in November 2006 another caiman, 2ft (60cm) long, was captured outside an apartment building in Brooklyn. Then on 22 August 2010, novelist Joyce Hackett was driving back to her home in Manhattan from JFK airport in torrential rain when she noticed a crowd of about 30 people in Queens. They were gathered around a 2ft gator, which was hiding under a parked car. Storm drains and gutters all over the neighbourhood were flooded from the downpour. "As we waited for pest control to turn up," she wrote, "everybody seemed strangely cheered by the appearance of a bad-ass reptile that could bite them." *Loren Coleman* in *Contemporary Legend – A Reader* (Ed Gillian Bennett & Paul Smith, Garland, 1996); *Lincolnshire Echo*, 12 Oct 2005; *NY Post*, 10 Feb, *Guardian*, 13 Aug 1982, 25 Aug 2010.



TRICIA WATKINSON / NEWSPIX / REX FEATURES

MIDAS MARSUPIALS

Willy Wonka had his much sought-after Golden Tickets, but Cleland Wildlife Park in Adelaide, South Australia, has something even rarer – golden wombats! The southern hairy-nosed wombat *Lasiorhinus latifrons* normally has black, brown, or grey fur, but Icy and Polar both sport an astonishingly beautiful, bright golden pelage, as if touched by King Midas.

These two bear-like but herbivorous marsupials are three years old, arriving at the park after being found in the wild six months apart and raised in a rescue centre. Their golden coloration, a phenomenon known as flavism, is the result of a mutant gene, but although aesthetically exquisite, it makes such wombats very visible in the wild and therefore highly vulnerable to predators. Consequently, very few specimens ever survive, and there is only one other golden wombat in captivity. So Icy and Polar (though surely Goldie and Sunny might be more apt names?) are extremely special and highly prized by the park personnel, who hope that they will breed when older (despite their shared golden hue, they are not related to one another). *dailymail.co.uk*, 2 May 2013.

ANY NEWS OF THE NIGHT JAGUAR?

A very obscure but fascinating (and reputedly extremely formidable) mystery cat that I have only recently learnt about (in Chad Arment's *BioFortean Review* series) is the Mexican renegrón, also dubbed the carraguar or night jaguar. Allegedly native to Colima, it is said to resemble a very large all-black jaguar but with coarser fur, and is exceptionally ferocious and fearless. I am only aware of two reports, both over a century old one extremely brief, the other more extensive. Is this cryptic Mexican cat still being reported today? Any *FT* reader with information is invited to send in details.

A NEW WINGED CAT?

It's been quite a while since I heard of any new winged cats, so I was glad to receive the following

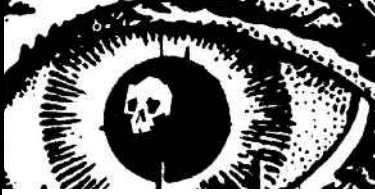
message on 5 May from my Facebook friend Mike Covell in Hull (Thanks Mike!): "Noticed recently on our school run that there is a cat with huge tufts of hair behind its neck that look like the stubs of little wings. Will try and get a photo of it, it's very tame." If he succeeds, I'll publish the photograph in a future Alien Zoo column.

INSURED FOR NESSIE KNOCKS

What would happen if you were in a boat on Loch Ness and collided with Nessie? No use contacting your insurance company to pay for the damage to your vessel, right? Wrong! In a remarkable first for such claims, Inverness-based insurance firm Towergate Moray Firth has recently provided cover for collisions with the Loch Ness monster as part of a wider insurance package to Jacobite Cruises. This tourist cruise company owns a fleet of three vessels that provide daily trips on the loch, transporting over 10,000 would-be Nessie observers each year. *Inverness Courier*, 24 April 2013.



TIM MORRIS



GHOSTWATCH

ALAN MURDIE heads for the seaside and is haunted by the Whistling Ghost of Minehead

OLD MOTHER LEAKEY'S GHOST

Towards the end of April, I fancied sampling some of the delights of traditional English May Day revels, and headed off to the seaside resort of Minehead in Somerset. Here, May Day has been celebrated for centuries by the ceremonial parade of an ancient Hobby Horse.

The Minehead Hobby Horse, or 'Sailor's Horse' as it is known locally, makes its first appearance outside a quayside pub on the evening of 30 April. Then at 5am on May Day it sets off from the harbour and is carried through the streets, accompanied by eager followers, folk musicians, and an unceasing drumbeat. Its perambulations continue for the next three days, with a detour one evening to nearby Dunster Castle.

The precise origins of the custom are uncertain. An older generation of folklorists would have classed it as a primitive survival of pagan rituals, but others suggest the custom arose from an attempt by 18th century sailors to raise money (the Horse's followers now collect for local charities). But at least one local tradition recorded in 1855 avers that it commemorates a phantom ship that once entered Minehead harbour, or alternatively an abandoned vessel like the *Mary Celeste*.

For seekers after ghosts, Minehead is best known for the strange story of the phantom of a 17th century woman – 'Old Mrs Leakey', or 'Old Mother Leakey'. The story is nearly 400 years old, but only in recent decades has it been openly re-connected with one of the greatest British ecclesiastical scandals of the 17th century.

In life, Old Mother Leakey was Mrs Susannah Leakey who lived with her merchant son Alexander and his family in a house by Minehead harbour. The house is still there, and was extended later to incorporate a fisherman's cottage. Although Mrs Leakey was considered a kindly and charitable soul, following her death on 5 November 1634, she took an exceedingly vicious and malevolent turn, returning as an evil spirit, intent on wreaking harm and being the centre of attention.

Dressed in a black gown, she haunted not only her son's house but also the town and the fields at large. Her troublesome spectre became notorious for kicking a local doctor who was crossing a stile, but far worse was to come. Notably, she haunted ships and boats owned by Alexander that were bound for Ireland. She appeared on top of masts and rigging and blew a whistle. Storms would be raised and the vessels sunk, and although no lives were lost, her son suffered. Her ghost also manifested at her old home to the terror of Alexander's family, though the only person

– with one exception – who could actually see her was Alexander's wife, Elizabeth. The exception was Old Mrs Leakey's little granddaughter, aged five or six, who cried out one night that her grandmother was attacking her. Before any of the family could intervene, the wicked spirit snuffed out the life of the poor child, strangling her in her cot.

Only after the murder does anyone seem to have asked Old Mrs Leakey why she caused so much mayhem. Elizabeth questioned the ghost when it manifested as an image in a mirror and in reply was instructed to go over

man and hardly likely to pay attention to her (particularly if she revealed the message came from a child-killing ghost). Elizabeth also raised the obvious objection that Mrs Leakey's penchant for sinking ships would prevent her from ever getting there. However, Mrs Leakey promised to cease sinking ships for 30 days, allowing Elizabeth to travel to Waterford, where she duly delivered the message to Bishop Atherton. Elizabeth was received very coolly, the Bishop remarking that if he was to hang at least he wouldn't drown. He then sent her packing.

On returning to Minehead, Elizabeth was met by local magistrates alerted to her strange behaviour and intent on interrogating her. She steadfastly declined to pass on the message imparted to Bishop Atherton, declaring that it could only be revealed to the King. Finding that their threats and inducements drew a blank, the justices called for support.

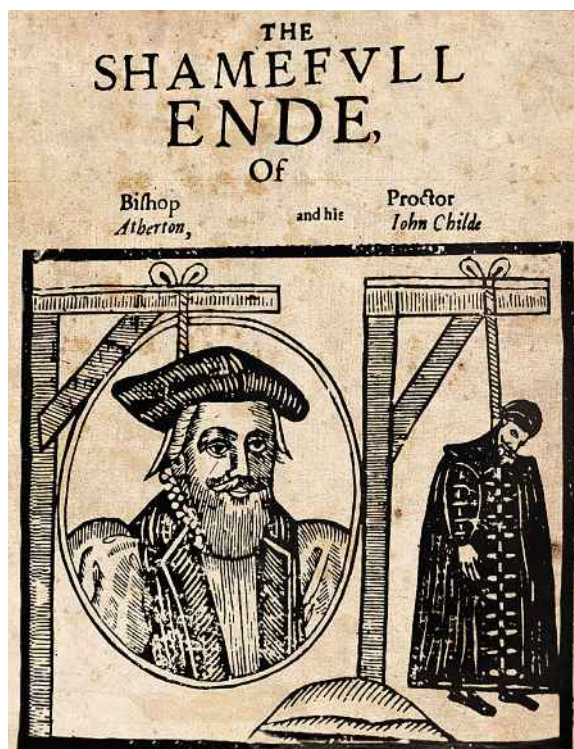
If Elizabeth's story of the ghost was a tactic to attract attention, it certainly succeeded. The peculiar affair sparked interest at national level, from the Privy Council and the highest ranks of the Church. In February 1637 the Bishop of Bath and Wells presided over a Commission to inquire into the child-killing ghost and Elizabeth's actions. The Commission was not convinced by the witnesses, including Elizabeth herself. The report, endorsed by Archbishop Laud, concluded: "Wee doe believe that there was never any such apparition at all". However, this verdict may have been a convenient tactic, covering up Bishop Atherton's scandalous behaviour, and did nothing to quell suspicions. Certainly, despite the Commission coming down firmly against manifestations of Old Mrs

Leakey's post-mortem return, belief in the phantom remained firm in Minehead, passing into local legend, and ultimately into print.

Sir Walter Scott indirectly helped promote her legend with a line in his poem *Rokeby*: 'How whistle rash bids tempests roar'. This obscure reference might have been missed, had not Scott provided a lengthy footnote explaining that: "The most formidable whistler that I remember to have met with was the apparition of a certain Mrs Leakey..." An earlier poetic reference might be Samuel Taylor Coleridge's female "Nightmare Life-in-Death" female who "thicks men's blood with cold" and who "whistles thrice" in his *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. Coleridge resided close to Minehead in the village of Selworthy (and was famously interrupted in his dream-inspired composition of *Kubla Khan* by a person from Porlock).

ABOVE: Bishop Atherton's "shameful end".

OPPOSITE: The Whistling Ghost remembered.



THE BISHOP WAS ACQUITTED OF EMBEZZLEMENT BUT CONVICTED OF SODOMY WITH A MALE SERVANT

to Ireland to convey a message to Joan, Old Mrs Leakey's eldest daughter. (Why the spirit did not pass on the message directly is a mystery). Joan was the wife of John Atherton, the Bishop of Waterford, who was originally from Somerset.

The message that Elizabeth was to take for Joan was that her clerical husband must repent of his sins or he would hang. Elizabeth commented that the Bishop was an important

Walter Scott later provided a full version of the Mrs Leakey legend (though with names spelt differently) for readers of his *Letters On Witchcraft And Demonology* (1830), probably re-enforcing lingering local traditions in Somerset.

After many re-tellings, it is perhaps understandable that the ghost story had diverged widely from its historical basis. The story was still circulating in the 1920s; on All Soul's Day 1927, the *Morning Post* stated: "When the wild November winds are whirling round the cliffs of North Hill and sailing craft are straining at moorings in Minehead's little harbour, children keep indoors at night for fear of meeting Old Mother Leakey".

Versions of the story have appeared since, for instance in Elliot O'Donnell's *Haunted Britain* (1948) and Peter Underwood's *Gazetteer of British Ghosts* (1971) – where I first read it, although Underwood decided to omit it from his later *Ghosts of Somerset*. However, the full story of the facts which lay behind Mrs Leakey's ghost with its mysterious message has been omitted from popular re-tellings, with many authors either being unaware of the ultimate fate of Bishop Atherton, or tactfully avoiding it; for Atherton did indeed hang as predicted by the ghost, in December 1640, following a trial filled with scandalous revelations.

The facts were also known to many later generations of religious writers and scholars, but many also elected to suppress the precise details either through distaste or to protect the sensibilities of their readers. Others, more forgiving, chose to concentrate on the confession and penitence that Bishop Atherton showed in prison awaiting execution. For although acquitted of embezzlement, the Bishop was convicted of sodomy with a male servant, a capital offence until the 19th century (the servant was also executed). The repentance of the Bishop on the eve of execution became a classic of penitential literature, a tool to bring sinners back to the faith. The Bishop traced his sins back to the collapse of his moral character occasioned by his "Reading of bad Books, viewing immodest pictures, frequently Plays, Drunkenness etc.," which "enticed him to his acts".

It appears that the popular mind wiped from folkloric memory the matter of the homosexuality – or bisexuality – of the Bishop and replaced it with another sinful act and crime, in which the living Old Mrs Leakey was complicit. This was that the Bishop had fathered an illegitimate child in Barnstaple with the knowledge of Old Mrs Leakey. After the Bishop had duly baptised the infant Mrs Leakey then killed it, and the body was burned on charcoal. Whilst ghost story writers recalled this crime, they did not mention acts of buggery.

It was not until the 20th century that an attempt was made to re-unite the fragments, with the a study published by folklorist Theo Brown in a chapter in *The Folklore of Ghosts* (1981), following an examination of documents in the Public Records Office.



Brown made clear that her principal interest was folklore, not the Bishop's misdeeds. Since then, the changing cultural ideas concerning ghosts, possible conspiracy theories and the eruption of the Atherton scandal amid the social and religious turmoil of the 17th century have all proved attractive to professional historians. Thus the whole story has been the subject of an excellent study under the sceptical eye of Professor Peter Marshall in *Mother Leakey and The Bishop – A Ghost Story* (Oxford University Press 2007), which suggests that at its heart was a family blackmail plot that went wrong.

As well as examining facts derived from the surviving historical documents, Prof Marshall scrutinises the continuing legendary life of Mrs Leakey's ghost, taking up the issues identified by Theo Brown and their local impact. His study shows how, in the popular mind, the ghostly Old Mrs Leakey took on an existence independently of the respectable religious interpretations of the sinful Bishop and his repentance before execution. He shows how later generations made both religious and political propaganda from the story while playing down or ignoring the ghostly aspects.

In the process of writing his book, Prof Marshall visited the Leakey family's old home on the quayside, which had been turned into a sweetshop – 'Old Mother Leakey's Parlour' – in the 20th century, but which he now found had been turned into tearooms. However, he stopped his historical and cultural pilgrimage at the very threshold, neglecting to actually venture within. Had he done so, he might have discovered that contemporary beliefs in Old Mother Leakey's ghost are still alive, with claims that she is still actively haunting the teashop.

On my visit to Minehead I found the building concerned, operating as the stylish Quayside Tearooms, though still acknowledging its earlier status as Old Mother Leakey's Parlour. Over an excellent cheese ploughman's lunch, I was told by the couple who run it that ever since they moved in six years ago there have been strange noises in the building. These have included footsteps crossing an upstairs room as well as repeated bangs and thumps. As with many hauntings, the worst was endured when they first moved in, but they recur periodically, along with object movements, most recently the throwing about of Coca Cola cans. The disturbances are attributed to Mrs Leakey at work in her old home. They have their own ideas about the villains of the piece and own a copy of Prof Marshall's book. Thus we may not have heard the last of Old Mrs Leakey.

Perhaps in the final analysis, the phantom provides an example of the continuing divide between popular and official or establishment culture, regarding attitudes towards the supernatural or paranormal. Over the generations, 'respectable' opinion treated ghosts with disdain, whilst romantic and popular culture embraced them. (See Roger Clarke, 'Ghost Mobs', **FT296:42-45** and the same author's 2012 book *A Natural History of Ghosts* for further examination of this historic division on ghosts in Britain).

The authorities found notions of Old Mrs Leakey's child-killing, whistling ghost distasteful, sensationalising an already scandalous case that brought disgrace and capital punishment down upon an establishment figure. Equally, the popular audience eager for retellings of the ghost story did not want to know the details of the sex life and practices of a Protestant bishop. Indeed, Theo Brown admitted, "I am fascinated by Old Mrs Leakey", but expressed her distaste in having to detail "her deplorable family and Atherton", and for "digging up ancient scandals better forgotten".

Or perhaps, as M R James put it in 1931, the one thing that you have to keep out of a good ghost story is sex because of its tendency "to spoil the whole business".

Sources: 'The Ghost of Old Mrs Leakey' by Theo Brown in *The Folklore of Ghosts* (1981), edited by Hilda Ellis Davidson and WMS Russell; 'Ghosts – Treat Them Gently!' by M R James, *Evening News*, 17 April 1931; pers. comm. at Minehead, 2 April 2013.



ARCHAEOLOGY

MATT PATTINSON

INDIANA UNIVERSITY

Confirmed numismatist **PAUL SIEVEKING** goes through his archaeological spare change and finds stories of coins washing up a long way from home and redrawing our maps of ancient trade in the process



LEFT: Two of the Kilwa coins found on the uninhabited Wessel Islands off northern Australia.

BELOW: The Chinese coin unearthed at Manda.

ARRIVING DOWN UNDER

In 1944, the uninhabited Wessel Islands off Australia's northern coast were a strategic position to help protect the mainland, two years after Darwin was bombed by the Japanese. Australian soldier Maurie Isenberg manned a radar station there and spent his spare time fishing on the idyllic beaches. One day he found five copper coins in the sand, which he later placed in a tin. Coming upon them again in 1979, he sent them to a museum for identification, and learned that they were 1,000 years old. He marked an old colleague's map with an "X" to remember where he had found them.

The discovery was apparently forgotten again until a few months ago, when Australian scientist Ian McIntosh, currently Professor of Anthropology at Indiana University in the US, took an interest. The five coins date from the 10th to the 14th centuries, and were minted by the former Kilwa sultanate, now a World Heritage ruin

on an island off Tanzania. How on Earth had they ended up in such a remote place?

Kilwa was once a flourishing trade port with links to India in the 13th to 16th century. The trade in gold, silver, pearls, perfumes, Arabian stoneware, Persian ceramics and Chinese porcelain made the city one of the most important in East Africa. The copper coins were the first coins ever produced in sub-Saharan Africa and have only twice been found outside Africa: in Oman in the early 20th century and in 1944 on the Wessel Island beach.

When Isenberg discovered the African coins he also found four from the Dutch East India Company, one dated 1690. Were the two finds connected? Maybe the coins washed ashore from a shipwreck.

On the other hand, archaeologists have long suspected that there were maritime trading routes linking East Africa, Arabia, India and the Spice Islands back in the 11th century or even earlier.

We already know that Captain Cook in 1770 wasn't the first white seafarer to step on Australia's shores. In 1606 Dutch explorer Willem Janszoon reached the Cape York peninsula in Queensland, closely followed a few years later by another Dutch seafarer, Dirk Hartog. And the Spaniard Luiz Vaez de Torres discovered the strait between Papua New Guinea and Australia, later named Torres Strait in his honour. However, none of them recognised that they had discovered the famed southern continent, the "terra australis

incognita", depicted as a counterweight to the known land masses of the northern hemisphere on many world maps of the day.

Prof McIntosh plans an expedition to the Wessel Islands this July. Besides revisiting the beach marked with an "X" on Isenberg's map, he will also be looking for a hidden cave nearby mentioned in Aboriginal legends and allegedly filled with doubloons and ancient weaponry. [AAP] news.com.au, 18 May; Independent, 21 May 2013.

Another coin find shows the extent of maritime trade across the Indian Ocean 600 years ago. A recent scientific expedition to the island of Manda off the northern coast of Kenya unearthed a Chinese coin from the reign of Emperor Yongle (1403-25), the

Ming ruler who sent Admiral Zheng He (aka Chengho Ho) to explore the lands west of the Celestial

Kingdom. (Researcher Gavin Menzies believes Zhen He circumnavigated the globe a century before Magellan, exploring the coastlines of both America and Australia – see **FT160:6**). Manda was home

to an advanced civilisation from about AD 200 to 1430, when it was permanently abandoned. *Science Daily*, 13 Mar 2013.



Recently, a crude 6in (15cm) lead weight was found in a swamp on North Stradbroke Island on the east coast of Australia. It was under 6.3in (16cm) of sand in an isolated and undisturbed area; based on sand deposition rates of 2-3cm over 50 years, archaeologist Greg Jeffreys reckoned the weight was dropped there in the early 17th century. Independent lead isotope analysis has matched it to two old British mines, one of which was active in Elizabethan times. Jeffreys said there was "no other way" the weight could have ended up there other than by ship. "Something like that wouldn't just wash up there in the current," he said. "It would have been a European ship, or a couple, that ended up wrecked on the Queensland coast, and the survivors tried to get home but never did." The weight was found 300m (328 yards) from a previously publicised Elizabethan coin dated 1593. A sailor's dirk, typical of 16th century sailors, was also found nearby in 1934. Together these finds support Jeffreys's belief that Europeans made landfall here 150 years before Captain Cook. Mainstream



ABOVE: Professor Ian Mackintosh of Indiana University points to the Wessel Islands, where he plans to take an expedition this

INDIANA UNIVERSITY

CLASSICAL CORNER



FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

165. RIGHT ROYAL PAINS

academics beg to differ. (*Queensland Sunday Mail*, 3 June 2012.

In 1991, a lead fishing weight, made in France or Spain between 1235 and 1400, was found in sediment on Fraser Island off the coast of Queensland. It was said to be the oldest European artefact ever found in Australia (FT62:42). In 1996, a 16th century Portuguese silver coin from the 1520s (or possibly a Spanish counterfeit from about 1580) was unearthed on the Mornington Peninsula near Melbourne on Australia's south-east coast (FT97:20).

Homo sapiens is thought to have settled in Australia about 40,000 years ago, and until now the orthodox opinion was that these ancestors of modern Aborigines remained isolated from other populations until the Europeans arrived. However, a genetic analysis of more than 300 Aborigines, Indians, Papuans, and people from other islands of Southeast Asia has found a "significant gene flow" from India to Australia about 4,230 years, or 141 generations, ago. The Aboriginal DNA samples had more than 10 per cent Indian genetic markers, suggesting there had been substantial interbreeding. The study's lead researcher, Irina Pugach from the Max Planck Institute of Evolutionary Anthropology in Leipzig, said the arrival of these people coincided with many changes in Australia's archaeological record.

"[There was] a sudden change in plant processing and stone tool technologies, with microliths appearing for the first time, and the first appearance of the dingo in the fossil record," said Dr Pugach. She thought it was possible that Indian ancestry came to Australia indirectly, through Southeast Asian populations that had trade links with northern Australia and Indonesia; but the analysis found no evidence of this in the genes of the Southeast Asian populations.

The study also found a common origin for Aboriginal Australians, New Guinea populations and the Mamanwa, a Negrito group from the Philippines. These groups are estimated to have diverged about 36,000 years ago. The report, published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, shows how little scientists know about Australia's human legacy. (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 16 Jan 2013.

"The Queen, My Lord, is dead.
"She should have died hereafter." –
Macbeth 5. 5., v16-7

Not really. But, when Mrs Mountbatten gets a tummy bug, the nation trembles. A glance at the fates of some ancient royals should induce much counting of blessings.

For painful instance, Byzantine emperor Constantine IX (1042-55, at right). His biographer Michael Psellus (bk6 chs130-1) describes his sufferings thus: "Paralysis followed paralysis in rapid succession. He could not lie on his bed for a proper rest; every position hurt. His servants would support his aching body until after much trying they found a posture that gave some relief. But this was not all. Even his tongue hurt him, and the slightest movement of his eyes set the pains in motion."

Constantine got over this, only to catch a chill while bathing (shades of Alexander the Great) and expire. Compared to our next case histories, he got off lightly.

'Wicked' King Herod got his comeuppance with a (divine?) vengeance. According to Josephus (*The Jewish War*, bk1 ch661), "He had a fever, intolerable itching all over his body, constant pain in the bowels, inflammation of the abdomen, and gangrene in the genitals that produced worms." For good measure, asthma, convulsions, and (like Hitler) miasmatic breath. Desperate remedies, including plunges into a tub of hot oil, didn't work. Dr Jan Hirschmann of the University of Washington identified 10 possible causes, including (apropos the balls-ache) Fournier's Gangrene.

Given the slaughter wrought on wives and children, our sympathies may be limited. Likewise with the Roman dictator Sulla, whose sanguinary career ended in similar fashion (Plutarch's biography, ch36 paras1-3): "Ulcerated bowels corrupted his entire body, converting it into worms. Although people worked day and night to remove them, they could not keep pace with the increase. His clothes, his bath, his hand-basin, his food, all were infected with this never-ending flux. He soaked himself many times a day to try and keep clean, but the swarm of vermin defied all purification."

Extreme phthiriasis or pediculosis have been suggested. Even this pales before the fate of

emperor Galerius (305-11, at bottom of page), inevitably seen as God's vengeance on his persecution of the Christians. Lactantius (*On the Deaths of the Persecutors*, ch33) and Eusebius (*Ecclesiastical History*, bk8 ch16) show little sign of forgiving one's enemies.

Here is the Eusebian gloating: "Without warning, suppurative inflammation broke out in his genitals, followed by a deep-seated fistular ulcer. These gnawed their way incurably into the deepest recesses of his bowels. From them came a teeming indescribable mass of worms, and a sickening smell with them, because the whole of his hulking body, thanks to his overeating, had

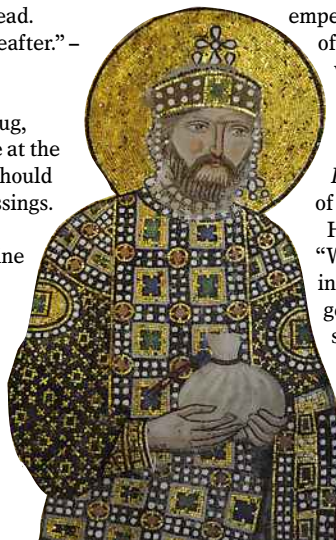
previously been transformed into a huge lump of flabby fat which then decomposed and presented those who came near with a revolting and horrifying sight. Of the doctors, some were unable to stand the overpowering and extraordinary stench [Lactantius adds that it filled not just the palace but the entire city] and were executed on the spot; others, unable to do anything now that the entire mass had deteriorated beyond hope, were put to death without mercy."

Executing medics who failed to cure, or who botched their treatments, was a tradition going back to the Babylon of Hammurabi's Law Code. Its revival might do wonders for standards of patient care in the NHS.

There have been other bizarre but kindlier royal demises. Often, à la Galerius, over-eating, from Antonius Pius (138) gobbling down too much Alpine Cheese (*Historia Augusta*, ch12 para4) to Henry I's (1135) famous 'surfeit of lampreys'.

FT readers who permit themselves a smile or more over these lurid reports may share the kinder destinies of Martin I of Aragon (1410) and Burmese King Nanda Bayin (1599), both of who died laughing, the former at one of his court jester's sallies (John Doran, *A History of Court Fools*, 1858, pp377-8), the latter on being told by an Italian visitor that Venice was a free state without a king. There's not been much to laugh about in Burma since the 1962 military coup (wasn't much in Orwell's *Burmese Days*, either).

"One's impression is that inhalations of germs may be healthy" – Fort, *Books*, p934



MANGO MANIA

PAUL SIEVEKING puts aside his Little Red Book to ponder the brief period of the Cultural Revolution when mango became metaphor



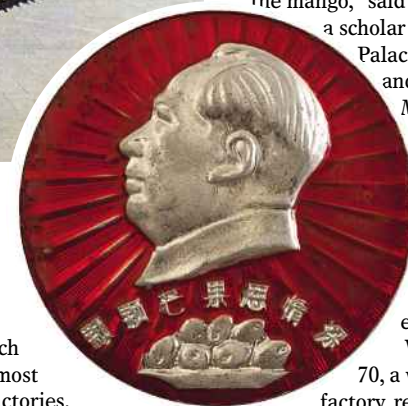
LEFT: Parading the fruity symbol of Mao's love for the people. BELOW: Mugs and badges were emblazoned with images of the thousand-year fruit.

been boiled," wrote Dr Li. On 31 August, the Pakistan government, impressed by the fruits' enthusiastic reception, sent a further 100 varieties and a 100 mango seedlings to Beijing. The Number One Machine Tool Factory decided to send its mango to its sister factory in Shanghai. "They specially chartered an aeroplane just for the mango," said Alfreda Murck,

a scholar at Beijing's Palace Museum and author of *Mao's Golden Mangoes and the Cultural Revolution*, whose work forms the basis of the Zurich exhibition. Wang Xiaoping,

70, a worker at the factory, recalled the fascination. "What is a 'mango'? Nobody knew. Few had even heard the word, let alone seen one. Knowledgeable people said it was a fruit of extreme rarity, like Mushrooms of Immortality. It must be very delicious. Its appearance nobody could describe. To receive such a rare and exotic thing filled people with a surge of excitement. That day was indeed a festive one for the factory. People were wild with joy... everyone held their wax model of the sacred fruit solemnly and reverently. Someone was even admonished by senior workers for not holding the fruit securely."

Plastic, wax and papier mâché mango facsimiles were sent out on special lorries to tour the provinces; some were placed in glass vitrines emblazoned with appropriately 'correct' political slogans. They were received in solemn processions with much pomp; preceded by a statue of Mao, followed by his portraits,



An exhibition at the Rietberg Museum in Zurich, Switzerland, recalls an odd episode in 20th century history, when millions of Chinese worshipped the mango. It was a sort of socialist version of Holland's 17th century tulip mania – though the comparison isn't really helpful in fathoming either. It began on 4 August 1968 when Pakistan's foreign minister, visiting Beijing, presented Mao Zedong with a case containing about 40 of the fruit. A day later, the Great Pork Swordsman (sorry, Helmsman) ordered that they be distributed among workers occupying Beijing's Qinghua University campus in order to bring militant Red Guards under control.

The date – 5 August – represented the second anniversary of the slogan 'Bombard the Headquarters' which had launched the Cultural Revolution in 1966, when students were given the mandate to create a new society by overthrowing Mao's opponents in the Communist Party's highest ranks. As rampaging Red Guards, they later split into irreconcilable factions, plunging the country into chaos. In late July 1968, as ideological conflict erupted into open battle at Qinghua, Mao

sought the assistance of some 30,000 workers from 'Worker-Peasant Propaganda Teams' directly affiliated to him. His mango gift was intended to send the message that power was shifting from the Red Guards to the working class. When the *People's Daily* announced the gift three days later, wider political implications were clearly in the offing. Mao's personality cult, engineered by Lin Biao, then in charge of the People's Liberation Army (PLA), had reached its zenith. In the ensuing months, the mango, perceived as a 'tribute' from an ally and a sign of Mao's benevolence, was transformed from fruit to metaphor.

Astonished by the miraculous

gift, the workers occupying the university sent one mango to each of Beijing's most important factories. The mangos were seen as a symbol of the Chairman's love for the workers and quickly became holy relics. A poem in the *People's Daily* ran: "Seeing that golden mango/Was as if seeing the great leader Chairman Mao... Again and again touching that golden mango/the golden mango was so warm". (It has probably lost something in translation).

At the Beijing Textile Factory, "the workers held a huge ceremony... then sealed [the mango] in wax hoping to preserve it for posterity," recorded Li Zhisui, Mao's personal doctor. "The wax-covered fruit was placed on an altar and workers lined up to file past it, solemnly bowing as they walked by." When the mango began to rot, it was delicately peeled and then boiled in a huge vat of water. "Another ceremony was held, equally solemn... Each worker drank a spoonful of the water in which the sacred mango had



banners and flags, often to the accompaniment of clashing gongs. Remote places with no replicas relied on black and white photographs of the real thing. There were frequent skirmishes between competing parties over the right to own the symbol in whatever form. One dentist in a small village, who dared to compare a touring mango to a sweet potato, was put on trial for malicious slander and executed.

The mango, known as *mang guo*, was invested with newly minted myth. The traditional peach, nearest to it in shape and form and associated with the legendary Queen Mother of the West, was known as a *changshou guo*, or *shou tao*, 'longevity fruit'; so the *mang guo* was said to fruit 'once every century' or even 'every thousand years', transforming it into a *qiannian guo*, 'thousand-year fruit' rightly used to confer wishes for Mao's longevity. Mango-flavoured confectionery soon catered to those with a sweet tooth.

Millions of aluminium mango badges were produced and worn to show unswerving loyalty to the Chairman. White enamel mugs, washbasins, plates and quilts were decorated with mangoes. Fake mangoes in glass cases were handed out to thousands of workers to display in their homes. Huge baskets of mangoes graced the central

floats in the great political parades of the following months: National Day (1 October 1968), Labour Day (1 May 1969), Founding of the Communist Party Day (1 July 1969) and People's Liberation Army Day (1 August 1969).

