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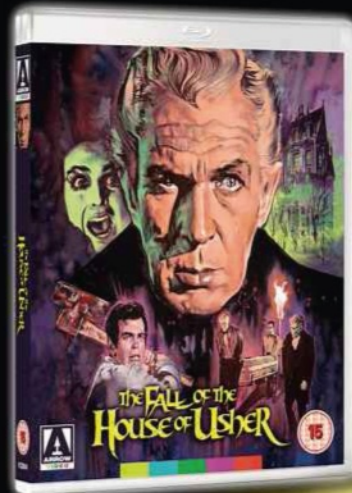
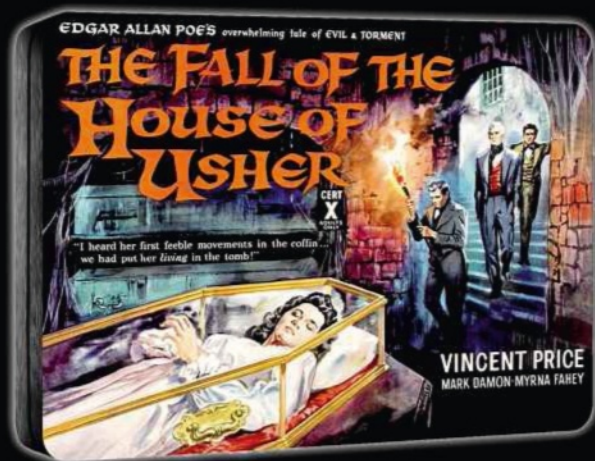
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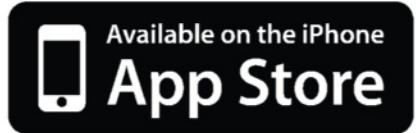
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## strange days

Manchester Museum's spinning statue; Chinese man's fake alien corpse; Iran's Mahdi mania; credulity-stretching coincidences; coffee curiosities; super-sized snake; giant badger panic; Donald Trump caterpillar and much more.

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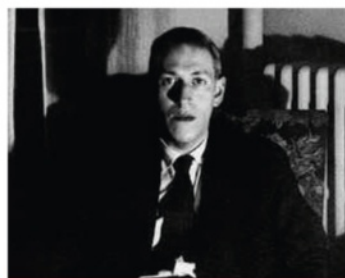
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From pulp fiction to post-humanism

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# editorial

## Food for thought

**LIVING ON LIGHT?**

It seems that the British-born Seattle woman Navenna Shine has given up her experiment in "Living on Light" - the 'Breatharian' idea that human beings can survive without food - after some 45 days of not eating. A number of people have died attempting the Breatharian 'diet', but in the video on her Youtube channel ([www.youtube.com/channel/UCMBZdxVz9EnXolJn2sFen](http://www.youtube.com/channel/UCMBZdxVz9EnXolJn2sFen)) announcing that she was to break her fast on 19 June, Shine seemed remarkably chipper for someone who allegedly hadn't had a morsel for 45 days and had lost 30lb in the process. She says that she has learned that living on light is "totally dangerous" - but only in the sense that most people aren't ready for something that requires years of preparation. "Living on light is not about simply not eating," she says, "in fact, not eating comes as a result of being the one who can live on light". In this issue (pp44-49), Ted Harrison explores the traditions linking fasting with spirituality and religion, from Indian holy men and Christian stigmatics to Victorian 'fasting girls' and contemporary Breatharians. Also, Paul Kou-dounaris looks at some of the strangest cases ever to come to trial, in which corpses, animals and even a haystack have found themselves accused of crimes as serious as murder, SD Tucker shares stories of the Tokoloshe, an unbelievably well-endowed, shape-shifting goblin rapist from southern Africa (with a penchant for pink knickers), while Roger Luckhurst and David Hambling reassess the place of HP Lovecraft in the literary canon. As ever, we hope to provide you with a varied diet of food for thought.

**SPINNING STATUE - STOP PRESS!**

The mystery of Manchester Museum's spinning statue (see p5) has elicited plenty of coverage from an excited media keen to find some sort of mummy's curse behind the odd events (see this month's Ghostwatch for Alan Murdie's excavation of such ancient Egyptian 'curses'). Just as we were going to press, our resident boffin Ian Simmons shed some new light on the mystery. He had discussed the matter with Manchester-based colleague Ian Russell, who had examined the statue close up. His explanation of the phenomenon is as follows: "The statue base is clearly convex. If you look closely from the side it is clearly resting only on points a couple of centimetres apart. Any vibration will therefore cause a slight natural rocking motion similar those rotating toys known as 'rattlebacks', which always rotate in one direction. This is due to the axis of the rattleback's curved base being non-aligned with the long axis of the object's mass distribution. The statue has a similarly elongated shape and its irregularly convex base is likely to

be resting on three 'high points'. The axis about which the statue naturally rocks is unlikely to be exactly aligned with its geometrical axis. Therefore, any slight rocking movement caused by vibration, however small, is likely to cause the statue to rotate, and always in the same direction. Vibration during museum opening hours must surely be the energy-source for the rocking movement. In addition to floor vibrations, the large area of glass in front of the case will also be vibrating due to visitor-noise."

But why hadn't the statue moved before? Ian Simmons believes that "the constant movement of visitors through the museum has created vibrations that have gradually loosened the shelf supports, or perhaps a floorboard, slowly increasing the level of vibration to which the statue is exposed, and only recently has this reached a threshold at which it is strong enough to start the statue moving."

**ERRATA**

**FT303:2:** Phil Baker wrote in pointing out an error in our last editorial regarding John Michell's alleged stint as a columnist for the *Daily Mail*. In fact, while John did write a column for a tabloid newspaper, it was for the *Daily Mirror*, between March 2001 and August 2002. Phil adds: "He might have edited a book

called *The Hip-Pocket Hitler* (a handy compendium of the great man's wit and wisdom), but I like to think he'd have drawn a line at the *Mail*."

**FT303:76-77:** Some errors also crept into into Simon Wilson's Fortean Traveller entry on Ettal. Unfortunately, the English title of Albrecht's poem, the putative inspiration for Ettal, appeared as "Titurel the Younger" rather than the correct "The Later Titurel", while the German title appeared as "Jüngere Titurel" rather than the more accurate "Jüngerer Titurel". We apologise to Simon for making his German look far less proficient than in fact it is.



MARTIN ROSS

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

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by Shelley Bowers

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# strangedays

## Electrocuted extraterrestrial

Chinese farmer claims close encounter and puts deceased 'alien' on display in his freezer

A Chinese farmer who claimed to have an alien in his freezer was jailed after the story caused an Internet frenzy. On 8 June, Li Kai from Binzhou, Shandong province, posted pictures of the alien's body, wide-eyed face, and sinewy hand on social networking sites, including Sino Weibo, China's version of Facebook. Other pictures show the creature's feet bound.

Li related how, at about 2am on 9 March, he went to the shore of the Yellow River to check electrified wire-netting he placed there for catching wild rabbits. As he examined his trap, he sensed a beam of light shining behind his back, turned and saw a UFO above the riverbank. "I had no idea when my bicycle had gone under that flying saucer, and then five aliens came down one after another," he said. Despite his fear, he managed to take a photo with his cell phone. At the same time, he noticed his bicycle being "sucked away" by the UFO. He threw rocks at the UFO, but they "shattered into small pieces". The aliens began chasing him and the one in the front ran into the rabbit trap and was electrocuted. As he ran home, Li saw a flash of light heading northwest; the surviving aliens had returned to their spaceship and flown away. Li hurriedly barricaded his door. After about seven minutes without hearing a sound, he ventured out accompanied by his big dog and returned to the rabbit trap. He found the alien lying facedown and poked it with a stick, but there was no movement, so he wrapped it in a blanket from his car and bought it back to his warehouse, where



LEFT: The 'alien' in Li Kai's freezer turned out to be made from rubber, chicken wire and paint. BELOW: The ETs who "sucked away" Li's bicycle.

he put it in his freezer.

Li – in one account described as a "seafood dealer" – said he contacted the police the next day, and they told him to contact the "relevant experts"; these included an astronomer from Beijing, who allegedly examined the body. Then mysterious "examiners from Binzhou City" arrived and banned him from his warehouse while they investigated. "They came three days in a row," said Li, "two people each day, each time they were different, and what's more, they always came in the evening and would only leave the next morning." In typical MIB fashion, they refused to tell him anything or leave their contact details.

Li insisted his story was true and said DNA tests had proved the alien did not come from Earth; however, Bo Weiqiao, web director at vehicle tech company China Transinfo, announced on Weibo that it was a publicity stunt for a Binzhou seafood company which "sells artificial sea cucumbers". Under police interrogation, Li admitted he made the creature himself out of rubber, chicken wire and white paint (total cost: £12.50) after seeing the alien movie *Paul*, starring Simon Pegg. He said: "I liked *Paul*, the alien in the movie, very much, so I created my own version." Li was jailed for five days for "fabrications" that "disturbed the social order". *chinasmack.com*, 12 June; *Sun, Metro*, (Sydney) *Morning Herald*, *Global Times*, 14 June 2013.



**MAHDI MANIA**

Waiting for the return of the 'Guided One' in modern Iran

**PAGE 10**



**BADGER'S CLASS WAR**

Unwelcome guest causes hysteria in Kent girls' school

**PAGE 12**



**WHAT ARE THE ODDS?**

A round-up of credulity-challenging coincidences

**PAGE 24**

# The spinning statue

## Manchester Museum hit by Egyptian spirit possession. Fact or friction?

An ancient Egyptian statue in Manchester Museum has been captured on video rotating on its own. The 10in (25cm) serpentine statue, dating from the Middle Kingdom (2000-1640 BC), depicts Neb-Senu, probably an official with priestly duties, wearing a shoulder-length wig and knee-length kilt. It was donated to the museum by Annie Barlow of Bolton in 1933, and has been on display there for 80 years, but staff members have seen it moving only recently.

"I noticed one day that it had turned around," said the museum's curator, Campbell Price, 29. "I thought it was strange because it is in a case



and I am the only one who has a key. I put it back, but then the next day it had moved again. We set up a time-lapse video [taking one photograph per minute over three days] and, although the naked eye can't see it, you can

clearly see it rotate on the film [turning to its left 180 degrees, but no further]. The statuette is something that used to go in the tomb along with the mummy. Mourners would lay offerings at its feet. The hieroglyphics on the back ask for 'bread, beer oxen or fowl'.

In Ancient Egypt they believed that if the mummy is destroyed then the statuette could act as an alternative vessel for the spirit. Maybe that is what is causing the movement." This last comment might have been tongue-in-cheek

– presuming he said it at all – but it lit the blue touch paper as far as media coverage was concerned.

Others have suggested that the vibrations caused by the footsteps of passing visitors makes the statuette turn, as the motion only occurs during daylight hours. That's the theory favoured by Professor Brian Cox, who teaches physics at Manchester University and is well known for his TV appearances. Price, however, is not convinced, commenting: "Brian thinks it's differential friction, where two surfaces, the serpentine stone of the statuette and glass shelf it is on, cause a subtle vibration which is making the statuette turn. But it has been on those surfaces since we have had it and it has never moved before. And why would it go around in a perfect circle?" Meanwhile, the other figures in the same display case stay stock-still. *Manchester Eve News, 22 June; ABC News, D.Mail, Sun, 24 June 2013.*

### EXTRA! EXTRA!

FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

#### MAN FOUND BAT IN HIS CORNFLAKES

*Orange News, 17 Nov 2012.*

#### International garlic smugglers hunted by Swedes

*D.Telegraph, 10 Jan 2013.*

#### Toy attacks US market

*Wolverhampton Chronicle, 17 Jan 2013.*

#### Seized sausages linked to assault

*Toronto Star, 4 Jan 2013.*

#### No such thing as Falkland Islander, claims Argentina

*D.Telegraph, 7 Feb 2013.*

#### Fluorescent mosquitoes on the loose in WA

*Epoch Times, 16-22 Jan 2013.*

#### Police held up by newt

*D.Mirror, 9 Feb 2013.*

#### Shoplifter explodes in court

*Toronto Star, 10 Jan 2013.*

#### Speeches at UN likely to attack free speech

*(Melbourne) Sunday Age, 23 Sept 2012.*

# CELEBRITY CATERPILLARS

The flannel moth larva, which bears a creepy resemblance to Donald Trump's comb-over, was spotted in the Amazon rainforest by biologist Phil Torres. *D.Mail*, 1 May 2013. PHOTO: Pernature.com / Caters News



The larva of the pink underwing moth, an endangered species found only in the Australian rainforest, photographed by botanist Lui Weber. It is characterised by teeth-like markings set between spots that look like eyes with large pupils. *Metro*, 30 Oct 2013. PHOTO: Lui Weber / Rex Features





## MIGHTY PYTHON

Jason Leon of Palmetto Bay, Florida, saw a few feet of snake sticking out of some roadside brush as he drove at night with friends in south-east Miami-Dade County on 11 May. When he pulled it out into the open, it turned out to be an 18ft 8in (5.7m) Burmese python (*Python molurus bivittatus*) – the longest ever found in Florida. When it began to wrap around his legs, he killed it with a knife and reported the find to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. The photograph shows staff at the University of Florida lying next to the dead snake – a 128lb (58kg) female – before an autopsy was performed. The skin was given to Mr Leon and the skeleton preserved by researchers.

The previous record for the longest python caught in the wild in Florida was a 17ft 7in (5.4m), 164.5lb (75kg) specimen caught in August 2012. Pythons are decimating populations of native mammals in the Everglades – they even take on crocodiles (see stunning 2005 photo, FT204:8). Up to the end of 2009, more than 1,330 had been captured. Florida now prohibits owning or selling pythons for use as pets, and federal law bans importation and interstate sale of the species. [AP] 22 May 2013. PHOTO: University of Florida

**SIDELINES...**

**CHEESE ROLLING**

Kenny Rackers, 27, from Colorado, won the main race in the annual Cheese Rolling competition in Gloucestershire on 26 May. Health and Safety spoilsports have banned the 'official' race since 2010, but rebel rollers continue the tradition. Since the 1850s (and possibly earlier), an 8lb (3.6kg) Double Gloucester is chased 650ft (200m) down Cooper's Hill in Brockworth, but this year it was replaced with a plastic cheese. *D.Telegraph, 26 May; Guardian, 28 May 2013. See FT117:21, 281:10.*

**VOTING FOR HITLER**

Among the 345 candidates running for the state assembly in the Indian state of Meghalaya in February were Frankenstein Momin, Billykid Sangma, Field Marshal Mawphniang, Romeo Rani, Kennedy Cornelius Khyriem, Jhim Carter Sangma – and Adolf Lu Hitler, a 54-year-old father of three, who has already won three elections to the state assembly. *[AP] 23 Feb 2013.*

**TIME-TRAVEL OPPORTUNITY**

A member of the public went onto the Fix My Street website, normally used to report potholes, to warn Brighton and Hove Council in East Sussex that a "wormhole or vortex" had opened up in Montreal Road. "It seems to be some kind of portal to other times," the report continued. "I would have investigated further, but I was concerned my little dog would be sucked into it." *Sunday Times, 19 May 2013.*

# Sensing earthquakes

## The woman who feels seismic events before they happen



ABOVE: Xiao Hongyun holds the diary containing her earthquake predictions.

other symptoms, but medical examinations have never revealed abnormalities. One day when she was 16 years old, she heard a roar while working in a rice paddy, but the people next to her didn't hear anything. Many days later, she learned that the Tangshan earthquake in northeast China had happened on that same day – 26 July 1976 – killing hundreds of thousands of people. However, she didn't associate her abnormal physical symptoms with quakes until 23 years later, when she saw a TV report on a major quake in Taiwan on 21 September 1999, the day after she suffered strong physical reactions.

Since then, Xiao watches the news every time she feels out of sorts. "After my physical reaction, most likely there will be an earthquake," she said. "Based on the degree of the ringing in my ears, I can judge how far, how strong, and in what direction approximately a quake will be." Because nobody believed her, she started recording every premonition that had been verified by a quake, asking her family and colleagues to sign the pages as confirmation. The closest predicted quake occurred in Linlin county, Chendu, and the furthest occurred in Chile.

The day before the Yushu quake of 14 April 2010, Xiao contacted Sun Shihong, a retired professor who had worked at the Chinese Seismograph Station, telling him she had had a strong physical reaction and that this usually happened the day before a quake. Sun Shihong came to believe in her unusual talent; since then, experts from various seismic stations throughout Hunan province have visited Xiao to investigate. They have concluded that she can sense the infrasonic vibrations in advance of seismic events. The higher the magnitude, the stronger the ringing in her ears. *Epoch Times, 15-28 May 2013.*

The day before a major earthquake, Ms Xiao Hongyun, 53, a teacher at Changde Normal School in Hunan province, China, usually suffers dizziness, tinnitus and palpitations. The most recent occasion was before the 7R-magnitude quake in Ya'an, Sichuan province, in April 2013, which claimed around 200 lives. She fainted while giving a lesson and was sent to hospital, but she appeared to have nothing wrong with her.

Speaking about her experiences, Xiao told *Epoch Times*: "I began to feel dizzy on the 18<sup>th</sup> and I could not fall asleep during the night, especially on the 20<sup>th</sup>; I was still awake at 4am, feeling very tired as if I were in a boat swaying on the water." She said to her husband: "I'm afraid a quake is about to happen

## The day before an earthquake Xiao suffers palpitations

somewhere." The Ya'an quake duly took place on the morning of 20 April. "I was sitting on the sofa and my legs could not stop shivering when the quake took place," she said.

Xiao said her quake sensitivity dates from an electric shock she suffered at the age of 13. "At that moment, my whole body went numb and I collapsed on the ground. Luckily I was not hurt badly." Since then she has experienced dizziness and

MARTIN ROSS



# THE ANIMAL QUAKE DETECTORS

- Four sensitive dogs, raised to protect the citizens of Nanchang as an early warning system for quakes, have been banished to a zoo after giving locals five years of heart-stopping false alarms. The dogs' removal from the local office of the China Earthquake Administration follows a long, desperate and ultimately fruitless experiment in canine quake prediction.

The dogs were positioned at the Nanchang quake centre in the hope that their supposedly 'abnormal' activity would provide officials with as much as 10 days to organise an evacuation and brace for tremors. Experts had advised that ducks or chickens were equally blessed with these predictive powers, but dogs were selected to bear the onerous responsibility of saving the city's five million souls from catastrophe. Unfortunately, the four dogs chosen howled loudly, plaintively and indiscriminately almost every night since they arrived at the centre. After years of this nightly psychological torture – and not a single official quake prediction – Nanchang residents finally snapped and brought the might of Chinese social media to bear on their plight. Multiple complaints were made, each in a tone of abject, sleep-deprived fury that “every night at 11pm they start barking over and over”.

On 7 May, the Nanchang Municipal Earthquake Prevention and Disaster Reduction



Bureau announced that it had punished the officials responsible for raising the dogs, and had sent the offending animals to a zoo. *Times*, 4 May 2013.

- Anecdotal reports of animals – including elephants, horses, wolves, snakes, and fish – behaving strangely before a quake are not unusual; for instance, before the 2004 Boxing Day tsunami [FT194:6]. These appear to confirm various folklore traditions.

- In December 1974 in the Chinese city of Haicheng, Liaoning

province, hibernating snakes fled their burrows, only to freeze to death. Cattle and domestic animals were restless and rats appeared in large numbers. This continued throughout January and escalated in February. On 4 February, the Chinese National Earthquake Bureau ordered Haicheng to be evacuated, and at 7.36pm that night, a 7.3R-magnitude quake hit the city, destroying half of all the buildings. [FT140:24]

- A few hours before a big quake in San Diego, California, in July 2009,

locals found dozens of Humboldt squid washed up on its beaches. The creatures are usually found at depths of 200 to 600m (656-1,968ft).

- Toads abandoned a pond in L'Aquila, central Italy, some time before a magnitude 6.3R quake with its epicentre 46 miles (74km) away on 6 April 2009. Five days earlier, when spawning had just begun, 96 per cent of male toads had left the site, and by three days before the quake there were no breeding pairs left. A day after the quake, they all started coming back. [FT265:22]



SEAN GALLUP / GETTY IMAGES

## SIDELINES...

### IS ABE SPOOKED?

Shinzo Abe, the Japanese prime minister since December, has denied rumours that he has not moved into his official residence because he was scared of ghosts, though no explanation has been offered for the delay. A number of former prime ministers have reported unusual phenomena while living in the 11-room Tokyo house known as the Kotai – which was the setting for political murders in the 1930s, including one of a prime minister. *D.Telegraph*, 25 May 2013.

### I'VE GOAT TO PASS

Students in Madhya Pradesh, India, have started sacrificing goats in a bid to guarantee an exam pass. The rite is conducted in honour of the tribal god Baba Dongar. *Metro*, 8 April 2013.

### WUNDERLUST

Council officers in Exeter, Devon, were left puzzled after one of their wheelie bins turned up more than 1,000 miles (1,600km) away in Hungary. *Sun*, 15 Mar 2013.

### SUPER-BRIGHT

Three-year-old Alice Amos has joined Mensa with an IQ of 162 – two points higher than Einstein and Stephen Hawking. She took the IQ test in Russian; her parents both speak their native Russian at home in Guildford, Surrey. Another bright spark is Lauren Marbe, 16, a cab driver's daughter from Loughton, Essex, who scored 161. *Sun*, 9 Feb; *Metro*, 13 Feb 2013.

### SNAILS CHOMP HOUSES

Giant African land snails are munching their way through 500 plant species in South Florida. They also eat through plaster walls to provide calcium for their shells. By April, 117,000 snails had been destroyed in Miami-Dade County since the first was spotted in September 2011. The snails have no natural predators, can grow to the size of a rat, and can produce about 1,200 eggs a year. *BBC News*, 15 April 2013.



**SIDELINES...**

**MYSTERY STYLIST**

Barney the shaggy moggie kept coming home with a new hairdo, courtesy of an unknown barber. Over eight months, he had his mane, stomach and leg fur shaved and styled. "I miss my long-haired cat," said owner Stephanie Warton, 60, of Croydon, south London. *Metro*, 2 Oct 2012.

**SNAP!**

Retired policeman Geraint Woolford was admitted to Abergale Hospital in North Wales in 2009 and ended up next to another retired policeman called Geraint Woolford. The men weren't related, had never met and were the only two people in the UK called Geraint Woolford. *D.Mirror*, 19 Jan 2013.

**FOOTY HUMOUR**

Hartlepool United celebrated a 2-1 victory over League One rivals Nottinghamshire County on 2 February after winning two goals – scored by Peter Hartley and James Poole. *Sun*, 3 Feb 2013.

**FLIES BESEIGE SARAJEVO**

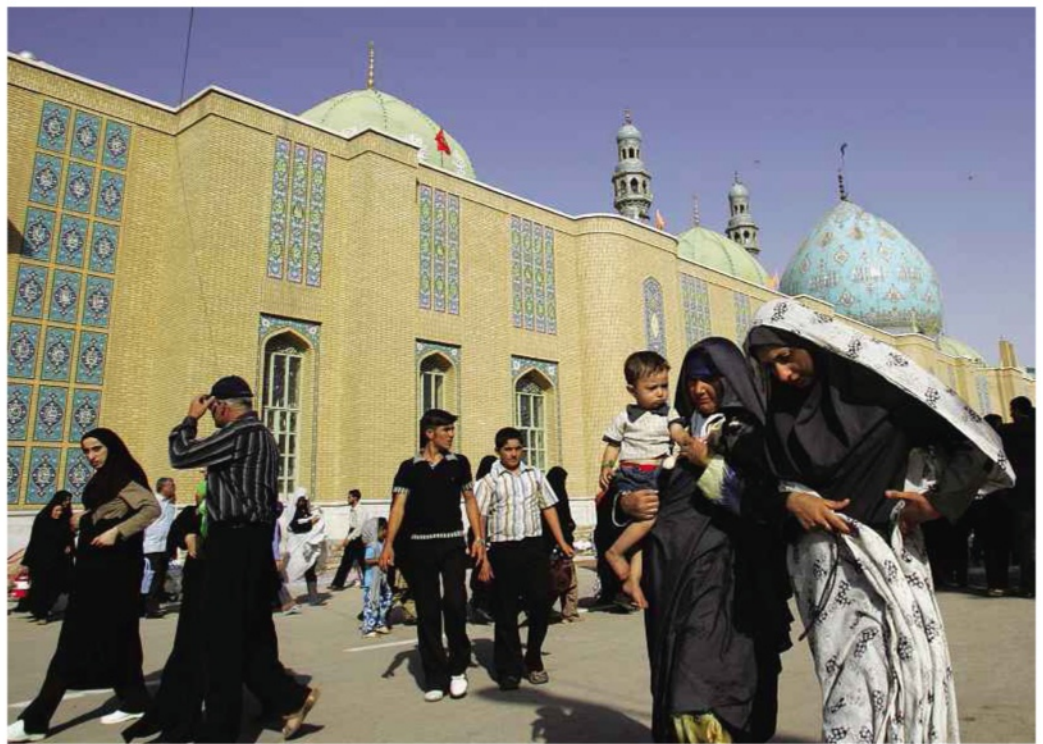
In early May, the Bosnian capital was overwhelmed by a massive swarm of flies. Some people fled the city, while the fire brigade advised residents to shut all doors and windows. Experts blamed rapidly rising temperatures after a damp spell. *D.Telegraph*, 3 May 2013.



MARTIN ROSS

**Mahdi mania**

PERSIAN PRETENDERS AT AN IRANIAN MOSQUE CLAIM TO BE THE SACRED SHI'A FIGURE OF THE 'GUIDED ONE'



AP / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: The courtyard of the Jamkaran mosque, where many (including President Ahmedinejad) claim the Mahdi will reappear.

Earlier this year, Iran's authorities arrested a score of men claiming to be Al-Mahdi (the Guided One), a sacred figure in Shi'a Islam, who was hidden by God just over a millennium ago and is expected to return and conquer evil on Earth. A website based in Qom, the country's holiest city, deemed the men 'deviants', 'fortune-tellers', and 'petty criminals', who were exploiting the credulous for alms during the Persian new year holiday, which fell in mid-March. Many of the fake messiahs were picked up by security men in the courtyard to the mosque in Jamkaran, a village near Qom, whose reputation as the place of the awaited Mahdi's advent has been popularised nationwide by President Mahmoud Ahmedinejad. When he took office in 2005 he gave the mosque \$10 million. (Mahdi mania might bear comparison with 'Jerusalem syndrome', when visitors to the Holy City develop delusions that they are Jesus, the Virgin Mary or some other biblical figure (see

**Many fake messiahs were picked up in the courtyard**



FT118:21, 129:47).