Mango madness lasted only 18 months, while the Cultural Revolution itself sputtered to a halt in 1971 with the death of Lin Biao in a mysterious plane crash, allegedly while escaping to the Soviet Union.

In 1974, Imelda Marcos visited Beijing and presented an ailing Mao with a case of mangoes; but the gift went virtually unremarked; clearly, the mango was on the way out. Only one mango product seems to have thrived. In 1968, the state tobacco industry marketed *Mang Guo* cigarettes manufactured in Henan, and it rapidly outperformed all other brands. It was manufactured until at least 1983, and was seen as late as 2003. A recent upmarket version has surfaced: *Jin Mang guo*, 'Golden Mango' menthol filter cigarettes, perhaps the last legacy of the mango phenomenon.

The exhibition "Mao's Golden Mangoes and the Cultural Revolution" runs in Switzerland until 16 June before going to Germany – and may transfer to Britain after that. *Asian Art*, 26 Feb; *D.Telegraph*, 8 Mar 2013.



Mythconceptions

by Mat Coward

165. GET SOME IN!

The myth

National Service reduced crime.



The "truth"

You can see the logic: if most crime is committed by young men, surely removing large numbers of them from civilian life for a period, and placing them under military discipline, will automatically reduce the crime rate. But it didn't happen. Crime rocketed in Britain during the 1940s. For instance, the number of violent crimes recorded in 1938 was 8,026. In 1948, it was 17,026, and 31,250 in 1958. National Service in Britain started in 1947, and the last national servicemen were discharged in 1963. All healthy males of military age were required to serve in the armed forces for 18 months (later increased to two years). The story told by the statistics could not be more straightforward: after a small drop in the early 1950s, the number of recorded crimes increased massively during the National Service era. In 1946, there were 472,517 recorded crimes; 479,710 in 1956 – and 978,076 in 1963.

Sources

(All figures quoted here are Home Office figures for England and Wales; crime recording is separate for other parts of the UK). www.homeoffice.gov.uk/publications/science-research-statistics/research-statistics/crime-research/crime-stats-1898-2002; www.nam.ac.uk/exhibitions/online-exhibitions/national-service/enlistment-training; <http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/real-life-stories/50-years-since-the-end-of-national-service-856384>

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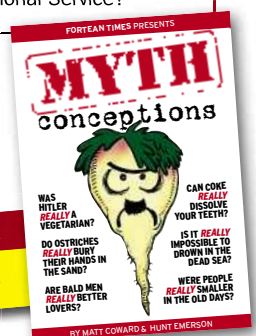
Comparisons of crime figures in different years are always muddled by the fact that some offences are added to the book over time, while others are removed – and that's before you get into discussions about population levels or recording protocols. But, given all that, can anyone disprove the *central thesis* that crime rates increased during National Service?

The Undead

"Hitler was a vegan", according to journalist Giles Coren (*I've Never Seen Star Wars*, BBC Radio 4, 9 Nov 2011). Is this variation supplanting the more traditional "Hitler was a vegetarian" myth? (See FT114:24, 260:17).

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BY MATT COWARD & HUNT EMERSON

FT303 23

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NECROLOG

This month, a much-loved pioneer of cinematic special effects stops motion, a Bigfoot collector bequeaths his files and a human computer shuts down for the last time



GETTY IMAGES

RAY HARRYHAUSEN

"I think you've got to develop courage enough to pursue your own interests in life, regardless of whether people think you're a loony or not."

So said Ray Harryhausen, a man who so many of us somehow assumed, or at least hoped, would – by life somehow imitating art – prove as immortal as his creations. Tragically, for those of us who fell in love with both the monsters and the man as children – and discovered to our delight that his unique œuvre also possessed the magical power to inspire adult sensibilities with its handcrafted sense of wonder – Ray died on 7 May in a London hospital following a short illness.

The widespread grieving throughout fantasy film fandom, would, I'm sure, have not only been deeply appreciated by Ray, but also understood, as he was an early example of one of the most important manifestations of the genre – the fan/professional.

Born in Los Angeles on 29 June 1920, to Fred and Martha, descendants of German immigrants, Ray's formative years were spent in an environment unrecognisable to many of us today. Without the benefit of online fan-bases, science fiction conventions or monster magazines, his already vivid imagination was nurtured instead by artists like Michelangelo, Rodin, John Martin (one of his greatest influences) and Charles R Knight, the legendary palæo-artist whose delineations of prehistoric life had

inspired and informed not only Ray, but the individual who influenced Ray most directly – special effects and stop-motion animation pioneer Willis O'Brien.

The 13-year-old Harryhausen was "stunned and haunted" by his first experience of O'Brien's creations in *King Kong* (1933), in the company of his mother and aunt at Grauman's Chinese Theatre (his aunt was Sid Grauman's nurse, and had received complimentary tickets). The film's primæval grandeur and its Mesozoic landscape, populated not only by Kong himself but a spectacular menagerie of beasts 140 million years dead, were realised by O'Brien and a host of artisans, themselves inspired by Charles Knight, and the engravings of Gustave Doré (who Ray also greatly admired).

To emulate *Kong*, and make his own fantasies come to life, became Harryhausen's hobby and obsession; with jointed steel skeletons crafted by his machinist father (who would continue to build armatures for Ray's professional films until his death in 1963) and tiny costumes and sculptures made by his mother, Ray created his own animations in his garage through the late 1930s. He corresponded with and befriended O'Brien, who responded to Ray's work with enthusiasm.

During that period, Ray met fledgling author Ray Bradbury and fan-collector Forrest Ackerman, with whom he would forge life-long friendships. On attending meetings at the science fiction

club in Clifton's Cafeteria, Ray said: "We were a small group of people interested in the unusual in films and fiction, but you try telling that to the average person – they thought we were a bunch of nuts!"

His professional career began in 1940, working on George Pal's *Puppetoons* animated shorts. In 1942, he was drafted into the Signal Corps, producing educational and orientation films for the Frank Capra unit. After the war, he made a series of fairy tale films, using outdated Kodachrome film stock he retrieved from an army garbage can, distributed to schools by Bailey Films.

In 1947, Willis O'Brien requested Ray's help on *Mighty Joe Young* (1949). Working for his mentor was a pivotal moment for Ray – his first chance to demonstrate his skills for the cinema, but also convincing him that O'Brien's effects process, utilising layers of glass paintings interspersed with miniature scenery, would be prohibitively expensive for a new generation of low-budget producers. Ray's innovative technique, combining rear-projection and split-screens to incorporate his creatures into real settings, was economically viable, and after proving its worth on his first solo film, Warner's *The Beast From 20,000 Fathoms* (1953), Ray began a long association with Columbia Pictures' 'B' movie producer Charles H Schnee, going on to film 12 of his 16 features with him. It was Schnee who coined the name 'Dynamation' for Ray's process in 1957.

The themes explored by Ray in his films were a compendium of fortune: cryptozoological wonders and super-normal animals resulting from variant nature or distorted science in *Mighty Joe Young* and *Mysterious Island* (1961); prehistoric survivors answering the foghorns of lighthouses and destroying Coney Island roller coasters; dinosaurs discovered by the explorers of lost lands in *The Valley of Gwangi* (1969), or in a time-warp with Raquel Welch in *One Million Years B.C.* (1966); the architecture of authentic ancient civilisations transformed into

dreamworlds of mythology in *Jason and the Argonauts* (1963) and the *Sinbad* trilogy.

While researching *Earth vs the Flying Saucers* (1955), Ray consulted George Adamski, putative recipient of Venusian (and later, Jovian) visitors, and for both *Beast* and *It Came From Beneath the Sea* (1954) Ray examined 'real' sightings of sea serpents and the Norwegian Kraken.

Harryhausen's brilliance practically established a new creative paradigm. Fan clubs and appreciation societies confirmed him as the first superstar movie technician in film history. In the 1960s, his dinosaur designs were the most advanced in the world, his swift, bird-like carnivores pre-empting *Jurassic Park* (1993) by three decades. Many contemporary palæontologists credit his films as their vocational inspiration.

Ray was seemingly indistinguishable from his work. His London home was furnished with bronzes, paintings, art and antiques, from various world cultures (one of his proudest possessions was the Joseph Michael Gandy painting *Jupiter Pluvius*, which dominated his living room). His study was the ultimate cabinet of curiosities – glass cases packed with hydras, skeletons, dinosaurs, homunculi and the distilled imagination of 40 years of filmmaking. He had lived there since 1971 with his wonderful wife Diana, with whom he would embark upon archaeological trips around the world, frequently scouting film locations.

I was privileged and honoured to have known Ray as a friend, and the work I carried out for him will remain the most outstanding professional achievement of my life. Perhaps his greatest gift to us all is that he not only created worlds that he believed in, but that he made the rest of us believe in them too. (See pp56-57 for more on Harryhausen's mythological monsters).

Raymond Frederick Harryhausen, special effects wizard, born Los Angeles 29 June 1920; died London 7 May 2013, aged 92.
Alan Friswell

NORMAN WOODLAND

Woodland was a graduate student of the Drexel Institute of Technology, Philadelphia, when in 1948 he learned that a local grocery wanted a way to encode product data in order to automate the checkout process. He came up with the idea for the bar code while sitting on the beach: "I poked my four fingers into the sand... pulled my hand towards me and drew four lines," he said. He realised that the lines could be turned into a code by varying the widths. With fellow student Bernard Silver, he developed a 'bullseye' bar code in which the lines appear as concentric rings, and in 1952 gained a patent. However, the idea failed to catch on, so they sold their patent for \$15,000. In the early 1970s, the big US grocery chains agreed a standard symbol known as the Universal Product Code (UPC). Although many experts favoured the 'bullseye', the chains opted for the cheaper vertical bar system created by George Laurer of IBM.

Norman Joseph Woodland, bar code inventor, born Atlantic City (NJ) 6 Sept 1921; died Edgewater (NJ) 9 Dec 2012, aged 91.

SHAKUNTALA DEVI

Devi, the daughter of a circus performer who lacked any formal education, exhibited numerical prowess from the age of three, and became famous after beating one of the world's fastest computers by 10 seconds in a complicated calculation. She once calculated the 23rd root of a 201-digit number in her head in less than a minute, and in June 1980, at Imperial College, London, multiplied two numbers picked at random by the computer department: 7,686,369,774,870 and 2,465,099,745,779. After 28 seconds she correctly answered 18,947,668,177,995,426,462,773,730, earning a place in the *Guinness Book of Records*.

At Stanford University, California, in 1988, Prof Arthur Jensen tried to unlock the secret of her abilities. He set her two problems: the cube root of 61,629,875; and the seventh root of 170,859,375. She gave the answers (395 and 15) even before Jensen's wife could start the stopwatch.

Shakuntala Devi, "the human computer", born Bangalore 4 Nov 1929; died 20 April 2013, aged 83.

STRANGE DEATHS

UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL



A traveller was shot dead by a rebel group in Tiringoulou, Central African Republic, after being accused of stealing penises with a magic handshake. The man bought tea from a Sudanese market stall, and then grabbed the vendor's hand. According to Louisa Lombard, a Californian anthropologist resident in the town, the tea seller said he felt an "electric tingling" and immediately sensed his penis had shrunk to "smaller than that of a baby". She said: "His yells drew a crowd. Somehow in the fray a second man fell victim. Witnesses confirmed the genitals did indeed shrink dramatically". Penis-theft and penis-shrinking panics, known as koro, erupt regularly in West Africa, Malaysia, and elsewhere [FT56:33, 82:30, 87:45, 93:10, 99:12, 103:12, 105:20, 126:66, 148:23, 156:10, 211:16-17, 238:16, 273:11.] *MX News (Sydney), 18 Mar; Sun, 27 Mar 2013.*

Zebiya Ngendakumana, 30, a mystic in Burundi, claims to have visions of the Virgin Mary on the 12th day of each month. Over the last few months, her sect has developed a following across the country and in neighbouring Democratic Republic of Congo, and has a tense relationship with the Burundi government. Last year, police destroyed a sanctuary of the sect in Kayanza, its stronghold, and its followers retaliated by breaking up a Sunday service at a local Catholic church. On 12 March 2013, as the Blessed Virgin was due for her monthly appearance, police attempted to prevent sect members from meeting on a hilltop in Kayanza. Hundreds, armed with clubs and stones, resisted; at least six were killed and 35 wounded, and four policemen were seriously hurt. *BBC News, 13 Mar 2013.*

Antje Crapnik, 47, dubbed the Nymphomaniac of Munich by the German press, made men desperate with her insatiable appetite [see FT293:10]. In April 2012, she picked up DJ Dieter Schultz, 43, in a bar. After eight bouts of sex he had had enough and tried to escape, but she barred the door. When she finally fell asleep, he rang the police and got them to rescue him. A month later, she struck again, keeping her victim on the go for 36 hours. Police found the 31-year-old African man weeping on the street outside her apartment. He too had escaped when she fell asleep. "Oh God, it was hell," he said. "I can't walk. Please help me." On both occasions, she was taken to hospital for psychiatric observation.

Her mother said Antje was bipolar, but her problems really started when her ex-husband ditched her for not being young enough. She became obsessed with proving her attractiveness and as her nymphomania increased her work suffered. She was made bankrupt and ended up on benefits in the grimy flat where she held her victims captive. "My daughter only went on the pull when she had a manic phase," said her mother.

On 29 November 2012, she bumped into a neighbour – Christian, 31, a heating engineer – with whom she had been having an on-off affair. They downed a bottle of vodka and several bottles of wine at her flat, and Antje snorted a white powder before they had sex several times. When Christian awoke the next morning, he found her dead in bed next to him. He said: "I knew something was wrong because usually she wanted it first thing in the morning." *Sunday People, 9 Dec 2012.*

James Campbell, 68, died after a pet boxer dog ran him over. His wife Iris Forter was preparing to back into the drive of their house in Florida. As Mr Campbell left the van to open his drive gates, he released the dog, which jumped into the van and hit the accelerator pedal, backing the van over Mr Campbell. Ms Forter tried in vain to stop the van from backing up. Mr Campbell was trapped under the vehicle and was pronounced dead at the scene. *(Queensland) Sunday Mail, 20 Jan 2013.*

Peter McGuire, 51, a bank manager from Middleton, Lancashire, was kicked to death by his daughter's horse as the family drove to a show jumping event. He was forced to pull over with the horsebox in tow in an attempt to calm the 10-year-old chestnut. His wife heard him say "Calm down" before she heard two loud noises. A vet had to sedate the horse so Mr McGuire could receive treatment, but he had suffered a horrific head injury and was pronounced dead at the scene. *D.Mail, 24 Jan 2013.*

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UFO CLOSE SHAVE

The latest in a long series of near-misses with unidentified objects reported by civilian aircrew was revealed in a report published by the Civil Aviation Authority's Airprox Board in March. An Airbus A320 had a close shave with a UFO as it made its final approach in broad daylight to Glasgow airport on 2 December last year. The board heard the aircraft was at 3,500ft (1,070m) above the city in clear conditions when the pilot and co-pilot saw an object "loom ahead" just 330ft (100m) away. Before they could react, the object passed 300ft (90m) beneath them, but not before they caught a fleeting glimpse of it. They said it was blue and yellow or silver in colour with a small frontal area "bigger than a balloon." Air traffic control saw nothing on radar, but radar at Prestwick did spot an "unidentified track history" 1.3 nautical miles to the east of airbus's position, 28 seconds earlier. Anecdotal evidence suggests aircrew have been reluctant to file air-miss reports, but in this case the pilot did because he believed the risk of a collision was high. This was fortunate because, in the absence of any MoD interest in UFO reports, the CAA's Airprox Board is the only remaining official body in the UK with a remit to conduct detailed investigations of puzzling incidents like this one, albeit purely with a safety remit. They checked and eliminated all the likely candidates for the identity of the "untraced aircraft", including small fixed-wing aircraft, hot-air balloons and gliders or paramotors. These, and meteorological balloons, were all ruled out as unlikely due to the lack of a radar signature, leaving the board unable to reach any firm conclusion as to the cause. *BBC News West Scotland, 1 May; Airprox report 2012166/UKAB meeting 20 Mar 2013.*

CITIZEN HEARING

The UFO disclosure industry appears to be running out of steam as its latest publicity stunt failed to make any impact on decision makers. In April, Stephen Bassett, who describes himself as a lobbyist for disclosure on ETs, paid \$20,000 (£13,000) to former US senator Mike Gravel – plugged as "a former presidential candidate" – and five other US politicians to stage mock congressional hearings at the Washington, DC, National Press Club. The Parapolitical blog dissed the Citizen Hearing on Disclosure (CHD) that ran between



LEFT: Lt Col Richard French at the CHD.

PROJECT BLUE BOOK WHISTLEBLOWER

Project Blue Book, the US Air Force's UFO project, has often been slated as being an early debunking exercise, despite the many unexplained incidents in its files. At the CHD, someone claiming to be "one of the authors", Lt Col Richard French, told the Disclosure panel that in 1952 he was despatched by his superiors to Newfoundland where two UFOs had been seen entering coastal waters. When French – now 83 years old – arrived at the wharf near St John's, he found over 100 people, including local policemen, staring into the water, where two circular craft could be observed floating beneath the surface, just yards from the shore. Two 2-3ft (60-90cm) tall 'beings' could be seen nearby. They were grey, very thin, with long arms and either two or

three fingers. He claimed: "They looked the way [aliens] have been depicted in motion pictures." Presumably repaired, the two UFOs accelerated out of the water before vanishing. They returned 20 minutes later, when the process of submersion and apparent repair was repeated. French claims that although he believed he had seen genuine, alien-piloted UFOs, his position in Blue Book precluded him from saying so officially. A fascinating tale – and one which plays into the hands of those who believe the 1950s were awash with aliens and government cover ups. But even in times when people didn't carry cameras, surely, even in a small town, there would be someone keen to break this world-shattering exclusive? Unfortunately, there is no factual evidence linking French to Blue Book and Bob Sheaffer claims his stories are "entirely fabricated". Even UFO proponent Antonio Huneus told the *Huffington Post* he had reservations about Lt Col French's credibility, "because of his age, his memory isn't as good as it used to be [and] it's clear to me that he's fairly well read on the subject of UFOs." Given these problems, why was he invited to give evidence at a mock congressional hearing? In this instance French was superficially plausible to those selling the disclosure ticket to a credulous audience because he told them what they wanted to hear. www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/05/13/alien-beings-repaired-und_n_3240437.html

29 April to 3 May as the "first-ever convening of the hands-down, nuttiest US congressmen who ever lived". The Paradigm Research UFO advocacy group then charged viewers for access to hours of footage on a live web stream that included seasoned performers like Stan Friedman and Nick Pope giving "evidence" alongside a dwindling number of genuine UFO witnesses. Unlike in a real-life congressional hearing, none of the CHD evidence was challenged or subjected to critical scrutiny by sceptical voices. Most is already in the public domain and has failed to convince anyone other than those who already believe in aliens and conspiracies. The *New York Daily News* mocked the organisers by publishing photos of what it called "space cadets" wearing tinfoil hats. The whole carnival was excoriated by Parapolitical, who revealed that the source of Bassett's largesse was a mysterious Canadian, Tom Clearwater, whose Twitter feed links to 9/11 conspiracy theories. The blog's analysis suggests the public is losing interest in what UFO sceptic Bob Sheaffer described as Bassett's "dog and pony show". A search of Google trends revealed that interest in UFOs actually dropped off during the CHD and just a handful of media sources covered it. *New York Daily News, 29 April: www.nydailynews.com/news/national/ufo-buffs-beam-well-paid-ex-pols-article-1.1330724; www.parapolitical.com/2013/05/results-are-in-ufo-carnival-a-failure/*

UP AND AWAY

I was eight when I first had one of my 'turns'. Someone was teaching me to swim. They failed miserably. A weird sensation had swept over me that I could not comprehend. This began with a sense of feeling lightheaded, as if I were rising into the air. A strange buzzing noise filled my ears and my head was an egg timer with sand piling up inside it. Then I lost consciousness, to 'awaken' inexplicably on the far side of the pool with the swimming instructor ashen faced and muttering something to my mum.

Only recently was I medically diagnosed, after a more serious attack. VVS – Vasovagal syncope – is a condition that can be triggered by a chemical imbalance, or even just by stress or tiredness. It might get dismissed as a 'panic attack' and can happen to drivers late at night on a lonely road, causing accidents. You are more at risk from such dangerous situations than the syncope itself, where a sudden fall in blood pressure gets transmitted via the vagus nerve. In extreme cases, pacemakers have been fitted to minimise recurrence, but most sufferers just have mild attacks with long gaps across a lifetime so have no idea that they even have a problem.

Whilst I have experienced seven or eight VVS attacks over 50 years, many apparent cases have been reported to me by people who understandably interpret them in supernatural terms. None of them had even heard of VVS, let alone been told that they had it. But 20 per cent of astronauts who are put through body tilt tests during training, a method now used by doctors to diagnose VVS, report an attack, suggesting that a similar proportion of the population might be susceptible and may experience symptoms whilst unaware of their origin.

After my latest episode, four years ago, I promised in this column to conduct research and gather case histories. This has been illuminating.

Johnny Caesar is an entertainer who started on the club circuit and now has a stint in TV soap *Emmerdale* on his varied CV. In interview, he told me how on 28 February 1970 at a hotel in Aviemore, Scotland, whilst playing for skiers, his electric guitar erupted into flames. As it fell to the floor, Johnny crashed down with it, and the audience roared with laughter assuming it to be part of the act. But Caesar lay on the stage, in real danger.

He explained: "I could not breathe... But my mind was alert. I was able to think about everything clearly... I'm dying, but it's not instantaneous. Somebody will realise what is wrong and save me."

Luckily, there was a doctor in the audience who ran to start chest compressions. Johnny says he had gone 'out of the body' and – in a state of extreme lucidity – observed events: "There was no hurt involved... I felt myself 'go out'. I just sort of drifted up... It was really nice and peaceful... There I was just above myself, looking down, and I could actually see myself down there. See my body being worked on."

Eventually, he made a conscious decision to return, snapping back into his body with a



20 per cent of astronauts in tilt tests report a VVS attack

shock of pain. Johnny's heart had stopped for two minutes and he required weeks of care in hospital. This, of course, was not simply a VVS episode – but I recognise the features. During my worst attacks, my mind was sharply focused and reality somehow enhanced, not dulled. Indeed in one of my earlier episodes I floated 'out of the body' and experienced the ability to see events from above before 'snapping back' as Caesar describes.

But what has all of this got to do with UFOs, you might ask? The deeper that I have looked into the connections between VVS, near death experiences (NDEs), out-of-body experiences (OOBEs) and alien contacts (CE4s) the more it seems that they are interconnected.

For instance, in a study of OOBEs by Gabbard and Twemlow, by far the most consistent aspect of being 'out of the body' is how lucid the experience seems. It was reported by 94 per cent of their witnesses, compared with 30 per cent describing seeing a bright light. Moreover, the percentage of people who describe some kind of OOBE/NDE experience is similar to the percentage of people susceptible to VVS. Plus, those attacks can occur when driving tired at night, exactly when a disproportionate number of UFO CE4s are reported.

Another of the most common things described during a VVS attack is the belief that you are dying, even though that is very rarely true. A typical account from an American VVS sufferer says: "You can feel the life being sucked out of your body. The first time it happened I thought I was a goner".

I had that feeling, too; which leads to interesting questions about why NDEs occur

not only when someone is actually near death (after a heart attack, for example) but when they are never physically at risk. This suggests that it is *fear* of imminent death that is the real trigger for an NDE to occur, and this same fear is being created by the combination of plunging pressure and flow of blood to the brain during a VVS attack.

My research implies that stress can trigger a VVS attack with a range of physiological consequences. In extreme cases this induces an out-of-body sensation. OOBEs then appear to be a kind of stage two of this physical process. But there is also a deeper stage three, where the NDE occurs. Here a person not only feels as if they are leaving their body and are dying but that they *have* died – and go on to see lights, tunnels and strange beings who communicate mystical information.

Stage three is fascinating because NDEs and CE4 cases might possibly be the same phenomenon interpreted differently – with the CE4 the Space Age version of the age-old NDE. That option has to be contemplated when you consider a case submitted to me by a woman from Coventry.

Mrs W was in a highly stressed state after a family row that saw her sleeping on the settee. Suddenly, she awoke. Everything around her felt very "lucid" and above her a white, oval light was pulsating. "All of a sudden I was pulled towards the light and merged with it," she said. "Then I became aware that I was as light as a feather." At this point, she started to float up and away – searching for her husband.

This simplified version of Mrs W's story could easily be a stage one VVS attack that merged into a stage 2 OOBE, but has elements that could be interpreted as a stage three NDE (going into the light) or a CE4 (being sucked into a hovering oval). Mrs W did not suggest either – to her it was just a strange experience. But it poses questions about the boundary between supposedly discrete phenomena.

For now I am simply introducing my project and hope to publish a longer article in *FT* in the future. Any observations and experiences from readers would be welcome via email at: nufon@btinternet.com.

BLASTS FROM THE PAST

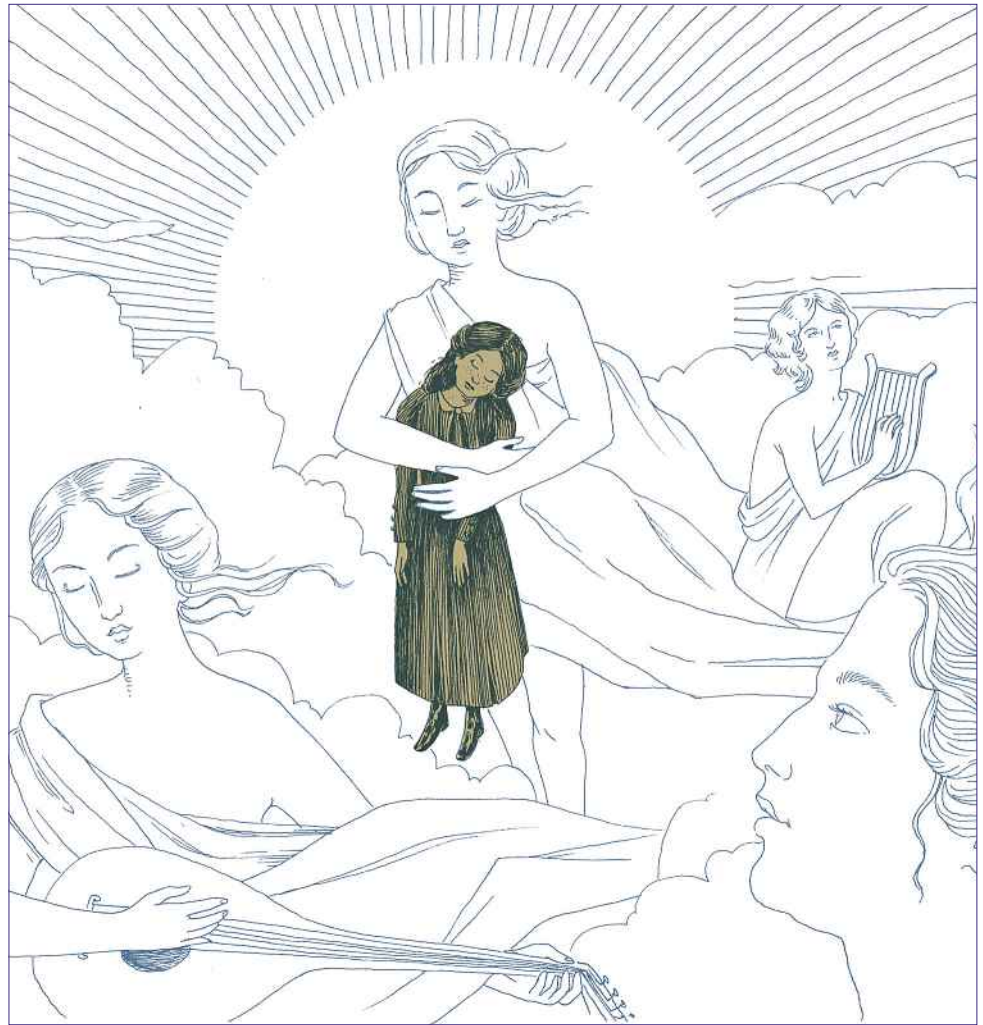
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45 ALTERED STATE: TELEPORTING IN MICHIGAN

THEO PAIJMANS looks at two cases of 'astral travel' and trance states in early 20th century Michigan

Over a century ago, two Michigan girls of roughly the same age claimed to have had some very unusual experiences. One girl said she was abducted and taken to a cemetery by a black ghost. The 10-mile (16km) trip to the cemetery occurred in such a short time that Fort's expression 'teleportation' springs to mind. The other girl went into regular trance states and visited heaven, where she encountered wingless angels and heard prophecies.

In December 1903, Mary A Kidder, a 14-year-old girl from Kalamazoo, startled her friends and relatives with her claims of visiting the heavens and bringing back messages from the dead and predictions of the future. Kidder fell into a trance three times a day, during which she claimed to be in heaven "where angels flock about her and reveal to her the past and the future... Miss Kidder foretells the details of her own death and that of her father and mother. She tells of conversations with angelic beings and describes graphically her vision of heaven. She says: 'I can't tell just what the sensation is like: I can't tell when the trance is coming. It just strikes me suddenly. I lose control of my body and seem to be carried up – up – up to an almost unimaginable height. The air seems soft and fans in my face. I fly through the clouds and then suddenly I know I am in heaven. About me stretches a great city, but there are no houses nor streets. Beautiful white-robed angels are singing and talking and sailing through the air. I am flashed through two immense, white, pearly gates and then the whole beauty of the place is before me. Colours of every hue and description and the most beautiful music I ever heard are on every side. I seem to know all the people there and they come to me and



CAPUCINE DESLOUIS

“About me stretches a great city... I am flashed through two immense, white, pearly gates and then the whole beauty of the place is before me.”

talk. It all seems so strange to me. The angels tell me their names and when I come back here and repeat them and describe what I have seen I find the living relatives of the angels right here and they look at me and wonder... I cannot understand how the angels pass through the air. They have no wings, nor do they walk. They

just seem to be taken through the air in any direction they wish to go.”¹

The newspapers² added testimonies of a number of persons claiming “to have been told remarkable things”, and all accurate. A possible cause for Mary's trance states, according to a Dr Frederick Shillito, was that she had been suffering

from a spinal condition. When a curvature of the spine developed, she was encased in a plaster cast. After several months, the cast was removed and “an hour later the girl's body became rigid, her eyes dilated and the most strenuous efforts failed to arouse her.” Shillito described her condition as catalepsy, adding that “the girl is known to have always been of a very religious turn of mind, and her visions of heaven and the angels may be accounted for in this way... While she suffers with catalepsy her hands remain stretched rigid and straight toward heaven.” He could offer no

explanation for the seemingly accurate messages the girl brought back from her altered state.³

Thirteen-year-old Tillie Jaster, living in Bay City, had a very different story to tell. Also in December, but 12 years before Mary Kidder's astral travels, she too was taken on a very unusual ride. That month in 1891 several newspapers published her unlikely story. "Stolen By a Black Ghost", the headlines shouted. "A Girl Almost Instantaneously Transported to a Lonely Grave Yard Ten Miles Away."⁴ The reports told of how Tillie had said that on 10 December "a ghost came to the door of the house where she is staying and took possession of her, remaining in that neighbourhood until Friday evening when he forced her to fly with him 10 miles to the Unionville cemetery, where he released his powerful hold upon her. She says the trip was made in 15 minutes..."

These accounts are intriguing, but frustratingly brief. Luckily, I was able to obtain the original account in the *Bay City Times Press*, a newspaper currently not digitised.⁵

So what happened to Tillie Jaster? Fortunately, the account in the Bay City newspaper featured an interview with Tillie. Instead of summarising, the flavour of light-hearted puzzlement is best kept intact by repeating the account as it was published:

Tillie Jaster is only 13 years of age, but she has been the cause of a genuine sensation in the neighbourhood around about the corner of Hampton and 11th streets. She has seen a real black ghost.

Tillie is big enough to be 16 and her red, round face has a chronic smile that ought to be enough to knock any ordinary ghost galley west.

But Tillie has given the

neighbourhood a shock from which it cannot well recover in many weeks for there are in that part of the city women and children who would believe almost anything you tell them, providing it teems with something supernatural or anything beyond the power of nature. Nature cannot handle ghosts and when you tell them that a ghost has been hanging around the neighbourhood, they believe it. But when you tell them that a black ghost – just think of it, a black ghost! – has been working his charms over an unsuspecting maiden, then no wonder that the women and children refuse to remain in the house after nightfall unless protected by the strong arm of man.

The Sunday Times reporter heard of the black ghost and Friday evening just after dusk sought to find its headquarters and what it had done.

The reporter went to the corner of 11th and Hampton streets and meeting two small girls asked them if they knew nothing about a ghost.

"It's over to Mrs Wilhelm's," was the speedy reply.

"And where does Mrs Wilhelm live?"

"Over yonder," said one of the girls, pointing to a one-story house on Hampton Street near where 10th street would strike were it cut through.

"There, she lives in there."

The reporter followed the direction and rapped at a storm door on the south side which was answered presently by Mrs Wilhelm who said, in reply to a question, that that was the place where the ghost had been. She invited the reporter into the parlour which was nicely furnished.

Tillie, speaking for the first time, "and me go with him. He came about half past six o'clock and went to the cemetery in Unionville."

"Oh horror! To the cemetery

in Unionville," remarked the astonished scribe. "How did you get there?"

"That's what she don't know," put in Mrs Wilhelm. "You see she doesn't know anything about how she got there, whether she walked or flew, but she got there and it only took her fifteen minutes. Wasn't that it Tillie?"

"Yes, I got back here at quarter to seven."

"You really missed Tillie?"

"Oh, yes, she was gone all night."

"She didn't stay in the Unionville cemetery all night with the ghost?"

"Oh no. After she got there she buried him and then she came back. She stayed with her sister Bertha that night. And she nearly scared her sister to death telling her about the ghost."

"Who and where is her sister?"

"Bertha Jaster. She works on Eight Street."

"But I understand Tillie was gone until Sunday afternoon?"

"Yes, she came back Saturday afternoon and went away again and came back Sunday."

"Did the ghost take her away that time?"

"I don't know," said Mrs Wilhelm.

"He didn't, did he, Tillie, that time?"

"No, I was by my sister that time."

"That's a very strange story," volunteered the reporter. "What kind of a looking ghost was it. A white ghost?"

"No. A black ghost"

"A black ghost."

"Yes. I saw a white ghost before."

"Did Mrs Wilhelm see the white ghost?"

"No. She can't see any ghost. If it runs against her she can't see it."

"You are not afraid of the ghost the way the neighbours are, are you?" asked the reporter directing his remarks to both the ghost seer and Mrs Wilhelm.

"No, Tillie isn't. I s'pose he

wouldn't hurt her so long as she does what he says."

"Tillie, what kind of a looking ghost was the black one?"

"I can't remember any more."

"What was his name?"

"I can't remember that anymore. He was a Free Mason and had killed his wife and two children. That's what he told me. He said he killed his wife because she wouldn't become a free mason. Then he killed his children."

"Do you suppose he came around to go to the masonic fair?"

"No. He didn't go anywhere but here. He was right round this house all the time. He stayed here from Thursday until Friday and then he went away."

Remarking about the strangeness of the story, the reporter asked what effect it had upon the neighbourhood. Mrs Wilhelm said that the women and children were afraid to stay alone at night. She further said that Tillie was in Bay City for the purpose of attending school and that her parents reside in Sebewaing. When the reporter rose to leave, Tillie wanted to know what he wanted to find out about the ghost for. She was satisfied and the conversation drifted to the canary in its cage and a moment later the reporter was wending his way out of the premises to 11th street.⁶

We hear no more of Tillie Jaster. I found a bit more about Mary Kidder. In 1909, a newspaper recounted how she had accurately predicted the whereabouts of her grandfather Jacob Rishel, who had disappeared 30 years previously.⁷

Mary Kidder was born on 8 May 1889. She gave birth to one child on 14 February 1920 that sadly died the same day. Mary A Kidder Bowers lived to a ripe old age of 80 years and died on 27 January 1970. She rests at the Riverside cemetery in Kalamazoo.⁸ I left a virtual bouquet of Forget Me Nots at her grave.⁹

NOTES

1 'Girl Has Talk With The Angels. Past And Future Events Are Described. Remarkable Revelations Which Tell Of Departed People Who are Unknown to Her', *Daily Leader*, Davenport, Iowa, 9 Dec 1903.

2 Her account was also published as: 'Visions Of Paradise', *The Deming Headlight*, New Mexico, 21 Nov 1903;

'Girl. After Sinking Into Trance. Tells Of people Long Since Dead', *The Newark Advocate*, Ohio, 26 Nov 1903; 'In Heaven During Trances', *Hutchinson News*, Kansas, 27 Nov 1903; 'Girl In Trance Describes Heaven', *Fort Wayne Journal-Gazette*, Indiana, 29 Nov 1903; 'Goes To Heaven In Her Trances', *The Evening World*, New York, 3 Dec 1903; 'A Picture Of

Heaven', *Daily News*, Marshall, Michigan, 'The Joys Of Heaven', 4 Dec 1903; *The Hartford Republican*, Kentucky, 4 Dec 1903; *The Waukesha Freeman*, Wisconsin, 10 Dec 1903; 'In heaven During Trance', *Marshall Expounder*, Michigan, 11 Dec 1903.

3 *Daily Leader*, Davenport, Iowa, 9 Dec 1903.

4 'Stolen By A Black Ghost', *The Daily Inter Ocean*, Chicago, Illinois, 22 Dec 1891; 'A Black Ghost Stole Her', *The Daily Picayune*, New Orleans, Louisiana, 28 Dec 1891. These accounts erroneously spell her first name as 'Lillie'.

5 My thanks go out to the Reference Department of the Alice and Jack Wirt Public

Library in Bay City, Michigan, for having located and sent a scan of the original account.

6 'Ugh! A Black Ghost. The Latest Sensation In The Spirit Line. Tillie Jaster's Story of Her Quick Flight to the Unionville Cemetery.' *Bay City Times Press*, Michigan, 20 Dec 1891.

7 'Girl In Trance Sees Missing Grandfather. Disappeared From Montour County Long Before Her Birth', *The Lock Haven Express*, Pennsylvania, 20 Apr 1909.

8 Data retrieved through www.ancestry.com.

9 One can do so through www.findagrave.com.

THE WITCH OF SCRAPFAGGOT GREEN

ROBERT HALLIDAY investigates a curious wartime haunting in an Essex village, involving poltergeist activity, missing geese and a vengeful witch back from beyond the grave. But were the multiple phenomena real, imagined or invented?

Main image: Witch model created by DAVID FOXLEY. Photo/illustration by ETIENNE GILFILLAN.

Great Leighs, in Essex (population 1,643 in the 2001 census), has acquired a reputation as a haunted village. This is due to ghost stories told about the St Anne's Castle, a local pub, and the Witch of Scrapfaggot Green, whose spirit was alleged to have terrorised the area during World War II.

The St Anne's Castle stands prominently on Main Road, the village's principal street, *en route* from Chelmsford to Braintree. Philip Morant's *History of Essex* (1768) says the building was once a mediæval hermitage (if so, it was probably attached to Leez Priory, a nearby monastery) and became an alehouse in the Elizabethan era. A tradition that this is England's oldest pub is doubtful: while it incorporates Tudor fabric, some sections only date from the early 19th century. A belief that it appeared in *Domesday Book* is patently incorrect.¹ Nevertheless, it displays some historic features, which were once enhanced by a four-poster bed in an upstairs room.

On 10 April 1939 the St Anne's Castle was featured as a haunted pub on *In Town Tonight*, a Saturday evening



ROBERT HALLIDAY

LANDLORD
ARTHUR SYKES
HAD HEARD
STRANGE NOISES

ABOVE: The St Anne's Castle in the Essex village of Great Leighs as it appears today.

BBC radio programme.² No recording survives, but the event was reported in the local press, when customers and staff vouched for the pub's sinister reputation and the strange goings-on there. Landlord Arthur Sykes had heard dragging noises on the floor,



while two visiting members of the American Psychic Circle had sensed something strange. Joyce, Arthur's eight-year-old daughter, was sleeping in the four-poster bed when she saw "a lightish figure" which vanished when she screamed: she was found white-faced and shaking. Of course, it could have been a bad dream or sleep paralysis, but it nonetheless affected the family.³

While the outbreak of World War II later that year might have diverted attention from the St Anne's Castle ghosts, the conflict directly impacted on the area between May 1943 and March 1944, when an airbase for the USAAF (United States Army Air Force) was built at Boreham, six miles (10km) south of Great Leighs. This was used for significant operations until July 1944, followed by intermittent minor operations until 1945.⁴

THE GHOSTS OF GREAT LEIGHS

The ghosts of Great Leighs returned to prominence in October 1944 when the *Sunday Pictorial*, a sister newspaper to the *Daily Mirror*, ran an article with the headline "The witch walks at Scrapfaggot Green". Arthur Sykes, who was now an ARP Warden, said: "Every day I hear of new mischief". Three geese had disappeared from a pen in his back garden. A haystack had collapsed. Alfred Quilter, a local shepherd, found his sheep had moved from their field to another paddock, yet the surrounding hedges and fences were all undamaged. Charlie Dickson, a builder, said heavy scaffolding poles were "scattered in his yard like matchsticks." The clock on the church tower had been running two hours late, and striking at midnight, despite being fitted with devices to prevent it chiming at night. There were strange happenings too at the Dog and Gun, a pub on the Boreham Road, 2½ miles (4km) south of the St Anne's Castle. Paint pots and brushes vanished from outside and were found neatly lined up under a bed in an attic. When some regulars were leaving one night, they nearly fell over a boulder that had seemingly materialised less than five feet (1.5m) from the door of the pub.

Arthur Sykes said that 200 years previously a witch had been burnt at the stake at a



ABOVE: Harry Price supervises the restoration of the 'Witch Stone' to its original site.

A WITCH HAD BEEN BURNT AT THE STAKE AT THE CROSSROADS

crossroads near the Dog and Gun and her remains buried beneath a stone. Ever since, the spot had been known as Scrapfaggot Green. When Boreham airbase was built, the stone had been moved, thus releasing the witch's spirit. Now, she was terrorising the area, even moving her stone to the Dog and Gun! The *News Chronicle* reported that some villagers had mounted night-time patrols to catch the culprit. Were they ghost-hunting, or did they think people were responsible?

Meanwhile the *Sunday Pictorial* contacted the celebrated psychic researcher Harry Price (see FT229:28-34, 299:44-49), whose best-known (some might say notorious) investigation at Borley Rectory had resulted in his 1940 book *The Most Haunted House in England*. Price, Arthur Sykes and the *Sunday Pictorial* reporters decided to lay the witch's spirit to rest by returning the stone from the Dog and Gun to her grave at Scrapfaggot Green. Before they could do so, another farmer found rabbits in his chicken coop. A photograph showed four villagers manoeuvring the stone into position, supervised by Arthur Sykes, watched by a woman holding a baby.⁵

The US magazine *Time* reported the story, saying that the morning after the stone was replaced it had been moved again, with a message on it saying 'non in sum', Latin for 'not here' or 'nobody home'. Two weeks later, the *Evening News* said that flowers had been placed on the stone.⁶

Harry Price described his visit to Great Leighs in his 1945 book *Poltergeist Over England* (see panel). Shortly before his arrival, 30 sheep and two horses died. He thought that while paranormal activity might have been at work, mass hysteria and practical jokers had also played a role. He claimed credit for the idea of replacing the stone, as a cathartic act to put people's minds at rest as much as to lay any spirit.⁷

CHIMES AT MIDNIGHT?

In 1965 one Albert Morrish from Chelmsford described his enquiries about the Great Leighs ghosts in *The East Anglian Magazine*. A local man told him: "They tried ter make out as 'er rang the church bells at midnight but my cottage is only just down the road and I never 'eard nuthin'."

Morrish wrote that a London businessman brought three local cottages to convert into a country home: one had an unpleasant atmosphere, and a dog ran from it in terror.



ABOVE: In October 1944 the *Sunday Pictorial* newspaper ran a story on the Witch of Scrapfaggot Green.

HARRY PRICE INVESTIGATES

A secret room was found in it containing a mummified black cat and a witch's pointed hat. He implies that this was the witch's house, but unfortunately provides no information as to the secret room's size.⁸

Between 1564 and 1645 there were about 100 executions for witchcraft in Essex, culminating in the campaign instigated by Matthew Hopkins, the infamous 'Witch Finder General', leading to 19 deaths (see FT198:30-36). This was followed by increased scepticism on the subject until the anti-witchcraft laws were repealed in 1736.⁹ Two Great Leighs residents were tried for witchcraft: Elizabeth Brooke and Ann Hewghes (or Hughes) in 1584 and 1626, but their fate is uncertain.¹⁰ Richard Deacon's biography *Matthew Hopkins: Witch Finder General* (1976) claimed that the Civil War witch-hunts were a front for espionage work, and that the Scrapfaggot Green Witch was a royalist spy who was killed by Parliamentarians. He cited his source as the manuscript *Tendring Witchcraft Revelations*. However, he provided no photographs of this manuscript, and it has not since been located. Richard Deacon was a pseudonym for George Donald King MacCormick, better known as Donald MacCormick, a prolific author of books about crime and espionage which relied on similarly unknown manuscripts, most notably *The Identity of Jack The Ripper* (1959) which has repeatedly been exposed by 'Ripperologists'.¹¹

Leaving aside Deacon's book, there appears to be no record of the legend of the witch of Scrapfaggot Green before it was related by Arthur Sykes in 1944. Harry Price believed 'Scrapfaggot' to be "probably a corruption of the Suffolk word 'scratch-fagot', an opprobrious term for an old hag or witch". Yet Ernest Gepp's *Essex Dialect Dictionary* (1929) includes 'Scrapfaggot', not as a name for a witch but for sticks used to tie faggots (or bundles of wood).¹² The belief that witches were burnt at the stake in England is fallacious: there is only one attested case of this (at Ipswich in 1647).¹³ All other executions were by hanging. Sykes also dated the witch's death to a century after the last witchcraft execution in Essex.

Many of the supposed poltergeist phenomena are dubious and amenable to non-supernatural explanation. It was said that the witch's spirit was roused by the construction of Boreham Airbase, yet activity was only reported six months after the base's completion. Arthur Sykes's geese were probably stolen (and eaten). The scaffolding poles and haystack which collapsed may have been badly stored. Painting equipment was moved under a bed, but in most reported poltergeist activity objects are thrown or scattered around: perhaps somebody simply tidied it away. The sheep could have jumped over the hedge or fence, and it would not be difficult for rabbits to enter a chicken coop (which might have contained grain). The church clock may have been set or wound badly (and one local person denied that it ever malfunctioned).

Apart from some animal deaths, which may have been due to disease, contaminated food, or a disturbed practical joker, the episode probably provided some



On October 6, 1944, the *Sunday Pictorial* rang me up and told me that their representative was at Great Leighs, where the most extraordinary things were happening all over the village.

He reported the following incidents: The tenor bell in the church tower tolled in the early hours of the morning, and the bell ropes played reversed chimes on Sundays; the church clock struck midnight at 2.30am, and lost an hour each day; a farmer's haystacks had been found pushed over in the night; corn stooks were found in adjoining meadows; cows in calf gave birth prematurely; the hens stopped laying; chickens – which no one had lost – were found drowned in water-butts; others had escaped from locked fowl-houses; sheep strayed through unbroken hedges; three geese, belonging to Mr Arthur J Sykes, landlord of the St Anne's Castle Inn (said to be the oldest in England: it dates from 1170), disappeared from his garden, though there was no break in the enclosure; a builder complained that a pile of scaffold-poles had been scattered about his yard, like matchsticks; a dozen paint pots, many brushes and other paraphernalia, neatly stacked over night, had been found by a decorator under the beds in a cottage where his men had been working, and so on. Nearly every person in the village had some story to relate, of strange happenings or displacement of objects.

With a friend I spent a day at Great Leighs on October 11, 1944, and we interviewed several of the victims, all of whom confirmed the reports I had received. A few hours before our arrival, 30 sheep and two horses had been found dead in a field. It was said they had been poisoned. During the same night, chickens in a yard and rabbits in hutches had mysteriously changed places, though the fasteners were undisturbed. Mr William Reynolds, the licensee of the Dog and Gun Inn, showed me a large boulder,

weighing some 200 pounds [90kg], that had been deposited outside his front door – just where one was likely to fall over it. I examined the stone carefully. It was of irregular shape, much worn, with no signs of moss or moisture on it. No one had lost such a stone, and its origin has not been traced.

Perhaps what interested me most was a certain bedroom in the St Anne's Castle Inn, which cannot be slept in – peacefully. Mr Sykes asked me what I thought of it. I told him that the contents of the room appeared to have been shaken out of a pepper-pot. He said: 'It is always like this. Nothing will "stay put"'. Over and over again we have straightened up the place, only to find next morning that everything was higgledy-piggledy. We now use it as a lumber room, but boxes and furniture are scattered about night after night. No other part of the house is affected.' It was from this inn that the BBC broadcast (April 15, 1939) a 'haunted house' programme.

The villagers declare that their misfortunes dated from the day when American bulldozers widened the road at Scrapfaggot Green, the centre of the village, thus displacing a two-ton stone that marked the remains of a seventeenth-century witch who had been buried (with a stake through her chest) at the crossroads there. They asked me what they had better do about it. I told them that if they believed the witch to be responsible for their troubles, the logical thing to do was to restore her tombstone to its original site. This they did, ceremonially, at midnight on October 11-12, placing the stone east and west in the traditional manner. The phenomena ceased. The result of my visit was that I came to the conclusion that the Scrapfaggot Green manifestations were partly genuine, partly the work of a practical joker, and partly due to mass-hysteria.

Harry Price, Poltergeist Over England, pp301-302.



ABOVE LEFT: The Dog and Gun public house, to where the Witch Stone was said to have moved. **ABOVE RIGHT:** the author points to the Witch Stone in its current location. **BELOW:** Great Leighs church, whose whose clock that is said to have given the wrong time and struck at midnight. **BOTTOM:** The author at Scrapfaggot Green.

local amusement and took people's minds off the war. I have searched local newspapers for mentions of the story without success, which lends support to the idea that it was promoted to boost the local pub trade when Boreham airbase ceased to be staffed and to increase the *Sunday Pictorial's* circulation.

It is doubtful that the witch stone had in fact attracted any previous folklore. *Time* quoted a Dr MacSweeney who said that roadworkers had regularly moved it over the past 20 years without suffering any ill effects. The Reverend William Smith, a vicar of Boreham, was later investigating local witchcraft traditions and was told that Arthur Sykes had placed the stone outside the St Anne's Castle to entertain US servicemen. Its movements in 1944 – to the Dog and Gun, for example – were probably arranged by local pub landlords. It has since been returned to the road outside the St Anne's Castle.¹⁴

FOLKLORE OR FICTION?

Yet the episode rapidly became accepted as authentic folklore. In 1948, a children's book called *The Witch of Scrapfaggot Green* was published by the Viking Press of New York. The author was Patricia Gordon – in fact a pen name for a husband and wife team, René and Patricia Prud'Hommeaux, who also wrote under the name of Joan Howard. The story closely follows the newspaper reports, although the village where the action takes place is not named. In this case, the witch is clearly shown to rise from her grave to create mischief, although never harming anybody. Local twins Sam and Daisy Bassett are the only people who can see or communicate with the witch. The villagers ask psychic researcher Michael Sedgwick (loosely based on Harry Price) for advice, but the witch eventually realises that she must fulfil a simple wish she never achieved in her life: having done this she returns to her grave of her own free will. Strangely, the book

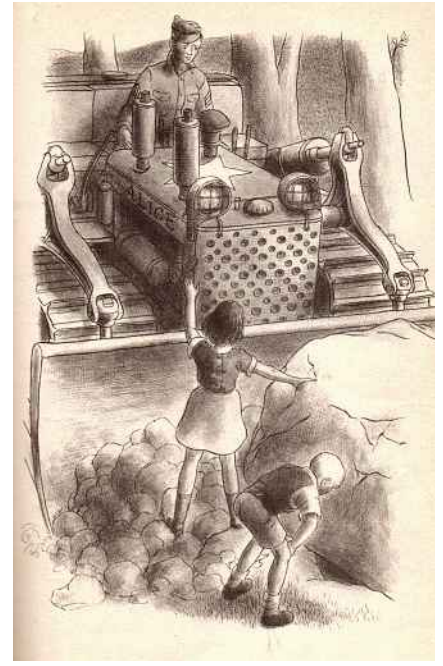
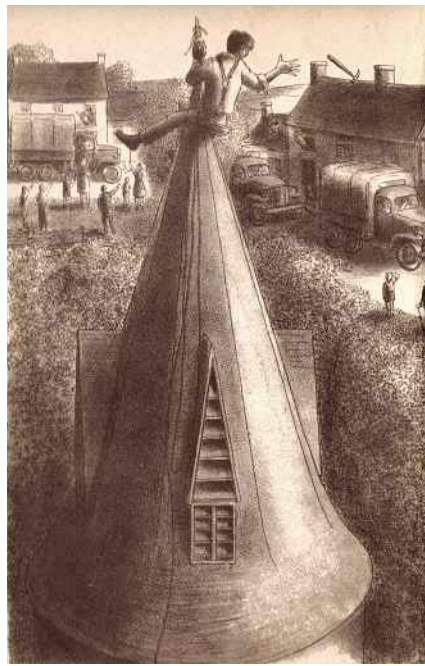


was never marketed or sold in the UK. The authors probably worked from press reports, as I can find no record that they ever visited Great Leighs.¹⁵

James Herbert Brennan, a prolific author on paranormal, occult and New Age subjects, has written an account of the affair, which is read by the actor Richard O'Brien, with appropriate illustrations, on *YouTube*.¹⁶ Essex folk singer Andy LeFevre wrote a song called *Scrapfaggot Green* which appears on his CD *Raindance*.¹⁷ In 1977 'Bob' Blake produced a Dungeons and Dragons fantasy game with the title *Of Skulls and Scrapfaggot Green*; although the roles in this had no connection with the events of 1944, it is impossible to imagine that Blake took the name from anything else.

Landlords have continued to tell ghost stories about the St Anne's Castle: the





ABOVE: Illustrations from the children's book *The Witch of Scrapfaggot Green*, showing the witch appearing to Sam and Daisy Bassett, the arrival of US troops observed from a church tower clearly based on that of Great Leighs, and Sam and Daisy warning a US serviceman about to move the stone that it covers a witch's grave!

room which contained the four-poster bed contains an unpleasant atmosphere. People have heard a child's footsteps in it, and have even felt as if they were being strangled. There is a presence by the fireplace in the public bar and sometimes a person is thought to be seen sitting there. Unpleasant things are seen and heard in the cellar, and many deliverymen from the brewery refuse to enter it.¹⁸ In 2002, I visited the St Anne's Castle when the then landlady told me these stories herself. Since then, the pub has changed hands. The present management may not be so keen to promote its reputation as a haunted building.

In March 2012 I visited Great Leighs to meet the village historian, Pat Watkinson, who took me on a local tour during which I visited Scrapfaggot Green for the first time.

This, in fact, stands in Little Waltham, at the end of a country road called Domsey Lane. (Anybody seeking this unaided should bring an Ordnance Survey Map of the area, and look for the OS grid reference TL 726130.) Pat told me that the cottages in which the mummified cat and the witch's hat were found stood here, but have since been demolished. Although she only moved into the village in the 1960s, she met some of the participants in the affair, including Alfred Quilter, who said that Arthur Sykes had invented the story in 1944, and that he and several other people had been invited to a photo-shoot in the pub when they were asked to smoke long 'churchwarden' style pipes.

Perhaps the story of the witch of Scrapfaggot Green tapped into the local

folklore that Essex is a witch-infested county: it may have been a somewhat unsophisticated invention, but it has continued to bamboozle and intrigue ghost-hunters and folklorists ever since. **FT**

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



ROBERT HALLIDAY has worked for various heritage organisations, including the Churches Conservation Trust. His publications include *Cambridge Ghosts*, co-authored with Alan

Murdie, *Cambridgeshire Strange But True* and *Suffolk Strange But True*. He has recently taken up horse riding.

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1 Philip Morant, *The History and Antiquities of Essex*, two volumes, T Osborne, 1768, vol 2: p98; William White, *History, Gazetteer and Directory of the County of Essex*, 1848, 351; http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Leighs; *Domesday Book, A Complete Translation*, ed Ann Williams and GH Martin, Penguin, 2002, pp1007-1013. The only study of Essex historic buildings that includes the St Anne's Castle is the *Unlocking Essex's Past* website: <http://unlockingessex.essexcc.gov.uk>.

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12 Ernest Gepp, *An Essex Dialect Dictionary*, Routledge, 1923, p96.

13 Cecil Henry L'Estrange Ewen, *Witchcraft And Demonianism*, Heath Cranton, 1933, pp302-3.

14 William JT Smith, *The Boreham Witch, Fact Or Fiction?*, privately

published, 1995, pp18-19.

15 I first found this book via a literary blog about juvenile ghost stories, 'Jenny's Wonderland of Books': <http://wonderlandofbooks.blogspot.co.uk/2009/05/thinking-about-ghosts.html>. I can find comparatively little about the authors, whose works were mostly published in the USA. Strangely, the book was never marketed or sold in the UK, and I believe I may be the only person in England to own a copy.

16 www.youtube.com/watch?v=3VuBazqZA_o

17 www.myspace.com/andylefevre

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THE UNCANNY VALLEY

From fairies and the Men in Black to Japanese robots, hyper-real sex dolls and CGI versions of famous actors, we are surrounded by all sorts of human-like simulacra.

IAN SIMMONS explains why the science of robotics has helped provide a new model of why the not-quite-human creeps us out so much, and just why that might be...

Back in September 1961, WD Clendenon, a correspondent of the famous UFO contactee George Adamski, was visited by an individual who claimed to be carrying out a political survey. The man's departure was immediately followed by an encounter with "a brilliant white ball of light".

Clendenon described his visitor as follows: "His skin was smooth, as though he had never shaved in his life. His skin reminded me of a baby's skin. When he smiled, his teeth were perfect and very white... his hair was dark and trimmed in a business-like manner. He looked almost too perfect and it bothered me."¹

In 1985, Dan Seldin awoke in Cleveland Ohio to find three black-clad people in his room, one of whom was a woman with dark eyes and black hair, who had sex with him. Later, when hypnotised by abduction researcher Budd Hopkins, Seldin said: "She looks evil, but she looks pretty, too."²

In 1990, an Irish farmer named McCleary had four crop circles appear in the oats growing on his Tipperary farm. After visiting the last one, he was interrogated about the circles by a thin



man dressed completely in black who suddenly stepped out from behind a shed and started talking to him. McCleary said the man was wearing clothes that looked 50 years old, and that he had something "dead" about him.³

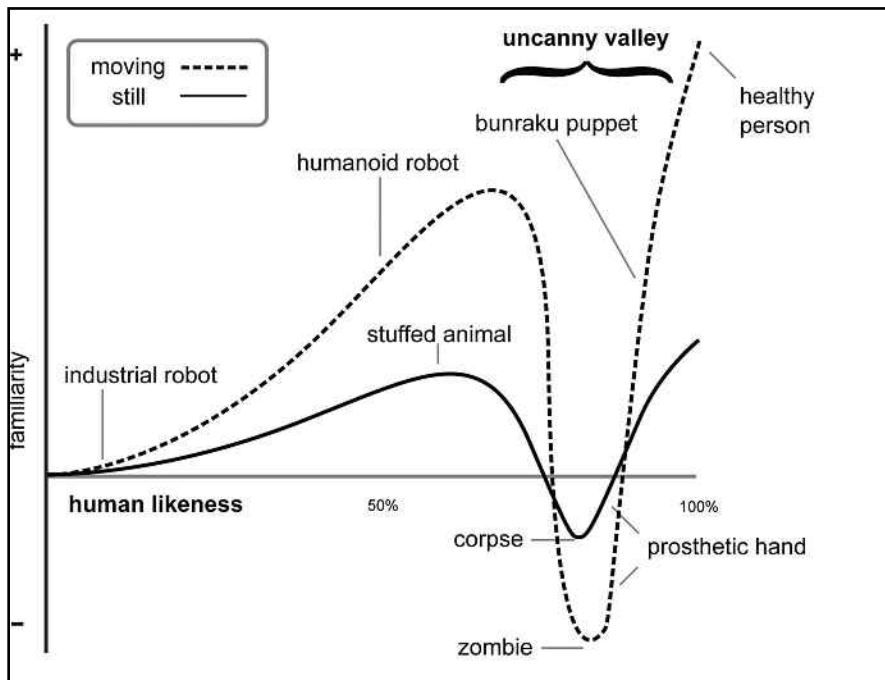
All three of the above witnesses had experienced classic 'Men in Black' (MIB) encounters, and all three found aspects of the individuals they met unsettling and weird. But MIBs are not the only kind of entities that possess such strange characteristics. Take Antonio Villas-Boas, who was abducted by aliens in 1957 and had sex with a beautiful blonde extraterrestrial; he was somewhat perturbed when she "growled like a dog" throughout.⁴ Then there are fairies. Emma Wilby in her book *Cunning Folk and Familiar Spirits* describes them as "possessing a human-like appearance and living an uncanny simulacrum of human life".⁵

Wilby, in her summary of fairy nature, gets to the crux of all these encounters, and indeed, pretty much every foratean encounter with such human-like entities.

LEFT: "An uncanny simulacrum" – one of Bean Shanine's hyper-real vampire baby dolls.



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Experiencers like those described above were not just coming face-to-face with weird beings or strange “simulacra of human life”, they were also staring deep into what has become known as the ‘Uncanny Valley’.

HUMAN SIMULACRA

The term was coined in a 1970 essay by Japanese roboticist Masahiro Mori as *Bukimi no Tani* – ‘The Valley of Eeriness’ – but it only reached wider currency when, in 1995, it was translated by Karl McDorman, who gave the phenomenon its now more familiar name.⁶ McDorman expected it to be of interest only to a few fellow roboticists, but it rapidly went viral and became something of a pop culture meme.⁷ So what exactly is the Uncanny Valley? It is perhaps best demonstrated by a graph mapping people’s emotional responses to various human-like and not so human entities (pictured above).

Essentially, the graph shows that as non-human objects become more and more human, our sense of empathy and comfort with them also rises – that is, until an object comes to resemble a human *very* closely; then our feelings of empathy and comfort take an immense nose-dive, to be replaced with unease and a sense that the object or entity is somehow wrong and even malign. And while this discomfort is marked enough with stationary objects, it absolutely rockets once the object is *moving*.

This concept was originally very much tied in with robotics, and is the reason that humanoid robots like Honda’s Asimo do not have realistic faces but either highly stylised ones, or, as in Asimo’s case, none at all – just a blank visor.⁸ Watch the Asimo video, then compare it to a video of the hyper-realistic Philip K Dick android created by Hanson Robotics.⁹ Which are you more comfortable with?

That’s the Uncanny Valley. Essentially, it’s the feeling of dissonance that you get when encountering something that on one level is giving out signals that it is a human being,

THERE’S A SENSE THAT THE ENTITY IS WRONG AND EVEN MALIGN



TOP: A graph mapping people’s emotional responses to various human-like entities.