Approximately 85 per cent of Shi'a Muslims are Twelvers, who believe Muhammad ibn al-Hasan al-Mahdi – born AD 869 (255 AH)

and hidden ('in occultation') since AD 941 – to be the final imam of the Twelve Imams, who will reappear with Isa (Jesus Christ) to bring peace and justice to the world. People of the Twelver faith form a majority in Iran, Iraq, Azerbaijan and Bahrain, and form a plurality in Lebanon. Alevis in Turkey and Albania, and Alawis in Syria, also regard themselves as Twelvers, but hold significantly different beliefs from mainstream Twelver Shi'ites. Followers of Sunni Islam and some minority Shi'ites believe that the Mahdi is not yet born, and therefore his identity is known only to Allah.

Iran's economic doldrums might have helped to cause this surge in people claiming to be mankind's saviour – and in women saying they were the Mahdi's wife. In 2012, seminary expert Mehdi Ghafari said that more than 3,000 fake Mahdis were in prison. Mahdi complexes are common, according to a Tehran psychiatrist. "Every month we get someone coming in, convinced he is the Mahdi," she

said. "Once a man was saying such outrageous things and talking about himself in the third person that I couldn't help laughing. He got angry and told me I had 'bad hijab' and was disrespecting the 'imam of time,'" as the Mahdi is known.

The most famous case was that of Ayatollah Boroujerdi who was sentenced to 11 years in prison in 2007 for (among other things) claiming he was the Mahdi. Like many 'false' messiahs, he was forced to recant on state television, confessing that he had been against the Islamic Republic's core tenets.

Ahmedinejad called his administration "the government of the hidden imam". In March he told a batch of new Iranian ambassadors to consider themselves "envoys of the Mahdi". After his speech at the UN in 2005, a video circulated showing him telling a leading Iranian cleric that world leaders had been enchanted, during his oration, by a halo around his head that had been put there by the Mahdi himself. It will be interesting to see if the number of pseudo-Mahdis decreases under the regime of Hassan Rowhani, Ahmedinejad's successor as president. *Economist*, 27 April; *D.Telegraph*, 17 June 2013.

## Soviet soldier resurfaces



An ethnic Uzbek Soviet soldier who went missing in Afghanistan nearly 33 years ago has been found living with Afghans in the western province of Herat. Bakhretidin Khakimov, a Red Army conscript from the city of Samarkand, has adopted the Afghan name Sheikh Abdullah; he is semi-nomadic as part of a local clan. He had served with a motorised rifle unit, was wounded in the head in 1980, only months after the Soviet invasion, and left for dead. He was nursed back to health by a local Afghan, who took him in and taught the art of herbal medicine. He embraced Islam and now practises as a healer. He was tracked down by ex-Soviet veterans of the war in Shindand district after a year-long search.

The veterans' committee lists 264 Soviet soldiers as still missing in Afghanistan, half of them Russians. In the first decade after the Soviet withdrawal in 1989 the committee found 29 missing soldiers; 22 of them decided to return home, while seven opted to stay in Afghanistan. Sheikh Abdullah was married but his wife died and he has no children. He understands Russian but speaks it very poorly. Some 15,000 Red Army soldiers and more than a million Afghans were killed in a decade of fighting between a Soviet-backed government in Kabul and mujahedeen fighters armed by the CIA and Islamic neighbours. *BBC News*, 5 Mar; *Epoch Times*, 13-19 Mar 2013.



ABOVE: Many people have claimed to be the Mahdi; Ayatollah Boroujerdi (opposite page) is a recent example, while others have included (left to right) Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, Juhayman bin Saif al-Otaiba and Riaz Ahmed Gohar Shahi.

## SIDELINES...

### ROBIN OF KENSHAM?

Historian Sean McGlynn, arguing his case in *History Today*, suggests that Robin Hood didn't operate in Sherwood Forest, but was a freedom fighter attacking French invaders in Kent. William of Kenscham (aka "Willikin of the Weald") led a band of archers against the forces of Prince Louis in the forests of the Kent Weald in 1216-17. *Sunday Telegraph*, 10 Mar 2013.

### PATIO INTRUDER

Angela Dentandt from Albuquerque, New Mexico, was puzzled when her patio furniture kept being moved. Surveillance footage showed an unknown woman walking up to the family porch and moving the furniture yet again. Dentandt said it was "funny but kind of creepy". *MX News*, 29 Oct 2012.

### TELL-TALE ADDRESS

Foster Allen, 24, who lives in Thief Lane, York, has been jailed for three years after admitting burglary. *Sun*, 16 May 2013.

### THAT WILL WORK

During a debate in the Russian duma (parliament) on 19 February regarding a ban on smoking in public places, Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, leader of the Liberal Democratic Party, said the ban should be extended to cover excessive eating, and added: "Sex should be restricted to one time per quarter through issuing licences, quotas or coupons." *Adelaide Advertiser*, 20 Feb 2013.

### EYES ABANDONED

On 4 April a pair of bloody eyeballs was found packed in ice in a box sitting on the lid of a dustbin near petrol pumps in Kansas City, Missouri. Security video showed two men drive up and leave the box the previous evening. Initially, the eyes were thought to be human, but after running some tests, police found they came from a pig. *KCTV Eyewitness News (Hartford, CT)*, 5 April 2013.



## SIDELINES...

### TOO YANG?

Gordon Burrington, a divorced 59-year-old from Redruth, Cornwall, got 31 men to join his dating website for UFO enthusiasts, but closed it down when it failed to attract any women. *Sunday People*, 3 Feb 2013.

### HORSE FLASHER

Five or six times in a single month, staff at the LCR Riding School in Lund, southern Sweden, observed a man aged between 35 and 40 pulling down his trousers and exposing himself to horses in the paddocks. There is no record of the man flashing in front of people; exposing oneself to horses is not a crime in Sweden. (Is it anywhere?) *Sydsvenskan (Malmo)*, 6+7 Mar 2013.

### LIVESTOCK TRICKS

About 250 head of cattle, valued at £65,000, disappeared from Rosegreen Station, east of Mount Isa in Queensland, leaving no tracks. About 10 days later, 56 sheep suddenly appeared in the village of Chiddingley, East Sussex. No sheep had been reported missing in the area. (*Queensland*) *Sunday Mail*, 14 April; *Metro*, 24 April 2013.

### SWEETCORN SURPRISE

When Suna Canatar, 50, of Charlton, south-east London, opened a can of Princes sweetcorn, she found a caterpillar "as big as my finger". *Metro*, 26 Mar 2013.



MARTIN ROSS

## ANIMAL TALES IN BLACK AND WHITE



### TWO-TONE LAMB

Farmer Richard Griffiths did a double-take when this lamb was born with black markings on one side of his face and white on the other. And while his front right and back left legs are black, the others are white. His colouring might even have saved his life by ensuring he was spotted in heavy snow when he was born in the Brecon Beacon National Park last April. The farmer's young sons have named him Battenberg after the two-colour cake, and his wife Marianne said: "We usually fatten up young rams for market, but we hope someone will take this one as a pet." *D.Mail*, *D.Mirror*, 4 May 2013.



### BADGER'S CLASS WAR

Last May, a badger was "causing hysteria" at a girls' school, resulting in "hundreds of screaming hysterical girls," according to one pupil's mother. For two weeks (and quite possibly for longer), students at Folkestone School for Girls in Kent were stalked, charged and sniffed by the woodland

creature, which is normally nocturnal. Parents described it as 'giant' and 'oversized', and staff at the school confirmed its appearances during lessons and breaks. It was thought to be from a sett lying on school property but "well away from school buildings", according to head teacher Tracy Luke. The sett was reportedly disturbed by recent building work. The

badger was spotted under one of the school's mobile classrooms, with pupils told to stay inside until the area was deemed safe.

At morning assembly the school's 1,048 pupils were warned to avoid the badger, but some said they felt "too scared" to walk around the grounds. *Metro*, *D.Mail*, 23 May 2013.

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# BEWARE GREEN CLOUDS!

Extreme weather events have often given rise to puzzling reports of "green clouds". **DAVID HAMBLING** looks at possible explanations for these colourful weather anomalies.



The tornado season started late in the US this year, but in the middle of May a gigantic twister half a mile (800m) wide tore through Moore, Oklahoma, killing 51 people. Several other deadly tornadoes followed. Some videos of these events appear to show a greenish cast to the sky, re-opening the debate over whether it is real — and whether green clouds are as deadly as folklore suggests.

Green clouds have long been associated with extreme weather in the US. The first sign of a storm in Winneshiek County, Iowa, on 20 June 1908 was when "a very peculiar cloud came up quite rapidly out of the west, against a strong wind blowing from the east. It was of a pale green color beneath a white crest."<sup>1</sup> Witnesses knew to take cover, as a green cloud was "a sure sign of hail" — in a place where hail can be dangerous. Sure enough there was a great storm, hail, lightning and a tornado that tore the tin roofs off many buildings.

In 1958, "a tornado descended from southwest of Downing and tore a half-mile wide path all the way to what is now Lake Proctor."<sup>2</sup> A 1973 tornado in Alabama was apparently accompanied by hail and "a green cloud". The "Green Storm" in Southern Michigan of 16 July 1980 was so called because of the "dark pea green sky" that preceded it.<sup>3</sup>

**"It was an awe-inspiring sight: the clouds were coloured a bright aqua-green"**

Like other unexplained phenomena, green clouds are fleeting and turn up unpredictably, and people are more concerned about taking cover than taking pictures. Photographs don't necessarily help anyway; film is geared to particular types of light, and digital cameras automatically adjust between daylight and artificial lighting. It is not always easy to determine real colours from a photograph.

During the Michigan "Green Storm", the cloud cover was so dark that streetlights came on. Sudden changes in lighting, and the curious light associated with storms, makes colour judgement difficult. People are not good at matching colours from memory, and until comparatively recently it was impossible to verify whether green clouds were real or folklore.

On 7 May 1995, Meteorologist Frank Gallagher set out with his fellow VORTEX researchers to get in front of an oncoming storm. He was armed with a spectrophotometer, which gives precise measurement of the real,

rather than the apparent colour of light. The storm was initially dull and grey, but underwent a dramatic transformation:

*"Instead of the common blue-grey, we were confronted with a most awe-inspiring sight: the clouds were coloured a bright aqua-green. I quickly grabbed the spectrophotometer and recorded the first objective colour measurements of a green thunderstorm... the spectrophotometer measurements proved what we had seen, and from a research standpoint, we were in business."<sup>4</sup>*

Further measurements have since confirmed these findings — but what causes this peculiar green colour? Clouds are white, so the green must be the result of reflection, refraction or scattering effects. Several theories have been put forward, the simplest being that it was a reflection of green fields below.

This theory was easily disproved with the spectrophotometer: colorimetric measurements from the ground and clouds showed that the wavelengths did not match up. As the storm turned greener, the amount of blue decreased, rather than increasing as it would if it was caused by ground reflections.

Then there was the 'black backdrop' theory. Thunderstorms generally occur in the afternoon when sunlight contains less blue because it travels through more

of the atmosphere, hence red sunsets. If this light is scattered, the resulting airglow is somewhat greenish. According to the theory, this glow is usually hard to see but shows up well against a dark cloud.

However, the backdrop theory only works if the storm is some distance away, and does not explain why a cloud would appear green from inside a storm. Gallagher notes that he has never measured green in a distant storm as you would expect if it were caused by the black backdrop, only in ones nearby.

This leaves the theory that the storm cloud is acting as a filter. Clouds tend to absorb the longer wavelengths, the reds and yellows. This is similar to seeing underwater or under ice, which filters sunlight so that it appears blue. If the late-afternoon light had relatively little blue in it, the light reaching the base of the cloud would be largely green.

The filter theory fits with observations of storms from underneath. Mathematical modelling of a cloud full of droplets of different sizes suggests that small drops could produce a blue-green or yellow-green light and larger drops create a yellow-green effect.<sup>5</sup>

The curious thing is that hailstones, which are most strongly associated with green storms in folklore, could not produce a green colour. Hailstorms are not always green, and green clouds do not always produce hailstorms. However, the existence of green clouds, and their close association with extreme weather, is now well proven, even though the details are not yet understood.

On its tornado awareness page, the US Federal Emergency Management Agency lists four warning signs of an approaching tornado. These include large hail, a loud roar "similar to a freight train", and a large, dark rotating cloud — but the top sign on the list is "dark, often greenish sky."<sup>6</sup>

Beware the green clouds...

1 <http://billpriceweb.com/storm.html>

2 [www.deleonhistory.com/?page\\_id=3945](http://www.deleonhistory.com/?page_id=3945)

3 [www.crh.noaa.gov/dtx/stories/1980derecho.php](http://www.crh.noaa.gov/dtx/stories/1980derecho.php)

4 [www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00431670109605186?journalCode=wws20#UcHdfxVwbjg](http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00431670109605186?journalCode=wws20#UcHdfxVwbjg)

5 [www.opticsinfobase.org/ao/abstract.cfm?uri=ao-42-3-505](http://www.opticsinfobase.org/ao/abstract.cfm?uri=ao-42-3-505)

6 <http://m.fema.gov/before-tornado/text>







# GHOSTWATCH

ALAN MURDIE heads for Egypt and unwraps the colourful history of the mummy's curse

## THE MUMMY RETURNS

Reports that an ancient Egyptian statuette was moving by itself inside its display case at Manchester Museum have provoked much excited media attention (see p4). Brian Cox's theory of "differential friction" was repeated on a feature on BBC television's *The One Show* on 25 June 2013 in a hyped-up live broadcast from the museum. Certainly, the combination of an ancient Egyptian relic tale and the involvement of Prof Cox seems to have been sufficient to excite the *Daily Mail*, though even by ghost story standards this is hardly dramatic stuff. Nonetheless, it did not stop the *Mail* commenting:

"Is this ancient Egyptian statue a sign that there really is a curse of the Pharaohs?" and "Those who like tales of haunted pyramids and walking mummies may regard the mystery of the 4,000-year-old relic – an offering to Osiris, god of the dead – as the strangest thing to hit Egyptology in decades" (23 June 2013).

As far as superstitious stories about ancient Egypt go, in this the *Daily Mail* is right. Over the last 100 years any ghost tale with an Egyptian angle has been liable to trigger sensational 'Curse of the Pharaohs' headlines in the English speaking-world. Such frissons of nervous excitement can cause people to jettison ancient Egyptian artefacts and relics in large numbers, just in case, whilst others rush to buy them.

Examples of past Egyptian mummy ghost/vengeful dead stories include the story of a mummified hand once owned and subsequently destroyed by society palmist 'Count' Louis Hamon and the celebrated story of the haunted mummy case of the British Museum, part of which caused the sinking of *The Titanic* (and exposed in *FT* as

glorious fiction 13 years ago – **FT136:40-43**). There is also the largely synthetic curse of Tutankhamen and the associated death of Lord Carnarvon in 1923 and the 'cursed Egyptian Bone' that supposedly triggered poltergeist activity and domestic misfortune at the Edinburgh home of Sir Alexander Seton and his wife Zeyla in 1936 after they had removed it from a skeleton in an ancient tomb. Geoff Holder in *Poltergeist Over Scotland* (2012) believes he may have identified the very tomb concerned as one numbered by archæologists as 'G8520' at Giza. Some of these tales may have been unofficially encouraged by Sir Wallis Budge (1857–1934), the keeper of Egyptian and Assyrian antiquities at the British Museum who wrote a large volume on ancient magic and amulets after many years of answering queries from visitors. (See his *Amulets and Superstitions*, 1930).

Along with a few lesser-known examples, such stories were in vogue from the 1820s up until World War II [**FT161:27, 174:24**], following which Egyptology was monopolised by professional archæologists. Thereafter, those seeking Egyptian mysteries switched attention to discussions of whether extraterrestrials or Earth-based super-civilisations played a part in building the Pyramids and the Sphinx. A great stimulant was received from Hollywood when Universal Studios released various films involving rampaging Egyptian mummies (a theme in cinema revived later by Hammer Films in the 1960s and successfully revived again at the

end of the 1990s). The original films made a huge impact on audiences in the 1930s. For instance, the late Sir John Mortimer in

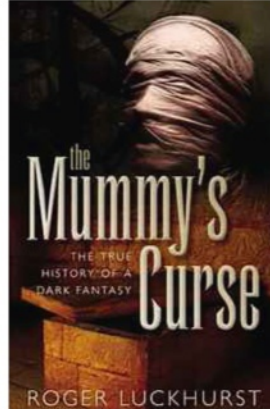
his autobiography *Clinging To The Wreckage* (1982) recalled seeing as a child *The Mummy* (1932) and also witnessing his tough public school boxing instructor collapse in abject terror during the screening).

In the autumn of 2012 the Curse of the Pharaohs was even the subject of a book *The Mummy's Curse: The True History of a dark Fantasy* by arch-rationalist Roger Luckhurst, who concluded with a psychosocial interpretation of it all. Via the Rationalist Press Association website he stated:

"I don't think the curse of the mummy was ever really about Ancient Egypt or the superstitions of North African populations. It was a fantasy that was the product of colonial occupation. That mummy curses remain popular still tells us much about Western fears of the fate of the Middle East."

Personally, I think this is a well-meaning rationalisation too far, reflecting how humanistic philosophy fails to supply a complete picture of reality. Middle Eastern politics did not produce the modern myths of curses and ghosts, any more than they produced the ancient Egyptian beliefs concerning the afterlife. In my view, there is no reason to think that the moving statuette story from Manchester and the reaction to it has anything to do with contemporary politics of the Middle East – for example the crisis in Syria – any more than the thrills of *Dracula* stories tell us about British views on Romanian affairs in the decades since Bram Stoker's classic 1897 novel. Indeed, if there is anything in the notion that international politics are prompting ghost stories on the domestic front, should we not be seeing a wave of spooky reports somehow connected with the war in Afghanistan? About the nearest I can find is a dubious remark concerning a supposedly haunted 19<sup>th</sup> century military tunic displayed at Edinburgh Castle and which supposedly flapped its sleeve without explanation in November 2001. This scared a French employee who witnessed it into quitting in a hurry. According to the 'Unsolved Mysteries' website and claims from the *Daily Record* at the time, "Workers believe the outfit's movements have been sparked by the war in Afghanistan. They think the ghost of the tunic's wearer is beating his drum because of the conflict". Unfortunately, for such a hypothesis, Edinburgh Castle was reputedly haunted long before the current Afghan War ever began.

Sources: [www.myusm.com/usm190976.html](http://www.myusm.com/usm190976.html); *Edinburgh Evening News*, *Daily Record*, 15 Nov 2001.



ABOVE LEFT: *FT* debunks the *Titanic* mummy curse. ABOVE RIGHT: A photograph of Zeyla Hay Seton (left) posing near the pyramid at Giza just minutes after she had taken the 'cursed Egyptian bone' from a tomb.



LEFT: Boris Karloff in seminal Universal film *The Mummy*, which started the series in 1932.

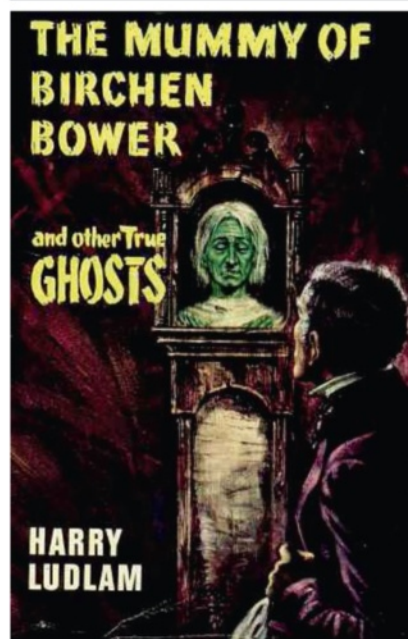
BELOW: The bizarre case of Hannah Beswick, who managed to become both a mummy and a ghost.

Compared with the dramatic pre-1945 stories and lore, the Manchester Museum statue is rather tame stuff, suggesting that Egyptian ghosts and ghouls are not what they once were. Nonetheless, Egyptian ghost tales provide a way of connecting us to an otherwise wholly mysterious culture obsessed by death and the after-life. Public fascination with the ancient Egyptians is multi-determined, arising from the sheer scale of their colossal monuments, exotic and beautiful art, obsessively elaborate funeral practices, mysterious hieroglyphics and the sheer antiquity of their civilisation. Alone or in combination, these elements have a tremendous subconscious resonance in the Western mind, fixed as they are against the romantic backdrop of the vast and mysterious shifting desert sands. In particular, the Egyptians also mummified the bodies of their dead and left them enshrouded in cloth, rather than as anonymous bones.

Confronted with an Egyptian mummy, you are left with the solid presence of a corpse and the feeling that the dead really have not gone away. This sensation – together with fabulous tales of buried treasure – all strike powerful chords in our modern Western culture and the instinctive fear attached to the return of the dead. Yet at the same time, the ancient Egyptian belief that the human soul survived the disintegration of its human shell and the placing into the sarcophagi of their dead, with cakes, toys, and jewels needed for the afterlife, is mirrored by the sentimental practices of many people today when they come to burying their loved ones, whether human or animal.

In recent years we have even seen sleepovers arranged for adventurous youngsters in the mummy room at the British Museum as a way of cashing in on public fascination, and maybe this is a course

## UNIVERSAL STUDIOS AND HAMMER FILMS RELEASED VARIOUS FILMS INVOLVING RAMPAGING EGYPTIAN MUMMIES



for the Manchester Museum to follow. However, over the years, I have known a number of psychical researchers who have expressed their sincere regret at the lack of manifestations around ancient Egyptian relics in their possession. For instance, the

late Manfred Cassirer, compiler of a major directory of ghost reports between 1967 and 1974, even had a sarcophagus on display in his hallway in Kilburn, but was thoroughly disappointed in never being troubled by any ancient Egyptian spirits, despite experimenting with séances and hypnotic regression to explore past lives.

Thus, I don't think that tales of ancient Egyptian ghosts and curses are allegories for the politics of the Middle East, and far be it from me to suggest that the gushing promotion of such stories by the popular press for decades involves any element of self-interest skulking in the heart of the magic, largely manufactured as it has been from a mix of puerile superstitions derived from folklore and the cinema.

Ironically, Manchester Museum (or rather its distinguished antecedent in the Victorian era) missed its chance to make sensational capital out of a haunted mummy story – albeit over a century and a half ago. This involved not a long-dead Egyptian but Hannah Beswick, a reclusive local woman who died in 1758. Beswick lived at Birchen Bower farm near Oldham and left directions to her trustees and doctor to embalm her body upon her death and to keep it above ground. These directions arose owing to an intense morbid fear of premature burial (apparently her brother had nearly been buried alive, reviving just as the coffin lid was being screwed down).

Her remains were duly embalmed and kept in the case of a grandfather clock for many years. Her ghost was reported prowling Birchen Bower, which had been turned into tenements – but caused no alarm to the occupiers. In 1829 the doctor who attended Beswick and was responsible for the embalming was himself dying. No longer able to preserve Beswick's remains, he arranged for their transfer (minus the clock case) to the Manchester Natural History Society. The Society duly displayed the mummy in their museum, in the company of an elephant, a giraffe and a canal horse known as 'Old Billy' who had lived for 61 years. By 1850 the body was recorded as well preserved "but the face was shrivelled and black". In 1868 the museum was taken over by a local college who – rather like the squeamish attitude of too many museum boards of today towards such relics – took an instant dislike to the mummy and arranged for its burial at Harpurhey Cemetery, Manchester. This occurred on 22 July 1868, meriting a brief paragraph in the *Manchester Guardian*. However, Beswick's ghost continued to haunt the neighbourhood of Birchen Bower as a Grey Lady, with manifestations claimed as late as April 1956, at a Ferranti factory built upon the site. See *The Mummy of Birchen Bower and Other True Ghosts* (1966) by Harry Ludlam.



# ARCHAEOLOGY

Our archaeological round-up is brought to you by **PAUL DEVEREUX**, Managing Editor of *Time & Mind – The Journal of Archaeology, Consciousness and Culture* ([www.bloomsbury.com/timeandmind](http://www.bloomsbury.com/timeandmind))



## NICE TO METEOR

Using equipment such as electron microscopy and X-ray CT scanning, scientists from the UK's Open University and the University of Manchester have confirmed that a bead from a necklace uncovered in 1911 at the Gerzeh cemetery, about 70km (43 miles) south of Cairo, is made from meteoric iron. The bead dates to around 3,500 BC, long before Egypt's Iron Age. There had been previous suggestions that it was meteoric in origin, but these were dismissed by academic critics stating that it was more likely it resulted from early attempts at smelting. This criticism is no longer tenable. Iron adornments are present in numerous high-status ancient Egyptian burials, and it is probable they are all made from meteoric metals, material that after all came down from the realm of the sky gods – holy bling. And maybe magnetic? *New Scientist online*, 30 May 2013.

## THE GOD OF FIRE

A stone representation of the fire god Huehuetotl has been found in a pit at the top of the Pyramid of the Sun in Teotihuacan, a mysterious 2,000-year-

old ruined city complex near present-day Mexico City. The pyramid effigy of the god, known to very early Mesoamerican peoples like the Olmecs, is made of a grey volcanic stone, weighs 418lb (190kg) and, as in its typical representations uncovered elsewhere, is bearded and has a stylistic depiction of a fire on its head. It was found along with two stone pillars or plain stelæ and other objects. The previously unknown



LEFT: The bead from Gerzeh cemetery. BELOW: The stone figure of Huehuetotl is brought down from the top of the Pyramid of the Sun at Teotihuacan.

pit, about 15ft (4.6m) deep, is beneath the remnants of a platform at the top of the pyramid that was probably a foundation for a now vanished temple. The find was made as part of an ongoing excavation in which a 400ft (122m) tunnel at the base of the pyramid has also been discovered. *Los Angeles Times*, 14 Feb 2013.

## IMMIGRATION ISSUES

It is particularly fashionable now in Britain (as in some other countries) to complain about immigrants stealing jobs and burdening welfare systems. But Brits, especially, ought to know their whole island is peopled by a wide variety of immigrants from one period of time or another. And it goes back a very long way. An article originally in *British Archaeology* reports that isotopic analysis of tooth enamel has revealed that a significant number of prehistoric skeletons unearthed at a burial site at Cliffs End Farm, near Pegwell Bay, Suffolk, were immigrants. While nine of the individuals had grown up locally, another eight had been born in Scandinavia and a further five came from the western Mediterranean, likely including Spain and North Africa. The burials had taken place over a period of almost 1,000 years, from the early Bronze Age to the middle Iron Age. Some of the individuals are thought to have



BOTH PICS: INHA



# CLASSICAL CORNER



FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

## 166. DEM BONES

emigrated from Britain as children and then came back as teenagers – an interesting fact in itself. *D.Telegraph*, 5 June 2013.