ABOVE: When CGI goes bad: the *Tin Toy* baby and the *Polar Express* Tom Hanks just gave people the creeps.

but on another is also signalling that it is not. Hence the MIB experiencers’ feelings that their strange interlocutors “looked almost too perfect and it bothered me”, or were in some way “dead” or “evil”. Something has to be very, very close to human indeed before we get over such feelings and our levels of empathy and comfort return. One of the reasons the idea of the Uncanny Valley gained swift currency was that the translation of Mori’s paper occurred not long before Hollywood made its first attempts at creating hyper-realistic CGI characters, with films such as *Polar Express* – and, by popular verdict, failed. Audiences found *Polar Express*’s multiple digital Tom Hanks’ even more disturbing and unsettling than the real one – dead-eyed and nightmarish, these simulacra pulled viewers deep into the Uncanny Valley. Pixar had already worked this out in 1988, having found that the realistic baby in their short *Tin Toy* generated widespread revulsion, which led to their policy of avoiding human leads in any of their subsequent films; hence the talking cars, cute monsters and animated toys that have predominated ever since.¹⁰ Video games have the same problem, particularly those that use recognisable people in digitised form. Speaking of a 2004 game based on the TV series *Alias*, Clive Thompson, writing in *Slate*, said: “Whenever the camera zooms in on her face, you’re staring at a Jennifer Garner death mask. I nearly shrieked out loud at one point... It’s as if [she] has been shot up with some ungodly amount of Botox and [is] no longer able to make Earthlike expressions.”¹¹ Over the last 10 years or so, CGI has improved its modelling of lifelike humans considerably – such that the almost-human Na’vi in James Cameron’s *Avatar* seem to have avoided the Uncanny Valley, as does the Ray Winstone character in *Beowulf* (though not Angelina Jolie as Grendel’s mother) and most of the characters in *Tintin* (though, again, not Tintin himself). It has reached the point where the digitally resurrected Audrey Hepburn in a recent Galaxy chocolate ad creates barely a whisper of the effect, although she still seems curiously empty, and no one would mistake her for the living Audrey.¹²

VALLEY OF THE SEX DOLLS

Research by Thalia Wheatley, from Dartmouth College in the US, has shown that the Uncanny Valley effect works with everyone from her students to a remote tribe in Cambodia, but only when they were shown human faces that were familiar to their own ethnic group. Using morphing software, she showed test subjects doll-like and human faces, finding that people said a face was more human than doll only if it had at least 65 per cent of a human face. They could even judge an artificial figure’s human appearance based on a single eye.

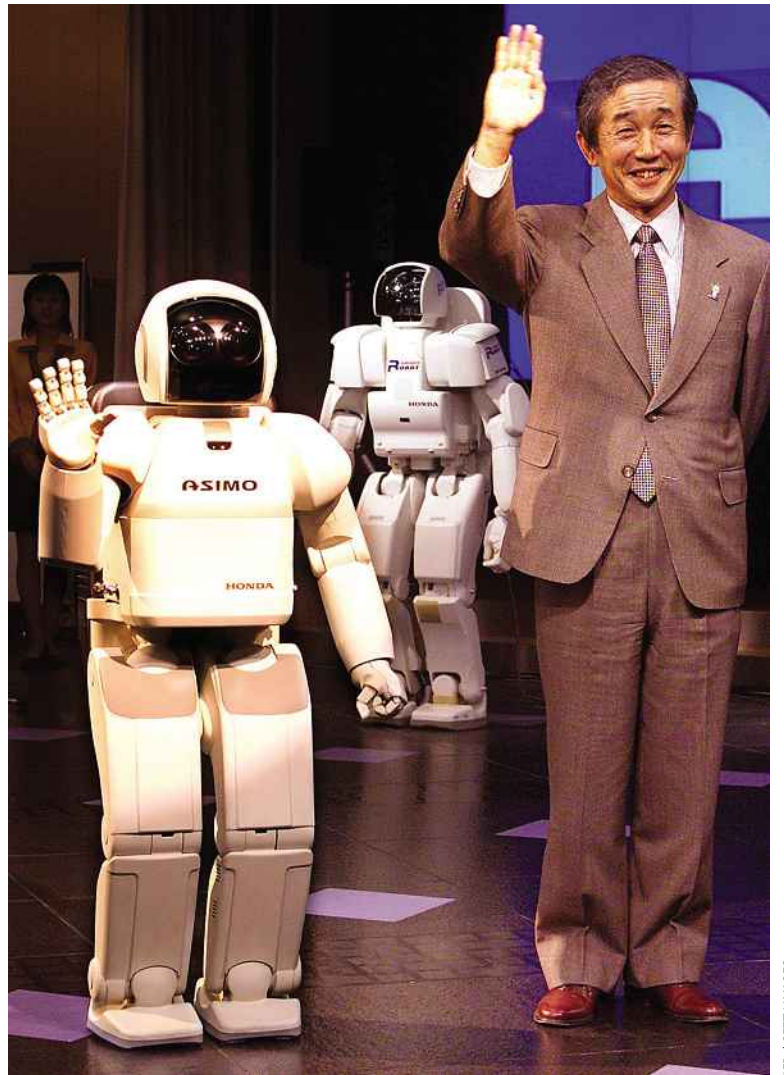
It is also clear, though, that responses to the Uncanny Valley vary between individuals. Some people clearly find appealing entities that others would very definitely place in the Valley – and nowhere is this clearer than in the world of sex dolls, where a premium is set upon their ability to appear as human as possible. For many people, these things



SCOTT OLSON / GETTY IMAGES



TOP: A reporter interviews an android version of sci-fi writer Philip K Dick developed by Hanson Robotics. **RIGHT:** Japan's Honda Motor President, Hiroyuki Yoshino and the company's humanoid robot ASIMO in 2000. **ABOVE:** An 'Actroid' developed by Osaka University and manufactured by Kokoro Company Ltd, unveiled at the 2003 International Robot Exhibition in Tokyo, Japan.



AFP / GETTY IMAGES



ABOVE LEFT: Former AI researcher Douglas Hines with his creation, the “fully functional” sex robot Roxxy. ABOVE RIGHT: Bean Shanine and one of her eerily lifelike babies.



are definitely deep in the Valley, but clearly for the people who buy Realdolls,¹³ the US life-size ultra-Barbie version, or any of the numerous, and even more unsettling, Japanese models¹⁴ (known as ‘Dollers’) this is not a problem.

Furthermore, there are a number of active projects to turn dolls like this into fully functional sex robots, which by rights ought to sit at the very bottom of the Uncanny Valley, and for most people probably do. Probably the highest profile of these is ‘Roxxy’, built by Douglas Hines, a former artificial intelligence researcher at Bell Labs. Looking at him interacting with Roxxy, he clearly thinks she’s marvellous, but I am not sure many will share that opinion, although he is marketing versions at \$9,000 a go.¹⁵

There is also a market for hyper-real baby dolls, precisely the size and appearance of actual babies, which are either amazingly cute or supremely unsettling, depending on your point of view.¹⁶ Artist Bean Shanine has capitalised on this, selling modified vampire and zombie versions.¹⁷ At the other end of the scale, there are people who experience Capgras Syndrome, a psychological disorder that results in them believing that their friends and relatives have been replaced with duplicates (sometimes overtly identified as robots) that are identical in every way with the original, but which they nonetheless know are doppelgänger, even if no-one else can tell. This could be viewed as a displacement of the Uncanny Valley effect so that it is applied to actual humans, not just human simulacra.

TOO CLOSE FOR COMFORT

Mori’s paper, while identifying the Uncanny Valley phenomenon, does not attempt to explain it. Although it has clearly struck a universal chord culturally, until recently very little work has been done into *why* the Valley exists. In fact, there is some dispute as to

FOR MANY PEOPLE, SEX DOLLS ARE DEEP IN THE UNCANNY VALLEY



ABOVE: An uncanny valley, to be sure – one of the US Realdolls displays her terrifying twin peaks.

whether it is even a single phenomenon or a combination of several, particularly because despite its near-universal occurrence – it has even been demonstrated in primates – there are clearly huge variances in what individuals place in it, as evinced by the behaviour of the ‘Dollers’.¹⁸

A number of hypotheses have been put forward to account for the Uncanny Valley. It has been suggested that it is the result of conflicting perceptual cues – many of the cues a hyper-realistic humanoid construct gives off strongly suggest it is a living being, but simultaneously it gives off others that signal that it is not, distorting our established perceptual boundaries. This results in us feeling uncomfortable because we are no longer sure what the entity is. Essentially, this hypothesis proposes that when something like a robot elicits an Uncanny Valley response, it is no longer being judged by the standards of a robot doing a passable job at pretending to be human, but is instead being judged by the standards of a human doing a terrible job at acting like a normal person.

It has also been suggested that the effect is a result of the human fear of death – something that human-like but inanimate objects invoke by having an appearance too close to that of a corpse for comfort. When they move, they double the horror by violating the convention that corpses are immobile, as they still don’t have enough life-like characteristics to pass as living humans. This may well have something to do with the fact that human faces are constantly mobile, with micro-expressions passing across them even when essentially still, giving them subliminal animation that we recognise as the sign of a living thing, and which even an animated artificial human will lack.

Linked to this is the idea that the Uncanny Valley is linked to pathogen avoidance – the subtly unnatural nature of the almost-humans reminds us too much of the



AFP / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: A visitor interacts with female humanoid robot “Minami” at the Takashimaya department store in Osaka, Japan. “Minami” is programmed to use various phrases such as “Do you come alone today” or “Let’s take a picture together” when speaking with shoppers.

appearance of someone who is ill, and we are genetically conditioned to flinch from disease for fear of catching it. On a less extreme level, it has been suggested that it is due to our mate selection responses, that we avoid mates who appear to have poor fitness, and the not-quite-human appearance of things in the Valley triggers this. Capgras Syndrome, it has been suggested, results from those experiencing it having an intact system for overtly recognising things, so that they can identify a person or an object, but a damaged capacity for emotionally recognising things. This means that when they see something,

they can tell what it is, but even if it is something they know very well, it still seems different and new to them, creating Uncanny Valley-style cognitive dissonance. This suggests that an interplay between these two modes of recognition is also at work in the rest of us when we experience the discomfort of coming face to face with a ‘spooky’ entity.

We are just beginning to develop an understanding of this peculiar emotional response. In time, research into the Uncanny Valley could throw much light on how we respond to the bizarre beings in the fortaean realm, and even help us discern

whether an apparently fortaean encounter is merely something entirely normal that has triggered an Uncanny Valley response in the percipient, or a genuine meeting with the inexplicable. **7**

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IAN SIMMONS has been a clippings sorter and regular contributor to *Fortean Times* for many years. He works in science communication and is based in Newcastle-Upon-Tyne.

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15 Thanks are due to my friend Helen Keen, who alerted me to Roxxy. Helen features Roxxy in her show *Robot Women of the Future*. There’s a video of Hines and Roxxy at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=2MeQcl77dTQ.

Apparently, when she debuted at the Adult Entertainment Expo in 2010 Roxxy garnered over 4,000 pre-orders, but it isn’t clear whether any have yet been met.

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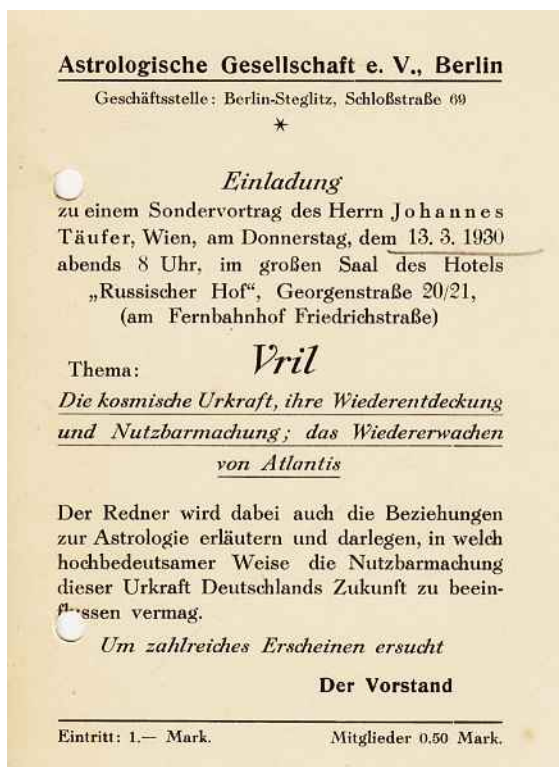
The Vril Seekers

How did a fictional force invented by a 19th-century English writer inspire a body of myth that takes in Nazi occultists, flying saucers, secret societies and free energy - and continues to flourish online in the 21st century? At long last, **THEO PAIJMANS** can reveal the truth about the fabled Vril Society...

Aliens from Aldebaran channelling blueprints for flying saucers to female mediums; secret meetings with obscure esoteric orders; the construction of a machine to travel to the hereafter; the Black Sun; the power of Vril – this is the current incarnation of a mythos that started a mere 15 years after the end of World War II. At its heart lies a black lodge of wizards and magicians, hovering over the cradle of National Socialism – the Vril Society.

In the spring of 1930, two slim pamphlets appeared on the streets of Berlin, one a mere 60 pages, the other approximately half that length. Only one pamphlet named its author, under the penname of Johannes Taufer – or ‘John Baptist’. Two German occult publishers distributed the pamphlets, perhaps to a fairly wide readership amongst the esoterically inclined. A Berlin address was printed in both of them. Having studied the pamphlets, anyone wishing to know more could obtain further information at this address.

The 60-page booklet by ‘Johannes Taufer’ appeared under the imprint of the ‘Astrologische Verlag Wilhelm Becker’¹ of Berlin. It bore the appropriate title *Vril. Die Kosmische Urkraft. Wiedergeburt von Atlantis* (Vril – The Cosmic Primal Force – Rebirth of Atlantis). The publisher was, in fact, an organisation that called itself ‘Reichsarbeitsgemeinschaft Das



LEFT: Invitation by the RAG for a lecture by Johannes Taufer on the theme of Vril, the cosmic primal power, its rediscovery and use and the rebirth of Atlantis.

biologischen Symbolen (World Dynamism – Forays through technological New Lands Using biological Symbols).

The Berlin group concerned itself with a new energy force called Vril, which it saw as one of the technical properties of Atlantis, and a new form of spiritual technology. This would eventually change mankind into a higher species and reform society as we know it into a new utopia. The RAG compared the Earth with an apple sliced vertically in two halves – the North Pole was the anode, or positive, and the South Pole the magnetic axis, the cathode, or negative. From this, the RAG drew certain technical and physical conclusions for the use of Vril energy, which it also called “the all force of the forces

of nature”. Certain devices, described as “ball-shaped power generators” would channel “the constant flow of free radiant energy between outer space and the Earth” and would enable “the specific use of this energy”.² Readers were invited to enquire for further information at the Berlin address given in the pamphlets.

Kommende Deutschland’ (Imperial Working Society The Coming Germany, abbreviated to ‘RAG’), whose headquarters were also located in Berlin, at Pallasstrasse 7-1. The second booklet, published by Otto Wilhelm Barth Verlag, was issued by the same organisation and entitled *Weltdynamismus. Streifzüge durch technisches Neuland an Hand von*



ABOVE LEFT: German edition of Bulwer-Lytton's *The Coming Race*. ABOVE CENTRE: Portrait of the author as a young man. ABOVE RIGHT: A tall, powerful female Vril-Ya. BELOW: A letter from Johannes Janik on RAG stationery and a letter from Otto Wilhelm Barth, who published the second of the RAG pamphlets, both from the RAG Archive.

THE BIRTH OF VRIL

The idea of Vril was much older. It was born in an 1871 novel called *The Coming Race* by Edward Bulwer-Lytton (see FT292:63). Bulwer-Lytton was a mixture of occultist and post-gothic novelist who had enjoyed fame with titles such as *Rienzi* and *The Last Days of Pompeii* and offered glimpses of his occult interests in *Zanoni*. *The Coming Race* was to be the last book of his prolific writing career.

One can read *The Coming Race* as a science fiction story – somewhat archaic, yet still captivating because of its potent ingredients: a race of beings, vastly superior to man, living inside the Earth, and a fantastic technology somewhere between a fairy tale and such post-Jules Verne conceptions as flying wings. The term Vril is introduced for the first time to denote an all-pervading, immensely powerful source or energy, which can heal or destroy and which is employed by the superior race, known as the Vril-Ya. The women of this humanoid race are taller and more powerful than their male counterparts. The Vril-Ya know of our existence – and with an unsettling indifference they also know that one day they will surface and put an end to the vastly inferior species of *Homo sapiens*. Bulwer-Lytton's novel ends with a warning that we must become aware, and realise that, one day, the Vril-Ya will rise.

“What is Vril?” the unnamed protagonist in Bulwer-Lytton's novel asks himself in astonishment. “There is no word in any language I know which is an exact synonym for Vril. I should call it electricity, except that it comprehends in its manifold branches other forces of nature, to which, in our scientific nomenclature, differing names are assigned, such as magnetism, galvanism, &c... in Vril they have arrived at the unity in natural energetic agencies, which has been conjectured by many philosophers above ground... by one operation of Vril, which Faraday would perhaps call ‘atmospheric magnetism’, they can influence the variation of temperature – in plain words, the weather; that by other operations, akin to those ascribed

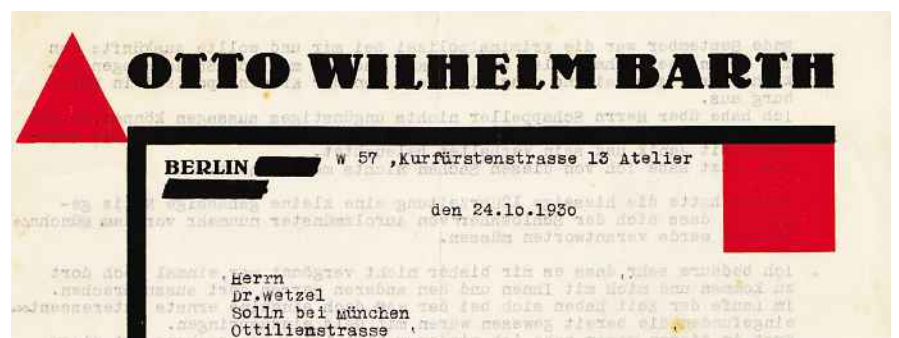
to mesmerism, electro-biology, odic force, etc., but applied scientifically through Vril conductors, they can influence over minds, and bodies animal and vegetable, to an extent not surpassed in the romance of our mystics. To all such agencies they give the common name Vril.”³

The influence of *The Coming Race* upon the occult underground was considerable. Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (see FT302:32-37), the co-founder of the Theosophical Movement, considered Bulwer-Lytton as one of her most important sources of inspiration. Reading one of his novels when living in Saint Petersburg practically started her occult career. In her *Isis Unveiled*, Blavatsky exclaimed that Bulwer-Lytton “allowed his readers to take it as a fiction” and she saw the similarity of Vril with Baron von Reichenbach's Od, Levi's Astral Light and Akasha. “Absurd and unscientific as may appear our comparison of a fictitious Vril

invented by the great novelist, and the primal force of the equally great experimentalist, with the kabalistic astral light, it is nevertheless the true definition of this force,” she wrote.⁴ Later, when she penned *The Secret Doctrine*, she entitled a chapter “The Coming Force”. Here, Blavatsky compared Vril with the sidereal force of the Atlanteans, called Mash-Mak, and concluded that “It is the Vril of Bulwer-Lytton's *The Coming Race*”.⁵ Through Blavatsky, the concept of Vril spread far and wide in theosophy, anthroposophy and other occult milieux.

PSEUDOSCIENCE IN NAZILAND

The Berlin group was completely forgotten and *The Coming Race* remembered, if at all, as a literary curiosity when in 1960 *Le Matin des Magiciens* (“The Dawn of Magic”) by François Pauwels and Jacques Bergier was published in France. In this best-selling book,





ABOVE LEFT: Willy Ley, seen at right, with Wernher Von Braun (centre) and Dr Heinz Haber; Ley's brief recollections formed the basis of the later Vril myths.
 ABOVE RIGHT: This 1928 pamphlet by Franz Wetzel and L Gföllner introduced Schappeller's ideas on his method of creating free energy.



© NACHLASS L. GFÖLLNER/KROLL EDITIONS

the authors offered a new look at the 19th and 20th centuries. It was in two parts, the second of which brought the authors' perspective to the causes of World War II: the occult roots of National Socialism.

National Socialism, as embodied in Hitler and the Nazis, was brought into existence and nurtured by obscure occultists and esoteric orders. The most mysterious and foreboding of them all – according to Pauwels and Bergier – was a secret society in Berlin. They first heard of this mysterious order through a German scientist, Dr Willy Ley, who immigrated to America in 1933. This Berlin society was called The Luminous Lodge, or the Vril Society. Pauwels and Bergier further claimed that the Luminous Lodge had friends among the Theosophists and the Rosicrucians. Karl Haushofer,⁶ a German professor of geopolitics and friend of high-placed Nazi Rudolf Hess, was a member of the Lodge.⁷ The Vril Society did not operate in a vacuum; it had connections with the German Thule Society and the British esoteric order The Golden

THE NAZIS WERE NURTURED BY OCCULTISTS AND ESOTERIC ORDERS

Dawn, Pauwels and Bergier claimed.⁸

After *Le Matin des Magiciens* the floodgates opened and many writers on the theme of occultism and Nazism expounded on the Vril Society with enough enthusiasm to disguise the fact that, as a rule, their claims were not backed up by any evidence.

Today, what has grown over the years to become what we might call the 'Vril Mythos' is grown stronger – and more wide-ranging – than ever, especially on the Internet. Now, the

Vril Society is a secret organisation involved in the construction of flying saucers with the help from aliens from Aldebaran, who astrally transmitted the blueprints to two female mediums in the 1920s. This original story, introduced in 1992, has already given rise to numerous variants: the mythos is still evolving.⁹

But – going back to earlier sources – what did Willy Ley actually have to say concerning the Vril Society? His nine-page article titled "Pseudoscience in Naziland" was published in an American pulp science fiction magazine in 1947.¹⁰ In it, he described some of the German irrationalist theories and movements, such as Ariosophy, pendulum research, the Hollow Earth theory and the doctrine of eternal ice evolved by Austrian Hans Horbiger. On the topic of the Vril Society, Ley, without even referring to it by this name, provided precious few lines – only 33, to be precise: "The next group was literally founded upon a novel. That group which I think called itself *Wahrheitsgesellschaft* – Society for Truth – and which was more or less localised in Berlin, devoted its spare time looking for Vril. Yes, their convictions were founded upon Bulwer-Lytton's *The Coming Race*. They knew that the book was fiction, Bulwer-Lytton had used that device in order to be able to tell the truth about this 'power'. The subterranean humanity was nonsense, Vril was not. Possibly it had enabled the British, who kept it as a state secret, to amass their colonial empire. Surely the Romans had had it, enclosed in small metal balls, which guarded their homes and were referred to as *lares*. For reasons which I failed to penetrate, the secret of Vril could be found by contemplating the structure of an apple, sliced in halves. No, I am not joking, that is what I was told with great solemnity and secrecy. Such a group actually existed, they even got out the first issue of a magazine which was to proclaim their credo. (I wish I had kept some of these things, but I had enough books to smuggle out as it was.)"¹¹

These sparse descriptions enabled German author Peter Bahn, in the 1990s, to identify



TOP: Following the publication of Pauwels and Bergier's book, the Vril mythos took off; Nazi flying saucers anyone?

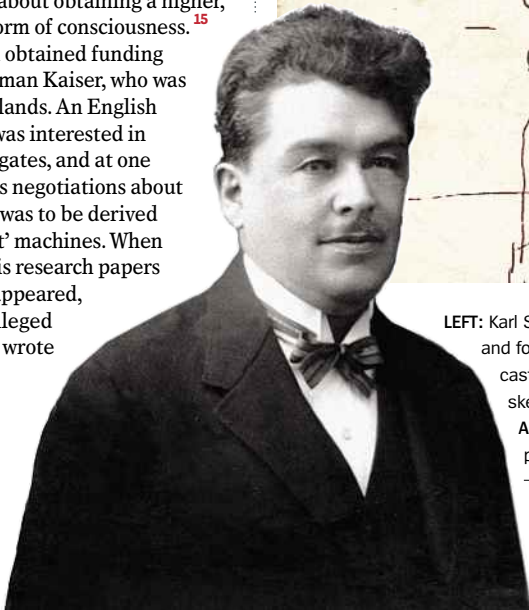
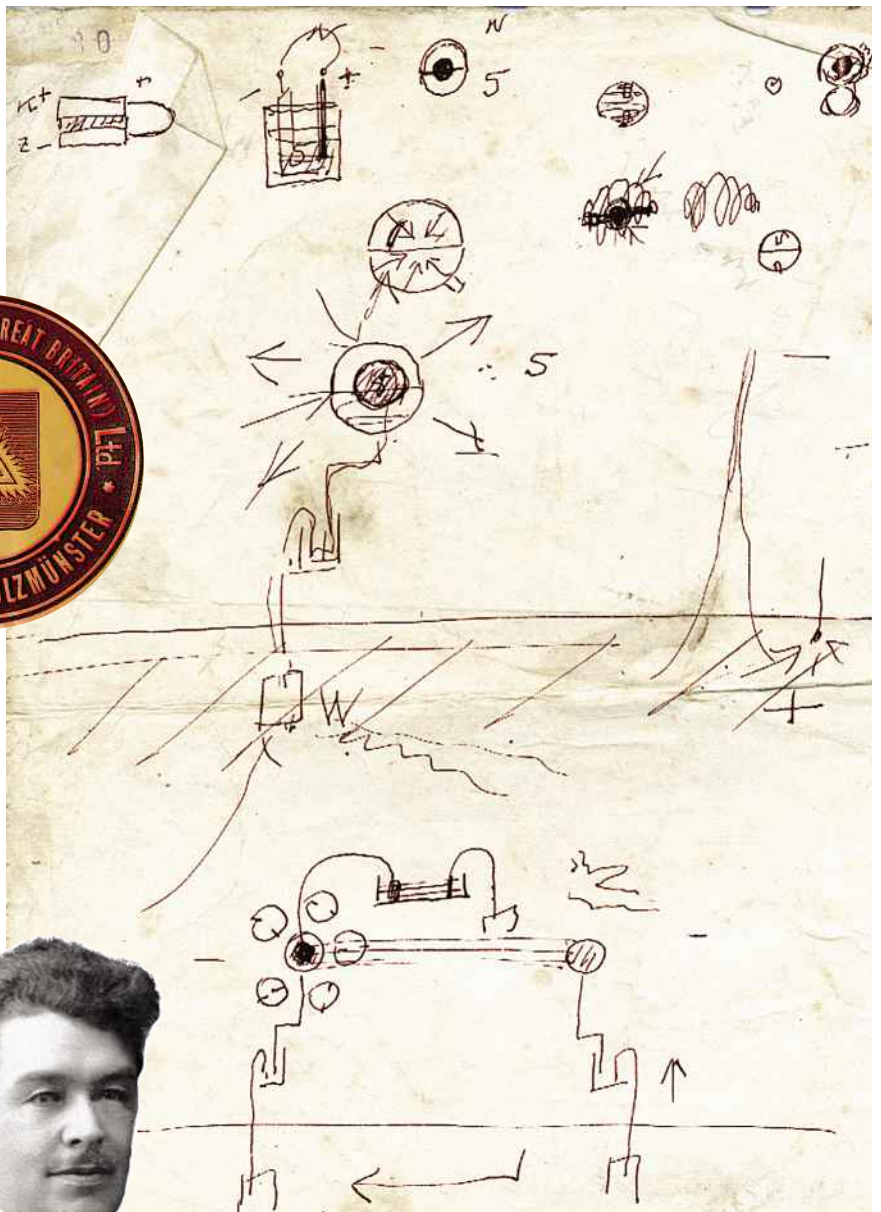
the RAG as the model for the Vril Society.¹² This in turn led to a further identification of what technology the RAG was actually talking about. We can find what the RAG stated in 1930 on the subject of “primal force”, the “primal machine” and “ball-shaped aggregates”, in other previously published pamphlets. One, published in 1928 in Munich, laid out the ‘Raumkraft’ or ‘spaceforce’ theory by Austrian inventor Karl Schappeller. The booklet was written by Franz Wetzel and L Gföllner, and was entitled *Raumkraft, Ihre Erschließung und Auswertung durch Karl Schappeller*¹³. A year later, in 1929, another pamphlet on Schappeller’s spaceforce theory was published.¹⁴

THE KING OF KARL'S CASTLE

Karl Schappeller (1875-1947) is certainly one of the least known yet most important persons of the 20th century free energy scene. Biographical data are extremely hard to obtain, yet we have collected enough to paint a preliminary picture of the man and his doings.

It is alleged that his work on his particular philosophy of free energy began in the 1890s. In the 1920s, Schappeller stayed in Vienna, where he collected around him a coterie, many of whom were young engineers. Schappeller developed new ideas on the supply of free energy and found financial backers, even in industrial and clerical circles. In 1925, he bought an old castle in his hometown of Auroldmünster, where he led a luxurious lifestyle, which brought him financial difficulties. This led outwardly to a negative image, but his labours inside the castle were of a different order. There he had earlier mentioned Franz Wetzel, one of the leading dowers of his time, amongst his co-workers. Schappeller was looked upon favourably by industrial companies, such as that of the Siegerland industrialist Fritz Klein, whose book *Logos und Bios* was advertised in the brochures of the Berlin RAG group. Klein had visited Schappeller in Auroldmünster. By all accounts, he is an interesting figure; he had travelled in China, India, Java and Japan during World War I, and after the war wrote two books in which he set out his ideas about obtaining a higher, multidimensional form of consciousness.¹⁵

Schappeller even obtained funding from the exiled German Kaiser, who was living in the Netherlands. An English shipping company was interested in Schappeller’s aggregates, and at one time entered serious negotiations about a ship’s engine that was to be derived from his ‘Raumkraft’ machines. When Schappeller died, his research papers and documents disappeared, although it is also alleged that he never really wrote much down, leaving that to others. It is claimed, however, that Schappeller or



LEFT: Karl Schappeller (1875-1947) developed new ideas on the supply of free energy and found financial backers, even in industrial, clerical and royal circles. TOP: The castle in Auroldmünster bought by Schappeller in 1925. ABOVE: The only known sketch made by Schappeller on a napkin, picturing his ‘space force’ system. ABOVE LEFT: Logo of the New Power Trust, a firm founded in the 1930s to promote the use of Schappeller engines in ships of the British Navy.

one of his co-workers did build at least some prototypes.

Schappeller considered the primal force as “that which holds the Earth in its inner together”. He also stated that “in the whole of nature, there is no nothing. No useless space. Where there is no matter, there is energy; therefore a so-called empty space is a space filled with force... energy is space controlling, matter is space filling. Because the cosmos is a closed vacuum, it is an immense space of energy.”¹⁶ Schappeller’s aim was to create a “constant discharge” between the cosmos and Earth, which he considered to be a reservoir of force. Since the word ‘plasma’ was still unknown at the time that he conducted his experiments and formulated his theories, he called a similar phenomenon “electrical vapour”, “luminous magnetism” or “luminous ether”. The use of the dynamic principles of the ether led to the construction of a ball-shaped device in which the luminous magnetism could be created and stored permanently, to be used as the conductor between the Earth and the cosmos.

Schappeller’s device resembled a miniature Earth and was built from two precisely calculated half globes with the hulls consisting of magnetic parts and with an inner room built of a nonmagnetic diaphragm. Inside this globe were two magnetic poles of “a certain mass”. Allegedly, a globe of only 6in (15cm) diameter delivered an astoundingly high number of kilowatts. The luminous ether regenerated itself and only dissolved when the globe was opened.¹⁷

AN INVENTED SOCIETY

A Vril Society such as Pauwels, Bergier and a host of other writers constructed over the years never existed. In the end, even the myths that has sprung up isn’t a clear-cut, unchangeable affair. It is interesting to note for instance that the Vril Society was initially seen – right up to the 1980s – as a shadowy, magical group steeped in occult rituals of the most unsavoury kind that, behind the scenes, helped manipulate Hitler into power. Only in the late 1980s and early 1990s did a small group from Vienna calling themselves Tempelhof Gesellschaft launch a fresh variant by abandoning these old fashioned ritual-magic underpinnings and shifting the focus to



LEFT: Johannes Taufer (1892-1966), writer of the *Vril. Die Kosmische Urkraft* pamphlet.

A BOGUS HISTORY OF A SECRET FLYING SAUCER PROGRAMME

technology received from an extraterrestrial race. This version introduced female mediums and astral contacts with aliens from Aldebaran and concocted an entire bogus history of a secret flying saucer construction programme.

In reality, Willy Ley – 17 years after the event – briefly remembered an odd group in 1930s Berlin, and it was this scanty recollection that formed the basis for Pauwels and Bergier’s creation of the ‘Vril Society’, three years after Ley had devoted a few brief lines to the subject in a science fiction magazine. From these beginnings, the whole thing took off.

Returning to the source – the RAG – it was impossible to make any further progress since their two pamphlets were published anonymously. Who was behind this group remained a mystery. That is, until a Swiss researcher contacted me a few years ago. By an incredible stroke of luck he had acquired

a large archive, which had been destined for the rubbish heap.