### HEAR, HEAR

A multinational team of researchers has reported its finding that elements of the small bones in the middle ear of our very early ancestors, hominins living millions of years ago in South Africa, could have provided a hearing faculty similar to modern humans. This suggests that hearing sensitivity is one of the earliest features of human evolution and could have a bearing not only on what these hominins could hear, but also how they communicated, laying previously unsuspected very early groundwork for the development of language. And it also points up the vast periods of time of hearing, listening and sound production that must have preceded much more recent prehistoric awareness and manipulation of sound. Those of us engaged in the study of archaeoacoustics have long argued that Neolithic peoples had a more sophisticated acoustic appreciation than is generally accepted. *New York Times*, 20 May 2013 (online corrected version 24 May), reporting on a paper in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Science*.

### LET IT RAIN

Britons facing a second year of particularly cool, cloudy, windy and wet spring and summer weather (perhaps due to the currently unexplained displacement of the jet stream, which might also be associated with extreme weather in many parts of the world), can perhaps comfort themselves to know that such periods have in the remote past apparently served to boost human cultural evolution. A team of researchers from Cardiff University, the Natural History Museum and the University of Barcelona, have analysed a marine sediment core from the coast of South Africa and reconstructed climate conditions on land for the last 100,000 years. They have found that periods of early human cultural innovation closely coincided with brief phases of increased rainfall and humidity in prehistory. Some of these climate switches were very rapid. If (pre)history is to repeat itself, let's hope an increase in human cultural development is for the better – the world could surely do with it. *Phys.Org*, 21 May 2013.

“Some of them are corpses, skeletons, mummies, twitching, tottering, animated by companions that have been damned alive. There are giants that will walk by, though sound asleep” – Fort, *Books*, p3.

Richard III must have got the hump at being buried under a car park in Leicester, often said (e.g. *Guardian*, 6 Dec 2000) to be England's most boring town. My own Nottingham associations incline me to agree. To be fair, though, while perhaps explaining CP Snow's costive prose, the place has produced a fair number of distinctive individuals: *FT* fans will treasure David Icke and Daniel Lambert (1770-1809), for long Britain's fattest fellow, weighing in at 50 stone (318kg).

Early Greek tradition (sources include Diodorus Siculus, Herodotus, and Plutarch; cf. JE Fontenrose, *The Delphic Oracle: Its Responses and Operation*, 1978, p75) held that a hero's bones (e.g. Orestes, Rhesus, Theseus) protect their host city. Steal the bones and you shall take the town – If Richard is moved to Westminster, what will happen to Leicester?

Preserved in honey, Alexander's body was moved from Babylon to Alexandria, after a brief hijacking to Memphis (Egypt, not Tennessee – no pre-Elvis mausoleum). Over the centuries, he was visited by several Roman emperors. Augustus bent down so enthusiastically to kiss it that he broke off a bit of the nose (Dio Cassius, bk51 ch16 para5). Caligula (Suetonius's biography, ch52) stole his breastplate. Despite its closure to the public by Septimius Severus for fear of tourists causing damage, it was visited by his imperial son Caracalla (AD 211-17) who thought himself the Macedonian's reincarnation (Dio, bk78 ch7 para2).

In 1977, archaeologist Manolis Andronikos announced he'd found the tomb of Alexander's father Philip II at Vergina in Macedonia, a claim widely, not universally, accepted: much turns on signs of his reported wounds and malformed leg; cf. Peter Green's measured discussion, “The Macedonian Connection”, *Classical Bearings* (1989), pp153-64.

Like father, like son. Prolific Alexander-mane, Andrew Chugg (*The Quest for the Tomb of Alexander the Great*, 2007; cf. Jonathan Thompson & Nicholas Pyke, *Independent*, 16 June 2006, online)

claims that the remains buried under the altar of St Mark's Basilica in Venice are, thanks to a nifty piece of mediæval body-snatching, actually those of the Macedonian. In the words of rival Alexander expert Robin Lane Fox, “Very charming but it's slightly stale buns” – Keep Chugging along, Andrew.

Last word on this belongs to Shakespeare's delicious skull-diggery dialogue (*Hamlet*, Act5 Sc1 lines177-80, Hamlet to Horatio: “Why may not imagination trace the dust of Alexander till he find it stopping a bung-hole?”)

Still in Alexandria, widely circulating reports from 2009 onwards portend the discovery by former Antiquities Director Zahi Hawass and Egyptologist Kathleen Martinez of the joint tomb of Cleopatra and Antony near the Temple of Taposiris Magna. All sounds very Indiana Jonesish.

“Dismissing with impatience” (Gibbon's formula for skipping over theological hair-splittings) the 2012 claim by Simcha Jacobovici and James Tabor to have discovered the ossuary of Christ – I do a bionic skip down to Byzantium's last emperor, Constantine XI, who fell in action against the Turks besieging Constantinople on 29 May 1453. Contemporary accounts variously claim that his body was never found, that it was with the decapitated head sent around to certify Mehmet II's triumph, and – most fortunate – that an angel rescued him, turned him into marble and hid him under the Golden Gate (not San Francisco's) where he awaits his chance to return and reclaim the city for Christ – No sign of him in Istanbul when I was there last year and no one mistook me for him.

Despite Suetonius's explicit statement (*Nero*, ch52) that he was formally buried in the family tomb, there is or was an urban legend that the ‘fiddling’ emperor's remains actually repose under the luxurious Rome Cavalieri Hotel – from one Golden House to another.

Ending as we began with British royalty,

what better finale than the belief (widely aired, e.g. in a 2002 British Museum pamphlet) that Queen Boudicca's last resting place is underneath platforms 9 & 10 at King's Cross station – but why has she not been awakened by the Hogwarts Express arriving and departing at platform 9 3/4? – Go ask Hermione.



# A<sup>Z</sup> ALIEN ZOO

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

## ALL WHITE IN THE END

On 23 May 2013, a paper in the journal *Current Biology* by a team of Chinese scientists including Dr Shu-Jin Luo of Beijing University revealed the genetic basis of white tigers – until now a controversial mystery. Mapping a family of 16 tigers living in Chimelong Safari Park, which included both white and normal tigers, the team found that the white coat is caused by a single amino acid change, A477V, in a particular transporter protein termed SLC45A2 (mediating pigment production). This change inhibits the synthesis of red and yellow pigment (phaeomelanin), but not black (eumelanin), thus explaining why white tigers still possess dark stripes.

Moreover, as the team pointed out, white tigers existed in the wild for centuries as a natural and viable variety, until as recently as the 1950s in fact, and that they died out not because of adverse natural conditions but entirely through hunting. Consequently, the team believes that the white tiger represents part of the

tiger's natural genetic diversity, is therefore worthy of being conserved, and should even be considered for reintroduction into the wild. They point out that the reason why captive white tigers sometimes exhibit defects and abnormalities is excessive inbreeding, not an inherent factor of the mutant white gene itself. [www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-22638341](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-22638341) 23 May 2013.

## SCUTES DO NOT A SEA SERPENT MAKE

On 8 June 2013, a striking 5ft (1.5m)-long but incomplete carcass was discovered washed ashore behind the Clifton train station on New York City's Staten Island. Its posterior portion was missing, but based upon the remainder some eyewitnesses speculated that it might be an anaconda or some other giant snake, even a giant prehistoric snake, or else a snakehead fish, or possibly a baby whale. However, from photographs posted online I could see that it was a sturgeon – due to the

presence of distinctive pyramidal scutes along its body that in sturgeons take the place of normal fish scales. Similarly, when the photos were shown to James Scarcella, a trustee with the National Resources Protective Association, he also confidently identified it as a sturgeon. Exit the Staten Island sea anaconda! [www.silive.com/news/index.ssf/2013/06/sea\\_creature\\_baffles\\_clifton\\_r.html](http://www.silive.com/news/index.ssf/2013/06/sea_creature_baffles_clifton_r.html) 9 June 2013.

## DODOS ON SHOW

If you've always wanted to see dodos and can travel north, it will soon be a doddle to make your dream come true. Running from 4 July until 31 October 2013, 'The Great Dodo Exhibition' at Kendal Museum in Cumbria plans to live up to its title by presenting the world's largest collection of dodos. Highlights are a series of life-like reproductions of this iconic species of extinct bird, including various adults and a chick, skilfully prepared by Pickering-based bird taxidermist Carl Church. Also on display are

a selection of dodo skeletons assembled by Luke Williams using casts of bones from three different specimens, a genuine dodo bone lent by The Last Tuesday Society in London, some special dodo sculptures in bronze by Nick Bibby, and a reproduction of a dead hanging dodo prepared once again by Carl Church. [www.kendalmuseum.org.uk/what's\\_on\\_130502\\_great\\_dodo\\_exhibition.php](http://www.kendalmuseum.org.uk/what's_on_130502_great_dodo_exhibition.php) 2 May 2013.

## FIFTH TIME LUCKY?

On 25 June 2013, an expedition from the Centre for Fortean Zoology (CFZ) based in Woolsery, Devon, sets out for Sumatra in search of this large Indonesian island's most famous cryptid – the orang pendek or 'short man'. This is the CFZ's fifth search for the highly elusive bipedal man-beast, and the team consists of CFZ cryptozoologist Richard Freeman, artist Adele Morse, and filmmaker Christophe Kilian. Lasting just under three weeks, the expedition will be journeying to Gunung Tuju, but will also be visiting the Kubu people to collect additional information and eyewitness testimony. <http://forteanzoology.blogspot.co.uk/2013/06/the-gonzo-blog-doo-dah-man-sits-and.html> 20 June 2013.



LEFT: A trio of white tiger cubs. ABOVE: One of numerous lifelike dodos created by taxidermist Carl Church.

# SCARED OF THE DARK ? YOU WILL BE !



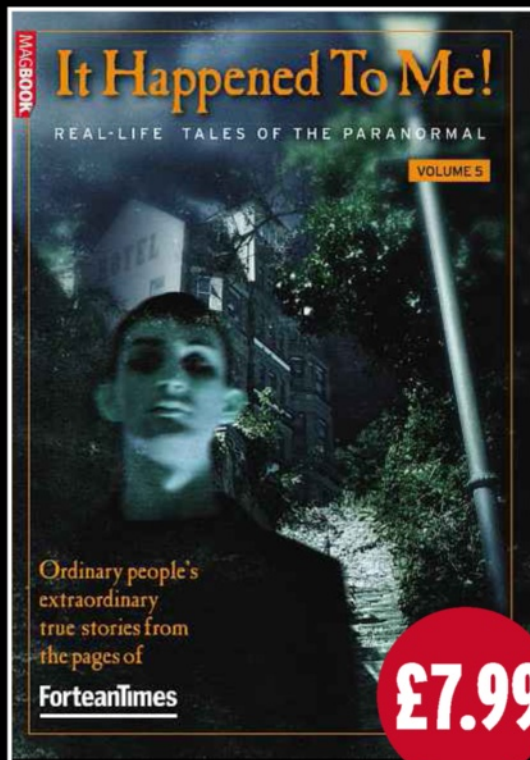
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## A DAMNED FINE CUP

A round-up of some of the medical marvels associated with a simple cup of coffee

While coffee almost certainly won't sober you up (see Mythconceptions, opposite), it can reduce the risk of booze-induced pancreatitis.<sup>1</sup> In 2005, it was reported that both coffee and tea cut the risk of serious liver damage in people who drink too much, are overweight, or have too much iron in the blood.<sup>2</sup> Six months later, researchers in California said that regular coffee drinking protects against alcoholic cirrhosis of the liver: one cup a day cuts the risk by 20 per cent, two or three cups by 40 per cent, four or more by a whopping 80 per cent.<sup>3</sup>

In January 2009, most national papers ran the story that a survey of 219 students at the University Of Durham showed that heavy caffeine consumption (such as three cups of brewed coffee or seven cups of instant a day) increased the likelihood of seeing ghosts, hearing voices etc. The top 10 per cent of coffee drinkers were said to be three times more likely to hear a non-existent person's voice than the bottom 10 per cent. Ben Goldacre in his 'Bad Science' column<sup>4</sup> demolished this journalistic simplification. The researchers had used the Launay-Slade Hallucination Scale (LSHS), 16 questions designed to measure "predisposition to hallucination-like experiences".

Goldacre commented: "Some of these questions are about having hallucinations or seeing ghosts, but some really are a very long way from there. Heavy coffee drinkers could have got higher scores on this scale by responding positively to questions like: 'No matter how hard I try to concentrate on my work, unrelated thoughts always creep into my mind'; 'Sometimes a passing thought will seem so real that it frightens me'; or 'Sometimes my thoughts seem as real as actual events in my life'. That's not seeing ghosts or hearing voices." What's more, there were obviously too many other possible factors (dope smoking, stress, lack of sleep,



### Voltaire was said to have consumed 50 cups a day

etc) to prove a direct causal relationship between coffee and high LSHS scores. The researchers pointed this out; something the news reports ignored.

Coffee originated in the Ethiopian highlands, where locals chewed rather than infused the beans for their stimulating effects. Coffee drinking first occurred outside Ethiopia in Yemen, shortly before 1470. From there it spread to Mecca, Modina and Cairo, reaching Constantinople in the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century. By 1615, coffee was traded in Venice as an exotic drug, and as the century progressed, coffee houses sprang up across Europe as centres of male conviviality, gossip and business. Voltaire (1694-1778) was

said to have consumed 50 cups of coffee a day. Informed in his eighties that it was 'slow poison', he replied: "It must be, because I've been drinking it for 65 years and I'm not dead yet!"

Today, caffeine is the world's most widely used drug, ahead of alcohol and nicotine. The most widespread words on the planet, found in virtually every language, are the names of the four great caffeine plants: coffee, tea, cacao, and kola. Coffee is the most important; over the last 30 years or so, it has become the world's second most widely traded commodity, after oil. The Apollo astronauts drank coffee three hours after landing on the Moon – history's first extra-planetary drug use.<sup>5</sup>

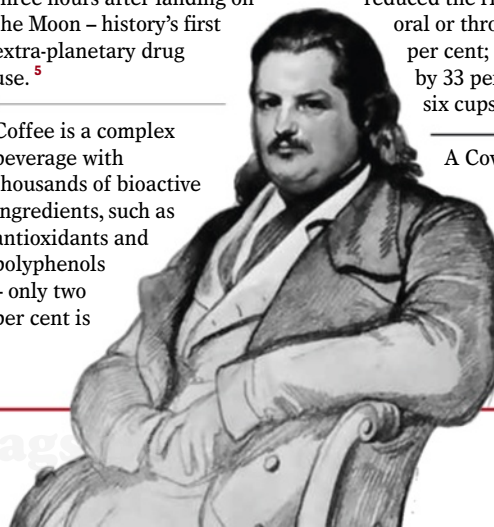
Coffee is a complex beverage with thousands of bioactive ingredients, such as antioxidants and polyphenols – only two per cent is

caffeine. It's the caffeine that can make you jittery and anxious, trigger insomnia and heart palpitations, or heighten blood pressure, though caffeine in coffee has less of an effect than caffeine in (say) fizzy drinks because in coffee it is counteracted by many other ingredients. Chlorogenic acid (CGA), one of the compounds in coffee, has been linked to a reduced risk of diabetes and lower blood pressure. It has also been found to break down fat, and is used in some weight-loss supplements. However, too much CGA could have the opposite effect, so its health effects are dose-dependent.<sup>6</sup>

Several good studies have indicated that regular coffee consumption reduces the risk of developing cardiovascular disease and Parkinson's disease, and might slightly reduce the risk of stroke. Pre-menopausal women who drink more than four coffees a day cut their risk of breast cancer by 40 per cent.<sup>7</sup> Coffee can lower the risk of developing basal cell carcinoma, the most common form of skin cancer.<sup>8</sup>

Moderate coffee drinking provides an 11 per cent lower risk of heart failure that among people drinking none or large amounts.<sup>9</sup> Drinking four or five cups a day could cut the risk of developing bowel or rectal cancer by 15 per cent; six cups or more, by 24 per cent. Drinking tea, however, had no observable effect.<sup>10</sup> A daily cup of coffee reduced the risk of death from oral or throat cancer by 26 per cent; two to three cups, by 33 per cent; and four to six cups by 50 per cent.<sup>11</sup>

A Coventry University study indicated that coffee boosts muscle strength in the elderly, reducing risk of falls and injuries.<sup>12</sup>





# Mythconceptions

by Mat Coward

## 166. SOBERING UP

### The myth

When you've had a few, and you need to get sober in a hurry, plenty of strong, black coffee will do the job. This is either because the caffeine, being a stimulant, counteracts the alcohol, or else because coffee is a diuretic and will therefore cause you to piddle all the booze out of your system. Or maybe both.



HUNT EMERSON

### The "truth"

The human body processes alcohol at a particular rate (roughly one hour per unit), and nothing you can do will speed this up. Nothing. Not drinking coffee, or drinking water, or eating food, or exercising, or sleeping, or vomiting, or inhaling fresh air, or having a shower... nothing. Only the passage of time removes the alcohol from your system. But the "You're not driving anywhere until you've got this coffee down your neck, young lady" approach is potentially worse than useless: it may actually be dangerous. Research suggests that caffeine and alcohol, in combination, can cause people to believe that they are sober when they're actually still drunk – with predictably deadly consequences.

### Sources

[www.nhs.uk/Tools/Documents/Alcohol%20myth%20buster.htm](http://www.nhs.uk/Tools/Documents/Alcohol%20myth%20buster.htm); <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/8403088.stm>; [www.totaldui.com/overview/basics/sobering-up-myths.aspx](http://www.totaldui.com/overview/basics/sobering-up-myths.aspx); Morning Star, 31 Dec 2012

### Disclaimer

All experts seem to be agreed that it's impossible to hurry the process of sobering up; however, the specific warning about the dangers of coffee is based on experiments on mice, so might therefore be taken with a pinch of salt (which also won't help you sober up).

### Mythchaser

Looking into the above, I came across two flatly contradictory statements, each of which came from an impressive source. So my question is this: is it true that the size of a drinker's body has a significant effect on how quickly it processes alcohol – or is that just another of the tipsy carnival of myths which surrounds this subject?



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Another study of 402,260 people over 14 years, of whom 52,515 died, found that women who drank four or five coffees a day were 16 per cent less likely to die than non-coffee-drinkers. Men drinking the same amount were 12 per cent less likely to die. Smaller or larger amounts of coffee were less effective. Those who drank decaf showed similar results, suggesting it was not caffeine but some other compound that was responsible. The improvement was observable across almost all causes of death, including heart disease, respiratory disease, stroke, injury, accidents, diabetes, and infections. No effect was seen on cancer death risk, and critics said it was "biologically implausible" that coffee-drinkers would be less likely to die in accidents.<sup>13</sup> A caveat: this doesn't prove that coffee postpones death, just that the drink and longevity seem to be related. However, conventional wisdom says that Balzac (1799-1850, pictured opposite) died of a surfeit of coffee. He drank several dozen cups a day, believing that he couldn't write without it.

Boiled Turkish/Greek coffee, rich in polyphenols and antioxidants and with only a moderate amount of caffeine, seems to be best for life extension, according to a study of the elderly inhabitants of the Greek island of Ikaria, who boast some of the highest rates of longevity in the world. However, lifestyle plays a significant part. "People sleep over eight hours a night, there is increased socialising and they have much less stress than people in Athens," said Professor Gerasimos Siasos, an author of the study.<sup>14</sup>

A study of more than 7,000 people found that those who drank six cups of coffee a day had reaction times six per cent faster than non-coffee drinkers and did four or five per cent better on memory and reasoning tests. The difference was more marked in the over-55s.<sup>15</sup> Coffee can also fend off, or even reverse, Alzheimer's disease – a

finding presented as news every year since 2005, suggesting the journalists responsible are themselves suffering memory loss.

Research at the University of Queensland involving 140 students seemed to show that subjects who had consumed a moderate amount of caffeine were more likely to change their point of view in the face of persuasive arguments than those who had been given straight orange juice.<sup>16</sup>

Medical researchers in Boston, who analysed studies of 120,000 people aged over 40 conducted over 28 years, found that those who drank three coffees or more a day increased the risk of developing exfoliation glaucoma, which can lead to temporary vision loss and even blindness. There was no risk associated with decaf, or other caffeinated products, such as tea, fizzy drinks or chocolate.<sup>17</sup>

### NOTES

- 1 University of Liverpool study reported in (Sydney) *Morning Herald*, 14 June 2006.
- 2 *Gastroenterology* journal, Dec 2005, Sydney *D.Telegraph*, 6 Dec 2005.
- 3 *Archives of Internal Medicine*, 13 June 2006.
- 4 *Guardian*, 17 Jan 2009.
- 5 *Forces of Habit* by David T Courtwright (Harvard 2001).
- 6 *Journal of Agricultural and Food Chemistry*, May 2013.
- 7 *Independent*, 17 Feb 2009.
- 8 *Cancer Research* (US journal), June 2012.
- 9 *medicalexpress.com*, 26 June, 2 July 2012.
- 10 *D.Telegraph*, 29 Aug 2012.
- 11 *American Journal of Epidemiology*, via *Int. Herald Tribune*, 19 Dec 2012.
- 12 *D.Telegraph*, 29 June 2012.
- 13 *New England Journal of Medicine*, 17 May; *Int. Herald Tribune*, 27 June 2012.
- 14 *Vascular Medicine* via *D.Telegraph*, 20 Mar 2013.
- 15 *Psychopharmacology* journal, via *D.Telegraph*, 23 Mar 1993.
- 16 *Scotsman*, 5 June 2006.
- 17 *Investigative Ophthalmology and Visual Science*, Oct 2012.

# WHAT A COINCIDENCE!

Newspaper surprises, long-lost postcards, shared birthdays and unlikely hands at cards



Stage magician Jayne Loughland got quite a surprise after going to pick up auction pieces she had won at Rogers Jones in Colwyn Bay, North Wales, on 18 June. When she got home she opened one of the items that was wrapped in a few pages of an old copy of the *North Wales Weekly News* dated 9 September 1982. "I saw an advert for the Arcadia Theatre, Llandudno, for *Showtime 1982* and saw my name and my brother's [Marc Whincup] with whom I was doing a magic act at the time," said Mrs Loughland, who is part of Saffire Illusionists. "I then turned the newspaper over to see what was on the other page and it was a picture of my future husband Stuart Loughland, who I now perform with. Stuart had written about the local music scene and his choice of top 10 hits for the week. This was ages before we had met and so it was such a shock to see all this. What an amazing coincidence!"

The next day, Mrs Loughland showed her sister-in-law Claire and her husband Ady Hughes the pages of the old *Weekly News* – and was amazed to learn

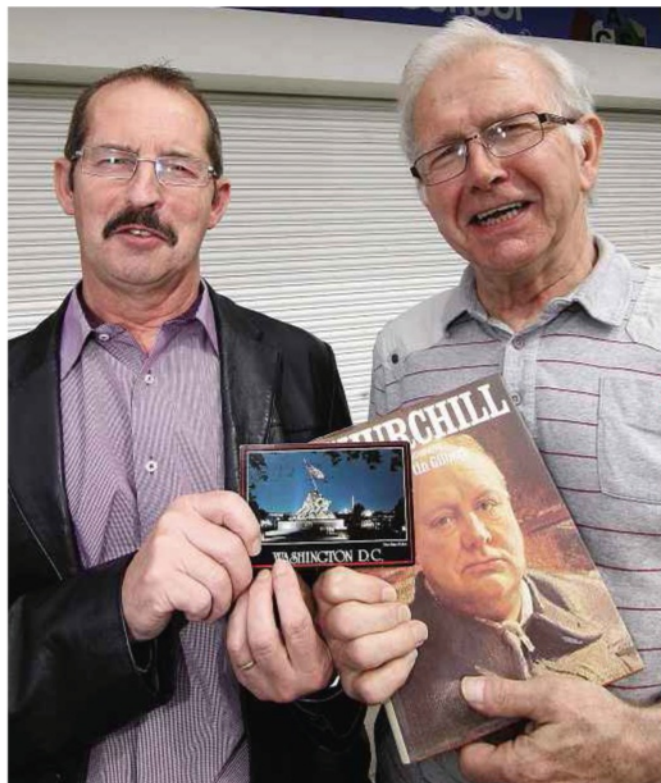
that not only did that issue come out on Ady's birthday, but had his picture in it as well, in the Annual Tony Baines Rose Bowl competition held at Rhos-on-Sea Tennis Club. So it meant there were three people from the same family on the same three sheets of newspaper that turned up 30 years later and none of us knew each other at the time!" (*North Wales Weekly News*, 20 June 2013.

Plasterer Jimmy Newton, 49, from Paignton in Devon, took up some lino and found a picture of himself underneath. It was a newspaper cutting of a football team to which he belonged in 1985, 28 years earlier. *Metro*, 26 April 2013.

Peter Dodds, 70, from Chesterfield, Derbyshire, bought a biography of Winston Churchill for 50p from a charity shop and found it contained a postcard sent in 1988 by his brother in the United States to their mother. He speculated that the book must have belonged to their father. *Metro*, Sun, 10 May 2013.

Olivia Spiller was born on 24 March 2013, the same day as her mother Natasha Woodgate (of Tiverton in Devon) turned 21 and grandmother Nicky Woodgate turned 51. The odds of three generations of one family being born on the same day are 133,225 to one, or so we are told. Weighing 4kg (8lb 13oz), Olivia was born five days after the due date given by doctors of 19 March. *Mail on Sunday*, 31 Mar 2013.

On 1 April, Tina Williams turned 50, celebrating her birthday on the same day as her two sons: Daniel turned 18 and Joe 16. Mrs Williams, of Irlam, Greater Manchester, said: "My friends call us the Three Fools." Odds for this triple birthday celebration are given by the *Sun* rather vaguely as "a million to one". The same situation arose on 8 June 2013, with the birth of Joey Reading on the same day as his brother Tyler (aged two) and his father Anthony (26). Saul



TOP: Ady, Jayne and Stuart looking at old copy of the *Weekly News*. ABOVE: Ian McCollum (left) with the postcard his brother Peter Dodds (right) found in a biography of Winston Churchill he bought from a charity shop in Chesterfield.

NORTH WALES WEEKLY NEWS

GLENN ASHLEY / ROSS PARRY AGENCY



BOTH PICS: ANDY STYLES



ABOVE: Jimmy Newton with the newspaper containing a picture of himself 28 years earlier.

Jacka, a professor of statistics at the University of Warwick, said the odds of two children being born on the same birthday as their father were 133,224-1, and that for two sons the odds were 532,899-1. Mr Reading, of Leamington Spa, Warwickshire, is no longer with Tyler's mother, but sees his son regularly. His second son Joey, with girlfriend Katy Porter, was due on 6 July, but arrived four weeks prematurely. *Sun*, 1 April; *D.Telegraph*, 21 June 2013.

Four whist players were stunned when each of them was dealt a complete suit in an opening hand while playing in their local village hall in Kineton, Warwickshire. "I shuffled the cards a number of times like I always do," said Ron Coles, 73. "I then passed the deck to Alan Beasley [74], who cut them. He passed the cards back to me and I dealt them out." Wenda Douthwaite, 77, who has attended whist drives for 50 years, said: "We've never seen anything like it before. Everything was done as usual. The cards were shuffled, cut and dealt as normal

but that was the only thing that was normal. And it was the first game of the night as well." Mathematicians say the odds of this happening are 2,235,197,406,895,366,368,301,559,999 to one. The 28-digit figure is the equivalent odds of a person finding a specific drop of water in the Pacific Ocean. (A moment's thought shows that these odds apply to any given hand.) *D.Mail*, 25 Nov 2011.