The archive proved to be a treasure trove – and enabled me to see behind the Vril Society. Original documents from the 1930s divulged everything in regards to the RAG: membership lists, internal correspondence, and the much sought after but elusive identity behind Johannes Taufer, the writer of the *Vril. Die Kosmische Urkraft. Wiedergeburt von Atlantis* pamphlet. His name was Johannes Janik. Janik was born on 27 July 1892 in Nikolsburg, a city in the Czech Republic. He died in 1966 in Augsburg. The irony is that he was still alive when *Le Matin des Magiciens* was published and even when the

German translation entitled *Aufbruch ins dritte Jahrtausend* appeared in 1962. Since Janik was involved in all kinds of esoteric endeavours till his death, one wonders whether he read the book and if he would have recognised in its tall tale his doings of some 32 years earlier.

The factual history of the RAG, though, is far more interesting. It concerns a small group that was not affiliated to upcoming National Socialism, although it did inspire Heinrich Himmler in later years. The RAG was part of a vibrant, pre-World War II underground in which unknown energies and paradigm-shifting technologies were debated. Its history also uncovers the fascinating trail by which a fictional force invented by a 19th century Englishman made its way through various occult milieux and became a topic of research and philosophising in Germany before the Nazis took power. How this developed, and what became of the RAG, is a fascinating theme and subject of my forthcoming book – and, ultimately, this is the source from which the whole Vril Society mythos sprang. **FT**

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



THEO PAUJMANS is an editor by day and a fortaean researcher by night. A regular contributor to *FT*, his latest book is *Behind the Vril Society*, to be published by Kroll Editions in August.

NOTES

1 German publisher Wilhelm Becker belonged to the leading German astrological scene long before World War I. Becker stayed in London for several years as a student of Alan Leo (1860 – 1917), one of the most important astrologists of late Victorian England. Initiated and prepared by Leo, Becker set up a flourishing astrologer’s shop in Berlin in 1910. In: Peter Bahn & Reiner Gehring, *Der Vril Mythos*, Omega Verlag, 1997, page 92. Cites as source Elic Howe’s *Urania’s Children*.

2 In *Welt dynamismus. Streifzüge durch technisches Neuland and Hand von Biologischen Symbolen*,

Otto Wilhelm Barth Verlag, 1930, as well as in Johannes Taufer, *Vril. Die Kosmische Urkraft. Wiedergeburt von Atlantis*, Astrologische Verlag Wilhelm Becker, 1930.

3 Bulwer-Lytton, *The Coming Race*, Blackwood & Sons, 1871, pp46-48

4 HP Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, J.W. Bouton, 1877, pp125-126.

5 HP Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, TPS, 1888, vol.1., p555.

6 According to Pauwels and Bergier, this information is to be found in Jack Spielting, *The Seven Men of Spandau*, which they refer to as a ‘curious book’ In Spielting’s book, there is no such information. See Joscelyn Godwin, *Arktos the*

Polar Myth, Phanes Press, 1993, pp53-54.

7 *Ibid*, p181.

8 *Ibid*, p283.

9 I followed this evolution in my *Free Energy Pioneer: John Worrell Keely*, Illuminet Press, 1998 and subsequently in my paper ‘La société du Vril, apocryphe et ténébreuse’, *La Gazette Fortéenne*, Vol 2, 2003.

10 Willy Ley, “Pseudoscience in Naziland”, *Astounding Science Fiction*, vol. 39, May 1947.

11 *Ibid*. pp92-93.

12 See: Peter Bahn and Reiner Gehring, *Der Vril Mythos*, Omega

Verlag, 1997.

13 Franz Wetzel and L Gföllner, *Raumkraft, Ihre Erschliessung und Auswertung durch Karl Schappeller*, Herold Verlag, München, 1928.

14 This was Schappellers *Raumkraft: Enthullungen der Geheimnisse im Schloss Auzolzmunster. Tatsachen von X.X.*, Winkler Verlag, 1929. The pamphlet was equally small in size; it numbers only 40 pages.

15 Fritz Klein (1877-1958). His first book was published in 1924 and was titled *An der Schwelle des vierdimensionalen Zeitalters* (on the threshold of the four-dimensional era). His second book *Logos und Bios. Die Zwewertigkeit der Welt*

als Einheit und Fundament einer noetischen Weltanschauung, was published in 1929. With ‘Noetischen’, the word used in the title of his second book, Klein referred to a little known term ‘Nous’, that stands for a higher consciousness as opposed to the animalistic soul, “especially in the Rosicrucian doctrines” according to Bahn. On Klein see: Bahn and Gehring, pp125-127.

16 Wetzel and Gföllner, pp8-9.

17 L. Gföllner, “Die Erschliessung der Dynamischen Technik durch Karl Schappeller”, *Zeitschrift für Geistes- und Wissenschaftsreform*, 5. Jahrgang, 1930, Doppelheft 9/10, pp206-208.

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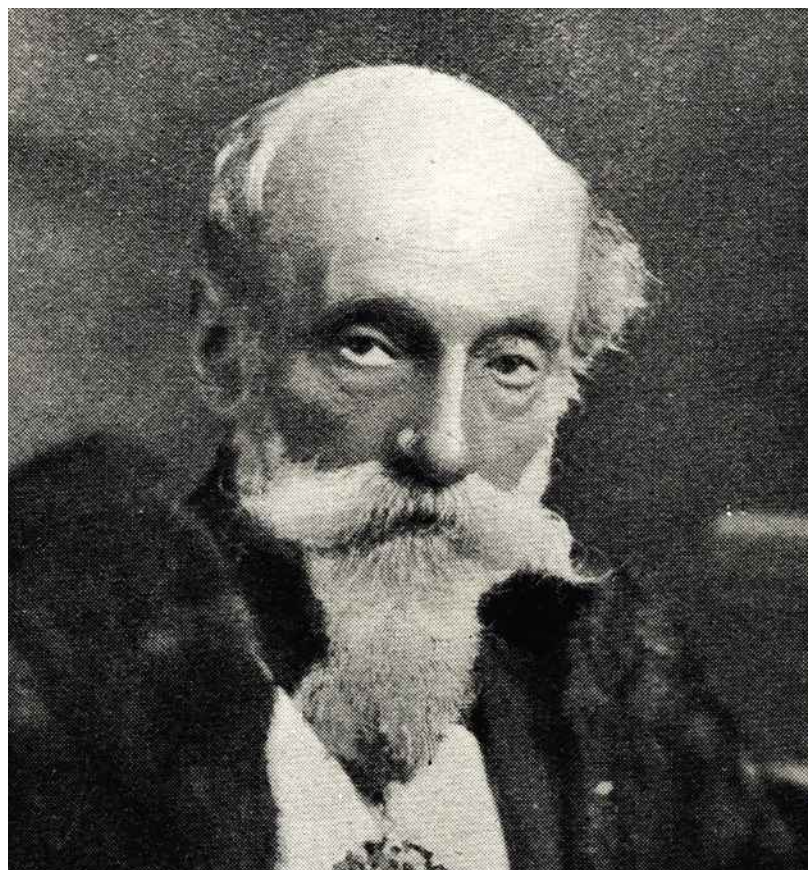
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DOCTOR PHENE'S HOUSE OF MYSTERY

Who was the mysterious Dr Phene? Why was he known as the Chelsea Hermit? And what secrets lurked behind the shuttered windows of his House of Mystery? **JAN BONDESON** takes us on a tour of vanished Chelsea and tells the strange story of one of London's forgotten eccentrics - a housing developer, alternative historian, collector of antiquities and expert on serpent worship.

Recently, I bought yet another postcard for my London collection, for the less than princely sum of £1.99. Its subject was reminiscent of the title of an old-fashioned Hammer horror film: 'Dr Phene's House of Mystery'. This house - a most extraordinary building - once stood at the crossing of Oakley Street and Upper Cheyne Row, Chelsea. Its frontage on Upper Cheyne Row was full of statues and other embellishments: dragons, mermaids, cupids and imps. But nobody lived in this strange house, apart from an aged domestic who never left her rooms in the basement, since she was fearful of ghosts. The windows were all shuttered and the doors boarded up. One story said that Dr Phene, also known as the Chelsea Hermit, had never allowed any person to see his House of Mystery and that all the rooms were empty apart from one that had been arranged as a mausoleum for cats. Another version was that Dr Phene had once been engaged to marry, but that his fiancée had died just before the intended wedding: the grieving Doctor had let the house he had built for them fall into decay. Clearly, the time had come to find out more about this mysterious Dr Phene.

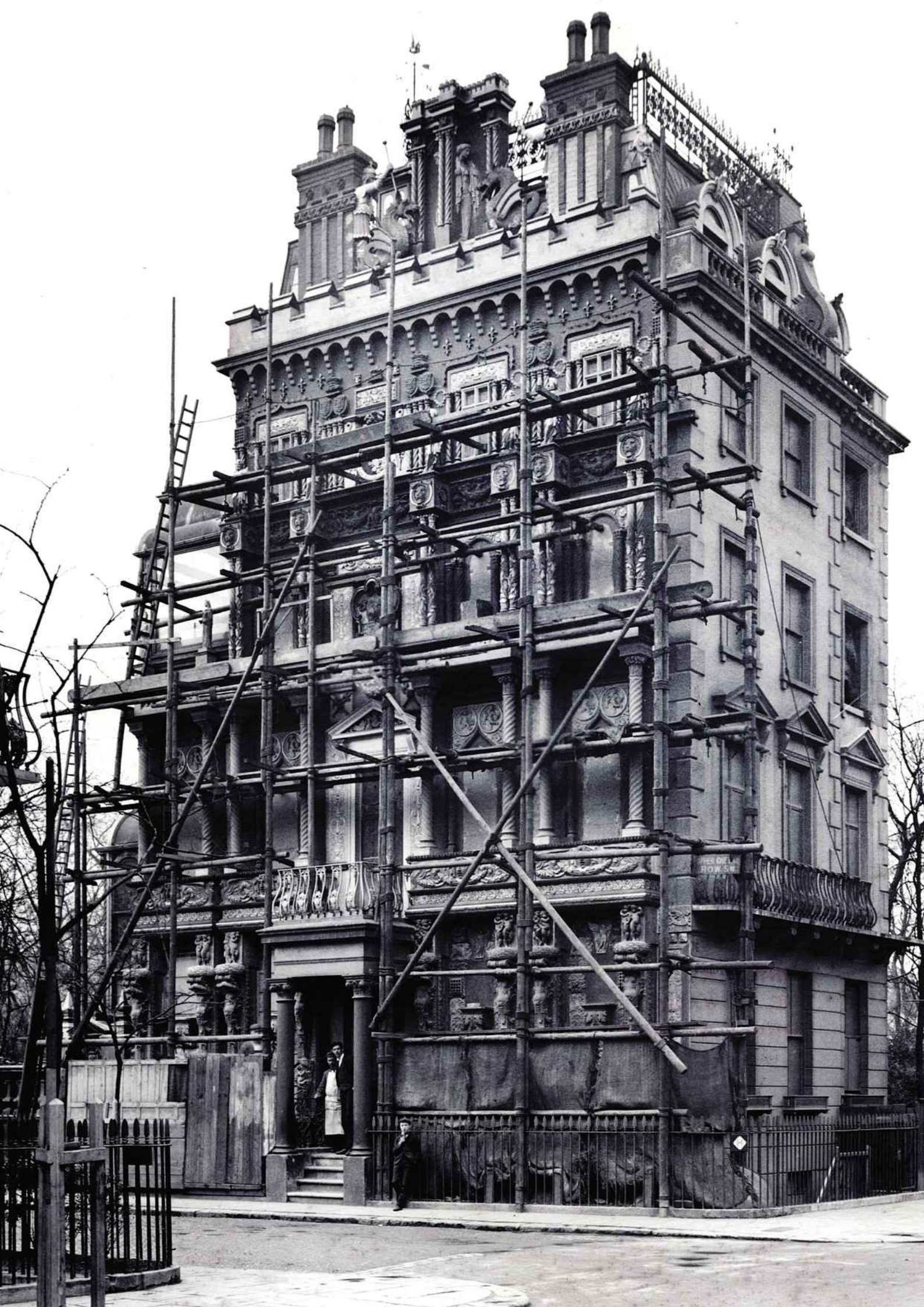
It turned out that John Samuel Phene was born in London, in or around 1825, and educated at King's Lynn Grammar School. He travelled abroad extensively as a young man, taking a strong interest in antiquarian pursuits and attending the excavations at



THIS PAGE AND OPPOSITE PAGE: ROYAL BOROUGH OF KENSINGTON AND CHELSEA

TOP: Dr John Samuel Phene of Oakley Street, Chelsea.

ABOVE: The House of Mystery, still covered with scaffolding before its completion in 1905.





ABOVE LEFT: Dr Phene outside his house at 32 Oakley Street, where he lived with his little dog and two female servants (one of whom, presumably, is also visible).
ABOVE RIGHT: A postcard of 'Dr Phene's House of Mystery, Chelsea' showing its frontage on Upper Cheyne Row.

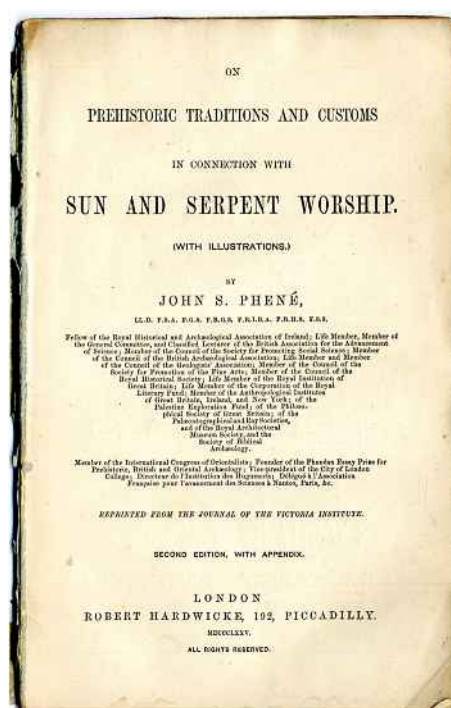


Troy and Mycenæ. When he returned to Britain in the 1840s, he claimed to possess a doctorate of law from some foreign university. In 1847, he married Margaretta Forsyth in South Shields, and took her with him to London, where he owned valuable land in Chelsea. The 1851 Census has the 26-year-old Dr Phene, the 24-year-old Margaretta and their servant living at No 98 Sloane Street. A shrewd businessman, Dr Phene made plans to develop this land, constructing Oakley Street, Phene Street and Margaretta Terrace. But although he had named a London street after her, Margaretta left him not long after and returned to South Shields, where she died in 1854.

Dr Phene built quality houses: long, imposing terraces that today remain much as he planned them, a tribute to the robust building techniques used. The Doctor had an idea that trees in cities served to purify the air and prevent epidemics, and he planted trees along both sides of Oakley Street in 1851. Prince Albert was impressed with this idea and had trees planted in front of the South Kensington Museum. Dr Phene also built a pub for his tenants to use, the Phene Arms, which is still in business today, called simply The Phene, and catering to the wealthy residents of Chelsea. George Best used to be a regular before he went to the Great Football Pitch in the Sky. When there was a proposal to convert the Phene Arms into flats, it was opposed by the local residents and the old pub was saved. During the hiatus when it was closed, a memorial to Dr Phene inside it, and a photograph of his House of Mystery, appear to have been lost.

Dr Phene was still building away in 1864, when he appeared in a lawsuit against a

THERE WERE MANY RUMOURS ABOUT DR PHENE AND HIS HOUSE



timber merchant who had maliciously damaged one of his fences. Interestingly, when before the Westminster magistrates, he described himself as plain Mr John Samuel Phene, landed proprietor. After the faithless Margaretta had deserted him, the Doctor never again took any interest in women. For many years, the 'Chelsea Hermit' lived contentedly at No 32 Oakley Street, with his little dog and two female domestics, in a five-story terraced house that still stands. Due to the very considerable income from his houses, he would never have to perform a day's worth of paid work in his life. The Doctor occasionally went on archæological expeditions to Ireland and Scotland, and was a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries, of the Royal Historical Society, and of the Geological Society. He occasionally published papers in the transactions of these learned bodies. An authority on serpent worship among the ancients, he published a short monograph on this esoteric subject in 1875.

Dr Phene was fond of speaking at various antiquarian conferences, but his opinions often went against those of everybody else. A short, dapper, white-bearded man, he rewrote history with cheerful abandon, imagining various classical civilisations upping sticks and settling in unexpected locations, leaving interesting archæological specimens behind – the significance of which nobody but he could appreciate. A sneering obituary writer commented that Dr Phene “had a very strong idea that he had made discoveries of profound importance”. His work was not taken seriously in his lifetime, and this dismissal has continued until the present day. It is sad but true that the Web of Science database does not contain a single reference to Phene's

antiquarian papers and monographs.

When Dr Phene planned Oakley Street, he had a large square building constructed at the corner with Upper Cheyne Row. It was there at the time of the 1871 Ordnance Survey, when Dr Phene was still actively building in the neighbourhood. It is not immediately clear what he wanted to do with this large building, except to fill its storage rooms and capacious garden with the statues and archaeological specimens he had collected. The building itself was gradually allowed to fall into decay.

As the years went by, the Doctor's ideas became increasingly grandiose. He imagined that his family was extremely ancient, and that he had been able to prove his descent from certain notable ancient Phœnicians. In 1897, he published a long poem entitled 'Victoria, Queen of Albion: An Idyll of the World's Advance in her Life and Reign'. Two years later, he published an account of the rise, progress and decay of painting in Greece, with illustrations by his own hand.

At a relatively late stage, the Doctor had the idea of turning the corner house at Upper Cheyne Row into a celebration of his own life and descent. His own house at No 32 Oakley Street was already adorned with armorials and flags, but with the large house at the corner, he thought he could do even better. From 1901 until 1905, a large team of builders was hard at work on the premises, reconstructing the facade and redecorating the rooms. When the scaffolding was taken down in 1905, the public had a view of what was undoubtedly the most astonishing house front in London. The text above the front door read 'Renaissance du Chateau de Savenay'. The Doctor claimed that his distinguished family had once owned this chateau, situated on the Loire, until it was destroyed by the Vendéans; he had resolved to create and build its counterpart in London. The fantastic figures and statues were painted red, yellow and gold. There were Greek and Trojan warriors, pagan gods and goddesses, armorial bearings and heraldic beasts, and busts of the Royal Family. When a journalist requested to have a guided tour of the interior of the House of Mystery, Dr Phene replied that nobody had ever been admitted to see it. When Mark Twain visited London in 1907, he also wanted to see the House of Mystery, but the Doctor refused to show it to him, because the grandly decorated rooms, left without any cleaning or maintenance, were already looking dirty and shabby. But when Twain was photographed with some of his London friends in front of the House of Commons, Dr Phene was one of the party.

There were of course many rumours among Londoners about Dr Phene and his extraordinary house. One version was that Dr Phene had once been engaged to marry a beautiful young lady, but she had died on the morning of the day fixed for the wedding. The grieving Doctor had resolved that nobody would ever inhabit the house he had built for them. This story is obviously untrue, since Dr Phene did not complete the house until 1905, when he was 82 years old. There were also rumours that the Doctor was a black magician and that the lewdest rituals were enacted inside 'Gingerbread Castle', as the House of Mystery was called by the locals. But in spite



TOP: Oakley Street, Chelsea, showing some of the terraces built by Dr Phene and which still stand today.

ABOVE: The rear garden of the House of Mystery, home to some of the larger pieces from Phene's collection.



ROYAL BOROUGH OF KENSINGTON AND CHELSEA

ABOVE: Dr Phene photographed in the garden of the Chelsea Mystery House, surrounded by various examples of his extensive collection of statuary.

of his interest in serpent worship among the ancients, there is nothing to suggest that Dr Phene ever dabbled in the black arts.

Dr Phene died on 9 March 1912, aged 89. For unexplained reasons, this mystery man was not given a grand funeral in Chelsea, but was buried at Kensworth near Luton. The coffin passed through the streets bare and uncovered; a single bouquet of flowers, given by the Countess of Seafield, was placed inside. Dr Phene's obituary in the *Evening Standard* was entitled 'Chelsea Hermit's Death: Vagaries of a Strange Career'. His will proved to be in excess of £31,000, and he left legacies to many charitable bodies, including the French Protestant Hospital, Victoria Park. He left £100 and the use of his private archives, to John Murray Publishers, for them to make sure that a proper biography of the Doctor was written. But since the publishers did not take him up on this offer, his papers went to the library of the Chelsea Polytechnic in Manresa Road, where they were destroyed by enemy action during the Blitz.

In November 1912, the contents of Dr Phene's House of Mystery were sold by auction. A journalist who was allowed to inspect the house was appalled at the state of the furniture, and the extensive damage done by birds invading the property. The ornate ceiling of a downstairs room illustrated

Dr Phene's ideas of the extensive travels of the ancient Phœnicians in Europe and Asia. Another ceiling had a vivid description of Hades. Although the Doctor had often been annoyed by rude street urchins making fun of him, many of the rooms were decorated with smiling children's faces in plaster. In the garden, a colossal 12-ft (3.6m) statue of Queen Victoria had 'Lot 177' chalked on the royal elbow; it was sold for just 12 shillings. Ten life-sized statues of kings and queens fetched 42 shillings for the lot.

Dr Phene had also owned old Cheyne House itself, which he had used as a repository for his collections of archaeological specimens. In June 1914, both the Mystery House and Cheyne House were put up for auction, on the order of the Doctor's executors. They are likely to have been purchased by speculators who were after the valuable land the houses stood on. The House of Mystery was still standing at the time of the 1921 Ordnance Survey, but it is stated to have been demolished in September 1924. Several houses were built on the site, which can easily be recognised today. Cheyne House was also pulled down, since it had become derelict. An artist's studio built in the garden of Cheyne House turned was found to be haunted by the ghost of a horse; this animal was so spooky, and appeared with such regularity, that both the artist and his servants

were driven from the building. It turned out that this ill-fated studio had been built on the very spot where Dr Phene had buried a favourite horse of his, a valuable animal that had once saved his life. There are, however, no reports of the Doctor himself haunting the site of his House of Mystery. **FT**

SOURCES

Morning Leader, 29 Sept 1905; *Times of India*, 9 Dec 1912; *Evening Standard*, 12 Mar 1912; *Daily Express*, 27 June 1914; *Daily Mirror*, 13 April 1922, 18 Sept 1924; also *Notes and Queries* 11s. 9 [1914], p407, pp457-8.

FT would like to thank Dave Walker of Kensington Central Library for his assistance in locating unseen photos of Dr Phene and his house.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



JAN BONDESON is a senior lecturer and consultant rheumatologist at Cardiff University, a regular *FT* contributor and the author of many books, including *Queen Victoria's Stalker* (Amberley, 2010), *Amazing Dogs: A Cabinet of Canine Curiosities* (Amberley, 2011) and *Those Amazing Newfoundland Dogs* (CFZ Press, 2012).

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Of madness and melancholy

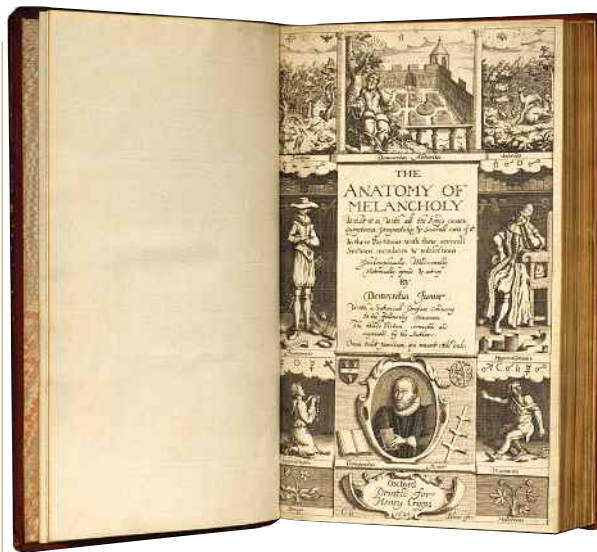
SD TUCKER re-examines Robert Burton's Renaissance classic *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, and finds a prototypical *Fortean Times* contributor at work



SD TUCKER is a Merseyside-based writer and regular contributor to *FT*. His latest book, *Paranormal Merseyside*, is available now from Amberley Publishing.

Palm trees, you may not realise, can fall in love; there were once two such plants (lesbians, apparently) which, such was their shared affection, bent towards each other deliberately so that their boughs could embrace and kiss, giving sadly unspecified “manifest signs of mutual love” as they did so.¹ You may also be unaware that there was once a dolphin which was so enamoured of a youth named Hermias that, when the boy died, the creature deliberately tossed itself out of the water onto dry land and committed suicide as it could not bear to live another day without him.² Men who have been bitten by rabid dogs, meanwhile, sometimes pass urine which contains microscopic puppies – or “little things like whelps” – inside it.³ It is an acknowledged truth, furthermore, that the proper form of the human soul is spherical, as that is obviously “the most perfect form” for it to adopt.⁴ Given this, perhaps it is not so absurd that the ancient Egyptians used to engage in open acts of onion-worship – after all, those particular vegetables are fairly round in shape.⁵

I have further tales to impart; such as that, for example, of a young maid named Katherine Gualter who, whilst possessed by devils in 1571, underwent strange convulsions and vomited forth pigeon dung, stones with written inscriptions upon them, and even a live eel, 1.5ft (46cm) long, which later simply vanished.⁶ Just as bizarre was the case of a German Jew from Magdeburg who, in 1270, fell into a toilet and couldn't get out. As it was a Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath, none of his fellow Jews were allowed to rescue him until the next day. Seeing as this was a Sunday, however, the town's Catholic bishop forbade him to be pulled out then, either, with the end result that the poor man died gasping



amidst the stinking raw sewage.⁷

Are any of these stories actually true? Possibly not, but they are all contained within the 1,000-plus pages of one of the most significant texts of the Renaissance, Robert Burton's magnificent *Anatomy of Melancholy*. First published in 1621, the book is ostensibly a medical treatise dealing with the topic of ‘melancholy’ – roughly speaking, what we might now call ‘depression’ or ‘madness’. In practice, however, it is a book about every conceivable topic under the Sun, from magic rings with the ability to make emperors fall in love with corpses,⁸ to a digression about the activities of poltergeist-like entities called foliots, who apparently banged doors, threw stones, and shaved people's beards off during the night.⁹

Burton is able to do this, he asserts, because the variety of ways in which melancholy can manifest itself are essentially infinite: “The Tower of Babel,” he says, “never yielded such confusion of tongues, as the chaos of melancholy doth variety of symptoms.”¹⁰ As such, Egyptians worshipping onions or Jews drowning in toilets count as examples of religious melancholy, whilst stories of Sapphic palm-trees

and suicidal dolphins are illustrative of the follies of love melancholy. Many of his examples, it seems, are chosen to entertain as much as instruct; his case-studies of insanity, such as that of the baker from Ferrara who thought he was made of butter and so would not go out in the Sun in case he melted,¹¹ or of the man who feared that if he had a piss he would drown the whole town (doctors fooled him into thinking that the place was on fire so that he could use his penis as a giant fire-hose, thereby effecting a cure),¹² are surely included by Burton more because they are funny than because they are reliable.

Or, then again, perhaps not. Burton's book is essentially a compendium of quotes, a patchwork quilt of the other authors he had within his own library (Burton owned around 2,000 volumes, which he left in his will to the Bodleian Library and Brasenose College, with which he was associated). The respect an educated person would have had for written biblical and classical sources during the 1600s was high indeed, and even some quite absurd things could be given credence simply for having been mentioned by an ancient Greek or Roman. For instance, when Burton first saw his mother using a live spider trapped in a nutshell as an amulet for medical purposes, he thought the idea “most absurd and ridiculous”. When he later read of the same cure in three obscure classical authors, however, he changed his mind completely.¹³

Either way, the marvellous variety of the book – comprising, as it does, accounts of the pagan and the Christian, the quasi-scientific and the purely folkloric – lends it the quality of one of the old ‘cabinets of curiosity’ in which genuine natural wonders vied for space with faked holy relics and unicorn-horns, and all given equal credence. Such an outlook is a welcome rebuke to the modern mind-set of increasing specialisation and the professional narrowing of academic interests. In fact, it could well be said that the nearest thing we have to Burton's writings today is *Fortean Times*. **FT**

I have used the 2001 *New York Review of Books* edition for quotes, and followed Burton's unusual method of structuring his work in my references; the first number given equates to the ‘Part’ of the book, the second the ‘Section’, the third the ‘Member’, the fourth the ‘Subsection’, and finally the page-number in that Subsection (page numbers in the whole not being consecutive).

NOTES

- 1 3.2.1.1, p.43
- 2 3.2.1.1, p.45
- 3 1.1.1.4, p.143
- 4 1.2.1.2, p.182
- 5 3.4.1.3, p.353
- 6 1.2.1.2, p.201
- 7 3.4.1.5, p.375
- 8 3.2.2.5, p.131
- 9 1.2.1.2, p.193
- 10 1.3.1.3, p.397
- 11 1.3.1.4, p.403
- 12 2.2.6.3, p.114-115
- 13 2.5.1.5, p.250

Harryhausen's mythological monsters

MARIA J PÉREZ CUERVO looks back at how special effects pioneer Ray Harryhausen's unforgettable animated versions of creatures from ancient myth and legend brought ancient texts to life on the modern screen



MARIA J PÉREZ CUERVO is a Bristol-based Spanish journalist whose interests include history, popular culture, Victoriana, rock and roll and doppelgängers. She tweets from @mjpcuervo.

As Alan Friswell relates in his obituary of the great special effects artist, it was seeing *King Kong* (1933) for the first time at the age of 13 that inspired Ray Harryhausen to breathe life into one of his own passions: dinosaurs. After building his own articulated creatures with the help of his parents, he put together a clip of an apatosaurus fighting an allosaurus – a showreel that would eventually open the doors of the big studios for him. Throughout his career, Harryhausen revisited dinosaurs on many occasions (*The Beast From 20,000 Fathoms*, *One Million Years B.C.*), as well as giving life to giant apes, underwater monsters and aliens in flying saucers. But it was with his work on *Jason and the Argonauts*, *Clash of the Titans* and the *Sinbad* cycle that he fundamentally shaped the perception of mythical creatures in modern popular culture.

Harryhausen's first mythological feature film was *The Seventh Voyage of Sinbad* (1958), inspired by the tales about the sailor traditionally told by Scheherazade in the *Thousand and One Nights*. Arguably the most popular character in the film was the Cyclops, a heavy-footed, stone-throwing giant.

The one-eyed giant appears in the tale 'The Second Voyage of Sinbad', "a black monster as tall as a palm tree", with an eye in the middle of his forehead, long sharp teeth, the ears of an elephant and an underlip that "hung down upon his breast". In the story, the Cyclops examines Sinbad and his fellow sailors in turn, lifting them up and throwing them on the ground with disdain, judging each of them to offer too measly a portion. He finally kills and roasts the captain, the fattest of them all, and devours him.

Harryhausen's Cyclops doesn't fit the traditional description of the monster. His is not a black giant, but a greenish, one-horned, cloven-hoofed beast, almost reminiscent of the Greek god Pan, with a furiously brutish yet expressively human



He shaped the perception of myth in modern popular culture

ABOVE: Ray Harryhausen with the serpent woman from *The Seventh Voyage of Sinbad*, his first mythological film.

BELOW: The wonderfully expressive Cyclops from the same movie.

face. The artist said he tried to instill a sense of sympathy into his creation – and this comes across particularly strongly when the monster is blinded.

But despite the Cyclops being the most fondly remembered creature of the whole film, Harryhausen's own favourite was the serpent woman conjured up by magician Sokurah (inspired by Jaffar, the character played by Conrad Veidt in Alexander Korda's 1940 film *The Thief of Bagdad*) in front of the Sultan's court. With her writhing limbs and serpentine tail, her undulating, strangely sensual dance nearly ends in self-suffocation – she is saved by Sokurah, who returns her to her human form.

Although there are no snake women in the *Sinbad* tales, the inspiration for the character was probably the

djinn, the supernatural shape-shifting creatures of Arabian lore (see FT138:17, 147:30-33, 268:8, 281:40-44, 291:16-17, 302:42-45) who often show a preference for adopting the form of a snake. There is, however, a long tradition of mythical serpent women, from the Egyptian Wadjet to the Greek Echidna and the Hindu *nagin*. With her ophidian appearance and blue-green complexion, this creature seems a clear, though admittedly more benign-looking, antecedent to the terrifying Medusa from *Clash of the Titans*: their creator, always working within tight budgets, would later transform the snake woman into the Gorgon.

Jason and the Argonauts (1963) was Harryhausen's first incursion into Greek myth, and was initially conceived by him as a mythological mash-up to be called *Sinbad in the Age of Muses*, with Sinbad joining Jason and his heroes to seek the Golden Fleece. The film is inspired by Apollonius Rhodius's *Argonautica*, and contains some of the most memorable creatures Harryhausen ever created. The first of these is the metal giant Talos. In the *Argonautica*, Talos is a bronze colossus that protects the coast of Crete by throwing rocks at

pirates and invaders. In the film, the muscular, towering statue awakens after the foolish Hercules decides to steal part of the treasure it guards. The titan lurches towards the *Argos* with a spine-chilling metallic creak that accompanies Bernard Herrmann's suitably martial score. It is Jason who finally defeats Talos by removing a peg from his heel, which – like that of Achilles – is Talos's most vulnerable spot. The *Argonautica* describes how "beneath the sinew by his ankle was a blood-red vein"; Apollodorus, in his *Library*, describes how Hephaestus had constructed Talos with "a single vein

extending from his neck to his ankle, and a bronze nail was rammed home at the end of the vein". But, whereas in the *Argonautica* Talos grazes his ankle on a



jagged rock, in the *Library* it's Medea the sorceress who draws out the nail from the titan's heel – exactly the job done by Jason in the film adaptation.

The Argonauts encounter the harpies later in the film. In Greek mythology, harpies were winged spirits, sent by Zeus to torment king Phineas of Thrace as a punishment for revealing the secrets of the gods. In his *Theogony*, Hesiod describes them as winged maidens with “lovely hair”, whose flight is faster than that of the winds and birds. Despite this poetic description, Harryhausen's harpies seem to be heir to another tradition that probably started with Æschylus's *Eumenides* and that presents them as demonic creatures, closer to the furies, the chthonic deities of vengeance. In the film, the harpies' wings are dark and cartilaginous, like those of a pterodactyl, and they have dark, petrol-blue skin and short, coarse hair.

Hydra, the offspring of Echidna, the mother of all monsters, and giant Typhon, lived in the fetid swamps of Lerna and was killed by Hercules as one of his 12 labours. The Greek hero defeated it with the help of his nephew Iolaus, who cauterised the wounds to prevent the regrowth of its multiple heads until there was only one left – which Hercules crushed and buried under a boulder. Hydra had the body of a serpent and, usually, nine heads, though in different interpretations they could reach up to 100. Harryhausen's creature has seven, a number that was clearly his lucky charm (*The Seventh Voyage of Sinbad* was named after his suggestion of using the mystical number), and is killed by Jason.

But the highlight of the film is the battle with the skeleton army. Harryhausen had had the idea of animating skeletons for a long time: there's already a skeletal warrior brought to life by Sokurah in the first *Sinbad*. The episode of the Spartoi, the Earth-born warriors who confront Jason in Colchis, seemed perfect for Harryhausen's vision. According to Apollodorus, the Spartoi were formed from the teeth of a Drakon, sowed by Jason after king Æetes's command. These otherworldly armed warriors were the ghosts of the ancestors of the Thebans, also summoned by the blind prophet Tiresias. Harryhausen knew that he couldn't depict the Spartoi as rotting corpses if he was aiming for a certificate suitable for younger viewers, so he decided to use skeletons instead. The scene is possibly the most memorable he ever shot, and took over four and a half months' of work.



ABOVE: Jason battles a skeletal army in *Jason and the Argonauts*.

BELOW: The model of the metal giant Talos on display in a 2010 exhibition.



Despite what classical tradition tells us, Harryhausen's skeletons weren't crushed by large stones. Instead, he had Jason jump off the cliff into the sea, where the army of the undead couldn't survive.

After *Jason and the Argonauts*, Harryhausen worked again on two further *Sinbad* adaptations – *The Golden Voyage of Sinbad* (1974) and *Sinbad and the Eye of the Tiger* (1977). In these he included mythical creatures such as the centaur and the griffin and gave life to the Minotaur-inspired Minoton. But the most unforgettable is Kali, the six-sword-wielding, head-sliding Hindu goddess of destruction. Her traditional garland, made with the heads of dead children, is replaced here by a belt ornamented with skulls. She is destroyed when she is pushed from a ledge and shattered to pieces.

Harryhausen returned to Greek mythology in *Clash of the Titans* (1981), based on the myth of Perseus and Andromeda, but with a modified storyline that allowed for the inclusion of more creatures. The final battle presents Perseus riding Pegasus, the winged horse that sprang from the neck of Medusa after she was beheaded by the hero. Perseus's aim is to save Andromeda from being sacrificed to a sea monster. In Apollodorus's *Library*, the monster was Cetus, sent by Poseidon to punish Queen Kassiopeia's hubris, after she boasted that her daughter Andromeda was more beautiful

than the Nereids. In the film, Ketos is transformed into the Kraken, a colossal four-armed humanoid creature covered in scales. Krakens, the sea monsters of Icelandic or Norwegian lore, are generally depicted as cephalopods in popular culture, probably after the description, based on oral tradition, of Carl Linnæus in his 1735 *Systema Naturæ*.

Although the battle with the kraken is the climax of the film, the best-remembered creature is undoubtedly Medusa. Her fearsome, luminescent green stare turns men to stone, but Perseus is able to defeat her by studying her movements through the reflection in his shield. Slithering by the crackling fireplace of a dimly lit temple, the approach of the Gorgon is mesmerising. Her uncanny movements and perverse appearance are enhanced by the effect of flickering light, proof of the effects artist's virtuosity.

Clash of the Titans was remade in 2010, a decision that surprised Harryhausen, who declared: “I thought we'd made the definitive version”. The CGI, which the genius considered a tool, rather than a method of entertainment, didn't achieve the spine-chilling effect of the most terrifying moment of the 1981 version – the killing of Medusa. Harryhausen knew precisely why: “There's something that happens in stop-motion that gives a different effect, like a dream world, and that's what fantasy is about”. **FT**

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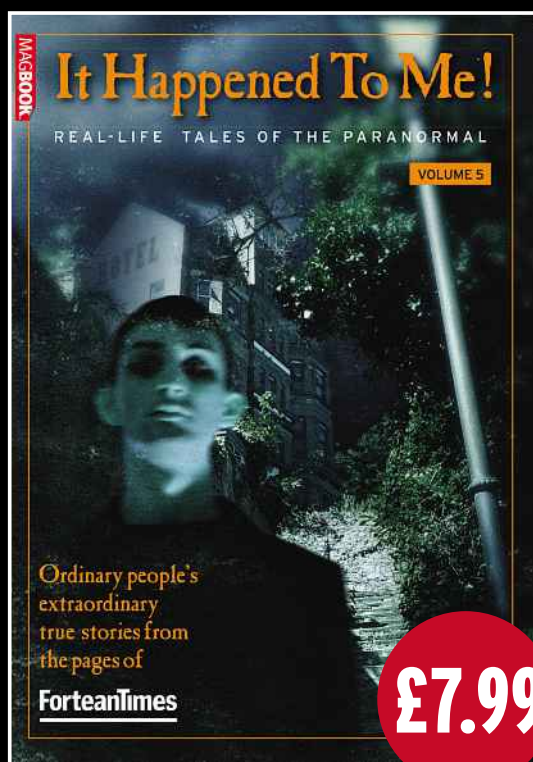
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reviews



Five centuries of hauntings

A wide-ranging study of ghosts from the Demon Drummer of Tedworth to the Enfield polt raises the question: why are the respectable middle classes so sceptical?



The Natural History of Ghosts

500 Years of Hunting for Proof

Roger Clarke

Particular Books 2012

Hb, 384pp, bib, notes, ind, £20.00, ISBN 9781846143335

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £16.00

Bernard Shaw remarked, "If you have a skeleton in the cupboard, at least make it dance". Britain has over 500-years' worth of ghost stories in its cupboard and in *The Natural History of Ghosts*, Roger Clarke makes them waltz.

Each generation has been scared and attracted by the idea of the dead returning to haunt the living. Trying to make sense of half a millennium of ghost reports, stories and beliefs is a huge undertaking. This book is neither a scientific treatise nor a field guide for ghost hunters, but a wide-ranging study of a universal cultural phenomenon. As Clarke recognises, psychical researchers have no actual ghosts to study. Beyond broad-brush theories and speculative categories, there is no settled taxonomy; but a wealth of historical and documentary evidence reveals how the living have responded personally and collectively to the idea of apparitions and haunted houses.

Many classic British ghost stories date back centuries: the Demon Drummer of Tedworth (1662), the Epworth Rectory poltergeist (1716), the Cock Lane

Ghost (1765) and the ghostly floating tube at the Tower of London (1817) are still being re-told and discussed. Victorian writers such as Mrs Catherine Crowe in *The Night Side of Nature* (1848), John Ingrams's *Haunted Homes and Family Traditions* (1886) and Charles Harper's *Haunted Houses* (1907) permanently fixed ghosts in castles, royal palaces and stately homes such as Hampton Court, Glamis Castle, Windsor Castle and Blickling Hall, with screaming skulls at Bettiscombe Manor and Burton Agnes Hall. Foreign ghosts that have also been absorbed into the canon include the Bell Witch of Tennessee, the 1901 Versailles time-slip and – from World War I – the haunted U-Boat 65 and the Angels of Mons. The last was willingly seized upon by the public and exploited for propaganda purposes, despite having no foundation beyond exaggerated rumours. The public wish to believe in life after death was also expressed in the enthusiasm for spiritualism which thrived after its importation from America in the 1850s until World War II.

New 'genuine' ghost reports spring up in every era; they are eagerly received and debated, and sometimes stimulate controversies that rage for decades. Novel sceptical theories also continually emerge, and Clarke provides examples of 'explanations' ranging from solar flares to hallucinations triggered by mouldy antique book bindings; however, no sceptical theory has vanquished belief in ghosts.

To the canon of 'true ghosts' have been added famous 20th century cases including Borley Rectory, the Brown Lady of

"Working-class people invaded cemeteries, hoping for a glimpse of the supernatural"

Raynham Hall photographed in 1936, the Roman soldiers of York seen in 1953 and the Enfield poltergeist of 1977. Writers and researchers have endlessly anthologised these and many minor hauntings in mundane settings. Dramatised versions and have thrilled and terrified millions. Shakespeare, Daniel Defoe, Charles Dickens, MR James and Arthur Conan Doyle all famously wrote of ghosts, and there are the Irish-influenced contributions of Bram Stoker, Oscar Wilde, WB Yeats and Sheridan Le Fanu. Many of Clarke's re-tellings will be familiar, but he spots recurring themes, patterns and striking coincidences within them, and his search for original sources has fascinating results, which he develops in the extensive and diverting footnotes. Particularly revealing is his study of the noisy 18th century haunting of Hinton Ampner, which he suggests was an inspiration for Henry James's *Turn of the Screw* (1898).

Wherever there have been ghosts, there have also been ghost hunters of varying degrees of probity and plausibility. Clarke shows how various celebrated mediums and investigators have become role models for those pursuing ghosts today. A journalistic eye for human vices and folly ensures his study is

never dull. Clarke also highlights how class dictates the way ghosts are presented and received: the aristocracy – including several monarchs – and the working class embraced belief, but the middle classes were more sceptical. This is most noticeable with the periodic ghost panics that occurred during the 19th century, when working class people invaded cemeteries or congregated outside haunted houses, hoping for a glimpse of the supernatural. Respectable society deplored the vulgarity of such ghost-hunting 'flash mobs'. However, the mass appeal of ghosts has survived, despite the efforts of sceptical doctors, reformers, scientists, psychologists and conjurers to quash them, with television audiences substituting for the Victorian crowd.

Whilst successfully covering the social history of ghosts, this is also a very personal book. Clarke grew up in two haunted houses and passionately believed in ghosts in childhood, though he never saw any. One of the sanest of British ghost hunters, Andrew Green (1927–2004), was an early influence, and Clarke's ideas crystallised before shows like *Most Haunted* distorted the topic with re-heated spiritualist dogma. He understands on a personal level the allure of a phenomenon which never manifests to order. Amid his scholarship, Roger Clarke's own serious wish to believe makes *The Natural History of Ghosts* the most original and readable book exploring our ghost-rich culture to appear for years.

Alan Murdie

Fortean Times Verdict

MAKES HALF A MILLENNIUM OF GHOST STORIES DANCE

9

Enchanting

Pace the Devil, the fairies seem to have the best tunes – and happily share them



The Otherworld

Music & Song from Irish Tradition

Rionach úi Ógáin & Tom Sherlock

Four Courts Press 2013

Pb, 160pp, illus, 2 discs, €25.00, ISBN 9780956562838

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £22.50

Traditional music is rife with supernatural stories. Fairies are ubiquitous in Anglo-Celtic songs and tunes: a dozen Child ballads mention them; and a number of pipe airs and fiddle pieces are said to have been learned from fairyfolk. In the engaging *The Otherworld* – a paperback with two discs of field recordings – the interaction of music and the supernatural in Irish rural life gets thrilling exposure.

I have long harboured an interest in folk music and the elfin tradition, which I wrote about in my book on modern legends of fantastic places, *Hidden Realms* (2010). Anyone who knows the literature will be struck by how many fairy narratives purport to be from first-hand experience and are related by apparently sane and sincere persons.

Explaining why this is so can be a vexing enterprise. Lizanne Henderson and Edward J Cowan, authors of the excellent *Scottish Folk Belief* (2001), put it best: “It should be possible to believe one’s informants without believing their explanations.” I coined the term “experience anomalies” to characterise such liminal phenomena: vivid perceptions of extraordinary entities encountered in some indefinable realm between the imagined and the ‘real’, preserved in memory and testimony but nowhere else.

The Otherworld contains some

colourful examples. The Donegal fiddler Néillidh Boyle (1889–1961), a friend of the celebrated piper and folksong collector Séamus Ennis, matter-of-factly asserted that he had learned fairy music after being taken to a fairy wedding. “They played such wonderful embellishments,” he recalled. “They said it was the enchanted music of Ireland that was long ago buried [...] since the days of the old bards, and the days of the old pipers...” Boyle appeared entirely serious.

Larger questions about the cause of supernatural experience aside, the two discs, compiled from recordings made by the Irish Folklore Commission (with many of the singers and players still alive), transcend solely ethnomusicological interest. These are sparkling performances which afford considerable pleasure and sometimes surprise. The opening cut on the first disc, which amounts to a sequel to the more famous ‘Down by the Greenwood Side-o’ (aka ‘The Cruel Mother’), was new to me. It is sung brilliantly by Mickey Connors, who was recorded at a Travellers’ camp in County Carlow in 1972.

The book boasts an endlessly informative text and many resonant photographs of singers, musicians, collectors, and – most of all – landscape features. The last of these record Ireland’s unsettling countryside, home to fairies, banshees, and ghosts, and serve to set already evocative songs and tunes in places that are both of this world and the otherworld. If there is another compilation like this one, I have never heard of it, and I doubt that it could be as stimulating as this one, a unique and (almost literally) haunting excursion into mystery and melody.

Jerome Clark

Fortean Times Verdict

FANTASTIC ANTHOLOGY AND RECORDING OF FAIRY MUSIC

9

The Science of Monsters

Matt Kaplan

Constable 2013

Pb, 256pp, illus, bib, ind, £12.99, ISBN 9781472101150

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £11.69



A survey of monsters, legendary and fictional, old and new, and the ‘science’ that explains how they came to be

and what makes them frightening, Kaplan’s book ranges over beasts like the chimera, Leviathan, dragons, vampires, Frankenstein’s monster, resurrected dinosaurs and aliens (entirely fictional/cinematic, not UFO-related). I put ‘science’ in quotes, because frankly the book is entirely made up of speculation such as Adrienne Mayor’s notorious ‘explanation’ of the griffin: that it may have been based on fossils of the beaked and frilled dinosaur Protoceratops. Even if the ancients knew such fossils, there’s no evidence that the griffin was actually based on them; such ‘explanations’ are simply made up stories that sound vaguely plausible to modern ears.

All the faults for which ‘unscientific’ writers like von Daniken are excoriated are here in full measure. The writing in questions (“Is it possible that...?”), the speculations that reappear shortly after as if they had been shown to be actually the case, even the classic “though there is no evidence for this, that doesn’t mean it didn’t happen.” In a chapter on giant animals, we’re told that the Nemean lion wasn’t, in fact, gigantic, which makes one wonder why it’s included at all; after which we’re treated to pages of speculation about it being based on memories of the large Eurasian cave lion, despite the fact that this became extinct a mere 10,000 years before Hercules was supposed to have wrestled with his Nemean foe. Following this ‘explanation’, we have constant references to the ‘giant’ Nemean lion. Such sloppy research and outright errors are alarmingly frequent: we’re told there’s no evidence of the Nemean lion’s gender, despite a vase painting that plainly shows it with a mane; a painting of a man fighting a sea monster, armed

with a sickle-like knife, is plainly Perseus, not Hercules; there is definitely no mention of Chinese ‘dragon bones’ in the I Ching.

To be fair, Kaplan is marginally better when it comes to more recent monsters such as vampires, although this is already well-worked territory. But there are no references, only a general bibliography; and when specific authorities are mentioned by name, they frequently don’t appear in the bibliography anyway. As if all this wasn’t bad enough, Kaplan’s rambling and frequently irrelevant writing is unbearably smug, with ‘smart’ asides and footnotes to aspects of mythic stories that he can’t explain such as “go figure” and “don’t ask.” Perfect fuel for testing the science of Ray Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451*.

Steve Moore

Fortean Times Verdict

A MONSTROSITY OF A BOOK – SMUG, SPECULATIVE AND SLOPPY 2

Making Sense of Near-Death Experiences

A Handbook for Clinicians

Eds: Mahendra Perera, Karupiah Jagadheesan and Anthony Peake

Jessica Kingsley 2012

Pb, 176pp, refs, inds, £18.99 / \$29.95, ISBN 9781849051491

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £17.09



The slenderness of this anthology belies its importance and value. It contains the condensed wisdom of 15 thinkers, physicians and psychologists at the leading edge of research into Near-Death Experiences (NDEs). Subtitled “a handbook for clinicians”, it was conceived as a practical summary for medical and welfare staff – including nurses, doctors, palliative care workers, psychologists, psychiatrists and pastoral workers – who may find themselves having to understand or counsel patients or others puzzling out an experience of this kind. Care is taken to distinguish between a ‘near-death episode’ (which might be “any close brush with death”) and an NDE, a subjective experience reported by perhaps a quarter of those who recover from being close to death or even

having been declared 'clinically dead'. It is unusual for books on this topic to win awards, but this one was 'Highly Commended' in the psychiatry category at the 2012 British Medical Association Book Awards.

Bob Rickard

Fortean Times Verdict

SLENDER BUT MEATY LOOK AT CUTTING-EDGE N.D.E. RESEARCH

9

Medusa

In the Mirror of Time

David Leeming

Reaktion Books 2013

Hb, 128pp, illus, bib, ind, £16.00, ISBN 9781780230955

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £14.00



Medusa was a descendant of Gaia, the only mortal of the Gorgon triplets, sister to the Graiae, and as

beautiful as Athene until the goddess replaced her hair with snakes and made her petrifying. She lost her head to Perseus, brother of Athene.

Medusa was familiar to the Greeks long before Homer immortalised her, and David Leeming, an American academic, points out that her head was an apotropaic emblem, rather in the way gargoyles drive out evil by their evil appearance. Anthropologist Jane Harrison notes that Medusa was basically a terrifying mask to which a body was later appended. This short but dense book suggests the Egyptian god Bes and the Mesopotamian demon Humbaba as Medusa's forerunners, but similar figures with a similar function of protecting through terror appear in other cultures.

By the Middle Ages, the old girl had become more of a *femme fatale*; she appears in *Roman de la Rose* as a symbol of the dangerous sexuality of all women. Freud said that she signified castration (to misquote Mandy Rice Davies, he would, wouldn't he?), but feminists reclaimed her as a victim of patriarchal oppression and postmodernists as a symbol of the Other.

It's all fabulous stuff.

William Darragh

Fortean Times Verdict

CASTRATING BITCH OR VICTIM OF THE PATRIARCHY?

9

A taxonomy of aliens

A good starting point for folklorists and others who can't tell their blonde Nordics from their inter-dimensional beings



Real Aliens, Space Beings, and Creatures from Other Worlds

Brad Steiger and Sherry Hansen Steiger

Visible Ink Press 2011

Pb, 350pp, \$19.950/£16.99, ISBN 9781578593330

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £15.29

As NASA discovers more and more exoplanets (planets outside our Solar System), hope continues to grow that some day we might make contact with some form of extraterrestrial intelligence. Many so-called ufologists, however, maintain that extraterrestrial aliens have already visited Earth on numerous occasions.

In a comprehensive overview entitled *Real Aliens, Space Beings, and Creatures from Other Worlds*, two long-time UFO researchers – Brad Steiger and his wife, Sherry Hansen Steiger – explore numerous accounts of alleged encounters with alien beings. Virtually every variant of aliens comes under their scrutiny, including “little green men,” “blonde Nordics,” “greys,” “insectoids,” “reptilians,” androids, hairy dwarves, Bigfoot creatures and inter-dimensional beings. Among the first-person accounts contained in this volume are frightening abduction episodes. In some instances, for example, the case of the Brazilian farmer Antonio Villas Boas, humans claim to have had intimate relations with their alien abductors, suggesting some sort of hybrid breeding programme involving humans and extraterrestrials.

Not long after the contemporary

UFO era commenced on 24 June 1947, when pilot Kenneth Arnold reported seeing nine shiny objects flying past Mount Rainer Plateau in Washington State, the US government began to take a keen interest in the topic. The Steigers examine its numerous efforts to get to the bottom of the UFO phenomenon, including the US Air Force's Project Bluebook, the CIA's Roberson Panel, and Operation Majestic-12 – a purported top secret mission established in 1947 by President Harry S Truman to conceal the truth about the alleged crash of an alien craft at Roswell, New Mexico, that same year.

To the authors, Ronald Reagan's occasional comments on the prospect of extraterrestrial aliens – including a 1987 speech before the United Nations General Assembly in which he opined that an alien threat would make the various peoples of the world recognise “the common bond that unites all humanity” – suggest that he knew the “truth” about UFOs, but failed to disclose it to the public. Moreover, the authors assert that representatives from both the US and Soviet space programmes have made numerous observations of alien craft.

In an interesting chapter, they explore the legends surrounding the Third Reich's involvement in the occult, including efforts to make contact with extraterrestrial aliens who would provide knowledge on advanced technology that could be harnessed to further Germany's geopolitical ambitions. To that

end, an enigmatic medium and Nazi sympathiser, Maria Orsic, claimed to have channelled messages from aliens on a planet in the Aldebaran star system on how to construct anti-gravity discoid aircraft.

According to the authors, a number of UFO researchers have faced intimidation and repression from the government and unknown sources. These episodes account for some of the mysterious Men-in-Black visitations that are a staple in UFO lore. To make their case, the authors cite the suspicious deaths of several key UFO investigators including, James E McDonald, MK Jessup, and Phil Schneider. For their part, the authors are firm believers in aliens, but concede that they are uncertain of their true origins. Do they come from distant planets? Or are they remnants of a terrestrial race that burrowed beneath the surface of the Earth many years ago? Perhaps they reside in different dimensions and occasionally establish contact with humans, either physically or only mentally.

Some of the contact and abduction accounts presented will be taken seriously only by the most credulous; nevertheless, the volume provides a good reference source for those interested in a broad taxonomy of alien beings, either from a scientific or folkloric point of view.

George Michael

Fortean Times Verdict

DECENT ATTEMPT AT A COHERENT CLASSIFICATION OF ALIENS

7

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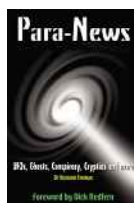
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The SF legacy

Fiction often precedes conspiracy theories, suggests a stimulating guide



Para-News

UFOs, Ghosts, Conspiracy, Cryptids and More

Richard Thomas

Bretwalda Books 2012

Pb, 252pp, £9.99, ISBN 9781907791727

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKCLUB PRICE £9.49

When I first read about the paranormal in the 1970s, credulity was the order of the day. Books were filled with reports of tantalisingly mysterious phenomena, coupled with optimistic speculations about interstellar travel, superpowers and survival after death. All that has changed. Wide-eyed optimism has been replaced by narrow-eyed cynicism. Plenty of people still believe in the extraterrestrial origin of UFOs, but the chances are they also believe there is a vast government conspiracy to cover up the truth. Much the same goes for belief in cryptids like Bigfoot, or in powers of the mind like telepathy or precognition. It's now commonplace for paranormal beliefs to go hand-in-hand with conspiracy theories.

The modern world of parapolitics can be daunting for the fortean traditionalist. Its natural home is the Internet, where much of the "primary source" material comes across as badly articulated paranoid ravings. This new book from Richard Thomas provides a welcome overview for those of us with a nostalgic hankering after grammatical English and logically structured arguments.

Thomas is only in his mid-twenties. He has already made a name for himself as a blogger, and much of the book's content has appeared online. However,

the way the material has been organised by subject means that you generally aren't aware that you're reading anything other than a traditionally produced paperback.

Most of the book is interviews between Richard and some of the key players in the worlds of parapolitics and the paranormal. There are conspiracy theorists like Jim Marrs, Richard Dolan and Timothy Good, traditional writers like Rupert Matthews, Richard Holland and Neil Arnold, and in-betweeners like Nick Redfern and *FT*'s own Mark Pilkington. The interview format is a perfect way to communicate a broad range of conflicting views, and Richard's sympathetic style brings out the best in his subjects. The whole book is astonishingly good-tempered, with none of the bitchiness or name-calling so often found in such discussions.

Perhaps the most surprising of the interviewees is Dean Haglund – the actor who portrayed the stereotypical conspiracy theorist Langly in the 1990s TV show *The X-Files*. It turns out Haglund has become something of a conspiracy theorist himself these days! The blurring of fiction and reality – with fiction often preceding reality – is one of the major subtexts of the book. Among many other topics, it explores how certain ideas espoused by modern conspiracy theorists appear to be foreshadowed in earlier science fiction works, such as the novels of Philip K Dick and the British TV series *Blake's 7*. It's all thought-provoking stuff.

While not quite the "ebook sensation now in paperback" that its cover proclaims, *Para-News* is a great read, offering a fresh take on what is now a rather old subject.

Andrew May

Fortean Times Verdict

FRESHENGLY SANE INTRODUCTION TO WEB PARANOIA

8

Dice World

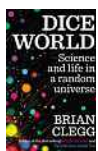
Science and Life in a Random Universe

Brian Clegg

Icon Books 2013

Pb, 274pp, figs, ind, £12.99, ISBN 9781848315167

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKCLUB PRICE £10.99



There can be nothing more fortean than trying to understand the underlying weirdness of the world around us and trying

to untangle what is unusual from what is abnormal. In his delightful approach to visualising the complexity of randomness, Brian Clegg takes us on a well organised non-mathematical tour of the subject.

Brian Clegg is a science author who despairs at the dull and uninspiring approach to teaching his favourite topics. He runs popularscience.co.uk and www.brianclegg.net, where you can find information about his other published works. His biography tells of appearances at the Royal Institution in London and multiple lectures given at the very best and brightest universities. He is also a columnist and contributor to popular media, radio and television programmes, and is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts.

So who could be better to try and take us on a journey into the heart of the Universe? In *Dice World*, Brian Clegg attempts to tell us why we humans were so wrong to think that the Universe is a massive, ordered, non-random machine. "It proved impossible to predict exactly how three planets orbiting each other would move. Meteorologists discovered that the weather was truly chaotic... it could never be predicted for more than a few days out. And the final nail in the coffin was quantum theory."

So we are told to forget Newton's clockwork Universe and embrace the reality of randomness and probability.

As I had done some statistics many years ago, the title of this book triggered a gut reflex concern that we were going into a labyrinth of mathematics from which my mind would never escape. Luckily, this was not case and I counted only a couple of

hairly equations, the second one even given a by-pass for those of a nervous disposition.

This reflects Brian Clegg's writing style in *Dice World*. He relies on words and anecdotes to bring the sometimes extremely abstract concepts into a very tangible reality. We can, with the aid of the book, demonstrate quantum effects in our living room. We also learn how to increase our chances of winning apparently random games.

There is some thought required in going through *Dice World*; to get the most out of the concepts it is worth trying to turn off your common sense. It is thought that Einstein commented: "Common sense is the collection of prejudices acquired by age 18." This pretty much sums up why we might not always be on the right track and also why it is so difficult to change our opinion.

Clegg lines up the usual suspects of physics in a *Who's Who* of "I can be more abstract than you!" He then tells us through Feynman quotations that we are not going to understand it, no one does, but we should be able to enjoy and appreciate the boldness of nature.

Essentially, the conclusion is that there is no fundamental driver: it is random. Creating true random is an essentially impossible oxymoron but what is both exciting and useful is the revelation that if we can relax for a minute and take a step back, we can use the outcome of randomness to our benefit in all sorts of ways that Clegg describes eloquently.

So if you are median, perhaps average (you're not average, are you?) then *Dice World* will give you the keys to differentiating correlation from causality, random from pattern and phenomenal from mundane and a lot more besides in an excellent review of this topic. If I understand correctly, there is a two in three chance of my lottery ticket being behind that door, as long as the cat, whose status is uncertain, has done nothing to it.

Paul Little

Fortean Times Verdict

EMBRACE RANDOMNESS AND PROBABILITY NOW!

8

ALSO RECEIVED

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

Mysteries of the Past

Ed: Glenn Kreisberg

Bear & Co 2012

Pb, 310pp, illus, notes, ind, £15.00, ISBN 9781431558

Kreisberg is a veteran of the New England Antiquities Research Association and one of the editors of the Official Graham Hancock website, and has the expertise to assemble this anthology of articles, commissioned by Hancock for discussion on that website. Offering “not an unbridled speculation” but “careful study, analysis and contemplation” of the latest findings in “alternative science, history, archaeology and consciousness research”. Leading authors (including Joscelyn Godwin and Anthony Peake) relish such topics as the resurgence of elemental shamanism; the mystery of higher consciousness; some secrets of Vedic literature; the builders of megaliths and old cities; was our Solar system engineered for us?; Mithras and Jesus; the Serapeum at Saqqara; future economies; what modern scientists are learning from the ‘Wisdom of the Ancients’ and much more. Informative, easy to read and, above all, hopeful.

UFOs, ETs and Alien Abductions

Don Donderi

Hampton Roads 2013

Pb, 228pp, index, notes, \$22.95, ISBN 9781517146955

A retired professor of psychology, faculty dean at McGill University and a UFO writer-investigator with 60 years’ experience, Donderi focuses on the politics – governmental and scientific – that dominate and shape debates and opinions about UFOs and aliens. He is convinced that extra-terrestrials – advanced, secretive and sinister – are behind it all and argues that the US and other governments have poisoned the discussion and obstructed practical investigations. His conclusion: full public disclosure; open discussion; and the development of a proper space defence system.

Infinite Energy Technologies

Ed: Finley Eversole

Inner Traditions 2013

Pb, 416pp, notes, resources, ind, £15.99, ISBN 9781594773808

The topic of ‘infinite energy technologies’ is vast and complicated enough for ordinary mortals to need a reliable guide, and this anthology fits the bill until (as Fort would say) something better comes along. It begins with an essay by Paul Hawken on contemporary environmental and ‘Occupy’ movements, which he calls “the largest social movement in history”. Modern audiences do not want to be depressed by frightening predictions for the planetary future; hence the emphasis here is the hope of green energy offered by unorthodox technologies. Thomas Bearden – an early *FT* contributor – is quoted as claiming that there have been at least 70 “successfully working free-energy technologies” that could have replaced fossil and nuclear fuels. Each, says Eversole, has been suppressed by vested interests. While some chapters focus on specific technologies (eg. water, zero-point, cold fusion and even anti-gravity), others deal with many lesser-known devices, generators and processes; and one section concentrates on the visionaries, like Tesla and Keely. The writers (including our own Theo Pajmans) all sound sane, reasonable, informed and inspiring, and show how the energy supplies of our future could be shaped by you actively expressing your concerns.