After a report of the Kineton game appeared in the *Daily Mail*, Jean Edwards wrote in to say that the same hand was dealt to her, her husband and two friends while they were on holiday in Cornwall in 1967, staying in a farmhouse in St Colomb Major. "We played solo every evening, and one night we were each dealt a suit – and it happened again the very next evening! The cards were always shuffled normally, but we felt it was all very spooky at the time and were convinced the farmhouse was haunted. We used to hear strange noises at night and had bats in our bedroom." *D.Mail*, 29 Nov 2011.

There was a *frisson* of excitement among Bilderberg watchers in April this year as some comments made about the group by the Honorary President of the Supreme Court of Italy, Judge Ferdinando Imposimato, hit the Net. Imposimato has a new book out about the murky events in Italian politics during the 1970s, and he was quoted as saying he had found a document that implicated the Bilderbergers in the so-called "strategy of tension" in Italy during that decade.

"In this document, which I have quoted literally, it is mentioned that the Bilderberg Group is one of the biggest promoters of the strategy of tension, and therefore also behind the massacres. Here's what Bilderberg does: It rules the world and democracies in an invisible way, influencing the democratic development of these countries."

The document, not yet made public, was written in 1967 by an Italian magistrate, Emilio Alessandrini, who was later murdered while investigating the Calvi affair. But since the 'strategy of tension' did not occur until the 1970s, whatever Alessandrini wrote in 1967 can hardly show that Bilderberg was "one of the biggest promoters of the strategy of tension".

Meanwhile – perhaps the point of the exercise – Imposimato has received lots of publicity for his book.

The persistence of the idea, as Imposimato puts it, that "Bilderberg... rules the world", despite the absence of evidence supporting it, illustrates the flaw in many conspiracy theorists' thinking: it's not *what* they think, but the *way* they think.

The human brain identifies patterns (which become 'theories'), and having identified one is then reluctant to let it go. We find ourselves 'in the grip of a theory', and it can be terribly difficult to shake. The idea propagated by the philosopher Karl Popper that we should hold all knowledge as provisional and try to falsify our beliefs is impossible for most people. The best we can manage is to look for evidence to support our theories; but many conspiracy theorists simply don't do this: identifying the pattern is enough for them.

This pattern-identifying activity interacts with conspiracy theories on the Net, where people in the grip of theories find that they are not alone in seeing the pattern and have their views reinforced.

In the 'conspiracy culture' which has now developed there are two elements which did not really exist before the Net. The first are individuals who have a financial interest in conspiracy theories – the Websites, radio and on-line TV programmes in the US, such as Rense.com and Infowars.com – whose audiences require a constant stream of material and appear to have little interest in quality control. Secondly, there are politicians in the Republican Party using conspiracy theories as political warfare. This began in the 1990s against the Clintons and has carried on with Obama. In Obama's first term they claimed that he was a Kenyan, a Muslim and/or a socialist.<sup>1</sup> Though such conspiracy-mongering failed to prevent the reelection of Clinton or Obama, Republican politicians are still at it, alleging that the Obama administration contains secret members of the Muslim Brotherhood, that one of Secretary of State Hilary Clinton's aides is a Muslim<sup>2</sup> and that the Democratic Congressional Progressive Caucus is a front for the Communist Party USA (whose current membership is apparently all of 2,000).<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Obama mocked this recently, stating that he wasn't the strapping young Muslim socialist he used to be. See [www.youtube.com/watch?v=IOMGfouNccM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IOMGfouNccM)

<sup>2</sup> When Bill Clinton was president the story was that the same woman was Hilary's gay lover.

<sup>3</sup> See [www.alternet.org/media/7-fringe-conspiracy-theories-now-taken-seriously-gop-lawmakers?paging=off](http://www.alternet.org/media/7-fringe-conspiracy-theories-now-taken-seriously-gop-lawmakers?paging=off)





## NECROLOG

We bid adieu to “the Gentleman of French cryptozoology, wave off a veteran Bigfooter and remember a controversial economist for whom religious morality trumped economic logic

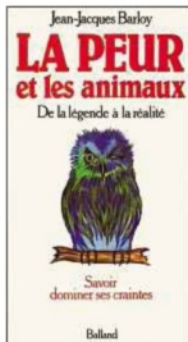


### JEAN-JACQUES BARLOY

was widely regarded as one of France's leading cryptozoologists. He was a close friend and disciple of the ‘father of cryptozoology’ Bernard Heuvelmans, and wrote a noted biography of him. For his doctorate in zoology he specialised in ornithology, with fieldwork in the grounds of royal palaces and a thesis on the house sparrow (*Passer domesticus*). He worked as a natural history journalist and wrote hundreds of articles, and a number of books on cryptozoology.

As Loren Coleman notes, he was credited as one of the first scientists to use computers in the analysis of cryptozoological data, most notably regarding the ‘Beast of Gevaudan’. The notorious Beast, commonly referred to as a vicious and voracious wolf-like creature, killed 130 people in France's Massif Central in the 1760s. Barloy's analysis of the victims – he confessed that the fact that they were all women or children, no men, made him suspicious – was published in the prestigious journal *Science & Vie* (n°753, 1980).

In an article for the online Institut Virtuel de Cryptozoologie, Barloy described how, in 1979, with the aid of Richard Tomassone, a director of the National Institute



for Agricultural Research, he transcribed details of the Beast's victims onto punched cards and was surprised by the conclusion. “It completely exonerated wolves; the thesis of the giant wolf collapsed. The fact that five per cent of the dead were beheaded [...] and the method of attack which changed over three years, was hardly compatible with the behaviour of a wild species.”

Contrary to the popular explanations by conspiracy theorists, historical revisionists and many cryptozoologists

(who favoured exotic wild predators of various types), Barloy claimed the data supported “a criminal case, one already advanced by insightful historians”. He pointed, in particular, to “the strange family Chastel”, who took advantage of the violent religious struggle in that region to rid the world of some Catholics.

#### Bob Rickard

The French folklorist Michel Meurger writes: For more than 30 years, Jean-Jacques and I were good friends. In 2007, we celebrated together our award of the *Grand Prix de l'Imaginaire*; he for his biography of Heuvelmans, and I for my whole work. Barloy had solid scientific credentials: a doctorate in zoology and a vast knowledge of the history of natural science. He became a full-time science journalist writing about animal behaviour, controversies (e.g. *Lamarck contre Darwin*, 1980) and zoological enigmas.

During the Seventies and Eighties, Barloy jostled in defence of endangered species (e.g. *Bataille pour les Phoques*, 1980). As a militant ecologist, he even produced a pamphlet satirising president Giscard d'Estaing, then vilified as a compulsive hunter (*Un chasseur nommé Giscard*, 1980).

He will be remembered for his useful panorama of the whole crypto-fauna of the Eighties – *Les Survivants de l'Ombre* (‘Survivors from the Shadows’, Arthaud, 1985, translated into Italian as *Animali Misteriosi*, 1987). Barloy understood the need to consider the riddle of strange animals from various perspectives. He wrote that the cultural approach, far from presenting a risk for cryptozoology, may, on the contrary, “usefully contribute to prune and refine the field”.

In 2007, the French publisher Editions de L'Oeil du Sphinx launched the first volume of their projected series celebrating the life and work of Bernard Heuvelmans – the *Bibliothèque Heuvelmansienne* – with Barloy's fascinating biography *Bernard Heuvelmans: Un rebelle de la Science*. It is a real cornucopia, crammed with unknown and surprising photos. Jean-Jacques edited two more titles in the series: an unpublished Heuvelmansian manuscript – *Les Félines encore inconnus d'Afrique* – about mystery cats of the dark continent; and a new edition of the controversial work about the Minnesota Iceman – *L'Homme de Néandertal est toujours Vivant* (1974) by Porchnev and Heuvelmans.

Barloy was probably the most qualified person to interpret the Heuvelmansian paradigm. He cultivated a rational and purely zoological approach to the discipline. He was also regarded as “the gentleman of French cryptozoology”. To say he will

be sadly missed is surely an understatement.

*Jean-Jacques Barloy, biologist and cryptozoologist, born France 1939; died France 26 January 2013, aged 74.*

### WARREN D THOMPSON

Thompson (seen below at his home in Redwood City, California in 1985) was the world's largest collector of all things Bigfoot, and had corresponded with the likes of Ivan Sanderson, Bernard Heuvelmans, John Green, René Dahinden and Roger Patterson. He made many field trips to the woods looking for Bigfoot, but never claimed a sighting. He was a member of the Bay Area Group, founded by the late George Haas and Archie Buckley. Haas published *The Bigfoot Bulletin* and after his death Thompson published *The Bigfoot Bibliography*, another exchange bulletin, to inform those interested about the latest publications in the field. Thompson inherited and augmented Haas's Bigfoot files, which eventually filled seven four-drawer filing cabinets. These have been willed to me as editor and publisher of *The Bigfoot Times*, which is now the world's largest single depository of Bigfoot information, including books, magazines, correspondence, tape recordings of eyewitnesses and numerous samples of suspected Bigfoot hair.

*Warren D Thompson, Bigfoot researcher, born San Francisco 9 Oct 1941; died Belmont, California 20 Mar 2013, aged 71.*

#### Daniel Perez



DANIEL PEREZ

**ROBERT FOGEL**



In 1993 Fogel won the Nobel Prize in Economics (shared with Douglass North) for his work in applying quantitative

methods to the study of economic history. He coined the term "cliometrics" for his discipline (after Clio, the muse of History). In 1974 he challenged the accepted view that the slave plantation of the pre-Civil War American South was a cruel, inefficient and dying institution. In *Time on the Cross: The Economics of American Negro Slavery* (written with Stanley Engerman), he analysed medical records, cotton yields and other data to show that slavery had been more profitable than previously thought. Pre-Civil War Southern plantations, he calculated, had been one-third more efficient than the small family farms of the North; moreover, slaves were healthier, lived longer and were better fed, housed and otherwise provided for than urban white industrial workers in the North. Fogel was condemned for providing a "cold-blooded" apology for a terrible institution; but he accused his critics of confusing economic efficiency with morality, likening the controversy over his views on slavery to the notion of selling "your dying parents for dog meat" to reduce burial costs. Though it would undoubtedly be economically efficient, "we don't do it because the thought revolts us," he said.

Fogel, who had been a Communist Party member in his youth, saw the forces of morality trumping economic logic as a major cause of historical development. In *The Fourth Great Awakening* (2000), he argued that repeated cycles of religious evangelism in American history had played a crucial role in pushing and shaping social change. The first "Great Awakening" began in the 1730s and ripened into the American Revolution; the second began around 1800 and spawned the anti-slavery movement that precipitated the Civil War; the third began in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, leading to the Social Gospel movement and the welfare state. A conservative fourth awakening began around 1960 and is still being played out, though Fogel predicted it would lead to voluntarism and a commitment to equal opportunity for all.

*Robert William Fogel, economist and historian, born New York City 1 July 1926; died 11 June 2013, aged 86.*

# STRANGE DEATHS

UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL



**After visiting a friend's farm in Magyarszecsod, Hungary, Sandor Horvath, 65, was chased, dragged off his scooter, and mauled to death by two donkeys. The retired firefighter was trampled and bitten so badly that investigators initially thought he had been torn apart by a pack of wolves or wild dogs. Csikos Darda, the daughter of the farm's owner, said: "I had noticed that the donkeys were becoming increasingly aggressive and I'd asked my father to do something about it, but he said they were fine." The animals were due to be destroyed. *MX News (Sydney), 21 May 2013.***

A dairy farmer was trampled to death by a bull as he tested cattle for tuberculosis. David Stephens, 55 – whose farm is near Kidwelly, Carmarthenshire, west Wales – was checking the herd with a vet when he was crushed. He was flown to hospital, but died from serious chest injuries. *Sun, 25 Jan 2013.*

**Michael Porter, 66, a retired lecturer from Edinburgh, was trampled to death by 30 cows when he and two relatives crossed a field in Wiltshire with two dogs on 13 May. He brother John, 72, was left fighting for life with a collapsed lung and broken ribs, while John's wife escaped unharmed. It was the fourth time in just five years that cows had injured walkers in that field, which lies in the village of Turleigh, near Bradford-on-Avon, and has a public footpath running through it. Paul Harris, a local resident, said: "It makes me wonder if there is a rogue cow." *D.Telegraph, 15+16 May; Sun, 15 May 2013.***

A fish, thought to be a giant sturgeon, dragged an angler to death in China. It pulled Huang Wu, 58, more than 45m (148ft) out into a Nanning river before he disappeared under water. "One minute he was chatting to us about what a big fish he had, the next it was the fish that had him," a witness said. His body was found washed up on a bank. *MX News (Sydney), 28 Mar 2013.*

**A climber was stung to death by bees 70ft (20m) up a cliff face – and his body left dangling from a rope for three days. Searchers found experienced hiker Steven Wallace Johnson, 55, after friends at work reported him missing. His dog was also stung to death on the mountain near Tucson, Arizona. It was thought he had disturbed a hive while hammering a spike into the cliff. "He was still 80ft [24m] from the top, so he didn't have anywhere to go when he was attacked," said a**

**policeman. "He was stung repeatedly." *Metro, 9 May; Sun, 10 May 2013.***

On 1 June, while using his tractor to help a neighbour clear a pile of brushwood in Moody, near Dallas, Texas, farmer Larry Goodwin, 62, disturbed an old chicken coop. Unfortunately, it was home to 40,000 Africanised honeybees, which chased him across a field and stung him to death. Allen Miller, a local exterminator who destroyed the bees, said he had seen more killer bee hives in the previous five weeks than he normally found in a year. "They can get up under your clothes where no other insect can go," he said. In a hive of ordinary bees, about 10 per cent will attack if a hive is threatened, but with Africanised bees, all of them attack you." There have been at least eight deaths caused by bee stings in the US since 1990. *D.Mail, 4 June 2013.*

**Nine people were killed by hailstones in Dongguan, a city in China's Guangdong province, on 20 March, and 272 others were injured by the storm. Three more hailstone fatalities were recorded the day before in neighbouring Hunan province, where 12,900 houses collapsed. *NY Post, 24 Mar 2013.***

A train driver was sliced in two at the waist after falling under the wheels of his locomotive. Gokul Shanmuganathan, 48, was leaning out of the cab at a shunting yard in Chennai, India, when he slipped to his death. The train didn't have a dead man's handle to stop it automatically, and slowly carried on until another driver spotted it had no driver. *Sun, 29 Jan 2013.*

**Five people died on 21 May when a 10m (33ft) sinkhole opened up at the gates of Huamao Industrial Park in Shenzhen, the southern Chinese boom town neighbouring Honk Kong, at a time when many factory workers would have been changing shifts. It was unclear how many people had fallen into the hole, but one man had been rescued and the search was continuing at the time of the report. *MX News (Sydney), 22 May 2013.***

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# BRITAIN'S X-FILES

## 21. Closed Encounters...

**DR DAVID CLARKE**, consultant for the National Archives UFO project, casts his eye over the final tranche of MoD documents as Britain's X-Files are closed down.

**A**fter five years, the opening of what have become known as 'Britain's X-files' by the National Archives has reached its end. Since 2008, more than four million people from 160 different countries have visited the project website ([www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ufos](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ufos)). In total, 209 files containing approximately 50,000 pages of information have been released into the public domain. Before Freedom of Information, these papers would have remained closed for at least 30 years.

The 10th and final tranche of 25 RAF files cover the final two years in the life of the legendary 'UFO desk'. The desk was first opened in the mid-1950s when the Air Ministry took on responsibility for answering questions from the public about the 'flying saucer' phenomenon. At that time there was genuine concern that some sightings – particularly those on radar – could be advanced Soviet reconnaissance aircraft. But after 60 years, during which some 12,000 sighting reports were logged, the defence value of the information declined to such an extent that, in 2000, following the Condign report, the intelligence services asked the RAF to no longer send copies of reports to them.

From that point on, the UFO desk was living on borrowed time. In 2007 the decision was taken to transfer all its surviving files to the National Archives and within two years it fell victim to a swingeing programme of cuts to public services caused by the economic recession. Possibly the most important document in the last



tranche is the final briefing prepared for Defence Minister Bob Ainsworth by Carl Mantell of the RAF's Air Command in November 2009.

This recommended that: "...[MoD] should seek to reduce very significantly the UFO task which is consuming increasing resource, but produces no valuable defence output." Ainsworth was told that in more than 50 years "no UFO sighting reported to [MoD] has ever revealed anything to suggest an extra-terrestrial presence or military threat to the UK [and] there is no defence benefit in [MoD] recording, collating, analysing or investigating UFO sightings." It concluded that "investigations into UFO sightings, even from more reliable sources, serve no useful purpose and merely divert

ABOVE: Dr David Clarke with his final batch of X-Files.

air defence specialists from their primary tasks. Accordingly, no further investigations should be carried out into UFO reports received from any source."

Figures show the UFO desk logged an average of 150 reports each year, but following the launch of the disclosure programme numbers began to increase dramatically. 208 reports were received in 2008 and this figure trebled in 2009 (643 reports were logged by 30 November). During the same year, UFO desk officer Paul Webb dealt with 97 FOI requests on UFOs.

This "upsurge in sighting reports" – mainly caused by a national craze for releasing Chinese lanterns – was the last straw for officials, who argued that MoD should follow the example set by the US Air Force in 1969 and "make UFOs history". But they were so conscious of accusations of a cover-up that they avoided making any "formal approaches to other Governments" in deciding on a course of action. This was because these "would become public when the relevant UFO files are released and could be viewed by 'ufologists' as evidence of international collaboration and conspiracy."

Mantell predicted the closure "will attract negative comment from 'ufologists' [who] may, individually or as a group, mount a vociferous, but short-lived campaign to reinstate the UFO Hotline suggesting that, by not investigating UFOs, MoD is failing its Defence commitment." But the briefing predicted the media coverage of their decision would be short-lived and would treat the closure in a "frivolous" way. Some of the ministry's more vociferous correspondents had already dismissed the file release programme as a 'whitewash' and continued to believe that top secret files were being hidden elsewhere. One email claimed "the papers recently released... are a cover-story, covering up the UK government's true intentions with UFOs; they have learnt more than they are telling you lot and us the taxpayers who are paying your wages".

But the MoD's last UFO desk officer, Paul Webb, took a more nuanced view. In a perceptive email dated 2 June 2009 he briefed a senior officer as follows: "I believe it is fair to say that the release programme itself... has been a success for the MOD... Naturally, the mainstream press tended on concentrate on the more sensational stories (especially those with drawings of aliens!) but I believe that despite the predicted increased interest in the subject in the short term, the wider general public is starting to get a more accurate impression of our role in UFO matters... I sense that realisation is also starting to dawn amongst some ufologists that we do not have hordes of investigators scurrying about the countryside investigating UFO sightings and that our interest is really

quite minimal. Naturally, a section of ufologists will never be convinced of that, but frankly, whatever we say, they will choose to believe whatever they believe and we will never convince them otherwise”.

## INVASION OF THE ORANGE ALIENS

Details of the 850 sighting reports logged by MoD in 2008-9 can be followed in the UFO sighting files: [DEFE 24/2623-2627 (2008) and DEFE 24/2459-65 (2009)]. Many descriptions are clearly of ‘Chinese lanterns’ that became popular from 2003 after they began to be sold at the Glastonbury Festival. Some of those who saw these floating orange lights in the sky for the first time believed they were UFOs. Others appeared to recognise them (noting, on more than one occasion, that “they looked like Chinese lanterns”!).

Others who filmed the lanterns on mobile phones and camcorders said they were amazed, stunned and even frightened. Sightings tended to cluster during the summer months when people were outdoors walking dogs, smoking cigarettes, enjoying family barbecues or relaxing outdoors in hot-tubs. A typical sighting, dated 8 December 2007, describes two clusters of amber, orange and white lights in triangular formation moving over the Vale of Neath in South Wales. The lights were silent and “moved in an unusual manner like a feather or a cork bobbing on water.” The family of five who spotted these lights were so amazed they pulled their car over to the side of the road to watch.

Chinese lanterns were traced as the source of a spectacular UFO sighting made by a group of soldiers from the 1<sup>st</sup> Royal Irish Regiment on 6 June 2008. The objects were filmed floating above Tern Hill barracks, near Market Drayton, Shropshire, on a mobile phone held by Corporal Mark Proctor. The soldier emailed the footage to the *Sun* newspaper who splashed the story across its front page on 25 June 2009.

The files reveal how the Army Press Office tried “to stop publication of the video” on the grounds the squaddies had broken regulations on speaking to the media and there was “a risk that it will be revealed as a fake and the soldiers/battalion will look stupid”. They said the damage was made worse by the fact the tabloid reported on the latest death of a soldier in Afghanistan as a small sidebar alongside the UFO story; “the comment from broadcasters was along the lines of ‘the services cannot fight two wars but it seems there are soldiers who have time to go UFO spotting’”.

Meanwhile, the BBC News on 25 June reported the landlord of a hotel near the soldier’s barracks claimed to have solved the mystery. Guests from a wedding party on the night of the

# SOLDIERS’ UFO SIGHTING IS LATEST TO BAFFLE UK



ABOVE: Corporal Mark Proctor’s UFO sighting, as it appeared in the *Sun*, and a 2009 letter from a schoolchild in Altrincham.

## “Please send a letter... I have a right to know”

### UFO Files UK

To mark the completion of the UFO file release programme, an iPhone/iPad app called ‘UFO Files UK’ has been launched by Black Plaques working with data provided by The National Archives and MoD. The app allows users to explore details of 5,000 sighting reports from the UK dating back 25 years. The app can be downloaded for 69p from the iTunes store at: <https://itunes.apple.com/>

‘sighting’ had released a number of Chinese lanterns. He was quoted as saying he found the UFO story “highly hilarious”. After this revelation, UFO desk officer Paul Webb told the Army: “I do not intend to investigate any further as I think we have our answer”.

Chinese lanterns were not the only source for UFO sightings recorded in the files. Others may have been the result of activities by Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) or ‘drones’ that are used extensively by police and private companies for security and surveillance. Following the release of the files, Professor RG Austin wrote to the *Times* (24 Jun 2013) to confess his role as the source of some ‘sightings’.

He wrote that a “British aircraft company” had developed a small, circular vertical take-off UAV during

the 1980s that was used in trials to test its capability for remotely detecting and destroying landmines and IEDs. He said the drone was used in “many civilian and military operations in several parts of the UK” and, when flying at night, carried two green and two red lights on its periphery that “showed up a ghostly image of its oval shape.” Professor Austin claims this drone gave rise to several UFO reports, but the development team did their best to tip off local police about its operations.

There are few clear images that resemble UAVs in the collection of poor quality images submitted for evaluation in the final days of the UFO desk. In the case of a photograph taken near Stonehenge in January 2009, nothing unusual was seen at the time and the ‘UFO’ was spotted only when the images were examined on a computer screen. The most likely explanation for this type of image is a bird. Similarly pictures of UFOs hovering above Blackpool pier were submitted in October 2008 and the RAF were asked to examine them. Their opinion was that one showed “stunt kites” and another “a seagull head-on.”

My personal favourite is the letter from a schoolchild in Altrincham that shows a flying saucer with an alien pilot waving goodbye. The letter writer says: “Me and my father have seen little aircraft in the sky – 2 little lights dancing around each other... please send a letter telling me the answer... I have the right to know”. In response, the UFO desk sent her a bag of ‘RAF goodies’.

Those who believe the MoD continue to hide the truth about the alien presence on Earth will not, of course, be so easily satiated. In his summary of the file contents, former desk officer turned UFO pundit Nick Pope hinted darkly that “much of the best material has not been released.” (*Sun*, 21 June 2013), while Tim Good drew on his contacts with “top people” to claim Earth continues to face an urgent threat from hostile aliens.

Such claims are impossible to disprove but the release of Britain’s X-files has, for the first time, allowed millions of people to see for themselves what constitutes the ‘hard evidence’ for UFOs collected by the MoD and reach their own conclusions. **FT**

The 25 files can be downloaded from The National Archives website: [www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ufo](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ufo)

### Author biography



DAVID CLARKE is a lecturer in journalism at Sheffield Hallam University. He is a regular *FT* contributor and, since 2008, has been the UFO files consultant for the National Archives.

# THE LAW IS AN ASS

As the trial of a dead man continues in Russia, **PAUL KOUDOUNARIS** looks back at some unlikely legal cases that saw corpses, animals and even inanimate objects in the dock

**O**n a dreary spring day, attorneys appeared before a judge to open a criminal case in a Moscow court. Statements were made, evidence given, and testimony offered, despite the fact that the defendant's cage was empty. It will remain empty for the duration of the trial, since the accused, Sergei Magnitsky, has been dead since 2009. A whistle-blower who had attempted to expose a quarter billion dollar tax fraud committed by government officials, Magnitsky soon found himself

**DESPITE BEING SIX FEET UNDER, HE WAS ORDERED TO STAND TRIAL FOR TAX EVASION**

jailed on similar charges, despite an international outcry that they were trumped up, brought in retaliation. The case did not make it to trial before Magnitsky died, having been beaten and denied medical care while in prison. Yet, Russian authorities were determined to conclude the case, regardless of whether their defendant was alive or dead. And so it was that Magnitsky, despite being six feet under, was ordered to stand trial for tax evasion.

As the process dragged on through March and April, an increasingly loud



ABOVE: A March 2013 hearing in the posthumous trial of lawyer Sergei Magnitsky for tax evasion; the accused is notable by his absence.

ANDREY SMIRNOV / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

FACING PAGE: PIG: OLIVER MATHYS/AFP/GETTY IMAGES JUDGE: PETER MACDIARMID/GETTY IMAGES IMAGE MANIPULATION: ETIENNE GIUFFRAN THANKS TO 'JUDGE' KEITH DEDMAN



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ABOVE: In 897, the corpse of Pope Formosus was exhumed and stood trial before an ecclesiastical court, where he was found guilty of abusing his office.

chorus of critics assembled to decry it. Foreign diplomats, journalists, human rights groups and the deceased's family have variously labelled the trial as Kafkaesque, a circus, illegal, and simply absurd. While all of the above claims about the Magnitsky case may be true, one criticism that cannot be levelled against the proceedings is that they are unprecedented.

### DEAD IN THE DOCK

The idea may seem unique in the modern world, but putting a dead man on trial would have hardly raised an eyebrow in mediæval and early modern Europe, where it was, in fact, quite commonplace. France even instituted a national criminal code in the 17th century that demanded such trials in the cases of traitors, suicides, and duellists, and ensured legal aid for the deceased of limited means. Corpses in manacles were brought before judges, appointed an advocate, and remained in the courtroom until all affairs were adequately concluded.