Paranormal Merseyside

SD Tucker

Amberley 2013

Pb, 256pp, refs, illus, £12.99, ISBN 9781848687295

In 2008, Liverpool was celebrated as a European Capital of Culture; this festival focused upon the city’s heritage in the arts, literature and music, its theatres, concert halls and art galleries; however, little attention was drawn

to its paranormal and fortean history. *FT* regular SD Tucker (an ex-teacher) provides a royal remedy in this fat volume in the excellent Amberley series of local histories. Almost every category of phenomena is represented here, and Tucker is an affable and knowledgeable companion as he guides you through streets and country lanes. Here is the

local background to his recent *FT* article on the area’s Little People (**FT299:26–32**) and much more, including poltergeists, UFOs, hauntings and ghostly floating heads. A big plus is the detailed history of a great many odd and interesting locations within and surrounding the city. This is a great one-stop book told with humour and an obvious love of the anomalous.

FORTEAN FICTION

Vurt

Jeff Noon

For 2013

Hb, 376pp, £16.99, ISBN 9780230768802



It’s nearly 20 years since I was chairing the Arthur C Clarke Award for the best SF novel of the previous year, and British astronaut Helen Sharman OBE presented the award to *Vurt*, a first novel by Jeff Noon. It became the flagship novel from the sadly long-gone independent publisher Ringpull, created by ex-Waterstone’s staff in Manchester, which specialised in quirky and often excellent books.

Vurt is a drug, except it’s a coloured feather you put in your mouth, which takes you into a virtual reality of shared dreams, or sometimes nightmares. Scribble is a young man on an Orpheus-like quest for his kid sister (and lover) who went into a *Vurt* world with him and never came back. He roams the backstreets of a near-future Manchester with a gang of friends, searching for a dealer to supply him with a Curious Yellow feather so he can go back into that world and find her.

The real world of Manchester’s underbelly is gritty and dangerous, and usually raining. In Bottletown, a housing estate with unemptied bottle banks, “When the banks were full, and overflowing, still they came, breaking bottles on the pavements and the stairs and the landings. This is how the world fills up. Shard by shard, jag by jag, until the whole place is some kind of glitter palace, sharp and painful to the touch.” That’s how *Vurt* reads, jagged, glittering, sharp, often painful: broken glass. “Such is beauty, in the midst of the city of tears. In Bottletown even our tears flicker like jewels.”

The *Vurt* worlds are appealing, terrifying, mystical, murderous. *Vurt* is a psychedelic romp, but it’s also a hard-edged acid trip. In my original review of it I described it as “too harsh for hippies, too beautiful for bikers”, and I’m pleased to see the quote on this 20th Anniversary edition, which contains three new powerful, poetic, poignant short stories set in the same world.

Noon has gone on to write other weird and wonderful novels, including the delightful *Automated Alice*, but it’s the sharp, jagged, risky *Vurt* that launched his career. When it won the Clarke Award I wrote in the *Independent* that it was “refreshing, disturbing and original”. It still is.

David V Barrett

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FORTEAN TIMES, PO BOX 71602, LONDON E17 0QD.



Fringe: Season 5

Dir various, US 2013

Warner Home Video, £24.99 (DVD), £29.99 (Blu-ray)

There's a bitter-sweet feeling about the final season in a popular TV show. The story you've been following for the last few years is brought to a satisfying end, but it's the last time you'll share in the adventures of a group of people you've come to know and love. Eccentric scientist Walter Bishop (John Noble), his son Peter (Joshua Jackson), FBI special agent Olivia Dunham (Anna Torv) and the team's technical assistant Astrid Farnsworth (Jasika Nicole) investigated "fringe" scientific phenomena: telepathy, horrendous biochemical attacks and the concept that became the heart of the first four seasons: the destructive friction between two closely parallel worlds.

From its beginning *Fringe* has taken risks. We had the main characters crossing into alternate worlds and meeting – and impersonating – different versions of themselves (nicknamed Walternate and Fauxlivia); much of season 3 was set in the alternate world. Season 4 began with a remade our-world, which Peter had never been a part of, and in which the other main characters didn't know him and had developed differently.

Near the end of season 4, one episode was set in a dystopian near future, with new lead characters. In season 5 we're in that future,

2036, but now the new characters are joined by the foursome from the previous seasons.

Walter, Peter, Olivia and Astrid had sealed themselves in amber in 2015, when Earth was invaded from the future by the Observers, the hat-and-suit-wearing, cold, expressionless, genetically-modified successors to mankind; in the confusion of the invasion they lost their young daughter, Henrietta. Now in 2036 they're released from the amber by the now-adult Etta, who is in the forefront of the resistance movement against the totalitarian rule of the Observers.

Before he ambered himself, Walter had left details of a plan to defeat the Observers on a series of videotapes preserved in amber in their lab at Harvard University in Boston. Much of the plot, more of a continuous story than in earlier seasons, concerns the team's attempts to retrieve items to work out Walter's plan which (in true Walter fashion) he now can't remember.

This season is much darker than previous ones, and the tone is set from the opening title sequence. In most seasons this included words and phrases such as Teleportation, Psychokinesis, Precognition, Hypnosis and Time Paradox – typically *Fringe* concepts. In this season the terms include Individuality, Community, Joy, Imagination, Private Thought and Free Will, ending up with the word Freedom trapped within razorwire. It's bleak. For

their increased intelligence and other abilities, including being able to teleport and to read people's thoughts, the Observers traded their emotions, and effectively their humanity. It's clearly symbolic that in scenes in New York we see that the Statue of Liberty is largely destroyed.

There's also a high body count: Olivia and Peter shoot dozens of Observers and human Loyalist soldiers during the season. And shockingly it's not only the bad guys who die; *Fringe* takes risks. Unlike many other shows, its main characters aren't set in stone; this season puts all of them through the wringer, and sees them all tested and developing as people, and in their relationships with each other.

It's not all dark. *Fringe* has a tradition of a quirky 19th episode each season. This time it's the 9th episode. Walter takes LSD, sees fairies dancing in front of him, holds conversations with his long-dead former assistant and sees a wonderful *Monty Python*-like animated sequence which gives him a vital piece of information. Most shows couldn't get away with it; *Fringe* does.

It's disappointing that this season is only 13 episodes instead of the 20 or more in each of the previous ones, but at least, unlike all too many American TV SF series, they were given the opportunity to draw the story to a close, bringing in ideas, and several characters, from previ-

ous seasons. There may be a few plot holes and time paradoxes, but they're inevitable in a story about parallel worlds and time travel.

The extras include an interesting 20-minute documentary on the making of *Fringe*, with creator JJ Abrams and showrunner JH Wyman, and a lively film of the main cast on a panel at Comic-Con 2012, after the filming but before the showing of season 5. The actors clearly loved working together and are emotional not just about the show ending but about individual scenes involving each other – and it was delightful to see that the clear favourite of both the cast and the fans was Jasika Nicole's Astrid (not just me then!).

David V Barrett

Fortean Times Verdict

SATISFYING END TO A QUIRKY
FRINGE SCIENCE SHOW

9

Blackfish

Dir Gabriela Cowperthwaite, US 2013

On UK release from 26 July

Blackfish is the powerful story of Tilikum, a performing "killer" whale who actually is one, as told by director-producer Gabriela Cowperthwaite. It's billed as a psychological thriller, but I would argue that it's much more important than that. Tilikum is an orca whale captured off Iceland when just two years old and introduced to the Sealand sealife park in British Columbia in 1983. He's punishment-trained, with food being withdrawn from him and his already trained female companions when he fails to perform. The fellow whales turn on him, raking him with their teeth.

The three are kept in a container that's only 20ft by 30ft for up to 17 hours a day, in total darkness, with no room to move. As they grow, they become more reluctant to go in and can only be coaxed inside by keeping food from them until they relent.

Unsurprisingly, Tilikum becomes disturbed, possibly psychotic, and kills a trainer. As one of the talking heads in a montage of news footage says: "If you're in a bathtub for 20 years would you not get a little aggravated?"

Tilikum is moved to SeaWorld and its better facilities (although it's all relative). The staff haven't been warned of his volatile nature, and he goes on to kill at least one, and probably two more people.

We're guided through the film chronologically as the stories of Tilikum, other captive whales, and those who lost their lives are slowly revealed. Heart-rending images of young whales being separated from their mothers are hard to watch with a dry eye, and difficult and often tragic encounters between the whales and their trainers are shown alongside beautifully shot footage of the orcas in the wild, interwoven with interviews with former trainers (SeaWorld itself reportedly declined to take part).

Revealing shots of theme park employees telling people that the whales live longer in captivity (completely untrue) and information on the research into the intelligence and abilities of these marvellous creatures is shown to back up Cowperthwaite's argument that we will be looking back at this state of affairs and considering it completely barbarous 50 years from now.

It's a well-told story, and a sad-denying reminder of the cruelty of humans in pursuit of money and the ability we have to delude ourselves. It should be compulsory viewing for anyone considering visiting SeaWorld or its ilk.

Julie McNamee

Fortean Times Verdict

HEARTBREAKING TALE OF THE MAKING OF A 'KILLER' WHALE **8**

The Seasoning House

Dir Paul Hyett, UK 2013
On UK release from 28 June

Others have loved this grubby, squalid film, but I see little to recommend it. Set during the Balkans conflict, the Seasoning House of the title is a filthy brothel where abducted girls are forcibly addicted to heroin to make them more compliant to any soldier's whim. This unsurprisingly usually runs to violent rape, often resulting in death. Angel (Rosie Day) is deaf and mute, which guarantees her survival as the perfect worker in this hellish environment; her chores mainly run to shooting the girls up with their daily smack allocation and mopping up the (copious) blood. Her wasted, skeletal frame allows her to move freely in the crawlspaces between the walls, and it's from here she plans her escape and revenge. This unrelent-

THE REVEREND'S REVIEW

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

THE BROOD

Dir David Cronenberg, Canada 1979
Second Sight, £14.99 (DVD), £19.99 (Blu-ray)

DEADLY BLESSING

Dir Wes Craven, US 1991
Arrow Films, £12.99 (DVD), £15.99 (Blu-ray)

When David Cronenberg found himself in a custody battle for his daughter he didn't climb Toronto's monuments dressed as a superhero. Instead he grabbed his typewriter, channelled his anguish and rattled out a psycho-horror classic. It's the story of a desperate father, Frank Carveth (Art Hindle), who tries to save his daughter from her maladjusted mother Nola and the therapeutic 'cult' she's joined. Nola is into 'Psychoplasmics': where the stress and anxiety of a patient can be externalised as physical deformity (usually yonic rather than phallic in nature – yes, this is Cronenberg). And when corpses start showing up, Carveth realises his ex-wife's fury is becoming near-omnipresent.

The Brood is a veritable tick-list of sociological themes: the monstrous feminine; the metaphysical potential of psychology; the brainwashing tactics of New Age cults; the changing role of fathers; the

wrench of divorce (Cronenberg said this was his version of *Kramer vs Kramer*) not to mention the miracle – or is that nightmare? – of birth. Where so much horror barely has even a single thematic heart (beyond teenagers being trapped and tortured) *The Brood* is a reminder of what scary films do at their gory, thoughtful best: provide metaphors for the frightening world we find ourselves in.

Pretty much everything works. The plot is tight and well-paced, the effects are suitably nauseating and (mostly) effective, Howard Shore's score is bracing and aggressive, the characters are believable and the acting is great. Particularly powerful is Samantha Eggar as Nola Carveth, who does her deranged and volatile glare to unsettling perfection. And Oliver Reed is excellent too as the Psychoplastic Guru Dr Hal Raglan. With that solemn bass delivery, he was an actor who could make even a shopping list sound vital.

At the time of its release, the late Roger Ebert called *The Brood* boring, unscary and disgusting, even asking the question: "Are there really people who want to see reprehensible trash like this?"



Well I guess there are, and I'm one of them. Because *The Brood* is one of Cronenberg's purest and most satisfying films, disturbing themes and all. Nice picture quality and extras too on this new Blu-Ray release.

Also out in HD is Wes Craven's largely forgotten *Deadly Blessing*, about repression and murder in an American Hutterite community. It's an intriguing but mostly tedious affair, which would have worked better as a TV Movie. Sharon Stone makes an early appearance and isn't particularly good. Still, there's a rather creepy Omen-inspired choral score by James Horner which does add a few chills and some effective cinematography. Oh, and one extra point for having Howie from *The Fall Guy* in it.

Fortean Times Verdict

CRONENBERG AT HIS BEST, AND CRAVEN SADLY NOT **9/5**



ing take on human suffering and misery requires a strong stomach to watch. In its favour, its London location makes the rounding up and massacring of civilians more shocking for its very ordinariness. Sean Pertwee adds yet another soldier to his CV, playing a vicious warlord, a role he approaches with his customary relish.

Tim Weinberg

Fortean Times Verdict

PRETTY UNPLEASANT STUFF BY ANY STANDARDS

5

Doctor Who and the Daleks / Daleks' Invasion Earth 2150AD

Dir Gordon Flemyng, UK 1965, 1966

Studiocanal £15.99 each (DVD), £19.99 each (Blu-Ray)

Very different from the TV series that spawned them, the two 1960s Dalek movies have been given the HD treatment for this pair of Blu-Ray releases (also available as plain DVDs). In the mid-1960s *Doctor Who* was black and white and watched on rather small, fuzzy screens, and while the Daleks were the breakout monsters in playgrounds the breadth of the nation, these dynamic movies offered over-excited kids the chance to see the metal meannies in full colour on the big screen.

Peter Cushing played the Doctor as an avuncular Earth scientist, rather different from William Hartnell's irascible and mysterious small screen version. He embodied the part with a kind of absent-minded charm, and was accompanied by active young co-stars – such as Roy Castle and Bernard Cribbins – who took on the action roles and provided some comic relief.

The star attractions were the Daleks, depicted in a wild array of colours as they battle the Thals on Skaro (in *Doctor Who and the Daleks*) or invade Earth with a crazy plan to bomb the planet's core and fly it around the galaxy (*Daleks' Invasion Earth 2150AD*). The stories may be rather juvenile (although well adapted from the long-winded TV serials), but they can't help but be enjoyable in a rather silly and sentimental way, whether you remember them from first time around or not. Extras include a couple of technical pieces on the movie restorations, some background information on the

making of the films and, on *Doctor Who and the Daleks*, an hour-long documentary on the 1960s' Dalek craze entitled *Dalekmania!*

Brian J Robb

Fortean Times Verdict

NON-CANONICAL (?) BUT COLOURFUL AND LOTS OF FUN

8

Hidden Face

Dir Andrés Baiz, Spain 2011

Metrodome, £15.99 (DVD)

While low-budget British horror tends to fanny around with Cockneys/hookers/vampires/werewolves* (*delete as applicable) and its US cousin is still hung up on, you know, girls and, um, how to slaughter them, here is a highly original effort from Spain (though set partly in Colombia) that succeeds in being utterly terrifying without even a drop of the old claret in sight.

Adrian (Quim Gutiérrez), an immensely talented conductor, comes home to find his girlfriend gone and deals with his grief by immediately starting a torrid affair with Fabiana (Martina Garcia), a pretty cocktail waitress. He proceeds to say nothing, in a very gnostic, Adrien Brody-esque way, for the film's duration. But is it a straightforward missing-persons story, a murder investigation (replete with greasy cops), a tale of haunting, or something much more contemporary and terrifying? Slow-moving and sinister, it milks mileage out of good ol' fashioned tropes, such as a big empty house during a storm, and approaches genre clichés with a gusto all horror directors should take note of.

With nods (psychologically) to *Rebecca* (how much of a person's past do we really know?) and (visually) to *What Lies Beneath?* (plus other classics, but we'd be pushing close to spoiler territory), this is inventive, scary as hell and shows the value of good writing. And the moral(s) of the story? Don't test your lover, or buy old houses from Nazis on the run. Probably the most voyeuristic film ever made. You'll really have to see it to understand why. Superb.

Tim Weinberg

Fortean Times Verdict

PANT-POOINGLY SCARY, BOTH OLD-FASHIONED AND ORIGINAL

9

GAMES

DIE NIBELUNGEN

Eurekal, £12.99 (DVD), £15.99 (Blu-ray)



A beautiful restoration and blu-ray release for Fritz Lang's early two-part epic will certainly appeal to cinephiles and students of German mythology, although those who think they know the story from Wagner may end up scratching their heads as the film goes off in all sorts of unfamiliar directions.

Wagner, of course, took what he needed from myth and turned it into a story all his own, while Thea von Harbou's script follows the mediæval *Nibelungenlied* more closely. Lang and his team supply stunning visuals, from expressionistic sets and lighting to opulent costumes and great battle sequences, while the newly recorded original score by Gottfried Huppertz means the films sound as good as they look. Be warned, though: at five hours long, *Die Nibelungen* can seem a somewhat ponderous classic of silent cinema at times. **David Sutton 8/10**

THE TALL MAN

Image Entertainment, £12.99 (DVD), £15.99 (Blu-ray)



Of interest to *FT* readers for its reading of the Spring-heeled Jack legend, as well as fears around other more contemporary abduction-type scenarios, this US/ Canadian/French hybrid has tough women at its centre, around whom hover worthless men. The town of Cold Rock has been in massive decline since the mine closed. To further add to its misery, a sinister figure known as The Tall Man has been linked to the disappearance of several of the town's children and only a mute goth on a bicycle holds the key to solving the mystery... Before you start thinking this runs like the tagline to some rubbish Stephen King mini-series, please let me assure you it's a lot better than that. A tour-de-force for Jessica Biel as the town nurse, suddenly at the centre of the community after the sudden death of her much-loved doctor husband, the film uses

constrictions of budget to get mileage out of clichéd settings like a deserted factory or lonely forest at night. With a twist revealed about half-way through, this could have been better paced, but is otherwise superb. Recommended, if harrowing, viewing. **TW 8/10**

CURANDERO: DAWN OF THE DEMON

Lion's Gate Home Entertainment, £12.99 (DVD)



In Central America, a *curandero* is an indigenous healer/shaman who provides cures for both spiritual and physical problems. The titular *curandero* of Eduardo Rodríguez's 2005 film (written and produced by brother Robert) is forced into the role of exorcist too

as he comes up against demonic powers in modern day Mexico City. Carlos is himself the son of a celebrated healer, but downplays the supernatural in favour of a psychological interpretation of what he does. Teamed up (in an *X-Files* inversion) with a female cop who's a believer, Carlos has to use his powers to bring Castaneda, the head of a Satanic-blood-drinking-drug-trafficking cult, to justice. When he starts having the kind of visions that would have left Don Juan crying for his mum, the film goes all hallucinatory; but this can't quite dispel the feeling of watching a series of discrete set pieces that never quite add up to a satisfying narrative. It's enjoyable and interesting for its Mexican colour, but hardly scary, even with demons and disembowellings galore; perhaps the problem is that the supposedly demonic villain Castaneda just looks so much like Uncle Fester. **DS 5/10**

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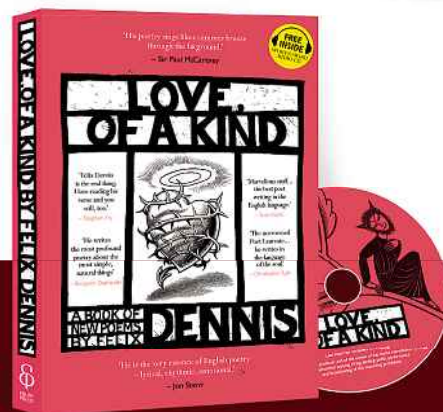
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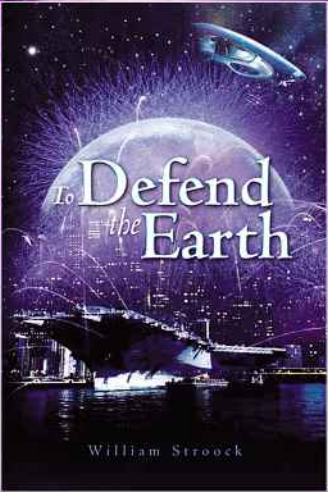
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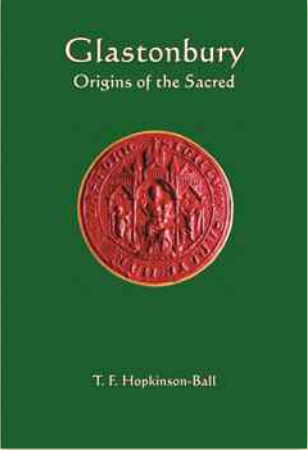


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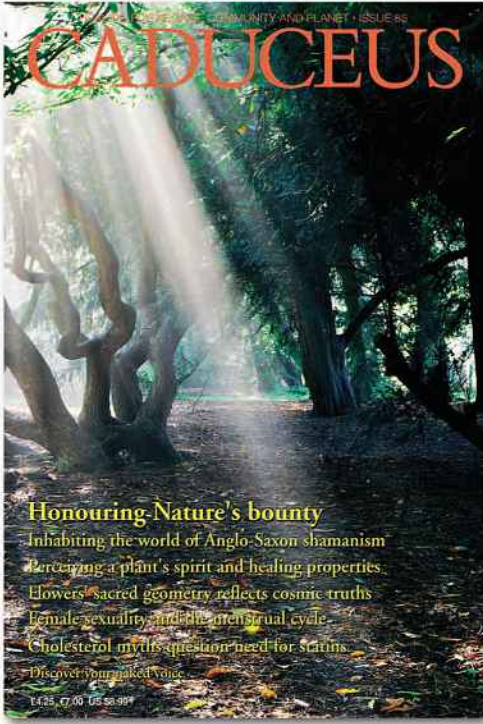
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Dear FT...

letters



Glasgow Polt

My obituary of Professor Archie Roy [FT301:24] contains an inadvertent error. I noted that "Roy also investigated haunted houses and poltergeist cases, notably a poltergeist at Maxwell Park, Glasgow, in 1974-5..." The Maxwell Park case is described in his book *A Sense of Something Strange: Investigations into the Paranormal* (Glasgow: Dog and Bone, 1990, pp.210-21.) He had collaborated with Rev Max Magee, and stated that apart from his and Magee's, the names of those concerned had been changed. He did not, however, say that 'Maxwell Park' was a pseudonym. As recently as 2008, in an interview he gave to researcher Michael Tymn, he still referred to "the Maxwell Park case" (though incorrectly dating it to 1972). (www.aspsi.org/feat/life_after/a073mt-a-Prof_Archie_E_Roy_interview.php).

Archie had indeed altered the location: it was not at Maxwell Park, on the south side of Glasgow, but in Northgate Quadrant, Balornock, on the opposite side of the city. Geoff Holder covers the case in his recent *Poltergeist over Scotland* (Stroud: The History Press, 2013, pp.158-66 – reviewed FT262:60.) He supplies the real location and the participants' names, and provides a number of references for those wishing to pursue this fascinating case in further detail.

Tom Ruffles
By email

Weird protests

A friend recently told me that he regularly sends his toenail clippings to the Vietnamese Embassy to protest against the black market in rhino horn 'medicine'. Moreover, many others do this and he believes the Embassy receives hundreds of envelopes of toenail clippings every month. This reminded me of PETA founder Ingrid Newman's will, in which she requested that her eyeball be mounted and sent to the US Environmental Protection Agency, her

pointing finger be sent to a circus company still using animal acts, etc. Do any readers or their friends perform weird protests – not necessarily limited to the posting of body parts?

Heather Robbins
Bognor Regis, West Sussex

Bearded lady

I read with interest your report on the fate of the much-abused "bearded lady", Julia Pastrana [FT300:4]. I am sure I am not the only reader to have noticed the coincidence with the name of the Mexican artist who campaigned for the interment of the corpse, Laura Anderson Barbata. Barbatus/barbata is Latin for bearded. Fortuna Barbata was the aspect of the goddess Fortuna to whom boys offered the first cuttings of their new beards as they became men, and she represented a deity who watched over and blessed the transition from childhood to adulthood. Barbata also has the meaning of "adulthood" or "sign of being an adult", and a beard was symbolically a mark of adulthood.

Fortuna's blessing on your continued fortean endeavours!

Simon Ramshaw
Addlestone, Surrey

The Grunch

Further to Alan Murdie's piece on 'Bele Sheephead', the half-human, half-sheep said to haunt Broughton Moor road in Cumbria [FT299:15], there is an interesting transatlantic parallel. He notes that the story is a variant of the urban legend 'the hook', examined by Jan Harold Brunvand in *The Vanishing Hitchhiker: Urban Legends and their Meanings* (1981). It is actually a variant of 'The Boyfriend's Death', though this is an easy mix-up as both involve cars and encounters with threatening, violent figures on lonely country roads.

In any case, the really tantalising thing that Murdie's article points to is this: there is a werewolf urban legend parallel

Simulacra corner



Stefanie Theodorou saw this tree face while cycling through a wood in Cuffley, Hertfordshire.

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with the Cumbrian tale from as far away as Louisiana. Brunvand notes: "In a New Orleans version, 'The Boyfriend's Death' is absorbed into a local teenage tradition about 'The Grunch' – a half-sheep, half-human monster that haunts specific local sites." (p21). Murdie also notes that Bele Sheephead "was last encountered in 1972", while Brunvand's source for 'The Grunch' was printed in 1971 (p26). So either this is a case of tale polygenesis or were-sheep were somehow popular in folk-imagination during the 1970s.

• Also on the subject of modern folklore, I enjoyed David Hambling's article on the Vanishing

Hitchhiker [FT298:14]; but though "inattentive amnesia" may go some way towards exploring the phenomenon, I'm not sure it can fully explain it. Brunvand noted antecedents of the tales from the days of horse and buggy riding in the 19th century (p35), and even a Chinese version where the vanishing girl walks behind a young man who meets her on the road (p36). I doubt whether these situations could produce sensory deprivation leading to "highway hypnosis". I'm agnostic when it comes to the paranormal, but perhaps we are dealing with what is just a good tale.

Lewis JW Hurst
Edinburgh

The Power of Pluto

Reading the letter of Jim Wyatt-Lees [FT298:68], I recalled that “The Power of Pluto” appeared in *Red Fire on the Lost Planet*, (1959) one of the “Lost Planet” series of children’s science

fiction by Angus McVicar, starting in 1953. His stories were serialised in “Children’s Hour” radio broadcasts, and reprinted in the 1960s, both in hardback and paperback. As far as I remember, the story was set on the “Lost Planet” itself, but like most

tales in the series it began with the preparation on Earth for an expedition there. The background reasons may well have included disturbances of the sort Mr Wyatt-Lees mentions. Of course, McVicar could have come across an earlier refer-



ence to “The Power of Pluto” and borrowed the term for his own writing, but I suspect that it was purely his invention.

IM Arundel
By email

I wonder if Jim Wyatt-Lees is remembering something about this 1966 comic (left). At the time, (February 1967) Marvel was experimenting with marketing British-style weekly multi-story comics in the UK rather than just importing or reprinting American single-story monthly titles.

They were called *Fantastic!* and *Terrific!* and may have had their own letters pages. They certainly had editorial pages and reprinted (in black and white) *The Mighty Thor*.

Stephen Wilson
By email

Tale Realised

Whilst reading Nick Beer’s account “Carrying the weight” [FT299:70], I was immediately struck by its overwhelming similarity to M R James’s classic ghost story “A Warning to the Curious”. So much so in fact that – this being the April issue – I looked for clues indicating an April Fool prank! I’m sure I won’t be the only reader who spotted this. Thankfully, despite waiting three years before returning the object, it seems that Mr Beer has avoided the fate of poor Paxton!

Graham Mullins
Chislehurst, Kent

Lack of Cushions

Regarding your obituary of William Roll [FT:286:26]: I knew Bill in the late 1970s in North Carolina, when he was spearheading the Psychical Research Foundation. His life was fraught with problems at the time. The

Zen meditation centre he was running had insufficient funds to buy “zafu” cushions, the little round blobs that prop you up during sitting meditation, and so all the meditators leaned to one side. Bill was involved in a painfully hopeless romance and asked a visiting Tibetan Rinpoche what to do “if you loved someone who did not love you in return”. His compassion motivated me to study meditation, Zen, and Taoism.

One of Bill’s graduate students was studying “practical paranormal abilities”, looking at individuals who took dangerous chances like pulling out into traffic without looking but were never hit – a fascinating concept. At the time, Bill noted that “many poltergeist activities seemed to be centred around teen girls suffering from a condition called ‘borderline personality disorder.’” This made such an impression on me that I spent a good part of my life investigating

and writing about this curious disorder. Thanks, Bill.

Wes Burgess, M.D., Ph.D.
Venice, California

Editor’s note: Dr Burgess is a psychiatrist who taught at Stanford, UCLA Medical Schools and the University of California, Davis, and is the author of numerous books and over 100 scholarly articles on the brain, behaviour, mental illness, human consciousness, and meditation. See his Wikipedia entry.

Defying Gravity

I am grateful to David Barrett for his review of *Defying Gravity* [FT300:66]. I think it’s a given that good science fiction doesn’t read as “science-fiction”. Whenever you place your characters – space, underwater, shopping mall etc – the drama has to arise from their reactions to each other and to their environment. Frank Herbert achieved this in *Dune* by making no concessions to the reader – we had to accept his world and run with it. In space or anywhere, “people are people”, and once the technology of getting them into space has been achieved, they have little else to do than be people.

Defying Gravity was indeed very good to look at, and much thought had obviously gone into it, with high production values and excellent effects. I stuck with it for the entire run; but, as with BBC’s *Outcasts*, I wasn’t surprised to find that it had been cancelled. The graveyard slot didn’t help, but was probably inevitable.

Both promised much, but ended up painfully boring, with far too much time given over to the development of dull characters. The selection of an extreme environment as a background assumes some human interaction with it. All I seem to remember is lots of talking heads and flashbacks to Earth-based training. In short, I was waiting for something to happen that would justify the space setting and take me out of myself for a while. Admittedly, the subplot involving the weird blobs had potential, but it felt like a bolt-on sop to escapist

space fans, rather than a plot-driver. Typically, things started to get going at the end of the last episode, if I remember correctly, but by then, for both *Defying Gravity* and *Outcasts*, it was too late. I enjoyed *Dune*, where the environment is as much a character as the people in it, if not the principal one. Perhaps that was the trouble with *Defying Gravity*: there was a major character, Space, doing nothing.

Trevor Sproston
By email

Coca Corrosa

The sad saga of Natasha Harris who reportedly died from a Coca-Cola overdose [FT300:27] contains the deathless sentence: “Several of her teeth rotted and had to be removed, and at least one of her children was born without tooth enamel”.

Allowing for the fact that teeth may rot without being exposed to Coca-Cola, and ignoring the Mythconception column debunking the belief that teeth will dissolve overnight in a glass of the brown stuff [FT166:28], we are left with the interesting possibility that good ol’ Lamarck may have been vindicated at last... or is there a metabolic pathway that allows acid from the Coke to pass up the umbilical cord and attack the enamel of the unborn child’s teeth, which are normally safely hidden within the gums? We await further revelations.

Nils Erik Grande
Oslo, Norway

ART – or design?

Guy Lyon Playfair may be a brilliant fortean researcher; but on the strength of his article [FT 299:51] he should keep well away from art criticism.

The Lascaux paintings are not “cave daubings” – they are highly finished works of art. I know; I have seen them. As is now recognised, art does not “evolve” as technology does. Ice Age human beings possessed as much aesthetic sense and knowledge as Leonardo or any modern artist and could create equally finished works. If Leonardo shows any superiority, it is probably because

he had access to technologically superior materials, not because he was necessarily a better artist: just as Iron Age carving improves on Stone Age carving because you get a better result carving stone with metal than with stone, not because Iron Age people were aesthetically more advanced.

I would personally question whether crop circles fall into the realm of art or of design (recognising that the boundary between the two is fuzzy). Arguably, “art” is a one-off, whereas “design” is intended for reproduction. Thus, a Rossetti painting is art, a William Morris wallpaper is design. Moreover, crop circles seem (for the most part) to consist of shapes, often repeated, rather than being representational, which again tends to place them towards the “design” end of the spectrum. If they are generated by a computer programme they are (in theory) endlessly reproducible and so should probably be viewed as design.

So perhaps we should adopt Mr Playfair’s suggestion of a crop circle gallery: not in the Tate, but in the Victoria and Albert Museum.