Sentences passed against corpses found guilty even included the ironic penalty of execution when applicable, and it was frequently carried out in brutal and degrading ways. King James I had the pickled bodies of John, Earl of Gowrie, and his son brought before a court in Scotland, where they were tried for treason, and their cadavers sentenced to be hung, drawn

## THE CORPSE WAS EXHUMED, CLAD IN ITS PONTIFICAL VESTMENTS AND BROUGHT TO TRIAL

and quartered, further dismembered, and impaled. Meanwhile, an 18th-century French court sentenced the corpse of Hubert Portier, who had been accused of murder and theft, to be dragged through the public square, hung from a gibbet, and then, to be sure he got the message, thrown into a cesspool.<sup>1</sup> Of course, such acts of overt cruelty were probably of little concern to the deceased victims.

Even those of the highest office could be subject to post-mortem trials. The most famous case against a dead person was that of Pope Formosus in 897, who had passed away the previous year. Pope Stephen VI accused his predecessor of abusing his office, and had the corpse exhumed, clad in its former pontifical vestments, and brought forward to stand trial. When an ecclesiastical

court confirmed the deceased's guilt, the vestments were stripped from the cadaver, and its fingers (or at least what remained of them) hacked off in punishment. The body was then further sentenced to be deposited in a potter's field.

### CREATURES IN COURT

The dead were not the only unlikely defendants in legal cases, however. Rats, insects, and all manner of vermin could face trial after running foul of the law. Unable to speak for themselves, animals were typically provided a public defender – such as in a 13th-century German case against several green beetles, which were provided a lawyer “due to their small size and status as minors,” or a 1519 hearing against field mice in Stelvio, Italy, when an advocate was appointed so that “said mice... may have nothing to complain of in these proceedings.”<sup>2</sup>

Accused animals were forced to be present for trials whenever possible, and if they were feral, attempts were made to place at least one specimen under arrest so it would be present to represent the others of its kind. If they were found guilty, a sentence was enacted on this representative, with the stipulation that it was intended as applicable to those others still at large. In an 1866 case against locusts in Pozega, Croatia, for instance, one of the insects was captured and

forced to sit through the trial. Found guilty of plaguing local farmers, it was sentenced to death by drowning, while anathemas were pronounced *in absentia* against the locusts not present in the courtroom.<sup>3</sup>

Trials against vermin were usually initiated due to damages to property or crops. They were not necessarily intended to recoup losses – the people who insisted on bringing legal action against locusts would have presumably understood that it was impossible to force them to pay a settlement – but rather to compel them to leave areas where their presence was not desired. It was for this reason that such trials were held in ecclesiastical courts: if a judgment could be gained against them there, it could perhaps lead to excommunication or exorcism of the offending animals, which might force them to desist in their behaviour by an act of God.

Defence attorneys often put up a spirited battle on their small clients' behalves, however. The lawyer appointed to defend the mice in Stelvio reminded the court of the good his clients were doing for the community by eating insect larvæ and enriching the soil with their droppings, and urged leniency in their case. The judge was moved, awarding the mice their own tract of land, as well as a two-week safe passage to vacate their current premises unmolested.<sup>4</sup> Meanwhile, when a group of Franciscan monks in 18th-century Brazil brought charges to evict termites from their friary, the defence attorney fought back with a vengeance. Telling the court that his clients were in fact far superior in their industry to the lazy monks, he accused the Franciscans themselves of being the guilty party, having

criminally trespassed into fields that had originally been the home of the termites alone. His vigorous defence succeeded in winning for the insects a settlement, in which the monastery was obliged to provide them with "suitable estates".<sup>5</sup>

The most famous case against vermin was a 1587 trial of green-coloured weevils in St Julien, France. Claiming damage to their vineyards, the people of the town filed suit before the local prince-bishop, but the advocate for the insects put up a canny argument. He pointed out that, according to the Book of Genesis, lower animals were created before man, and God instructed them to be fruitful and multiply. God also stated that: "to every thing that creepeth on the earth, every green herb has been given for meat." He argued that God, in his infinite goodness, would not so command the weevils if it would cause harm to others. After several weeks of wrangling, the town was forced to offer a settlement – the weevils could have a piece of land outside of the vineyards to dwell in and do with as they liked. But the advocate for the insects rejected the offer, claiming that the land was not good enough for his clients. They wanted the vineyards. The process continued, although the final judgment is unfortunately not known: the last page of the trial's transcript was found damaged – fittingly, having been eaten by insects.<sup>6</sup>

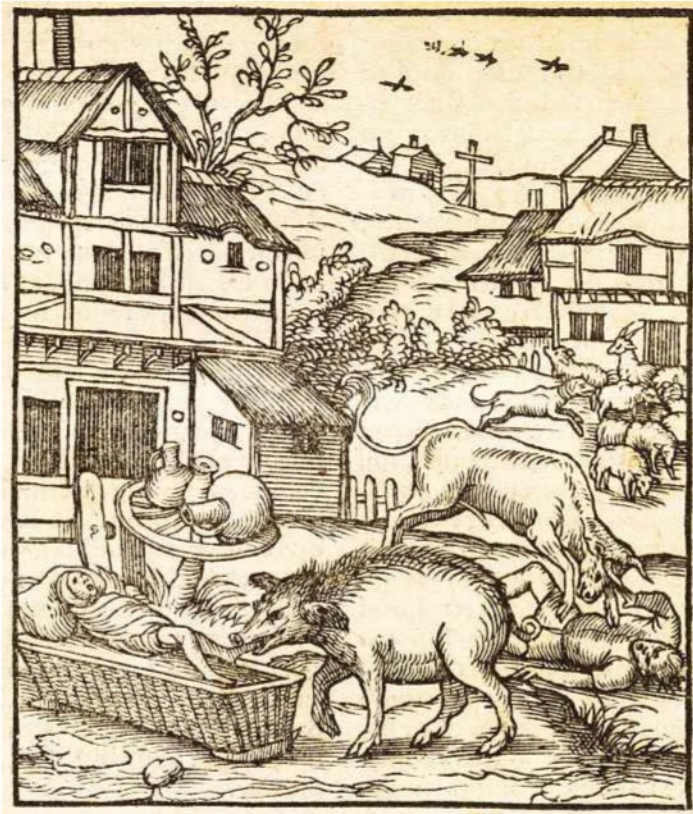
When animals were forced to stand trial, however, it was most frequently for charges of murder, involving pets or livestock that had in some way been implicated in a person's death. Although they may very well have been involved in the death of a human, the

level of intentionality and premeditation of the animals was not considered an issue in such crimes, and they would be jailed in the same prisons as human defendants, tried, and then executed. Pigs in particular were common targets of such accusations. Joos de Damhouder, a 16th century jurist from the Low Countries, even included an engraving of a pig attempting infanticide in his legal manual *Praxis rerum criminalium*. The transcripts of murder trials against animals often contained unlikely elements – for instance, a French pig was executed in 1494 after being found guilty of killing an infant by strangulation.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, when justice was served, it was a cause for great excitement. In 1386, for example, a sow that had been accused of infanticide was executed in Falaise, France, and the joyful residents commemorated the event by having a scene of the animal's death painted on the wall of the parish church.<sup>8</sup>

Incapable of articulating their innocence, animals accused of murder obviously had a hard time defending themselves. They were even known to be put to the rack, with their cries under torture considered confessions of guilt. Justice was not always blind, however, and in some cases they were exonerated. When a sow and six piglets were found near the body of a dead boy in Burgundy in 1457, it was assumed that they had caused the child's demise. A trial was arranged, and the sow was convicted and executed. But regarding the piglets, the court found that there was no direct evidence of their involvement with the crime. Their owner was told that he might pay bail for their release pending further



ABOVE: "Trial of a sow and pigs at Lavegny", from the *Book of Days* (1870). While the sow was found guilty of having murdered and partly eaten a child, her piglets "were acquitted on account of their youth, the bad example of their mother, and the absence of direct proof as to their having been concerned in the eating of the child."



ABOVE LEFT: A 16th century criminal manual shows a pig attempting infanticide and a bull in the background attempting to murder a man by goring. ABOVE RIGHT: The execution of a pig in Falaise, France, in 1386. This is an engraved copy of the original painting of the event in the local church.

investigation, and they were eventually acquitted – orphaned to be sure, but cleared of all charges.<sup>9</sup>

### CRIMINAL OBJECTS

Trials against animals and corpses at least involved proceedings against things that were currently or previously animate. But even inanimate status was no excuse for criminal behaviour, and it was possible for charges to be brought against all manner of items. These included a bale of hay accused of suffocating a man named Anthony Wylde in Nottingham, England, in 1535. Mr Wylde died after the entire stack fell on him, but jurors called to hear testimony determined the particular bale which was directly responsible for the incident and delivered an inquest to the local jail. Exactly what the jailers did in the case is not recorded, but whatever their response, it was apparently not stern enough to discourage two thraves of rye from murdering Robert Yreland, again in Nottingham, seven years later; they were accused of sliding forward to knock him off a ladder and cause his demise, resulting in another inquest.<sup>10</sup>

The most extraordinary case of an inanimate object being accused and incarcerated was that of a church bell from the town of Uglich, Russia, which inadvertently rang after the assassination of Prince Dimitry, the youngest son of Ivan the Terrible, in 1591. This was considered a politically offensive act, and the bell was found guilty of sedition. It was exiled to the

Siberian town of Tobolsk, and sentenced to solitary confinement. The case had a happy ending, however, proving that the punishment of inanimate objects could be rehabilitative instead of simply punitive: after a period of time, the bell was partially purged of its guilt, and allowed to stand in a local bell tower, and eventually – after three centuries of probation – given a pardon, and sent back to Uglich in 1892.<sup>11</sup>

Back in Moscow, the trial of Sergei Magnitsky continues at a glacial pace, with the court convening only periodically to hear new testimony. The process may be slow, but then again the defendant isn't going anywhere. In any event, the supporters of the deceased have no illusions about the outcome. With Magnitsky unable to defend himself, he will most certainly be found guilty, and an exasperated official from an investment fund for which the

deceased formerly worked has summed up the proceedings as “a ridiculous Stalinist show trial.” That sentiment is probably right, but Magnitsky’s defenders may not wish to abandon all hope. After all, the deceased is still only accused of tax evasion, while the Uglich bell was accused of sedition. If the Russian courts were eventually able to reconcile the traitorous bell, they may yet find mercy for Sergei Magnitsky. **FT**

### AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



**PAUL KOUDOUNARIS** is an art historian, author and photographer from Los Angeles. He is a leading expert in the history of bone-decorated shrines and religious structures and a regular contributor to *FT*.

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# TERROR OF THE TOKOLOSHE

SD TUCKER reveals the untold story of southern Africa's hairy, invisible, bisexual ghost-rapist, and discovers a variety of tall stories and tabloid tales about what may very well be the weirdest (not to mention most well-endowed) creature in all of world folklore

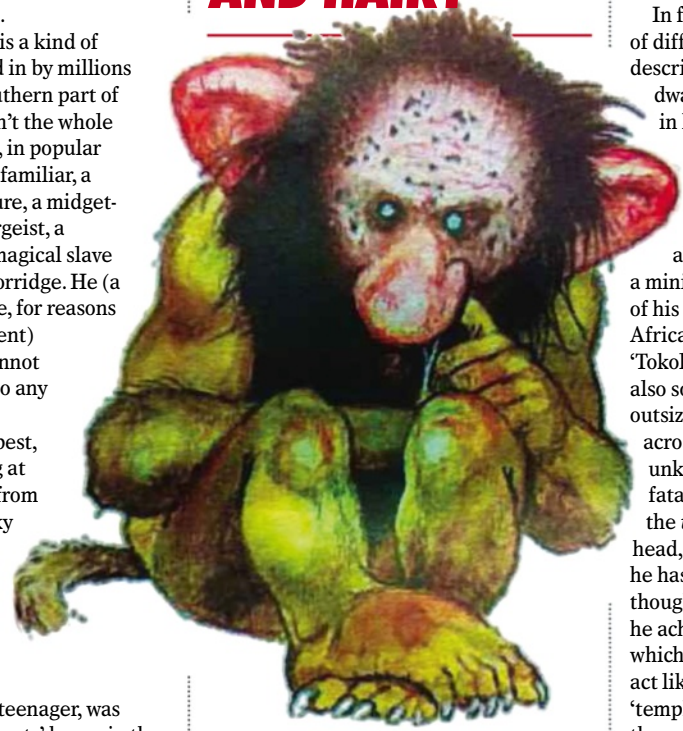
**W**henever I mention to people that I'm writing a book about *tokoloshes*, their initial response is pretty much unanimous; namely, to frown and ask: "What the hell is a *tokoloshe*?" The trouble is, there isn't really a simple answer to that question.

Basically, a *tokoloshe* is a kind of magical goblin believed in by millions of people across the southern part of Africa. However, this isn't the whole story; a *tokoloshe* is also, in popular African lore, a witches' familiar, a supernatural rapist-figure, a midget-zombie, a kind of poltergeist, a UFO-pilot, and even a magical slave labourer made out of porridge. He (a *tokoloshe* is usually male, for reasons that will become apparent) has many forms, and cannot ultimately be reduced to any single one of them.

Perhaps it would be best, then, to start by looking at an eyewitness account from somebody who was lucky (or unlucky) enough to have bumped into one – a South African lady named Flora Ntshuntshe. One moonlit night in 1916, Flora, then still a teenager, was walking back to her parents' house in the Northern Cape Province town of De Aar. Suddenly, she saw a "strange-looking object" coming towards her. At first, she was not entirely sure whether it was an animal or a child. Apparently, it was neither. It was a *tokoloshe*.

According to Mrs Ntshuntshe, the beast "was short and fat with a fur cape or animal skin round his shoulders. His eyes were like lights, yellow, shining

## THEY ARE DESCRIBED AS SMALL, BROWN AND HAIRY



brightly and looking evil. He looked hard and very angrily at me, but otherwise took no notice... I shook with terror and watched him hurrying up the street. I wondered if any evil would befall me or my people, but I think his thoughts were elsewhere and he was too concerned with thinking about something else to worry about me."

The description is a fascinating and

eerie one, and even if we don't believe a word of Flora's claims, surely we can still get a good picture of what a *tokoloshe* actually is from her story? Clearly, he is conceived of as being some kind of supernatural and demonic little man with glowing eyes – the southern African equivalent of a hairy troll, perhaps. If only it were that straightforward.

In fact, *tokoloshes* appear in a variety of different guises. Generally, they are described as being small, brown, hairy, dwarf-like figures of less than a metre in height... sometimes with only the one buttock. A variant form, however, has the *tokoloshe* as a "little old man" rather than a hairy monster. Occasionally, he is also alleged to look something like a miniature bear with hair coming out of his ears – which is why some southern African children give the pet-name 'Tokoloshe' to their teddy-bears. They are also sometimes supposed to have large, outsized heads with a bony ridge running across the top, which they rather unkindly use to head-butt cows, usually fatally. Other people, however, say that the *tokoloshe* has a large hole in his head, while some descriptions even say he has horns, like the Devil. Most often, though, he is said to be invisible (a feat he achieves by the use of a magic pebble which he keeps inside his mouth) and to act like a poltergeist. These are the basic 'templates' of the *tokoloshe's* appearance, then; and it seems that those who believe in him mix and match these various details from description to description.

## HUNG LIKE A TOKOLOSHE

However, there is one constant in reports of *tokoloshes* – the claim that they have gigantic penises, of a length and flexibility which would put even the famously well-endowed John Dillinger to shame. So large are these marvellous

It has knocked out this woman! Now the creature of evil is trapped!



Julia Mafaka has nightmares on the floor... at the foot of a creature she says is a tokoloshe which has tormented her for 16 years. The creature appears engaged in a struggle with another being around the neck. Inside it is a wolf.

**Full story on P2**

# TOKOLOSHE!

She lost her job, she lost her husband, she lost her house in six years of hell!

# TERROR BY TOKOLOSHE!

**By BRIDGET MASANGO and SPENCER KIDANA**  
**IT WALKS the house by night and insults her family in a scary voice.**

**It throws stones at her windows when it arrives... AND IT STEALS FOOD AND SHITS ON THE FLOOR WHEN IT LEAVES!**

After six years of this terror, Queen Mafaga has had enough of the hairy tokoloshe, which has legs but no body or face.

Queen told *Daily Sun*: "This evil creature has turned my life into a nightmare."

She was forced to leave her teaching job in 2002. A few months later her husband decided to divorce her for no reason. Her daughter aged 15 was forced to leave school. She had to sell her house and move because of the creature's in-

hairy legs accompanied by a frightening voice.

The creature started chasing us away to our bedrooms. It said it wanted to prepare supper in the kitchen.

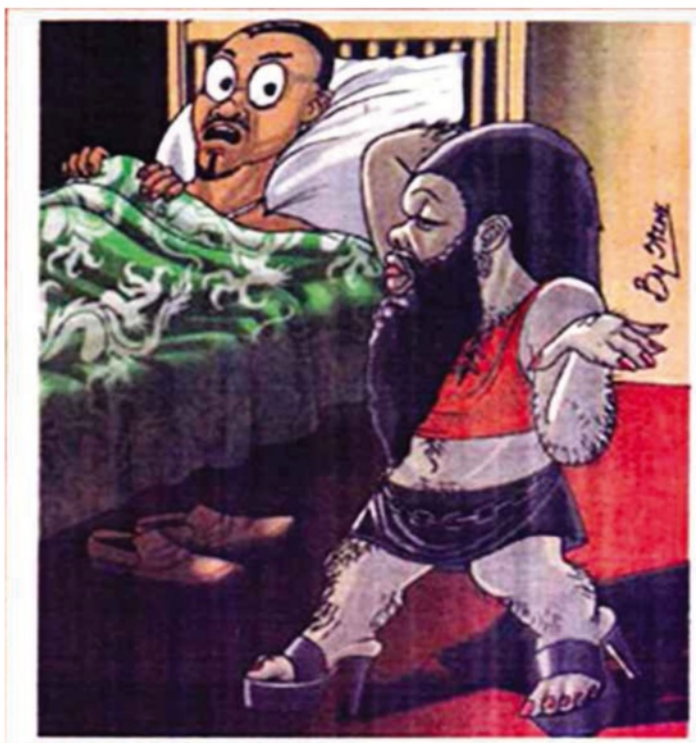
After some minutes, the creature disappeared... but when we went to check in the kitchen, they were shocked to find shit on the floor.

"I was so shocked that I decided to sell our house at Lebanon, near Mabopane, north of Tlokweng, and moved to another place in Morija View, Mabopane."

"But it moved with us! It appeared in the night as usual. There is no prophet, sangoma or priest who can tell where this evil creature came



**I'VE HAD ENOUGH**, says Queen Mafaga, who needs help to get rid of an evil tokoloshe.



*By Steve Jobb*

# TERROR of the gay tokoloshe!

**10 Years ago in Sun!**

# TOKOLOSHE SPLITS COUPLE!

**By SHONHO SHO**  
**UNHAPPY SHO** Bhekheya no longer takes his wife sleep in the bed with him.

That is because it's small, hairy tokoloshe, with a beard, who is only about a metre high, is threatening to tear their relationship apart.

AND IN THE MARRIAGE BED OF BHEKHEYA AND DELILE, THERE IS VERY LITTLE HAPPINESS.

When trouble first started coming to their house, Delile Mthembu (41) and Bhekheya Meyisa (40) from Ekurhuleni, south of Durban, thought they would fight this thing together.

But the little tokoloshe had other ideas. "Whenever I sleep in the bed with my husband, the tokoloshe drops me off the bed," said Delile.



Delile Mthembu and her husband Bhekheya Meyisa say they were attacked by a tokoloshe. Photo by Abraham Kordob

**KZV'S BRIGHTEST DAILY PAPER!**



**DJ Shota does his thing! See P26**

**DAILY SUN CELE BACKS KITO SEE P4**

**DAILY SUN ALL SHACK UP! SEE P5**

members, in fact, that the creature is obliged to walk around with his dick slung over his shoulder, so that it doesn't drag along the ground and trip him up. Fortunately for their observers' modesty, however, most *tokoloshes* are said to cover their genitals with a type of sheepskin cloak termed a *kaross*; no doubt this is what Flora Ntshunsheshe's *tokoloshe* was hiding beneath his animal-skin cloak. This penis is notable not just for its size, but also for its amazing magical powers. The *tokoloshe* is able to use this incredible instrument to open doors and to act as a kind of 'periscope' in order to keep a lookout for his enemies. He can even send it underground (pity the poor blackbird who mistakes *that* for a nice, fat earthworm). If you manage to get hold of one yourself, meanwhile, it is said that you can chop it up and use a piece of it as a free battery in a remote control!

It's because of this fearsome phallus, and also on account of the *tokoloshe's* alleged penchant for biting off sleepers' toes, that many women in southern Africa place piles of bricks beneath their beds at night. Thus, they are raised high enough off the ground that the *tokoloshe's* penis will be unable to enter them whilst they sleep (a wholly illogical idea, given its length). This is a telling piece of folk-belief, as it speaks of perhaps the most widespread myth about *tokoloshes* in southern African society today – namely, that they are serial sex-offenders on a scale which would make even former *Top of the Pops* presenters blush.

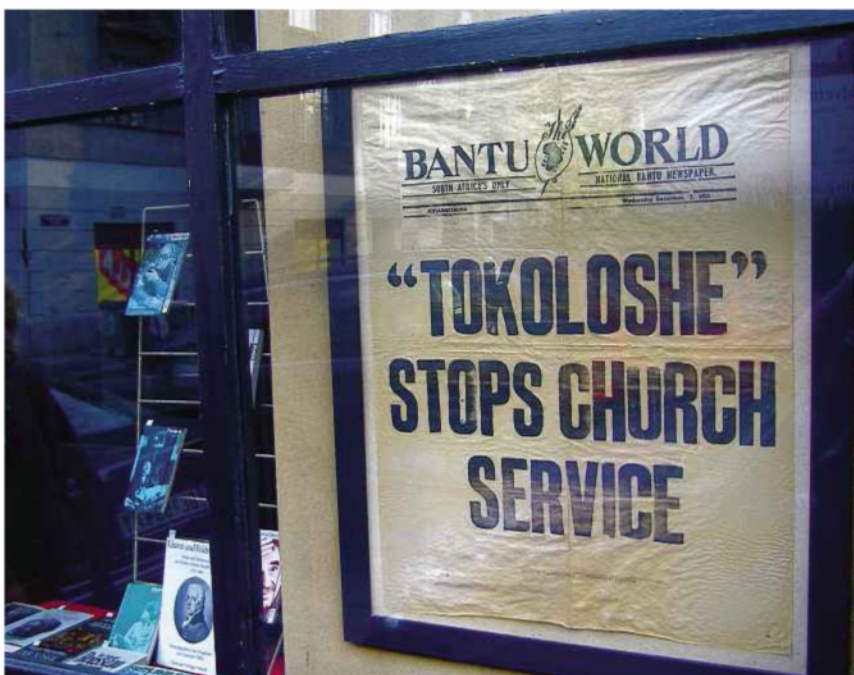
The idea that *tokoloshes* are rapists seems to be related to local witchcraft beliefs; the idea goes that evil witches either send



## WOMEN BEGAN WAKING UP DENUDED OF THEIR KNICKERS

One night, however, the situation began to get even worse, as the *tokoloshe*, before raping the wife, openly told her that it was going to infect her with AIDS. Seemingly, this prediction then came true; the woman developed mysterious sores and lost a lot of weight; she went to see a doctor, who confirmed that she had HIV. Strangely, though, the husband refused to go and get tested. He didn't need to, he told a reporter; after all, he said, with possibly misplaced confidence, he now always ensured that he and his wife "condomised", as he put it, during intercourse.

Occasionally, minor collective panics have been caused by the idea of sexual assaults being perpetrated by *tokoloshes*, particularly in Zimbabwe (where the creatures are also known as *chikwambos*). In 2009, for example, there was a widespread scare in the Magwegwe suburb of the nation's second city of Bulawayo when several women began waking up in the mornings denuded of their knickers; one lady found hers hanging on her door handle. Eight women complained of experiencing what they described as being "heavy" sexual encounters during the night, waking up in the morning tired, knickerless and drawn, and with unspecified but unmistakable "signs that they had been raped during the night" present between their legs. As far as the outraged local community was concerned, this was all very obviously down to the actions of a *tokoloshe*. The local residents' association decided that the *tokoloshe* must have belonged to a nearby wizard, but had recently got out of control and started going on the rampage after dark. They reported the case to the local police force, whose response was sadly not recorded.



TOP: A *tokoloshe* as depicted in the figure of a traditional African doll-puppet. For modesty's sake, his most obvious anatomical feature appears to be hidden beneath his sheepskin kaross. ABOVE: Disrupting Christian worship appears to be another unusual *tokoloshe* pastime according to this South African newspaper.



## WATER AND STONES

Such bizarre beliefs do not simply appear from nowhere. The figure of the *tokoloshe* has been around for thousands of years, although his current form is certainly rather different from the original conception of the entity. The earliest place to which we can trace back the *tokoloshe* is beneath the water. The word has its etymological origins in the Xhosa language, in the word *uthikoloshe* – a dwarf-like water sprite formerly worshipped by that particular tribe.

The *tokoloshe*, then, was originally a river-deity of the Xhosa people of what is now South Africa's Eastern Cape Province. It was apparently known to some other Bantu peoples in certain of the eastern parts of what we now call South Africa, Swaziland, Lesotho and Zimbabwe; it seems safe to say that the *tokoloshe* has lived in the water for a lot longer than he has been going around raping people or helping out witches. Even during his earlier existence, however, the *tokoloshe* was supposed to have at least some kind of dangerous sexual component; one common myth, for instance, was that he had a habit of seducing any girls who were foolish enough to go down to rivers or pools to bathe or wash their clothes.

An amazing South African case of a water-dwelling *tokoloshe* living up to this now rather old-fashioned conception is supposed to have occurred in 1893, near a river in the Mount Ayliff district of Eastern Cape Province. Here, a District Surgeon named HB Maunsell had been sent out by the British authorities to investigate some curious goings-on at a *kraal* – a kind of circular enclosure for cattle – near the Umzimvubu River. Stones, it seems, were being hurled at people by invisible hands. Maunsell discovered that the events had begun after a 15-year-old girl living at the *kraal* had gone down to a stream that ran into the Umzimvubu to fetch some drinking water. Lying down at the edge of the stream, she was most disturbed to see a



ABOVE: If putting bricks under the bed doesn't work, you can always try these "strong" *tokoloshe* salts...

"little old man" lurking beneath the water.

The girl screamed and ran away, followed by the *tokoloshe*, who seemed to have taken a fancy to her. When she got back home, she fainted. Coming round, she then allegedly started vomiting up bizarre substances such as iguana bones and skeletal dog-toes – and, more suggestively, grey hairs from an old man's head and small white pebbles of the sort normally seen by the river where the *tokoloshe* had his lair. Soon, poltergeist-like phenomena began bothering the girl in her hut. She would be asleep on a mat when her blankets were pulled from her and thrown across the room by unseen forces. Worst of all were the stone showers themselves; these occurred inside the hut, and involved pebbles and rocks falling down from the thatched roof and striking the people inside with great force, harming them. Weirdly, upon closer inspection, it was found that the

thatching had no holes in it, meaning that the stones were materialising *inside* the hut, at ceiling-height, and then falling down from there. Discovering that the girl at the centre of this haunting had been visited by a local witch-doctor not long before she had seen the *tokoloshe* in the river, Maunsell's somewhat unlikely conclusion was that this man had hypnotised the girl and all her family and neighbours into seeing the ghostly phenomena, for reasons entirely unknown. He had no doubt, however, that they were all totally sincere in their account of what they said had occurred.

## GOBLIN MARKET

Nowadays, you are far more likely to find a *tokoloshe* lurking on a market-stall than in a haunted river. *Tokoloshes*, like many legendary creatures, change with the times and adapt to modern conditions

## KHUMALO THE KILLER

One of the saddest consequences of the widespread African belief in *tokoloshe*-rape is the related idea that women can be impregnated by the entities and give birth to half-human, half-goblin babies. Often, this is used as an 'explanation' for disabled births, as with the old European legend of the fairy-changeling. People sometimes kill such children, presuming them to be demonic, and end up being arrested and charged with murder.

Probably the most notorious such trial of recent times was that of Siphon 'Ronald' Khumalo, a 56-year-old self-styled South African 'holy man' who appeared in the dock at the High Court in Durban in 2001 accused of force-feeding a three-month-old baby a deadly cocktail of herbs and paraffin before finishing it off by punching and slapping it around with a machete for eight hours until it died, allegedly because his supposed magical powers had allowed

him to see that it was actually a *tokoloshe* in disguise. The baby, Zama, was not actually his, but belonged to his girlfriend Henrietta Jabu Gcabashe. Whilst living with Gcabashe, Khumalo professed to have witnessed the baby repeatedly changing its gender in the middle of the night – apparently a sure sign that it was a *tokoloshe*, but also something which, conveniently, only he had the power to see. After being arrested for murdering his tiny victim in October 1999, however, Khumalo told the police that he had not killed the *tokoloshe* outright at all. As a holy man, he said he had the power to resurrect the dead baby, and that he had only killed it in the first place in order to thereby exorcise the possessing *tokoloshe* from its body. By this logic, he said, he had therefore not committed murder at all.

However, the baby steadfastly refused to return to life. According to Khumalo, this was because the police had foolishly decided to refrigerate the corpse before its autopsy, interfering with his ability to magically resurrect it. He had even thoughtfully stuck

a note to the dead child's head warning the police not to keep it in cold storage, but they had apparently ignored it. Given all this, he reasoned, it was in fact *the police* who were guilty of murder, not him! In court, however, Khumalo's ridiculous defence did not stand up. The presiding judge, Jan Hugo, noted that Khumalo had a history of violence and rightly called his crime "disgusting and brutal", sentencing him to life imprisonment with no right of appeal. Judge Hugo ultimately summed up the case with the withering words: "The accused has no right to kill people just because he thinks they are not human and that he has superhuman powers."

And yet, quite a few other people *do* think that they have such a right. There was even a recent South African case in which a man murdered his own father after coming to think that the old man had been forcibly sodomising him during the night in the form of a big gay hippo-monster – but then, that's another story... one which you'll find in my book on the *tokoloshe*.

# SOMETHING NASTY IN THE TOILET

*Pinky-pinky* is a particularly perverse sub-species of albino tokoloshe that has sparked an outbreak of bizarre panics centring on school loos throughout southern Africa...

School toilets, in playground legends the world over, are always said to be haunted, but in South Africa such stories can have genuine consequences.

In the early 1990s, a new addition was made to the continent's cabinet of supernatural curiosities – namely the rather odd figure of *pinky-pinky*. A sub-species of albino *tokoloshe*, this particular entity was meant to be all white (or sometimes all pink) and to live inside school loos. Imagined as being half-male/half-female (wearing trousers down one side of its body and a dress down the other), and half-human/half-animal (with cat-like features down one side of its face and the mouth and chin of a snake), its main character trait was either raping schoolgirls who were wearing pink panties or simply stealing pink underwear from them – hence the name, *pinky-pinky*.

It seems that the first widespread *pinky-pinky* panic broke out across several all-black schools in the South African city of Pretoria during September 1994. Children became

hysterical, schools were closed, and the press began reporting on supernatural attacks allegedly taking place inside toilets, leading even some adults to start believing in *pinky-pinky*'s reality.

Perhaps the worst *pinky-pinky* scare occurred at Moretele Primary School in the township of Mamelodi, just north of Pretoria, in 1994. Here, the outbreak became so bad – or so exciting – that every child in the school was soon claiming to have had an encounter of their own with the monster. Teachers were sceptical, but their pupils

were beyond their control, so the school ended up calling in the police. Lieutenant Elias Maswele arrived, having been told that there was a case of alleged child molestation to investigate – but he hadn't bargained for one of this kind. Children frantically gathered round and told him tales of girls being raped and slapped about and of boys having their socks stolen. They told him that the creature was living in the toilets, so Maswele went in and investigated; he could find nothing. The children were unsurprised; *pinky-pinky* would not appear to adults, they said. They told Maswele to wait outside while they went in and chanted a new song they had invented in order to conjure up the demon. It went like this:

*My name is pinky-pinky,  
I live in a toilet;  
My father is a sangoma [witch-doctor]  
And my mother is a witch.*

Once they had finished, the children began screaming and poured out of the toilets, the summoning allegedly having worked.

## ITS MAIN TRAIT WAS STEALING SCHOOLGIRLS' PINK PANTIES



Meanwhile, a concerned parent had arrived on the scene and went into the toilets himself, armed with a monkey-wrench and intending to kill *pinky-pinky*. He soon came running out too, however, claiming that an invisible being had touched him in the cubicles. The next day, a mob of angry parents arrived at the school, demanding that the loos be burned down in order to destroy *pinky-pinky* and cleanse the place of evil forever.

Outraged by the presence of demonic forces, the irate adults subjected the children to a severe cross-examination. They soon discovered, however, that every child had experienced something different; their stories about *pinky-pinky* simply did not correspond with one another. Some said he had elephant-legs; others that he had cow's hoofs; yet others asserted that he had chicken-legs. A few said that the *tokoloshe* was friendly and would dance for you if you asked him nicely; others claimed that it had threatened to chop their legs off and take them away with it to "mend its child," who presumably had none of its own. It became obvious that the kids were just making it all up, and the mob dispersed, leaving the toilets intact. The scare did briefly resurrect itself a few days later, when one parent claimed that *pinky-pinky* had made her son levitate through the air and then burned his hand, but it later transpired that this was just a pathetic attempt by the woman to cover up the fact that she was physically abusing the boy herself. *Pinky-pinky* had disappeared from Mamelodi Primary – but this didn't prevent him from later popping his head up through the toilet-bowl elsewhere.<sup>1</sup>

For example, what appears to be the most recent *pinky-pinky*-type scare outside South Africa itself occurred in 2012 in Mahlebezulu Primary School in Zimbabwe's second city, Bulawayo. Here, what one teacher called a "stark-naked female goblin" – or *chikwambo* – was seen sitting on the toilet before attacking schoolgirls who had gone to the loo. Supposedly, the result of these assaults was quite serious – one nine-year-old girl, for example, ended up with swollen feet (?) after being attacked, and another was described as being left in a "critical condition". When word got out that there was a goblin in the toilets, the school's teachers rushed in to confront it, but could see nothing; as ever, *pinky-pinky* could only be seen by schoolchildren. However, the adults on this occasion supposedly did hear the creature; upon returning to the staffroom and holding a prayer meeting to exorcise the *chikwambo*, the teachers were reportedly startled to hear it laughing at them in a sarcastic fashion. Eventually, parents hired a local prophet, a Mr Ndlovu, to come out and bless the school, after which things quietened down.<sup>2</sup>

Of course, given the ridiculous nature of *pinky-pinky*'s appearance, and its strange pædophilic predilections, this particular social panic appears especially absurd upon first glance. However, the alleged presence of *pinky-pinky* in South African schools has been explained, relatively plausibly, by some commentators as being some kind of manifestation or expression of local schoolchildren's fears and stresses about a



ABOVE: Moretele Primary School, Mamelode, site of a major *pinky-pinky* panic in 1994.

variety of other, very real matters. The South African collector of urban legends Arthur Goldstuck, for example, was struck by the fact that the creature frequently appeared just as schools began gearing up for their end-of-year exams. Pressure on the children to succeed being high, Goldstuck felt that the appearance of *pinky-pinky* might be a way for them to express their anxieties about their tests in a way that was socially acceptable. In support of this idea, Goldstuck says that *pinky-pinky* scares tended to begin with the older kids – those sitting their examinations – and then spread down through the younger age groups.<sup>3</sup>

However, other, more elaborate, reasons have also been put forward to account for the panics. For example, in that indispensable volume *Ladies and Gents: Public Toilets and Gender*, an academic named Claudia Mitchell sees great significance in the fact that *pinky-pinky* lives, according to some accounts, not in the girls' toilets, but in the space between the girls' and boys' conveniences. Therefore, she essentially deems it to be occupying a 'liminal' space ('liminality' being a concept used by sociologists and folklorists to describe something which seems to be 'borderline' in nature).

Mitchell interprets *pinky-pinky* as being some kind of expression of schoolgirls' fears about going through the borderline state of adolescence and entering into the adult world as young women – a change she views as being a potentially dangerous one in contemporary South African society. She quotes the artist Penny Siopis, who made a series of artworks relating to *pinky-pinky*, to the effect that the entity "embodies the fears and anxieties that girls face as their bodies develop and their social standing changes" – a particular concern in South Africa where, she says, "rape and the abuse of women is extremely high".<sup>4</sup> The fact that *pinky-pinky* chooses to attack only girls wearing pink knickers could, perhaps, then be seen as being some kind of coded warning against young females flouting their gender or maturing sexuality within such a potentially dangerous social environment. Thus,

Mitchell views the haunted school toilets in *pinky-pinky* manifestations as being in some sense emblematic of all those liminal, in-between spaces in the outside world – alleys, bushes and stretches of lonely veldt – where there is a substantial chance that these same hysterical schoolgirls might one day come across rapists or other abusive and dangerous males in their rapidly-approaching adult life.<sup>5</sup>

In the catalogue for her 2005 exhibition featuring *pinky-pinky* paintings, *Passions and Panics*, meanwhile, Siopis seemed to view the entity as being an expression not only of South African schoolgirls' fear of rape, but also of wider social malaises, writing that the mass hysteria the demon gave rise to in South Africa as a whole "speaks of the fears and phobias of our post-apartheid moment, and the unspeakable psychic states of anxiety and moral panics in society at large... As much as *pinky-pinky* is a perpetrator of violence, it also seems a victim of, and scapegoat for, violent, uncivil actions – a constructed something to blame for social problems."<sup>6</sup>

In many ways, it would be difficult to come up with a better description of the ultimate psychological source for 'demons', 'evil ghosts' and many other of the imaginary figures at the centre of modern mass hysteria outbreaks than this.

#### NOTES

- 1 Arthur Goldstuck, *The Ghost that Closed Down the Town: The Story of the Haunting of South Africa*, Penguin South Africa, 2006, pp313-314
- 2 "Naked female chikwambo severely attacks primary school girls in the toilet in Bulawayo"; ([bit.ly/Lx5Y18](http://bit.ly/Lx5Y18)) myzimbabwe.co.zw
- 3 Goldstuck, op. cit, p248
- 4 Penny Siopis quoted in Claudia Mitchell's essay, "Geographies of Danger: School Toilets in Sub-Saharan Africa" in Olga Gershenson & Barbara Penner (eds.), *Ladies and Gents: Public Toilets and Gender*, Temple University Press, 2009, p62
- 5 Ibid, p72
- 6 <http://tinyurl.com/69cpoar> – 'Passions & Panics – a new exhibition by Penny Siopis'

# THIS PAP TOKOLOSHE SELLS LIKE HOT CAKES!

By MKHUSELI SIZANI

HE's a little man – made of red Lesotho pap.

The man who makes these little men says they are otokoloshe . . .

And they are often very violent. The price for just one is R15 000 – at least!

The father of the little men is an inyanga from Chris Hani squatter camp in Port Elizabeth, Shadrack "Mkhulu" Mdakana (63).

He told *Daily Sun*: "This tokoloshe is deadly. Stock farmers, business people and jealous people make use of it.

"The Lesotho people made this tokoloshe in order to shepherd their sheep, goats and cows because there's a lot of stock theft there.

"This pap tokoloshe sells like hot cakes these days. Business people buy it to expand their businesses and attract more customers. Jealous people also buy it to stop the progress of others and make their lives hell.

"This tokoloshe costs between R15 000 and R25 000!" he said.

"The sellers of this otokoloshe make it with Lesotho pap mixed with

evil muthi.

"They make it look like a human figure.

"Then you dig a hole and place it there in your yard.

"When it is partly buried the zangoma will give you muthi to wash yourself. But when you wash yourself you must be naked and stand on top of this 'tokoloshe grave' . . .

"After a month the tokoloshe will grow into a size of a two or three-year-old boy. But when you look at him, he looks like a strong man with one eye on his forehead and a beard!

"In his mouth he always has a small stone like a marble that makes him invisible to people.

"Most of the time he likes to play with kids," he said.

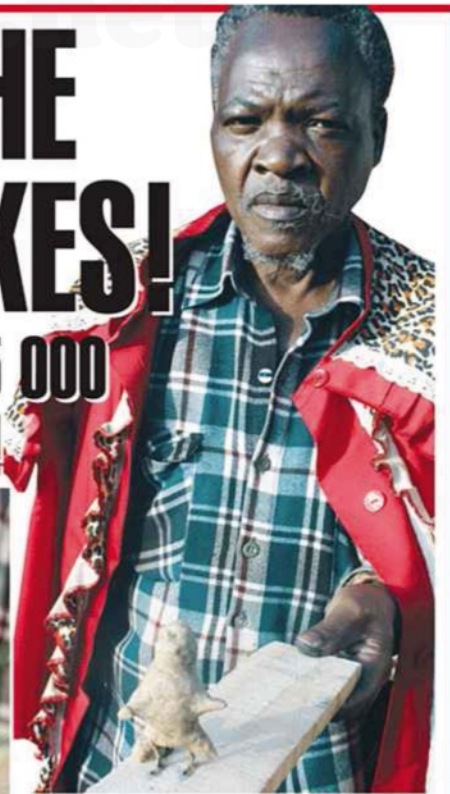
But watch out: the pap tokoloshe is a troublemaker.

"Hell breaks loose when the owner of this tokoloshe is dead – the tokoloshe becomes very violent!

"He rapes the kids or pokes the wife of his owner.

"He will do this until the whole family is dead," Mkhulu said.

... for R15 000 to R25 000!



Inyanga Shadrack "Mkhulu" Mdakana shows a tokoloshe. INSERT: A R15 000 tokoloshe made of Lesotho pap. Photos by Mkhuseli Sizani

ABOVE: Would you buy a used *tokoloshe* from this man? Self-styled witch-doctor Shadrack Mdakana displays his patented porridge-zombies in a 2012 *Daily Sun* story.

and mindsets; and, in these days when most people's god is that of the capitalist marketplace, *tokoloshes* have become something of a valuable commodity. In Zimbabwe in particular, it is fairly easy to buy a *tokoloshe* from a market-stall – although, *caveat emptor*, they are just fakes. Indeed, many of them are little more than potatoes disguised to look like hairy little beings by unscrupulous conmen. Others, meanwhile, are merely empty bottles with a label reading "TOKOLOSHE!" glued to them. The contents of such vessels, naturally, are said to be invisible...

The *Daily Sun* recently carried a story about just such a *tokoloshe*-vendor, a 63-year-old witch-doctor named Shadrack Mdakana, who was making a living selling people little home-made models of *tokoloshes* which, when planted in the ground, would supposedly come to life, bringing their owners great wealth. Mdakana, who lived in a squatters' camp in the city of Port Elizabeth, seemed to have a very good grasp of the need to keep manufacturing costs down and then sell on his products at as high a price as possible. After all, his 'little men' were made out of a substance as cheap as porridge (or 'red Lesotho pap', as the dish is known locally) and then sold on for absurdly high prices ranging from 15,000 to 25,000 Rand.

According to Mdakana, his porridge-men were well worth the investment. "This *tokoloshe* is deadly," he explained, telling the *Daily Sun* how livestock-farmers from neighbouring Lesotho made good use of his products by employing them as slaves to herd their sheep. He said that his *tokoloshes* sold like hot cakes; they could be used to expand your business empire and bring you riches, or to cause the

downfall of your enemies. All you had to do was to buy one of his porridge-dolls and bury it in your yard. After a month, the planted *tokoloshe* would grow to the size of a toddler and raise itself up from the ground. This little man would then be your slave. But Mdakana added a note of caution: once the being's master dies, he explained, the *tokoloshe* breaks free of all control and "rapes the kids or pokes the wife of his owner... until the whole family is dead." Quite a design flaw!

A 2010 news report from Botswana, meanwhile, about the nefarious activities of a local sorcerer named Dr Imrani, is also indicative of the ease with which *tokoloshes* can be purchased these days. Dr Imrani takes out regular advertisements in Botswana's newspapers, claiming that he can lengthen people's penises ("10 to 25cm within a day!") as well as offering what are termed "short boys and rats to gain good life". These "short boys", he explained to a curious reporter, were nothing less than *tokoloshes*.

He defined these as being the corpses of the dead, which he fetched from local graveyards at night, using his magical powers to call them forth. Dr Imrani said that he would then carry the corpse away and breathe more life into it, at the same time whispering certain instructions in its ear on behalf of the clients who had commissioned him to create a *tokoloshe*. This treatment, apparently, had the effect of shrinking down the corpses, giving them their nickname of 'short boys'. Thereafter, the *tokoloshes* would become his clients' property, performing slave labour for them at night, laying bricks or doing farm work for instance. In this way, entire undead labour forces could be created from *tokoloshes*,

saving smart businessmen money on wages and administration fees. Zombies, it seems, are the ideal employees; they work long hours without complaint, never get sick or take a day off, and don't have their own trade union.

Zombies, witch-doubles, astral-rapists, midget-bears, poltergeists, magical porridge-men... which is the true form of the *tokoloshe*? Probably, he doesn't have one. In fact, it's my opinion that the *tokoloshe*'s polymorphous, shape-shifting nature is his most significant quality – and most likely the quality that makes this folkloric figure still so useful to the modern African mind. After all, if he is invisible, as he usually is, and can take on any number of different forms, as he frequently does, then he can quite easily be used as a simple, shorthand 'explanation' for phenomena as diverse as witchcraft, wet-dreams, hauntings, UFOs and a person's success or lack of it in business. For any modern Africans who believe in the supernatural, the strange but fascinating figure of the *tokoloshe* can satisfy all their needs. **FT**

SD Tucker's new book *Terror of the Tokoloshe* is available now from CFZ Press, priced £12.50 (ISBN: 9781909488106). Full sources for all the material used in this article are provided in the book.

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# NOT BY BREAD ALONE

Fasting and spirituality have been linked in many religions, from Christianity and Islam to New Age cults. **TED HARRISON** examines the phenomenon of inedia, sitting at table with a selection of Breatharians, stigmatics and hungry holy men...

On 3 May 2013, a 65-year-old woman from Seattle stopped eating in order, as she put it, “to explore Breatharianism”.

Five weeks later, her story became a global media phenomenon and Navenna Shine was shown in a video looking healthy and talking lucidly about her experiment.

She was living quietly at home and sharing her thoughts on social media pages. She said that she drank water and, although she is not being medically monitored, there is no reason to suspect she is cheating with her diet.

Four weeks into the fast she wrote: “Today I found exercise kind of tiring... I need to lie down afterwards, it’s like my blood sugar does something.” She was well aware of the dangers of what she was doing and described “rough days” when she “felt weak” and “threw up bile”.

After four weeks and two days she wrote: “I have the feeling that my body has reached a point where it has used up all its stored fats and is now looking around for what next to consume.”

She weighed 159lb (72kg) when she started fasting and by 10 June her weight had reduced to 128lb (58kg) and was holding steady. She told her Facebook friends: “Quite an interesting weekend. After the media blitz, the storm in the teacup died down, it is now very quiet. I felt really down for



LEFT: Navenna Shine and her empty fridge. OPPOSITE: The Jain sadhu Prahlad Jani.

without any side effects.”

Devout Jains are strict vegetarians. Such is their reverence for all sentient beings that some even carry brooms to sweep the path ahead as they walk, lest they tread on an ant or crush a beetle underfoot.

Holy man Prahlad Jani takes his religious practice

to the ultimate extreme. To avoid any possibility of eating a fellow creature, he does not eat at all.

Now 83, the sadhu claims he has forsaken all food and drink for 70 years. He was, he says, overshadowed by the goddess Amba and since then has had no need or desire to eat [FT180:10]

Despite subjecting himself to close medical scrutiny, and having had sceptics accuse him of fraud, he persists with his claim and his lifestyle. When not lying on a hospital bed being monitored by incredulous doctors, he lives a simple life as a hermit in a cave in the jungle close to the Gujarati temple of Ambaji, rising at 4am and spending most of the day meditating.

To honour his protector-goddess he dresses as a female devotee, “wearing a red sari-like garment, nose-ring, bangles and crimson flowers in his shoulder-length hair. In return, Mr Jani believes

## HE LIVES A SIMPLE LIFE AS A HERMIT IN A CAVE NEAR THE TEMPLE OF AMBAJI

a while and even considered finishing the experiment. After talking to a few friends I am once again feeling as well as I did on my first day.

“I shall not go below 120lb so by 125lb I shall start looking at what I am going to do. Today I decided to add a package of Emergen-C into my water. This has no nutritional value but contains trace minerals that the body needs. It also makes the water taste better and it seems I can drink larger quantities





ABOVE: The phenomenon of inedia – surviving without food – has been associated with Christian stigmatics like Louise Lateau (left) and Therese Neumann (right).

that the goddess sustains by feeding him with a life-giving, invisible ‘elixir’, which has supposedly given him the strength to continue without food or water.”<sup>1</sup>

His followers are convinced he has supernatural powers, and his reputation was much boosted when the Indian military decided to investigate to see if they might learn anything from him that might help troops survive without food in hostile terrain.

### MYSTICS AND STIGMATICS

Fasting and sanctity have been linked in many religions. The New Testament tells how Jesus prepared for his ministry by going into the wilderness and surviving for 40 days and 40 nights without any kind of emergency rations. When Satan suggested he turn stones into bread, he rebuked his tempter with the words: “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.”<sup>2</sup>

But not even Jesus suggested that holiness alone would sustain the physical body forever. He went back to eating and drinking once his period of fasting was over, with his first stop being a wedding feast – just in time to top up the supply of wine.

Several of his followers, however, have, over the centuries – like eastern ascetics – taken a denunciation of food to extremes.

Inedia, surviving without food, has been regularly associated with the more eccentric end of the mystical spectrum. The stigmatist Louise Lateau (1850-1883), as well as displaying the wounds of Christ on

her body and experiencing ecstatic trances, is said to have fasted for 12 years. Beginning on 26 March 1871 and continuing until her death in 1883, she ate no food whatsoever, and lived entirely on the Holy Eucharist. She drank only a litre of water per week. “This extraordinary grace brought her some additional unwanted attention from the popular press, at least one of whom dubbed her the ‘Belgian fasting girl’. Additionally for this same period of 12 years, she did not require any sleep at all, and normally passed her nights in contemplation and prayer, often kneeling at the foot of her bed.”<sup>3</sup>

The Bavarian stigmatist Therese Neumann (1898-1962) is also said to have survived on nothing but one small Communion wafer every day. She fasted from 1922 until her death in 1962, and is said to have foregone liquids entirely from 1926.

Photographs of her, nevertheless, show a round-faced, rather plump lady displaying no signs of dehydration or malnutrition. She received much media attention in her lifetime and displayed no reluctance to play out the role of celebrity saint.

In 1927 the Bishop of Regensburg arranged for her claims to be tested. For 15 days she was observed and monitored at her home by a team of four Mollersdorfer Sisters, members of an order of nursing nuns, supervised by a medical practitioner, Dr Seidl.

Therese was weighed and measured regularly and her pulse and temperature recorded. All excretions were collected and

analysed.

“Professor Ewald of Erlangen, an opponent of any supernatural explanation of this phenomenon, admitted that the keenest and most relentless attention was given to the matter of food throughout the period of observation. Despite the constant alertness, it could never be ascertained that Therese Neumann took nourishment or attempted to take it.”<sup>4</sup>

During World War II, Neumann refused ration cards as, she said, she had no need of them.

### FASTING GIRLS

What the cases of Louise Lateau and Therese Neumann have in common is that both women were examined in their own homes with their families in attendance. In the case of Sarah Jacob, the celebrated Welsh fasting girl, her exposure as a fraud and subsequent death were the direct result of being observed by an independent team with no religious interest in the case and her family being excluded.

Her tragic story started when rumours spread around the village of Llanfihangel-ar-Arth in rural central Wales that 12-year-old Sarah, a farmer’s daughter, was living and thriving without eating. When a local clergyman, the Rev Evan Jones, became convinced that her claims were authentic, her fame spread almost overnight. “Soon people were coming from far afield, from the English cities as well as Wales, catching the train to Pencader and walking over two miles to the farm to stand gazing in wonder



at this young girl who was defying the laws of nature.

“They brought gifts and money for her, dropping their sovereigns onto the bedspread as she lay, surrounded by flowers, reading and quoting the Bible. Everyone marvelled at her appearance.”<sup>5</sup>

Sarah kept to her apparent fast for two years. Sceptics speculated that her sisters secretly fed her, or that Sarah fed herself when the household was asleep.


It was arranged that she should be monitored over two weeks by the vicar and a medical team, but their findings were inconclusive as the observers failed to maintain a strict 24-hour watch. As Sarah developed, seemingly healthy and growing fatter despite the lack of food, suspicions were aroused and fraud suspected. One Dr Phillips, of Guy’s Hospital, organised a further vigil with six nurses brought in to maintain a round-the-clock watch on the girl.

“And now Sarah’s position became really untenable. If she had previously been able to slip out of bed to find food in the night, now it was impossible.

“The experiment was cruel: the nurses were instructed not to treat or help, simply to mount a watch. If Sarah asked for food they were to give it but otherwise they were to do nothing. And, of course, she did not, and the tragedy was to be played out until the bitter end.”<sup>6</sup>

Was it pride, fear, loyalty to her parents, or even religious conviction that prevented her from speaking out and admitting that her fast was a sham? After a few days she lapsed into a coma and died on 17 December. A post-mortem was held and the law took its course. Her parents, who had refused to allow the nurses to revive and feed their daughter, were charged with her manslaughter.