Martin Jenkins

London

I enjoyed Guy Playfair’s interesting article on crop circles, but I feel I must quibble with his assertion that Art “evolves”. Technology yes, but not Art – witness the simple, sublime sophistication of the Neo-Palaeolithic paintings in such caves as Lascaux and Chauvet in France, and the Altamira caves in Spain. Picasso famously said of them, “After Altamira everything is decadence”.

Merrily Harpur

By email

Giants Will Reappear

I was interested in an article about giants in Ireland [FT272:16 – maybe]. My hobby is looking for the 12 lost tribes of Israel. They are not lost – hidden maybe, but not lost. Moses was ordered to destroy seven tribes, all of them giants. God’s chosen people were chosen so that “the meek would inherit the earth” – meek meaning small. Descendants of Abraham and Sarah. They came out of Egypt to

become a threat to the giants and slaughter them. This went on for years, right up to the time of David.

The Book of Judges explains that although the Israelites settled in the land, they did not get rid of the giants (Canaanites) altogether. King David for example was a man carrying the giant gene and fathering giants. He despaired for his progeny. Bathsheba was married to a giant and avoided children. However the priests realised that she (BB) and David (BA) could produce a man kind child with the giant gene outbred. Very often giants appear only in the first born. The second one would be man kind. See Mendel’s theory of genetics. So David’s first born ‘died’ and the next one, Solomon, lived.

Since Europeans are descended from the Israelites, as time goes on, giants will reappear. By slaughtering their own people, they reduced the tribe of Benjamin to 13 men, and had they not done it, by now Benjamin (Ireland north and south) would be overrun with giants. In 1928 *British Israel Truth* was published and the government of the day destroyed every copy they could get. I tried to write a book about giants. My computer got sabotaged three times. So I say no more.

Violet Horton (Mrs)

Balby, South Yorkshire

Radio hacking

You reported a tactic used by the Nazis in the early years of World War II: their radio transmitters would interrupt BBC broadcasts with messages designed to alarm or persuade British audiences to end the war [FT296:21]. The article asked if such ‘radio hacking’ had happened elsewhere. Yes it did – just a few months later, by Britain’s own Political Warfare Executive (PWE).

From 1942 to 1945, Sefton Delmer, previously a foreign correspondent for the *Daily Express*, was given the task of spreading black propaganda using radio broadcasts. While he initiated a number of original and effective broadcasts on shortwave, these influenced only a small audience; but in 1943 he was authorised to transmit on medium wave (or the medium frequency AM broadcast

band) using a powerful new transmitter code-named ‘Aspidistra’.

Purpose-built by the Radio Corporation of America and named after the popular song by Gracie Fields (“It’s the biggest aspidistra in the world”), this consisted of the main transmitter: a 600-kilowatt amplitude modulated monster sited “somewhere on the south coast” and a 500-watt unmodulated transmitter usually positioned 50 miles (80km) away, which would mislead any German direction finding. 600 kilowatts would allow strong reception over most of Western Europe and perhaps beyond.

At first, Aspidistra transmitted Soldatensender Calais, which the casual listener might assume was a station provided for the entertainment of German armed forces. As well as speeches by Hitler and Goebbels, popular music and news from German regions (all recorded from legitimate German broadcasters), the station transmitted the latest American music ‘from discs captured by our brave U-boat crews’, the results of football matches between army units (from information provided by resistance fighters) and news with more information of Allied victories than official German channels might provide.

Stories about Nazi officials culled from local German newspapers subscribed to from Sweden were worked up as malicious gossip using the well-known skills of British tabloid journalism into “see how the fat cats at home behave while we are on the front line” tales. German prisoners-of-war who had defected to become announcers supplied current armed forces slang and jokes and genuine regional accents. All this gave Delmer’s team practice at imitating official German broadcasters, because Aspidistra had one more trick.

In volume two of his autobiography *Black Boomerang* (1962), Delmer states that Aspidistra “had been specially designed... to make lightning changes of frequency” which for conventional broadcasters could

take hours or even days. Unlike the BBC, Germany used separate frequencies for each regional broadcaster, but as Allied air raids proceeded overhead, individual radio stations would go off the air so as not to provide a navigational beacon for enemy aircraft.

Knowing the route of air raids, Aspidistra would be waiting “in ambush on the frequency of the German station” (p16ff) playing the same record, or giving the same speech in synchronisation. Aspidistra would “take over the German target frequency within one two-hundredth of a second of the German station closing down”, leaving Delmer’s team free to insert apparently genuine new and official commands designed to lower morale and respect for the authorities and cause panic, such as orders from a local Gauleiter to evacuate, thus blocking roads, or for Volksturm units to set up roadblocks or occupy buildings or otherwise make a nuisance of themselves.

Although the Cold War should have presented numerous opportunities, this very effective technique does not seem to have been used anywhere else, to my knowledge. Aspidistra was used for conventional BBC broadcasts into Europe until it was retired in 1982. Modern sound broadcasting technologies such as FM and DAB exhibit the ‘capture effect’, where a more powerful transmitter can capture a receiver, so they could be used this way. Digital television also exhibits the capture effect, so the possibility is there, yet it seems never to have been used. Does anyone know of an instance?

John Alexander Faulkner

Sydney, Australia



TONY HUSBAND

it happened to me...

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Papal Clues

On 1 October 2012, my husband and I were watching *Warehouse 13* – a TV fantasy series that incorporates a lot of fortean themes – when the postman delivered a package from the History Book Club. I tore it open immediately, being a regular book fiend, and was somewhat disappointed to see it was one my husband had ordered: *The Emperor and the Saint*, about Frederick II and St Francis of Assisi. I opened it at random to chapter 13, page 317, and saw a photo of Steinerne Bruke, a bridge in Ratisbon, a town in Germany I had never heard of. At that precise moment a character on screen said: “Bruke means bridge in German”.

Well, this caught my attention. I promptly went on Facebook and posted it as my “Synchronicity of the Day”, since I collect them like odd souvenirs. My sceptical friends suggested it was all merely coincidence, of course, while others suggested helpful connections for the number 13 which I hadn’t thought of. All good fun.

Then it occurred to me that the word bridge suggests “pontiff” (from *pontifex*, derived from Latin *pons*, bridge). The then-Pope was German. So the “German Bridge” would be Pope Benedict. Hmm. I went to Wikipedia to check out the bridge location and was surprised to learn that it was very near the birthplace of Benedict, that the Pope had taught at the university there, and owned a residence less than a kilometre away. So I posted a comment on Facebook that since I had noticed synchronicities often seemed meaningful, I was going out on a limb and predicting news about the Pope in the near future. This got big laughs from my sceptical friends!

In February 2013 when Pope Benedict announced his resignation, I mentioned the synchronicity to my husband and said perhaps this was the news I’d “predicted”. He was all bah, humbug and said it had been almost four months, and that was too long to matter. So I forgot about it again, until 13 March, when I remembered the “13” connection, and had an intuition

that the Pope would be chosen that day, although, once again, my husband said bah, humbug.

I came home from work just in time to see CNN announce that the new Pope had indeed been chosen, and had picked the name Francis I, after St Francis of Assisi. I went to Facebook to track back on the convenient yet annoying Facebook Timeline to 1 October and re-read the original posting, trying to remember what we’d said about the number 13, and only then realised I had totally forgotten that the book in question was about St Francis of Assisi. It had been tucked away amidst our vast pile, and anyway it was my husband’s book and went into his vast pile. My husband was slightly impressed at this, although I haven’t heard from any television producers yet about my

“They decided to put the photos on the computer and discovered that one had an image of a teenage girl!”

new psychic reality show. Sigh. A prophet in her own country and all.

Julia Morgan-Scott
Chattanooga, Tennessee

Beetle Message

I have written to you about seeing a trail of several hundred Devil’s coachhorse beetles (*Ocypus olens*) when I was aged about 10 [FT291:71]. The beetles are not social creatures, and the event is still unexplained although I have consulted an expert. Well, I am glad to say that there is a conclusion of sorts. It is said that Jung was analysing a client who was relating a dream about a beetle when a beetle flew into the room – a cockchafer if I remember, a large and impressive insect. Jung’s theory of synchronicity is said to have been influenced by this event. Anyway, I was recently at my kitchen table reading FT and came across an article about Jung. I just happened to get up and go to the sink by the window and discovered a Devil’s coachhorse beetle on one of the taps. All I can say is ‘thank you Carl Jung’ (and FT).

Simon van Someren
London

The Watford Girl

During the Easter holidays this year, my niece Lauren and her parents visited the ‘Harry Potter’ sets in Watford, as my niece is an avid Potter fan. She took photos of everything with her digital camera, shooting in a standard mode. On returning home, Lauren and her father decided to store all the photos on the home computer, and discovered that one had an image of a young, possibly teenage, girl [below]. You can see that part of her head is missing at the back, the top of her head is transparent while her face seems to be solid. Lauren doesn’t remember seeing the girl and told me the railing was only about waist-high for an adult. I can assure you the image has not been altered in any way. If anyone knows the identity of the girl or has a logical explanation for the image, we would be grateful to know.

Libby Bytyqi
Portland, Dorset

Bald Man Mystery

In my mid-20s I worked in the maintenance department of a factory and we had an electric clock system operated from one central clock in the reception area. One day all





the clocks in the factory stopped at 12.10pm. My supervisor tried in vain to restart the main clock. At this point – and I really can't explain this – I knew I had to see my girlfriend. She lived in a small village a good 10 miles (16km) away from the factory and I couldn't drive back then. Somehow, I managed to convince my boss that I had to leave work straight away, but assured him I would make the time up the following day. I walked to the outskirts of town and then took a country road leading to where my girlfriend lived.

A short distance along the road, a car pulled over and the driver asked if I needed a lift. Perhaps he knew the buses weren't very regular at this time of day, or maybe he was just a Good Samaritan. The journey didn't take very long and he soon dropped me at the flat my girlfriend was renting. I knocked on her front door several times and when she finally opened it she seemed confused, and had a nasty red burn on her left forearm. I asked if she was OK, but she just stumbled back into the living room and collapsed on the sofa.

After a short while, she'd recovered sufficiently to tell me that she'd been ironing in the living room when she had an eerie sensation that someone was in the flat with her. At that point, she accidentally caught her arm with the iron and fell back in shock. That's when she saw an overweight, bald, middle-aged man, sitting in the corner of

the room staring at her. Within seconds he disappeared. I reassured her it was probably caused by the shock of the burn. I stayed with her that night, but I didn't dare mention to her that the man who gave me the lift was overweight, bald, and middle-aged. Of course, it could have been sheer coincidence that the descriptions matched, but what I couldn't explain was that, other than asking if I wanted a lift, there was no conversation between us during the journey. Then I realised that I hadn't even told him where to drop me off. He already knew.

Mark Braybrook
Hampshire

My Haunted Decade

I'm beginning to realise that I may have been haunted for 10 years, and not known it. A decade ago I moved into a flat. It was dingy and dirty, and I was never comfortable there. I didn't like to be alone there; I always had to have the television or radio on. If I was off work, I would spend the day in a coffee shop or pub rather than alone in the flat. I often felt as if I was being watched, or that someone was in the other room. I didn't like to have any of the doors closed, as I always felt there was someone behind the door. I would even try and wash my hair with my eyes open, because I was so nervous that someone was watching me. It was worse in the dark. Every time I came into

the flat, I would reach round for the light switch, unwilling to walk in until there was some light – and every time, I was convinced something was waiting to grab my hand.

Sleep was the most affected part of my life. I had a lot of nightmares. I would often wake up, thinking I heard knocking, or the doorbell ringing – which was strange, as the doorbell didn't work. For a while, I would wake up at exactly the same time every night, after hearing three knocks. If I fell asleep during the day, in the living room, I would always dream that I couldn't wake up again, that I was struggling to open my eyes and couldn't. At night, I would try not to get up, as I hated walking past the living room. I felt there was something in there at night that resented me disturbing it. I never saw anything though. I had a feeling there was a girl in white in the living room, but I never saw her.

Sometimes I would feel something touch me, but I always put it

down to a muscle spasm – although I never had these spasms outside the flat. I'm fairly sensible, and I would not believe the flat was haunted without some evidence beyond 'feelings'. I put the nightmares and the knocking noises and the struggle to wake up down to hypnagogia. And as for the rest – I read and enjoyed ghost stories, and that was bound to influence my imagination. As far as I was concerned, it was all in my head. The entire experience, I said to myself, was a quirk of my personality and mind.

But then I moved. And after I had settled down in my new flat, I realised the nightmares had gone: no knocking in the night, no muscle spasms that felt like someone touching me, no more feeling I was being watched. Everything that had made me uncomfortable in the old flat had gone. That was when I realised it hadn't been in my head after all; it hadn't been my imagination. I really had been haunted.

Michelle Birkby
Hampton, London

Fire Foretold

My husband and I were enjoying a quiet cup of coffee early one Friday evening. Suddenly I thought I could smell smoke. I rushed out to the kitchen and it seemed to be full of smoke. I could no longer smell it and the 'smoke' vanished very quickly. When I told my husband he didn't believe me.

The following day was my son's birthday and we were taking him to Blackpool to see the lights as a treat. Just before we left the house I noticed a smell of burning. When I went out to the kitchen the chip pan was smoking. If I hadn't noticed the smell there would have been a fire whilst we were out. Somebody or something was warning me the previous day. Whoever/whatever it was, I thank them/it.

Pamela Nowell
Upton, Wirral

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FORTEAN TRAVELLER

87. Ettal: The Grail Church of Bavaria

SIMON WILSON sets off on his own quest for the Holy Grail – and finds an unlikely Grail Temple nestled in the mountains of southern Germany

Many have sought the Holy Grail, in fable and even in reality: few, if any, have actually found it. But in the 19th century distinguished German scholars believed they had located the temple in which the Grail – or at least a version of it – resided. It was to be found in the very south of the country, in Bavaria. And it is still there.

The Grail Temple has a long tradition in German literature. According to mediæval poets, it stood on the mountain of Munt Salvasch, at the heart of the land of Salvaterre. Within the Temple, at its central point, hovered the Grail itself. This mysterious sacred object was served by

an elect community of men and women, and preeminently by the divinely appointed dynasty of Grail Kings.

By far the most detailed account of the Temple appears in a work called *Jüngere Titurel* (“Titurel the Younger”), composed between 1260 and 1275 by a man known only as Albrecht. According to Albrecht, the Temple was a tremendously complex circular structure, built almost entirely of gold and precious stones: sapphires, emeralds, amethysts, rubies, and gems unknown to us. Around the Temple were placed 72 choirs (or individual chapels).

This immense, 72-sided, shining

and sparkling polygon was built by Titurel, the first of the Grail Kings, to instructions provided by the Grail itself. Albrecht clearly meant it to be a symbolic structure, unrealisable beyond the pages of a book. And yet, 180 years or so ago, German art historians and antiquarians began to make the extraordinary claim that, not long after Albrecht had finished his poem, the Temple had actually been built.

The monastery church at Ettal is some 45 miles (70km) southwest of Munich, close to Oberammergau. It was, the antiquarians agreed, directly inspired by Albrecht’s Temple. Ettal even housed a kind of Grail, which transformed the Bavarian Alps into the enchanted land of Salvaterre.

Nestled in the foothills of the Alps, Ettal had been founded in 1330 by Ludwig IV of Bavaria (1282-1347). We can be certain that Ludwig knew the Grail Temple of German literature: Albrecht had dedicated his poem to Ludwig’s father. The church is a 12-sided rotunda; now thoroughly (and disappointingly) Baroque, in its original Gothic appearance it would probably have looked somewhat like the chapter houses of British cathedrals such as Lincoln, York or Wells.

Ettal, then, would have resembled a reduced and much less ornate version of the Grail Temple.

On the face of it, it must be admitted that such observations are too flimsy a foundation on which to build elaborate theories. But there are other

BELOW LEFT: Kloster Ettal today.

BELOW RIGHT: Ludwig IV of Bavaria, founder of the monastery.



connections between the Grail and Ettal, stranger and deeper ones which suggest that Ludwig may have intended Ettal to be the centre, at least symbolically, of an ideal Grail kingdom, a sort of Salvaterre, independent of existing imperial and ecclesiastical power structures.

This possibility was first hinted at by the antiquarian Hyacinth Holland in a pamphlet of 1860. Holland posed the obvious questions. If Ettal was based on the Grail Temple, where was the Grail? And just why did Ludwig need a Grail Temple any way?

Answering the first question, Holland proposed that a statuette of the Madonna and Child played the role of the Grail at Ettal. Now housed in its own chapel in the easternmost part of the church, the statuette probably once stood on an altar at its very centre, making it, like the Grail in Albrecht's Temple, the focal point of the whole building. The carving was donated to Ettal by Ludwig himself, and was always intended to be the hub of the community. A story which goes back at least to the middle of the 14th century – and possibly to the very foundation of Ettal – has it that Ludwig was given the carving by a mysterious monk, who instructed him to build a church to hold it. It seemed to him that the monk was an angel sent by God. After giving him the statue, the monk, indeed, vanished before his astonished eyes.

Like the Grail, then, the carving was heaven-sent. And like Titurel, Ludwig received divine instructions to build a church/temple to house it.

Holland relates that the sacred statue was reputed to have Grail-like powers to heal the bodies and souls of all who came under its enchantment. Primarily, it was intended to heal the builder of Ettal, and Holland imagines Ludwig as the Fisher King, “gaining new strength by looking at the Ettal Grail and... forgetting all his political pains.”¹

This remark seems at first sight to be a somewhat sentimental fantasy. Yet it actually goes straight to the heart of the reason Ludwig built Ettal: it offered a kind of mystical solution to his political and spiritual troubles. The Grail and its Temple were, indeed, almost the only solution possible, given the extent of his problems.

Albrecht had written his story of the Grail and the Grail Temple against the background of the Great Interregnum, a chaotic period in which the Holy Roman Empire was effectively without leadership following the excommunication of the Emperor by the Pope. At the heart of the conflict was the fundamental question of who should be regarded as the head of Christendom – its royal or its ecclesiastical representative. Germany, at the centre of the Empire, was plunged into anarchy.

Albrecht's poem was an intervention into this chaos. His solution to the troubles of his age was divine kingship (in the form of the Grail Kings) and a



The statue was reputed to have Grail-like healing powers

society transformed by the Grail (as represented by the enchanted land of Salvaterre, and the lords and ladies serving the Grail). Significantly, both the royal dynasty and the Temple community exist independently of the Church: they do not rely on ecclesiastical authority for their legitimation, but on God himself, through the medium of the Grail.

Albrecht also makes it plain that this ideal realm has no place in the Europe of the 13th century: as he relates, the Grail, the Temple and its community have been forced to leave Salvaterre for the mythical kingdom of Prester John in the East.

Ludwig IV, the founder of Ettal, faced the same problems as those which had beset the Germany of the Great Interregnum: rival rulers and bitterly antagonistic popes. He was elected King of Germany in 1314, and with that became King of the Romans, a title customarily adopted by the Holy Roman Emperor prior to his imperial coronation. From the beginning of his reign, however, he faced debilitating

ABOVE: A painting in the monastery shows Ludwig's encounter with the mysterious monk who instructed him to build the church at Ettal.

DETAILS

Kaiser-Ludwig-Platz 1
82488 Ettal,
Germany
08822 74-0
<http://abtei.kloster-ettal.de/>

NOTES

1. Hyacinth Holland: *Kaiser Ludwig der Bayer und sein Stift zu Ettal*, Munich, 1860, p31.

FURTHER READING

SR Wilson: “The Grail Utopia in Southern Germany,” in *Temenos Academy Review* 14 (2011), pp138-158.

challenges to his position from powerful rivals, culminating in his excommunication by Pope John XXII in 1323.

Ludwig saw the chaos of the Great Interregnum returning. Eventually, he decided to re-establish order by what amounted to founding the Holy Roman Empire anew: he had himself crowned Emperor in Rome in 1328 and appointed an anti-pope to serve under him. His plans however came to nothing as he began to run out of money and support. Humiliatingly, he was forced to flee Italy, his alternative Empire in ruins.

It was on his return journey to Germany that he received the miraculous statuette and was inspired to found the monastery at Ettal. Essentially he was resorting to Albrecht's solution: he would establish order by mystical means.

Ludwig himself laid the foundation stone for Ettal, and chose its peculiar dedication: “unser Frawen etal.” The name means something like “The Valley Pledged to Our Lady” and evokes a new marriage of Heaven and Earth. Ettal was the centre of a new religion, in the word's literal meaning: a binding back or reconnecting to spiritual realities.

Ettal, then, does indeed have the characteristics of a Grail centre, as portrayed by Albrecht. As in the *Jüngere Titurel*, the church was built according to divine instructions, by a king who had been, in his own eyes at least, directly appointed by God. It seamlessly connected Heaven and Earth.

For Ludwig, founding Ettal was a symbolic act, intended to establish a new kind of order in Germany in the face of the implosion of the Holy Roman Empire. It was an enchantment based around a magical object endowed with divine powers and it existed independently of the church hierarchies and rival princes, all vying for wealth and influence. Bavaria and Germany symbolically replaced Prester John's kingdom as the home of the Grail, and Ludwig was both Titurel, builder of the Grail Temple, and Prester John himself, ruling over a perfectly ordered realm.

Unfortunately, the Grail enchantment proved incapable of easing Ludwig's political pains for long. Power-hungry popes and kings went on eating away at his authority. He died in 1347, on the eve of what he had hoped would be a decisive battle against his rivals.

Ludwig's foundation of Ettal, however, was not in vain. On the contrary: whilst the Holy Roman Empire is long gone, Ettal continues to hold sway over the imagination, reconciling, for the mystically minded, heaven and earth.

You too can pay it a visit, if you so wish. **FT**

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Why Fortean?



Fortean Times is a monthly magazine of news, reviews and research on strange phenomena and experiences, curiosities, prodigies and portents. It was founded by Bob Rickard in 1973 to continue the work of Charles Fort (1874–1932).

Born of Dutch stock in Albany, New York, Fort spent many years researching scientific literature in the New York Public Library and the British Museum Library. He marshalled his evidence and set forth his philosophy in *The Book of the Damned* (1919), *New Lands* (1923), *Lo!* (1931), and *Wild Talents* (1932).

He was sceptical of scientific explanations, observing how scientists argued according to their own beliefs rather than the rules of evidence and that inconvenient data were ignored, suppressed, discredited or explained away. He criticised modern science for its reductionism, its attempts to define, divide and separate. Fort's dictum "One measures a circle beginning anywhere" expresses instead his philosophy of Continuity in which everything is in an intermediate and transient state between extremes.

He had ideas of the Universe-as-organism and the transient nature

of all apparent phenomena, coined the term 'teleportation', and was perhaps the first to speculate that mysterious lights seen in the sky might be craft from outer space. However, he cut at the very roots of credulity: "I conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while."

Fort was by no means the first person to collect anomalies and oddities – such collections have abounded from Greece to China since ancient times. **Fortean Times** keeps alive this ancient task of dispassionate weird-watching, exploring the wild frontiers between the known and the unknown.

From the viewpoint of mainstream science, its function is elegantly stated in a line from Enid Welsford's book on the mediæval fool: "The Fool does not lead a revolt against the Law; he lures us into a region of the spirit where... the writ does not run."

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

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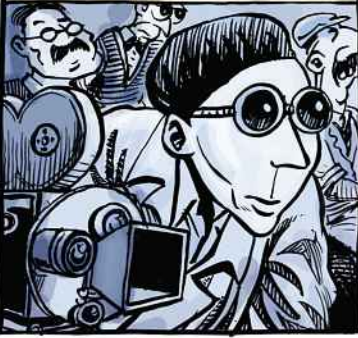
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PHENOMENOMIX • Albin Grau • HUNT EMERSON + KEVIN JACKSON

"NOSFERATU" (1922) IS THE FIRST TRUE VAMPIRE FILM, AND MAYBE STILL THE BEST...



CRITICS USUALLY SAY THAT IT WAS THE GREAT GERMAN DIRECTOR, F.W. MURNAU, THAT MADE IT SO SPECIAL...



BUT- MUCH OF THE FILM WAS CREATED BY A MUCH MORE SHADY FIGURE- ALBIN GRAU!

I COULD HAFF BEEN EIN KONTENDER!



GRAU SAID HE GOT THE IDEA FOR THE FILM WATCHING A SPIDER KILL A FLY...



HE ALSO SAID THAT HE HAD ENCOUNTERED A REAL-LIFE CASE OF VAMPIRISM, TOLD TO HIM DURING THE FIRST WORLD WAR WHEN HE WAS STATIONED IN SERBIA...



ALBIN GRAU WAS AN OUTSIDER IN THE FILM WORLD, BUT A LIFELONG INSIDER WHEN IT CAME TO OCCULT SOCIETIES...

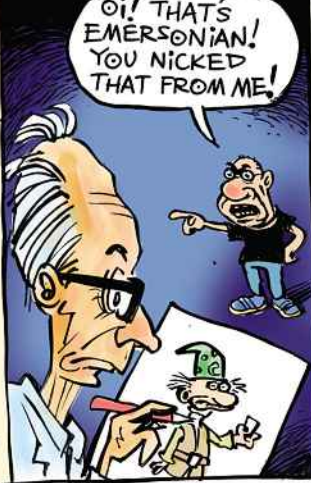


HE INTRODUCED LOTS OF SECRET MAGICAL LORE INTO THE FILM... LIKE THE WEIRD SYMBOLS ON THE LETTER NOSFERATU READS...



Oi! THAT'S ENOCHIAN! YOU NICKED THAT FROM ME, JOHN DEE!

...AND HIDDEN REFERENCES TO OCCULT MASTERS, INCLUDING PARACELSUS AND ATHANASIUS KIRCHER. IN LATER YEARS HE DREW A PORTRAIT OF PARACELSUS...



Oi! THAT'S EMERSONIAN! YOU NICKED THAT FROM ME!

"NOSFERATU" FLOPPED AT THE BOX OFFICE, AND GRAU'S COMPANY WENT BANKRUPT! AFTER 1925 HE RETREATED INTO THE OCCULT...

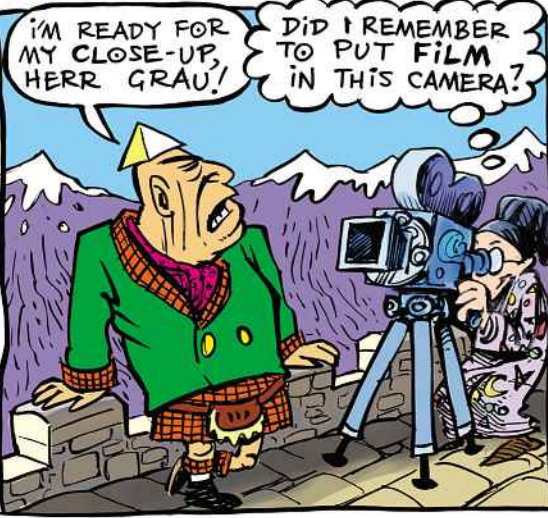


...AND GUESS WHOM HE MET??



YES- IT'S YOUR OLD PAL ALEISTER CROWLEY AGAIN!

LEGEND HAS IT THAT GRAU FILMED CROWLEY'S VISIT TO GERMANY- BUT NO FOOTAGE HAS EVER BEEN FOUND...



I'M READY FOR MY CLOSE-UP, HERR GRAU!

DID I REMEMBER TO PUT FILM IN THIS CAMERA?

HE DEVOTED THE REST OF HIS LIFE (HE DIED IN 1971) TO WRITING FOR "GNOSIS," THE MAGAZINE OF AN OCCULT GROUP CALLED FRATERNITAS SATURNI, AND TO DRAWING GREAT OCCULTISTS...



LISTEN, MATE - THAT'S MY TURF!

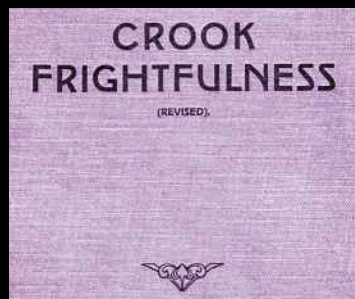
TODAY, ALBIN GRAU IS ALL BUT FORGOTTEN- BUT FOR FILM BUFFS, "NOSFERATU" KEEPS HIS NAME ALIVE... OR AT ANY RATE, UNDEAD!



I COULD HAFF BEEN EIN KONTENDER!

AH, SHADDAP!

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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.

JULY 1973

Most UK papers this month followed the farce that was the rediscovery of Atlantis by the Ancient Mediterranean Research Association (AMRA), sponsored by Pepperdine University, Los Angeles. Led by AMRA founder Maxine Asher, who taught at Pepperdine, the expedition – which included 70 members who had ‘donated’ around £1,000 each for the privilege, and her AMRA co-founder Dr Julian Nava, a history professor from California State University (later appointed Ambassador to Mexico by Jimmy Carter in 1980) – intended to scuba dive down the Spanish coast from Cadiz.

On leaving New York for Cadiz on the 6th, Asher announced to the press: “I simply know we will find Atlantis because I am psychic. O God, how strong the vibrations are these days!” She also said most of her ‘students’ were psychic too and would be getting six credits each as part of their studies. Two weeks later, Asher announced their discovery of long-lost Atlantis; there was “evidence of roads and columns in the exact place described by the Greek philosopher Plato.” These subterranean ruins, including walls, were “95ft [29m] down and 14-16 miles [23-26km] out” and vanished 14,000 years ago. Dr Nava was more cautious when questioned, saying simply that more details would be given when the photographs had been studied.

Suddenly, the Spanish police stepped in, halting further exploration and saying the requisite permits were “incorrectly applied for”. They also told the press that it was “impossible” that AMRA had found anything new as the area was “well known” to be full of Roman ruins. Dr Egerton Sykes (then one of the foremost UK Atlantologists) turned up, saying this need not have anything to do with Atlantis but, he believed, Asher’s find could be of a city or town more than 8,000 years old from a time before the last change in sea level.

Now the story gets more bizarre. Mrs Asher couldn’t be found and (said *Newsweek*) Dr Nava had resigned from AMRA. *Newsweek* labelled her “a part-time mystic” whose mission in life came during an earth tremor in 1971 when “a book on Atlantis tumbled from her bookshelf”. Her ‘students’ are described as “two dozen mid-fortyish divorcees and widows”. An archaeologist assigned to AMRA by the

Spanish Ministry of Education claimed to have seen a PR statement about the discovery “two days before the alleged find was made” – and there were doubts that any dives were made at all in the area. No wonder Asher fled (abandoning her students) and Dr Nava abandoned ship! When *Newsweek* tracked her down, Asher was in Dublin, preparing to search off the Irish coast with a new group of Irish students.

Jason Colavito, who blogs as a “skeptical xenoarchaeologist”, has an interesting archive of the US State Department’s telegrams concerning the AMRA expedition (jasoncolavito.com/atlantidiscovery-telegrams.html), which led to a genuine “international incident” requiring intervention by Kissinger and Nixon (to whom Asher appealed for aid). She had asked the State Department to secure permissions for the team to enter Spain. This was refused by Spain on 3rd July, but she went ahead anyway. It seems that Franco’s fascist government believed the AMRA team to be spies because of the US government’s advocacy. Colavito writes that Asher continues to maintain that she and her group were persecuted “to hide their discovery of Atlantis, with support from ‘the Jews’ and Catholics.” The Wiki page on her says she claims “that there were murder attempts, and that at one point she was forced to jump from a moving car to evade kidnappers.” All due, no doubt, to the machinations of the evil Atlanteans. **FT1:13**

JULY 1993

A newspaper in Tadjikistan drew attention to the coal fires that have been burning under Ravat Mountain for over 3,000 years. Clouds of black ash and super-heated gasses are seen rising from cracks in the side of the mountain. The subterranean fire was noted by Pliny the Elder in AD 50. **FT73:23**

JULY 2003

A 73-year-old Taiwanese woman complained that she had suffered pain for the last 53 years whenever she had sex. Finally, Dr Chen Yi Jen of the Tri-Services Hospital conducted a CT scan. He found and removed a rusty sewing needle lodged in her vagina. It seems the unnamed woman had given birth in 1949 by caesarian during which the midwife lost the needle used to stitch up the incision. “She looked for it but didn’t find it and later forgot about it,” said Dr Chen.

FT178:10

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