Evidence given at their trial at the Carmarthenshire Assize described how “day



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## SEVERAL 'FASTING GIRLS' CAME TO PROMINENCE IN VICTORIAN SOCIETY

by day, and hour by hour, the child grew weaker and weaker. The watchers remained remorselessly at their post; and medical men came in and out of the dying girl’s chamber, and spoke calmly and analytically of her ‘altered appearance’. On Thursday, the 16th of December, the parents were spoken to. ‘Your daughter will die if she takes no food, say the medical advisers’; and still no

ABOVE: Breatharianism is the New Age form of inedia – “a life-changing futuristic (r)evolutionary meme”.

food was forthcoming. The little creature’s vitality ebbed away, slowly, but surely, with life and plenty within easy reach, and no one with heart enough to give to the prostrate victim that nourishment which would have saved her from death. But it was too late now. They spoke to the little sufferer at 10 o’clock on Friday morning, and ‘received no answer’. The parents came in, and friends of the family gathered around, and the nurses hovered about the little low bed, and all of them watched the convulsive throes and the delirious moanings of the child they had killed between them.”<sup>7</sup>

The jury found the parents guilty and they were sentenced to imprisonment. The medical team was not admonished.

Sarah was one of several ‘fasting girls’ who came to prominence and fascinated Victorian society.

It was not solely a British phenomenon. In the USA in 1866, 19-year-old Mollie Fancher took to her bed, where she remained until her death 50 years later, becoming known as the Brooklyn Enigma.

“Within months of her self-imposed confinement, Fancher began exhibiting unusual symptoms: she frequently fell into trances, had violent spasms and refused to eat or drink. According to one account, her stomach had ‘collapsed, so that by placing the hand in the cavity her spinal column could be felt.’

“Reactions to the numerous journalistic reports of Fancher’s astonishing accomplishments ranged from awe to angry disbelief. Rev Joseph Duryea, a prominent Presbyterian pastor in Brooklyn, hypothesised that Fancher’s ‘mind or spirit’ was now ‘governed by other and higher laws than those that control it while under the bondage of the body.’ His language resonated deeply with the vibrant spiritualist movement of the period, whose adherents, many of them highly educated, championed Fancher’s extraordinary talents



ABOVE: In 1866, Mollie Fancher took to her bed and stayed there for 50 years, supposedly without eating.

as living proof of the reality of psychic phenomena [sic].

“Accounts like that of Duryea were matched in passion, if not in numbers, by those voicing incredulity or hostility. Some simply declared Fancher to be a fraud (albeit a clever one) who willfully deceived a gullible, superstitious public out of a desire for fame and fortune.”<sup>8</sup>

### LIVING ON LIGHT

Inedia is not explained exclusively in religious or spiritual terms. One form is described in both spiritual and in pseudo-scientific terms by practitioners who, like Navenna Shine, call themselves Breatharians (see FT120:14). They maintain that through adopting lifestyle changes it is possible for a person to derive sufficient fluid and nourishment to survive from light and the air we breathe. As Australian Breatharian Jasmuheen explains: “The capacity to live on light is directly related to our ability to attract, absorb and radiate Divine Love which is determined by our lifestyle. When we are well tuned and our body fit, we can access an inner power which has the ability to love us, guide us, heal us and also nourish our cells. As vast multi-dimensional beings, we have limitless access to a source of internal nourishment (prana-chi) that constantly bubbles champagne-like throughout the matrix of life.”<sup>9</sup>

Jasmuheen, born Ellen Greve, has, she said, survived on prana-chi for the past 20 years and drinks only the occasional cup of tea. When, in 1999, she was put to the test by the Australian television programme *60 Minutes*, she was unable to substantiate her claim on screen.

She agreed to be closely monitored over a number of days by the television team, who

would check she had no access to any food or liquid. After only four days, and protesting that she was in fine health, she was strongly advised to end her fast by a doctor after showing alarming symptoms of dehydration.

She explained that the test had been unfair to her as she had, for the first two days, been confined to a city hotel room. She needed fresh air to live on, she explained, and the air she was forced to breathe was polluted.

As several commentators noted, to see a self-styled prophet of the Breatharian Movement debunked was good entertainment, especially when the television crew found her fridge at home stocked with food – for her husband, Jasmuheen explained, unabashed.

Yet the report had a more serious purpose, for the deaths of five people have been linked to her theories, and, as one newspaper warned, “thousands more deluded disciples around the world are putting those same theories into practice.”<sup>10</sup>

In September 1999 the emaciated body of a 49-year-old woman, Verity Linn, was found in a remote part of the Scottish Highlands (see FT129:9). Police believed “she was following the Breatharians’ 21-day fast. A diary belonging to Ms Linn recorded her last days as she refused to eat or drink, believing it would ‘spiritually cleanse’ her body and ‘recharge her both physically and mentally’”.<sup>11</sup>

Other deaths linked to Bretharianism include those of a 31-year-old Munich teacher, 53-year-old Melbourne resident Lani Morris, a pregnant woman in Hungary and, in 2012, a Swiss woman who died of starvation after having attempted to survive on light. Jasmuheen has denied any responsibility for the deaths, saying she simply shares research

and that readers of her books have a duty of “self-responsibility”.

Jasmuheen is an admirer of Wiley Brooks, the founder of the Breatharian Institute of America. Brooks claims to have lived largely on air and spiritual power for 30 years now. He also claims a number of interesting past lives, having at different times in history been, amongst others, Adam, Enoch, Elijah, Francis of Assisi and Joseph Smith, founding father of The Mormons. It is not explained, however, how he could have been, as he claims, simultaneously Jesus and John the Baptist.

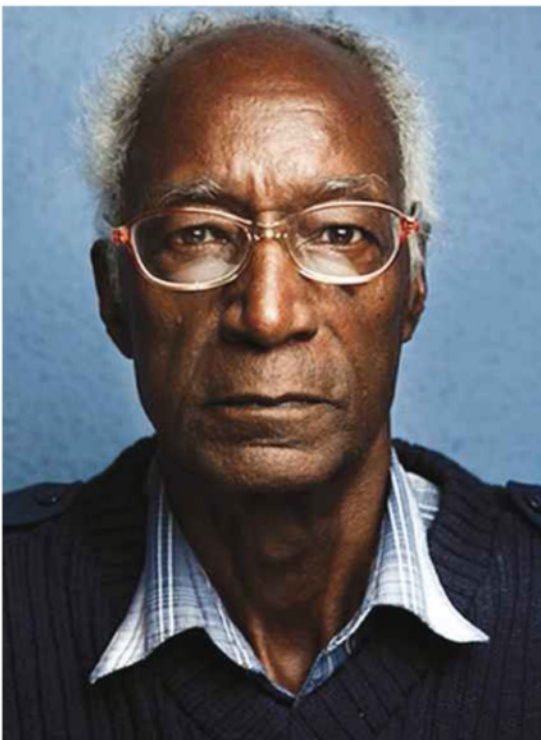
Brooks states that his potential followers must first prepare by combining a junk food diet with the meditative incantation of “fifth-dimensional” words – which might explain how in 1983 he was “allegedly observed leaving a Santa Cruz 7-Eleven with a Slurpee, hot dog and Twinkies. He has also admitted that he periodically breaks his fasting with a cheeseburger and a cola” (FT40:23).<sup>12</sup>

### FAKE FAKIRS?

The Indian Sadhu Prahlad Jani does not encourage others to follow his demanding life regime and has not – so far – been unmasked as a fake. He allowed himself to be monitored over a test period in 2003 and again in 2010, when he was under the video surveillance of three cameras continuously for 15 days in an experiment arranged by scientists from India’s Defence Institute of Physiology and Allied Sciences.

They reported that no evidence of cheating was found, and the fact that Prahlad Jani showed no signs of malnutrition or dehydration led to speculation that his Yoga practices might have caused his body to undergo biological change.

But the Indian Ministry of Defence has



ABOVE: Wiley Brooks, founder of the Breatharian Institute of America and Australian Breatharian Jasmuheen, who claims to have “lived on light” for over 20 years.

IAN WALDIE / GETTY IMAGES



**ABOVE:** In 2003, David Blaine attempted to spend 44 days suspended in a box without food. Here, he is seen at the beginning of the second week of his challenge.

been taken in by the absurd claims of a village fraud, said Sanal Edamaruku, Secretary General of the Indian Rationalist Association. "It is shocking to see that government officials and scientists are so gullible to believe that a human being can survive 60 years without food and water! The claim does not only contradict experience and common sense, but also our well-established biological and medical knowledge about the functioning of the human body. It is absolutely impossible that it is true."<sup>13</sup>

The Indian Rationalist Association has a track-record of debunking fake fakirs, and although Edamaruku was denied an opportunity to join the 2010 testing team or review their methods and results, he later wrote about what he perceived as the weakness of the procedures used. "An official video clip revealed that Jani would sometimes move out of the CCTV camera's field of view; he was allowed to receive devotees and could even leave the sealed test room for a sun bath; his regular gargling and bathing activities were not sufficiently monitored and so on."<sup>14</sup>

Three years after the experiment, no scientific paper has been published and claims have been made that the doctor in charge of monitoring, Dr Sudhah Shah, is himself a Jain and devotee of Prahlah Jani.

Dr Shah later wrote of Prahlah Jani: "The world is full of mysteries and there are people with amazing capacities. Some of them defy the rules of science and medicine. I had studied this unmatched living legend who claims to live without food and water and without passing urine and stool from years together."<sup>15</sup>

In 1999, the Indian rationalists investigated the claims of Kumari Neerja from Uttar Pradesh state. Supposedly she stayed alone in a small room and had fasted

for five years. However, on examining her room closely, the investigators "found the entry to a little toilet hidden behind a shelf and a brick hole, through which she received food. Blood tests revealed the presence of glucose, indicating the intake of food. When finally a harmless gas, causing vomiting sensation, was released into her room, she vomited pieces of chapatti and potatoes."<sup>16</sup>

### SAINTS AND SINNERS

Fasting as a religious discipline is widely practised. Religious leaders generally advise moderation, and if fasting threatens to injure health, believers are normally exempted. Islam, for instance, has a list of those who for medical reasons may be excused from observing Ramadan. Instances of fasting being taken to extremes are nevertheless found in many of the world religions, including Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism and Shamanism, as well as the Jain faith and Christianity.

The truly and excessively devout endure long periods of deprivation within the context of meditation and prayer. They take the bare minimum of food and water to sustain life. In some cases it may be that a spiritual vanity overtakes them. The little they do ingest, they do in private. This creates an illusion of complete abstinence, generating rumours of spiritual accomplishment bordering on the miraculous. Families of devotees may then realise there is money to be made from encouraging and promoting this illusion. Unless the rumours are squashed early, they take on a life of their own and are very difficult to reverse.

It appears that in some cases an explanation for inedia lies in what today would be labelled anorexia nervosa, but with religious overtones. If, in modern language, anorexia is thought of as a condition caused

by a distorted image of the body, religious inedia involves a distorted spiritual rather than physical self-image. The many mediæval stories of saintly women living off nothing but the Eucharist perhaps might fall into this category. From the 13<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> centuries in particular, "fasting was fundamental to the model of female holiness"<sup>17</sup> in much the same way that dieting today is fundamental to the model of female physical perfection.

Nowadays, there are even entertainers who specialise in stunts that involve apparent starvation. The best known is David Blaine. He is described as an illusionist and endurance artist and it is often difficult to know when one facet of his performance changes to the other. When he has performed stunts that involve long periods of starvation, he has been observed to suffer measurable physical stress. In 2003, after being suspended in a transparent box by the River Thames in London for 44 days with only water to drink, he lost 55lb (25kg) in weight (FT178:5). He never claims that his body transcends the normal laws of biology, as religiously motivated extreme-fasters might. He talks of being mentally attuned to endure the suffering involved in being starved or buried alive.

The history of miraculous starvation involves both fraud and self-delusion. That it is truly possible for the human body to survive without food or drink for extensive periods of time is a feat that, despite many historical claims, is as yet unproven. **FT**

### NOTES

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### AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



**TED HARRISON** is a former BBC religious affairs correspondent, regular *FT* contributor and author of a number of books. His latest, *Apocalypse When?*, is out now from Darton, Longman and Todd.

# The Fortean Times

## Random Dictionary of the Damned

compiled by the Hierophant's Apprentice



### No 51: AFFLICTIONS OF THE AFFLICTED

In chapter 14 of *Wild Talents* ([www.resologist.net/talent14.htm](http://www.resologist.net/talent14.htm)), Charles Fort details some of the 43 cases he had collected of what he called 'Invalidism'. These involved "human beings who were ill, sometimes temporarily, and sometimes dying, at the time of uncanny – though rather common – occurrences in their homes. No conventional theory fits these cases. But the stories, as collected by me, are only fragments." As in, for example:

One day, in July, 1890, in the home of Mr. Piddock, in Hafer-road, Clapham, London – see the *London Echo*, July 16, 1890 – the daughter of the household was dying. Volleys of stones, of origin that could not be found out, were breaking through the glass of the conservatory. It is probable that not a doctor, in London, in the year 1890 – nor in the year 1930 – if what is known as a reputable physician – would admit any possibility of relationship between a dying girl and stones that were breaking windows.

But why should any doctor, in London, in the year 1890, or any other year, accept the existence of any relations between a bombardment of a house and a girl's dying condition? He would be as well-justified in explaining that there was only coincidence, as were early palæontologists in so explaining, when they came upon bones of a huge body, and, some distance away, a relatively small skull – explaining that the skull only happened to be near the other bones. They had never heard of dinosaurs.

In other words, Fort is saying that something – or things – ought to connect this case and other similar ones that he had noted, beyond their phenomenological resemblance. And even that is tenuous. Several of the dozen or so accounts he retails involve showers of stones upon the houses of ailing or expiring people, most of them very young. Sometimes the stones appeared to fall from *inside* the house. That's a connexion of a sort, but not an

explanatory one of any kind. Besides, not all these reports feature mischievous minerals:

In the home of Alexander Urquhart, Aberdeen, Scotland, there was an invalid boy. Stories of doings in this house were told in London newspapers, early in January, 1920. The boy was simply set down as "an invalid boy", and presumably doctors were not mystified by his ailment. Nobody was recorded as suspecting anything but coincidence between whatever may have been the matter with him, and phenomena that centered around him, as he lay in his bed. It was as if he were bombarded by unseen bombs. Explosive sounds that shook the house occurred over his bed, and, according to reports by policemen, the bed was violently shaken. Policemen reported that objects, in the boy's room, moved—

Surely there is something missing here, for although "Nobody was recorded as suspecting anything but coincidence between whatever may have been the matter with him, and phenomena that centered around him, as he lay in his bed", somehow policemen got involved – by invitation, we presume. So while coincidence was not ruled out, neither was mystery, and the weighty tread of investigative authority was added to the din. A few days later, the *London Daily News* reported (in the words of Fort's *précis*), "Aberdeen ghost laid low – prosaic explanation for strange sounds – nothing but a piece of wood that the wind had been knocking against a side of the house." Which sounds plausible enough. But three days after that, the *Glasgow Herald* was writing of "thumping sounds that shook the house and rattled the dishes". The paper may simply have been late reporting the story, although Fort implies that the 'phenomena' were continuing after the guilty wood/wind combo was discovered.

## DON'T MENTION THE POLTERGEIST

Perhaps unconsciously, Fort admits of some ambiguity in the following case:

Early in the year 1893, as told in the *New York World*, Feb. 17, 19, 1896 – an elderly man, named Mack, appeared, with his invalid wife, and his daughter Mary, in the town of Bellport, Long Island, NY, and made of the ground floor of their house a little candy store. The account in the *World* is of a starting up of persecutions of this family attributed to hostility of other storekeepers, and to dislike “probably because of their thrift”. Stones were thrown at the house “by street gamins”. Several boys were arrested, but there was no evidence against them. At the time of one of the bombardments, Mary was on the porch of the house. A big dog appeared. He ran against her, knocking her down, injuring her spine, so that she was a cripple the rest of her life. All details of this story are in terms of persecutions by neighbors: in the terms of the telling, there is no suggestion of anything occult. Unidentified persons were throwing stones.

The terrified girl took to her bed. Stones thumped on the roof above her, throwing her into spasms of fright. In one of these convulsions, she died. Missing in this story is anything relating to Mack's experiences before arriving in Bellport. His daughter was crippled, and died of fright. He arrived with an invalid wife.

‘Ambiguity’ in this instance meaning, first, that, as Fort puts it, “in the terms of the telling, there is no suggestion of anything occult”, and Fort apparently wants his readers to ponder whether or not “the telling” is wrong, or anyway missing a necessary occult ingredient. Second, Fort makes a wholly pertinent point: “Missing in this story is anything relating to Mack's experiences before arriving in Bellport.” One suspects he would like the reader to think that in the Mack family's life there *may* have been earlier incidents that held *every* suggestion of “something occult” at work.

But any sceptic would make the same point, wondering if the Mack family had a history of infuriating their neighbours, and why. Mack can be a Jewish-American name. Was the neighbours' expressed dislike of the Macks' “thrift” an unobvious euphemism for their anti-Semitism? But if the Macks were Jewish, why did they (unusually, for obvious reasons) name their daughter Mary? We may note too that the events as described allegedly occurred in 1893, yet the *New York World* didn't report them until 1896. Much may be had in the way of Chinese whispers in three years. Does anyone smell fish, here? Didn't Fort have a tastier, more teasing, instance than this among his other examples of ‘Invalidism’?

Here's one that's odd enough, taken by itself:

In the *Religio-Philosophical Journal*, July 15, 1882, as copied from the *New York Sun*, there is a boarding house story. Mrs William Swift's boarding house, 52 Willoughby Street, Brooklyn – the occupant of the back parlor was ill. Raps were heard. Several times appeared a floating, vaporous body, shaped like a football. Upon the ailing boarder, the effect of this object was like an electric shock.

Once again, like Fort, one would like to have more than the fragments of this tale. Especially what was ailing the boarder (*food poisoning?*), and what if any medication was being deployed.

We have in our own files accounts of visions experienced during a combination of illness and pharmaceuticals. In the mildest, the patient was visited by an osprey that sat on the end of his hospital bed for “what felt like” half an hour. In the creepiest, shape-shifting wailing entities – which the patient was able to see *through a wooden door* – thinned and elongated themselves to pour into his bedroom between the top of the door and the lintel (at which, thoroughly terrified, he snapped back into ‘normal’ consciousness). There may be other explanations for the 1882 Brooklyn case that don't require medicalising it, such as perhaps another landlady's grudge against Mrs Swift. Then again, things *may* have been just as weird as Fort says they were, but that (as he admits in so many words) doesn't really get us anywhere. For, as he remarks of this cluster of oddities, “if there were connecting circumstances, they are now undiscoverable.”

It's surely apparent by now that Fort was flailing a bit in this chapter. He didn't set much store by witchcraft *per se*, but did speculate that powerful emotion, particularly hate, might generate psychokinetic effects with deleterious consequences (see *Wild Talents*, ch21). This probably explains his including these two cases in his ‘Invalids’ file (emphasis added):

In the *Religio-Philosophical Journal*, March 31, 1883, and the *New York Times*, March 12, 1883, there are accounts of the *bewitchment of the house*, 33 Church Street, New Haven, Conn. Tramping sounds – objects flying about. A woman in this house was ill. While she was preparing medicine in a cup, the spoon flew away. Sounds like *Hey, diddle, diddle!* Then it was as if an occult enemy took a shot at her. An unfindable bullet made a hole in a glass.

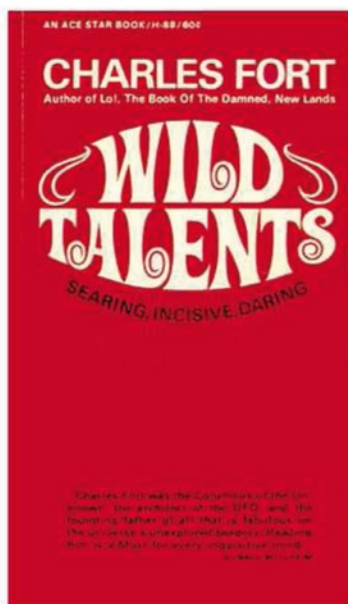
In the *Bristol (England) Mercury*, Oct. 12, 1889, and in the *Northern Daily Telegraph*, Oct. 8, 1889, are accounts of loud sounds of unknown origin in a house in the village of Hornington, near Salisbury. Here a child, Lydia Hewlett, aged nine, “was stricken with a mysterious illness, lying in bed, never speaking, never moving, apparently at

death's door.” It was said that *this child had incurred the enmity of a gypsy*, whom she had caught stealing vegetables in a neighbor's garden.

## STILL NO POLTERGEISTS

So, what do we have? A very peculiar set of reports in which sickly or dying people, most of them children, are set about by hails of stones or equally seemingly inexplicable plagues or other bizarre phenomena. This seems unfair, although no one has plausibly shown that the Universe is ultimately fair, let alone just. The material ought to be promising, but nothing besides these superficial motifs really makes these stories hang together – as Fort admits, letting us glimpse an uncharacteristic frustration: and for once he is not even inspired to witticism. Like any good Buddhist, Fort generally takes the position that all things are connected (see *Book of the Damned*, *passim*) – the world is “one inter-continuous nexus” – but he did also invent, or light upon, the concept of the Cosmic Joker, which one could regard as a perception of God-as-Trickster. In *Lo!*, in a rare teleological reflection, Fort went so far as to write: “So many of our data are upon a godness that so much resembles idiocy that to attribute intelligence to it may be even blasphemous. Early in this theological treatise we noted a widespread feeling that there is something of the divine in imbecility.” This leaves room in the world for hilarity and wonder and weirdness, but it scarcely guarantees mercy.

Thus one of Fort's cases of ‘invalidism’ speaks of a house in Weti, Zanzibar, bombarded by clods of earth. The local bishop



is called, and sees “a mass of mud appear on a ceiling”. He exorcises the house. “The mud-slinging stopped. But then illness came upon the woman of this house.” So it goes.

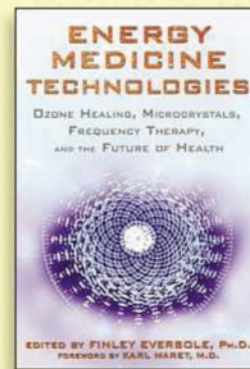
As this last example demonstrates, not the least problem with Fort’s data here is that none of the cases has anything wholly in common with the others beyond featuring someone who’s ill – or who becomes ill – before or after one weird manifestation or another. The apport-like clouds of mud and stones and ‘ghostly’ noises and ‘vaporous’ bodies can’t *all* be said to be somehow attracted to illness, *per se*, since some of the people involved were allegedly made ill by bewitchment of some kind, others just happened to be sick, and one may have been haunted. Unfortunately these terms merely substitute one unknown for another, which is why we’ve banned the P word from this entry. Fort remarks that his cases have no conventional explanation: but neither, as a group, do they support any unconventional one either.

Fort seems to have included at least two of his cases in a strenuous attempt to suggest ‘mystery’ when there’s no need (need as in “*Entia non sunt multiplicanda praeter necessitatem*”). The first of these is the Mary Mack case quoted above. In the second, reported in the *Daily Mail* of 19 August 1920, we learn that a house in South Woodford, London, was showered with stones for several nights. On the night of 13 August, the police held a vigil, perched in trees or on roofs, but “volleys” of stones continued to “bombard” the upper floor and defy all efforts to discover their source. No fewer than 40 policemen arrived for sentry duty the next night, as did yet more stones. (That so many of London’s finest – some from Scotland Yard – trooped forth to enjoy some overtime perhaps occurred because the house’s occupant was “Mr HT Gaskin, an American, the inventor of the Gaskin Life Boat” and thus, we imagine, a person of some distinction and influence.) The show of force worked insofar as the pebbly showers ceased thereafter. As they might, if urchins or yahoos were at work, and had prudently concluded that a third night of fun under the noses of the Old Bill might not prove a lucky one. The bombardment of the *upper* part of the house certainly suggests that human muscles – perhaps enhanced with catapults – were at work. But Fort decides not to pursue the obvious.

With such incoherence in the pattern of examples given, one wonders what kind of mish-mash is represented in the 32 cases in his notes that Fort *didn’t* cite. Given his patent frustration with such a beguiling theme, to the point that it stifles even his talent for wisecracks, it’s surprising that Fort didn’t take a few additional steps back from what he’d collected and conclude that what he’d found was no more than a string of very loosely connected coincidences. In the light of his *persona*’s habitual contrariness, that would have been surprising in itself, if characteristic at a deeper level. Granted, ‘coincidence’ might not be the true or only answer to the puzzle Fort set himself and his readers (even if it is a reasonable one); and he may have been picking up oblique clues to something more exotic. But that’s not the issue. What this curious chapter illustrates is something like a *compulsion* on Fort’s part to produce instances of Something Strange Going On and to discern links between and among them. “I act,” he wrote in *Wild Talents* (ch13), “as if trying to make allness out of something.” Fair enough. Humans are pattern-seeking creatures, and Fort often found, or made, unexpected patterns that are often deliciously and deliberately batty. In this case, he ended up with a ragbag of inconsistent data that even to him makes no sense *as a set*. He seems nonetheless to have thought there was something to be gained in publishing it. One wonders what.

Sometimes the man’s creative confusions fail him, and exasperate a reader who, while remaining critical, usually enjoys his scatty paradoxes, and it’s only proper (fair, even) to provide an example. One would like to end by quoting Fort thus: “To deny, ridicule, or reasonably explain away occurrences that are the data of this book, is what I call useful.” But that would be taking him out of context.

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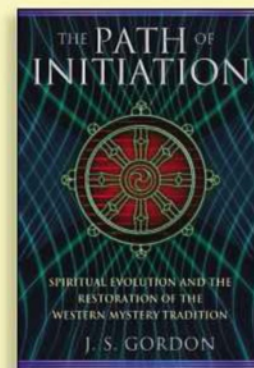
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# forum

## WEIRD statistical variation

**ROB GANDY** and **DENIS ADAMS** ask whether the so-called decline effect reveals 'cosmic habituation' or just statistical variation?

**ROB GANDY** is a regular *FT* contributor and visiting professor at the Liverpool Business School, Liverpool John Moores University. **DENIS ADAMS** is a retired business analyst from the Liverpool Business School, and has long witnessed the decline effect in his special interest of horse racing.

**W**illiam Ashton gave an excellent description of how the replication of scientific studies is seeing a fading away of original results, described as the decline effect, and considers Jonathan Schooler's suggestion that the cause might be cosmic habituation – i.e. after repeated replications of a study, the Universe is getting tired of responding (**FT299:52-53**). To study the decline effect, Schooler suggests an online registry for all research studies, which is actively being pursued by some psychologists with the Open Science Collaboration (OSC)<sup>1</sup> – but the fear is that this might lead to psychology being stigmatised.

As long-in-the-tooth statisticians, we thought that we should add our tenpenn'uth, given that invariably the results of scientific experiments are measured statistically.

Because a paper is published doesn't necessarily mean the statistics are valid, even with a statistician involved! Repeating studies may not yield significant results – because significance did not exist in the first place. Porter screened all papers and letters in the weekly *British Medical Journal*, *Lancet* and *New England Journal of Medicine* in 1997 for examples where correlation and bi-variate linear regression were used. This yielded 15 categories of errors, including failure to clearly state the number of cases involved, not quoting confidence intervals when appropriate, and attaching undue importance to a significant outcome in the context of correlation.<sup>2</sup> Even where a study is replicated is there certainty that identical statistical analyses are used?

Analyses of which people were studied in six sub-disciplines of psychology, published in top

behavioural science research journals from 2003 to 2007<sup>3</sup>, revealed that 68 per cent of subjects came from the United States, with 96 per cent of subjects from Western industrialised countries (specifically North America, Europe, Australia and Israel).<sup>4</sup> Also, 73 per cent of first authors were at American universities, and 99 per cent were at universities in Western countries. Therefore 96 per cent of psychological samples came from countries with only 12 per cent of the world's population. Fortean will enjoy the inference that most published research in top behavioural science journals is based on samples drawn entirely from Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic (WEIRD) societies.

Furthermore, in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, the premier journal in social psychology, 67 per cent of American samples (and 80 per cent of samples from other countries) were composed solely of undergraduates in psychology courses.<sup>5</sup> Hence, a randomly selected American undergraduate was over 4,000 times more likely to be a research participant than a randomly selected person from outside the West.

The dominance of American authors in psychology publications may simply reflect American universities being able to attract the best international researchers, and that similar tendencies exist in other fields. However, psychology is a distinct outlier: 70 per cent of all psychology citations come from the United States – a larger percentage than any of the other 19 sciences.<sup>6</sup>

Consequently, psychology research has been largely studying the nature of WEIRD people, a narrow and potentially peculiar subpopulation, rather than the full breadth of human diversity. Unfortunately, despite their narrow samples, behavioural scientists like to draw inferences about the "human mind" and "human behaviour" – something that is rarely challenged or defended. Leading scientific journals

and university textbooks routinely publish research findings claiming to generalise about "humans" or "people" based on research done entirely with WEIRD undergraduates. Commonly, there is no demographic information about the participants, aside from their age and gender.<sup>7</sup>

A genuine danger that needs to be addressed is that if study samples continue to be dominated by undergraduates in psychology courses,<sup>8</sup> then replicated studies might be affected by some of those participating having (some) prior knowledge of the published studies and results through their research and teaching.

We infer that William Ashton refers to the replication of published experiments where the findings were statistically significant, because if the findings were *not* statistically significant the authors would be unlikely to write up the research and submit it for publication, the journals would be unlikely to publish and no one would consider replicating the experiment. Potentially, researchers could have undertaken similar (if not identical) experiments before, but without significant findings, and without seeking publication. A published paper might only reflect the first time an experiment has produced statistically significant findings.

If a statistical analysis is "significant with 95 per cent confidence" (the usual yardstick adopted) then this means the probability of those statistical results occurring is less than 0.05; in broad terms, if an experiment is undertaken 20 times then such an outcome is likely to happen once. What is usually inferred by researchers is that if they get statistically significant results in one experiment, then they should *always* get statistically significant results if the experiment is repeated – not necessarily a valid assumption.

Published work is biased towards statistically significant findings (where relevant), but it might only reflect that proportion of experimental research which would be *expected* to yield statistically significant findings in line with probability for a given experiment. The OSC will be invaluable by providing data on all experiments, but its data might not help measure a decline effect but rather evidence of the ranges of results that would be expected in line with the laws of probability: less cosmic habituation, more statistical variation. **FT**

### NOTES

**1** S Carpenter, "Psychology's bold initiative", *Science*, 335, 2012, pp1558-1561.

**2** A Porter, "Misuse of correlation and regression in three medical journals", *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*, 92, 1999, pp123-128.

**3** J Henrich, S Heine and A Norenzayan "The weirdest people in the world?", *Behavioural and Brain Sciences*, 33, 2010, pp61-135.

**4** J Arnett "The neglected 95%: Why American psychology needs to become less American", *American Psychologist*, 63(7), 2008, pp602-614.

**5** Ibid.

**6** R May, "The scientific wealth of nations", *Science*, 275, 1997, pp793-796.

**7** Henrich, Heine and Norenzayan, op cit.

**8** Arnett, op cit.

# Lovecraft resurgent

**ROGER LUCKHURST** traces HP Lovecraft's journey from beyond the literary pale to semi-respectability, via Sixties psychedelia and post-humanist philosophy



**ROGER LUCKHURST** teaches at Birkbeck College, University of London. *HP Lovecraft: The Classic Horror Stories* is published by Oxford World's Classics.

In May, that respectable scholarly publishing house Oxford University Press released an edition of HP Lovecraft's *Classic Horror Stories* in its World's Classics series. This was several years after the Library of America had received disdainful comment from scholars for publishing an anthology of the Rhode Island author's work. Could a writer who published in amateur journals and lurid horror and science fiction pulp magazines ever be included in a list of 'classics'?

As the editor of that *Classic Horror Stories* edition, I can tell you it was a pretty close-run thing. The series editor is normally confident in her judgement about what fits the series. With Lovecraft, she professed herself at a loss. She received many inquiries, many pitches and proposals for editions, but found the writing itself ghastly. Several years ago, she asked me: what was going on? Could I explain the value or appeal of this hack writer? The edition was the outcome of our conversations.

My editor was not alone in needing persuasion. HP Lovecraft (1890-1937; see FT184:32-40) was at the receiving end of one of the most acid put-downs in literary history. After Lovecraft's death, his friends tried and failed to publish a collection of his stories with a mainstream publisher, and so set up the Arkham House press to print these horrors themselves. The celebrated critic Edmund Wilson got hold of the early Lovecraft anthologies and in 1945 wrote a damning review in which he declared that "the only real horror in most of these fictions is the horror of bad taste and bad art." He declared the nascent Lovecraft cult "infantile" and demolished the writer's execrable style with haughty grandeur.<sup>1</sup>

Lovecraft promptly vanished from any consideration, his works left to gently rot between the endpapers of *Weird Tales* and *Astounding Science Fiction* and in the tiny circulation of Arkham House editions.



Since the 1960s, however, Lovecraft's reputation has grown with the speed of one of his extraterrestrial fungi. Colin Wilson celebrated Lovecraft as a "spectacle of self-destruction" in his book *The Strength to Dream*. Kenneth Grant, the follower of Aleister Crowley, mashed together the Beast's devilish cosmogony with Lovecraft's panoply of nasty gods, the Old Ones.

Mass paperback editions and B-movie adaptations led to bizarre fusions in popular culture, like the psychedelic band HP Lovecraft, part of the Haight-Ashbury scene in the 1960s. In that crazy Californian world, it was no wonder that the Church of Satan picked up on Lovecraft and incorporated the Old Ones into their worship. There are now substantial studies of the New Religious Movements that have used Lovecraft's 'Cthulhu Mythos'.<sup>2</sup>

In the 1970s, Lovecraft received the proper artist *manqué* treatment with a French study by Sorbonne professor, Maurice Lévy. It happened again 20 years later when Michel Houellebecq, the bad boy of contemporary French letters, launched his controversial career with a study of Lovecraft called, ominously enough, *Against the World, Against Life*.

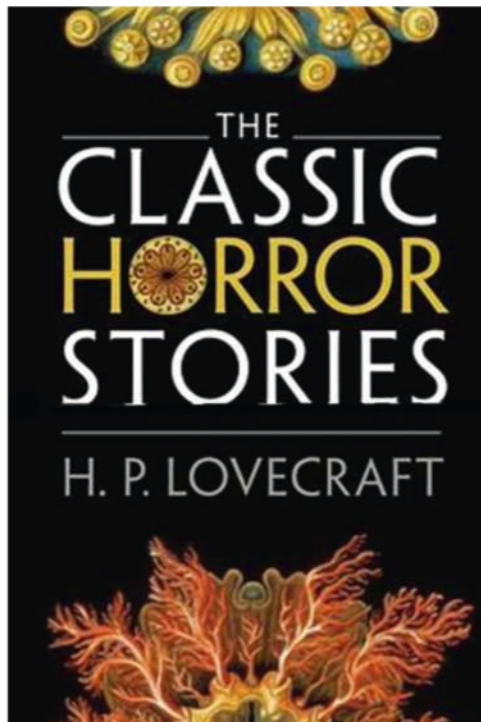
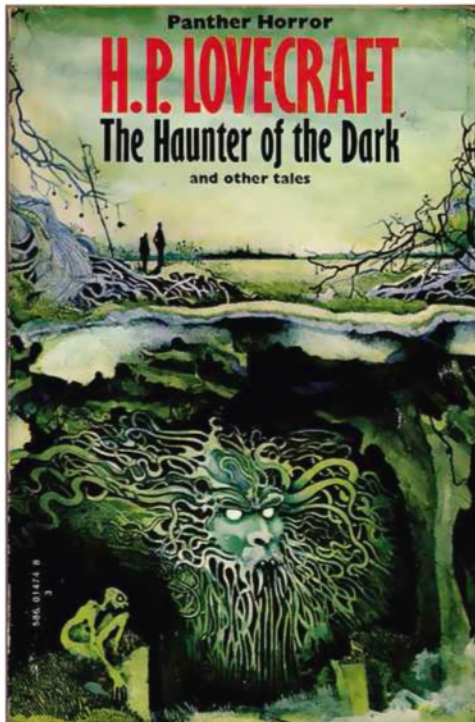
Far from withering, the Lovecraft cult has grown exponentially. First editions of those Arkham House imprints now sell for about £15,000, manuscripts for massive sums. Thousands of stories have been added to the Cthulhu Mythos by diverse fans and writers.

Since the millennium, Lovecraft has become a linchpin in many different areas. The hip writers associated with the New Weird movement, a term coined in 2003 and most commonly associated with the genre-hopping work of Marxist fantasist China Miéville, used Lovecraft as a key reference point, even though many of this new generation set out to radicalise and subvert Lovecraft's ultra-conservative politics.<sup>3</sup> The *Guardian* newspaper even has a dedicated blog called 'Weird Things', written by Damien Walter.

A sign of how things had turned around was this telling fact: the Library of America edition of Lovecraft's tales appeared in 2005. It was only two years later that the same series eventually got around to publishing the selected essays of Edmund Wilson. Is that the last laugh one can hear gurgling from Lovecraft's grave?

Meanwhile, the release of Ridley Scott's film *Prometheus* was said to have scuppered the finances for Guillermo del Toro's long-cherished plans to film





Lovecraft's novel *At the Mountains of Madness*. The whole *Alien* series of films, and HR Giger's designs for the creature, could not have existed without Lovecraft. His slimy and tentacular sublime is visible everywhere in contemporary science fiction and horror.

Strangest of all, perhaps, a group of philosophers began to contend that Lovecraft was the most important figure for the development of what is variously called 'weird realism' or 'object-oriented philosophy.' The Cairo-based philosopher Graham Harman has argued in several books since 2008 that Lovecraft is the tacit philosopher of a movement in thought concerned with trying to think beyond the human-centred subject. The Western tradition needs to decentre or aggressively dethrone the tyranny of organising the world around human subjectivity. This anthropocentrism has led, they claim, to various social and ecological catastrophes, not just errors in how to think about our relationships with objects and the world.<sup>4</sup>

Lovecraft professed a philosophy of 'cosmic indifferentism'. Horror in his fiction is generated from the realisation that the vast age of the Universe and the discovery of creatures that existed before and after the paltry span of humanity renders all human values and beliefs irrelevant. "When we cross the line to the boundless and hideous unknown," Lovecraft said in a famous

## "We must learn to leave our humanity at the threshold"

letter about 'The Call of Cthulhu', "we must remember to leave our humanity – and terrestrialism – at the threshold." In the words of Eugene Thacker, another of these weird realist philosophers, Lovecraft's fiction is "a non-philosophical attempt to think about the world-without-us philosophically." His writing reaches for "the enigmatic thought of the unknown."<sup>5</sup>

It is this embrace by critical theorists that has given Lovecraft a degree of cool cachet. Mark Fisher, author of *Capitalist Realism*, praises what he calls Lovecraft's Pulp Modernism as a radical antidote to redundant humanism. A delirious hybrid of theory/fiction/conspiracy by Reza Negarestani called *Cyclonopedia* mixes together Lovecraft, French avant-garde theorists Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari and a conspiratorial history of capitalism to produce an extraordinary science fiction about the politics of oil as an extraterrestrial demonic thing lurking

in the cracks of the planet.

A lot of this philosophising can be traced back to the influence of the writer Nick Land, whose career has something very Lovecraftian about it. In the 1990s he was employed by Warwick University and set up the Cybernetic Culture Research Unit in the philosophy department. It produced wildly experimental writing that mixed up continental philosophy, rave and jungle music and concrete poetry, and embraced marginal pulp writers like Lovecraft. Land published the cheery tome *Thirst for Annihilation* and academic legends say that towards the end of the 1990s he spoke only in prime numbers whilst blinking wonderingly at the world from underneath his desk. Was he mad, drug-addled or excoriating the conventions of the university? No one quite knew. In 1999, he either resigned or was fired and disappeared from academia, exactly like one of Lovecraft's maverick professors at Miskatonic University who travel into unknown territories never to be seen again. Nevertheless, Land influenced many to explore the idea that conventional thought could be undone by taking the delirium of our pulp fictions seriously. You can read his take on Lovecraft in the splendidly cracked tome of Land's collected writings, *Fanged Noumena*.<sup>6</sup>

The Oxford edition of *The Classic Horror Tales* emerges in the context of this kind of attention. Some will no doubt say that this is the last nail in the coffin for Lovecraft's subcultural cachet – that he has reached a kind of deathly respectability. Personally, I still like to think of the edition as bursting out of the chest of the literary canon like that lovely little beast in *Alien*. **FT**

ABOVE: From pulp to classic – a 1970s Panther paperback and the new Oxford University Press collection.

OPPOSITE PAGE: HP Lovecraft (top) and French philosopher Michel Houellebecq.

### NOTES

- 1 Edmund Wilson, 'Tales of the Marvellous and Ridiculous' in *Classics and Commercial: A Literary Chronicle of the Forties* (Allen, 1951), p. 288.
- 2 See Victoria Nelson, *Gothika: Vampire Heroes, Human gods, and the New Supernatural* (Harvard University Press, 2012) for a recent survey.
- 3 Ann and Jeff Vandermeer (eds.), *The New Weird* (San Francisco: Tachyon, 2008). The 'New Weird' was coined by the novelist M John Harrison, although rapidly discarded.
- 4 See Graham Harman, *Weird Realism: Lovecraft and Philosophy* (Zero Books, 2012).
- 5 Eugene Thacker, *In the Dust of this Planet: Horror of Philosophy Vol. 1* (Zero Books, 2011).
- 6 Nick Land, *Fanged Noumena: Collected Writings 1987-2007* (Urbanomic, 2011).

# File under 'science fiction'

The real HP Lovecraft is too often co-opted by occultists and ignored by those who present him as a purveyor of conventional scares, says **DAVID HAMBLING**



**DAVID HAMBLING** is a science writer for the *Guardian*, *Wired* and *New Scientist* as well as a frequent contributor to *FT* and its regular science columnist.

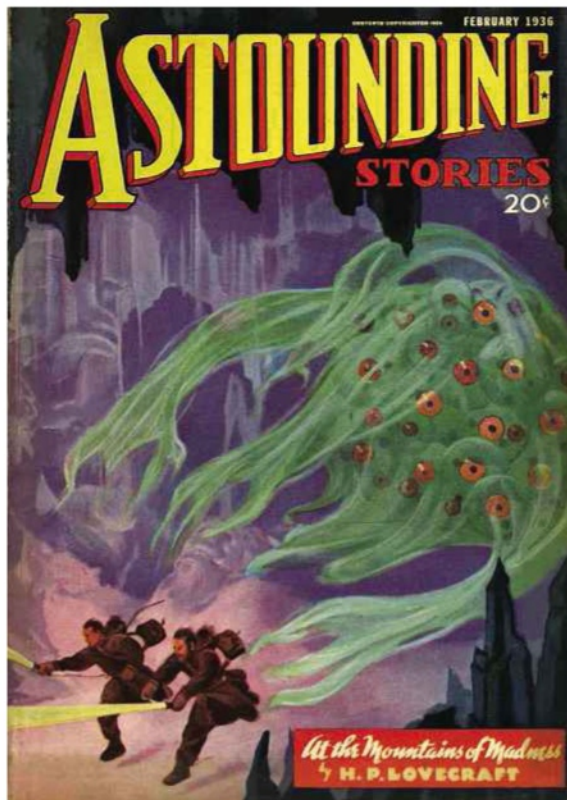
HP Lovecraft is a cult author. It's not just that he has legions of devoted and knowledgeable fans – there are actual religious cults based on his works. But Lovecraft stood against anything religious or supernatural. In spite of an undeserved reputation for being allied to the occult, Lovecraft was a powerful advocate of science – and he wrote science fiction, *not* supernatural horror.

This is important because Lovecraft deserves credit for wrenching horror into the modern world. Stephen King described him as the greatest writer of horror stories in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. His protoplasm-oozing stamp can be seen everywhere from the hordes of *The Walking Dead* to the slimy horrors of the *Alien* series and even the *Nemesis* ride at Alton Towers. *Doctor Who*, with its premise of hidden alien terrors stalking humans, is built on Lovecraftian foundations.

Lovecraft banished the darkness of superstition, in order to replace it with the terrifying light of scientific knowledge. His is a universe indifferent to human suffering.

But what about the groups who believe in the reality of Lovecraft's beings from other planes? British occultist Kenneth Grant matched Lovecraft's myths with established lore, then blended it with Aleister Crowley's work to create an unholy melange known as the Typhonian Cultus. In Chicago, voodoo practitioner Michael Bertiaux established a coven that claims to have made contact with the Lovecraft's aquatic Deep Ones at a lake in Wisconsin. The Esoteric Order of Dagon is based directly on Lovecraft's work, asserting that he unconsciously channelled cosmic forces.

Lovecraft would be appalled. In 1925, he wrote to fellow writer Clark Ashton Smith: "I am, indeed, an absolute materialist so far as actual belief goes; with not a shred of credence in any form of supernaturalism – religion, spiritualism, transcendentalism, metempsychosis, or immortality". He



## Cthulhu is an alien who just happens to look like a god

added, rather tellingly: "It may be, though, that I could get the germs of some good ideas from the current patter of the psychic lunatic fringe."

Cthulhu is an alien who happens to look like a deity to his insane worshippers. He is no more a god than any Pharaoh, just a powerful extraterrestrial who needs human assistance to awaken. The problem is that Lovecraft's powerful writing carries so much conviction. "This intellectual denial... is belied by the subjective certainty with which he wrote of such matters," insists Dagon's Frater Tenebrous.

ABOVE AND OPPOSITE: 1936 issues of *Astounding Stories* featuring Lovecraft's *At the Mountains of Madness* and "The Colour Out of Time".

But look closer and you can see how Lovecraft turned away from the supernatural trappings of earlier weird tales, the age-old themes of hauntings, witches' curses and pacts with the Devil, all fitting into a Christian worldview. Instead, Lovecraft populated his pantheon with horrors from modern science. Earlier works – Shelley's *Frankenstein*, Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* – had a scientific gloss, but Lovecraft plundered the latest astronomy, physics, biology and geology wholesale. Ghosts and ghouls belonged to a world of remote cottages, horse-drawn carriages and flickering oil lamps; their ecosystem was threatened by electric lighting, automobiles and the telephone. Lovecraft rejuvenated the genre by realising the potential of alien beings and science to occupy the niches vacated by ghosts and superstition.

In *At the Mountains of Madness*, scientists in the Antarctic accidentally defrost something dangerous. This initially appears to be a simple re-framing of a hundred earlier stories of the danger of disturbing tombs. However, the monster is not just a plot device, but an introduction into an entire alien world. In passing, Lovecraft appears to have originated the whole "Ancient Astronaut" genre.

Similarly, "The Shunned House" looks like a classic ghost story about a building whose inhabitants have had the life sucked out of them. But the narrator quashes the possibility of vampires early on, diagnosing: "certain unfamiliar and unclassified modifications of vital force and attenuated matter... operative through rare and unknown laws of atomic and electronic motion." Lovecraft's protagonist does not think of holy water or exorcism; anticipating *Ghostbusters* by six decades, he arms himself with a modified Crookes Tube, a cutting-edge device of the 1920s for producing X-rays and other hard radiation. When it fails to quell the menace, with predictably unfortunate consequences, our hero doesn't resort to a priest. Instead, he promptly orders "a pick-axe, a spade, a military gas-mask, and six carboys of sulphuric acid." This is a serious commitment to the materialist approach.

Lovecraft painstakingly reworked the supernatural into a scientific background. The menace in "Dreams of The Witch House" inhabits in an extradimensional space attached to the house. Such additional dimensions, a rich field for scientific speculation

in Lovecraft's time, were a recurrent theme in his work. They offer the possibility of whole new worlds tucked away nearby, but just out of our sight. (Current Superstring theory suggests that there are no less than 10 spatial dimensions – what terrors may lurk?).

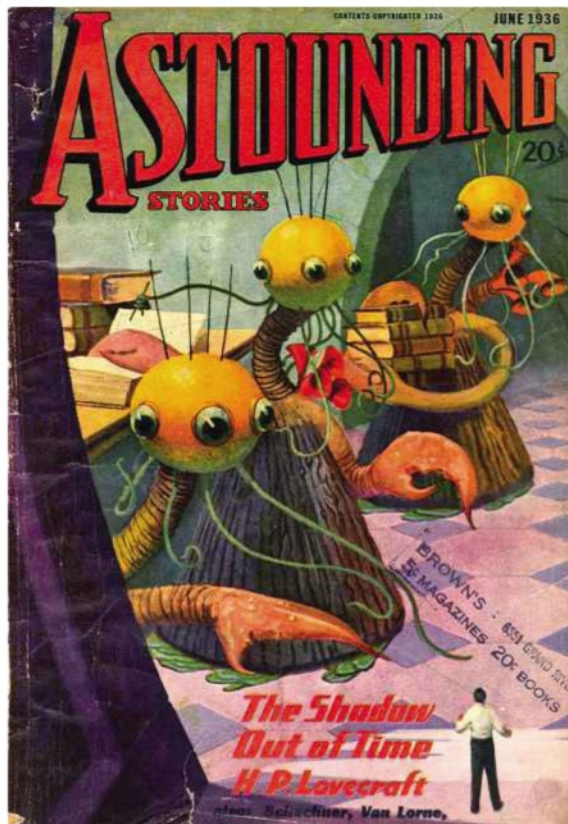
In "The Call of Cthulhu", the central horror looks like a resurgent ancient god, but is revealed to be a bizarre extraterrestrial linked to ancient sites. The plot involves thought-transference, a hot topic for scientific study before it was relegated to the fringe.

Lovecraft also deserves credit for upgrading zombies. Traditional zombies owed their un-life to voodoo and were brought back as placid slave labour. The real threat was the witch doctor. In his 1921 classic "Herbert West, Re-Animator", Lovecraft invoked modern medical technology to bring back the dead. The reanimated corpses are not the obedient slaves of voodoo lore, but howling, deranged flesh-eaters of a type instantly recognisable to any modern moviegoer. This is weird science, to be sure, but science rather than voodoo.

Lovecraft's scientific approach means his creations are, if anything, over-described. Traditional horror relies on creatures seen only in shadow, but Lovecraft sticks his monsters under a spotlight and dissects them with a biologist's eye. In "The Whisperer in Darkness", the extraterrestrial fungoid beings called Mi-Go are "pinkish things about five feet long; with crustaceous bodies bearing vast pairs of dorsal fins or membranous wings and several sets of articulated limbs, and with a sort of convoluted ellipsoid, covered with multitudes of very short antennæ, where a head would ordinarily be."

You can almost see the camera panning slowly across lovingly rendered CGI. Lovecraft's creatures are not two-dimensional plot devices, but N-dimensional beings with elaborate back-stories including history, biology, technology and culture. The Mi-Go hailed from a planet they called Yuggoth, which Lovecraft identified with the newly discovered Pluto. Various other planets and stars are also name-checked, testimony to his attachment to astronomy.

Lovecraft wrote science before he wrote fiction. At the age of eight, he 'published' a weekly newsletter called *The Scientific Gazette* written in pencil, producing 'editions' of four carbon copies for five years. He followed it with his own *Rhode Island Journal of Astronomy*, a combination of reports from Harvard University and



Lovecraft's observations from his own 2½-inch telescope, a gift from his mother. It ran four years and was published in issues of 25 copies. By the age of 16, Lovecraft had eight years of science reportage behind him, and was writing astronomy pieces for a real journal, the *Providence Tribune*. He followed this with an extensive monthly column for the *Providence Evening News*.

Although he speculated enthusiastically about life on other planets and other scientific topics, Lovecraft was scathing about pseudo-science. He wrote a vitriolic letter to the *Providence Sunday Journal*, attacking an article on the Hollow Earth theory. As an astronomer, he despised astrology, and was incensed when his astronomy column was replaced in 1914 by an astrology column. He wrote a series of attacks ("Science versus charlatany") some in the form of satirical astrological predictions ("May: superior conjunction of Mercury shows that weather will be much warmer than January...").

Lovecraft moved away from science writing into fiction, but collaborated with fellow arch-sceptic, Harry Houdini, ghost-writing an anti-astrology piece for him. Houdini had

attacked fake spiritualists in his book *A Magician Among The Spirits*, and the two planned a book together called *The Cancer Of Superstition*. The project was sadly halted by Houdini's sudden death in 1926.

Lovecraft worked with many other writers, including Ashton Smith and Robert E Howard, and allowed them to use Cthulhu and his other creations freely. But those who followed him did not share his values. It was his literary executor August Derleth who coined the term 'Cthulhu Mythos,' suggestive of ancient mythology. Derleth even invented a whole new class of benign Elder Gods to counterbalance dread Cthulhu, to create a traditional struggle of good versus evil. But in Lovecraft's universe there were not, and could not be, any such beings.

Lovecraft called his philosophy Cosmicism; others call it Cosmic Indifference. The Universe is vast, ruled by the laws of physics, and completely indifferent to anything as small and insignificant as mankind. There are no gods, benign or otherwise.

As has often been noted, the existence of supernatural horror also implies the existence of the opposing forces of good. If vampires exist, but can be repelled by a crucifix, then Christianity must be valid. If a demon possesses a child, there must also be angels. Director Stanley Kubrick remarked to Jack Nicholson that his movie *The Shining* was an optimistic work, because ghosts meant there was life after death (author Stephen King did not agree). Lovecraft's universe offers no such possibility of salvation.

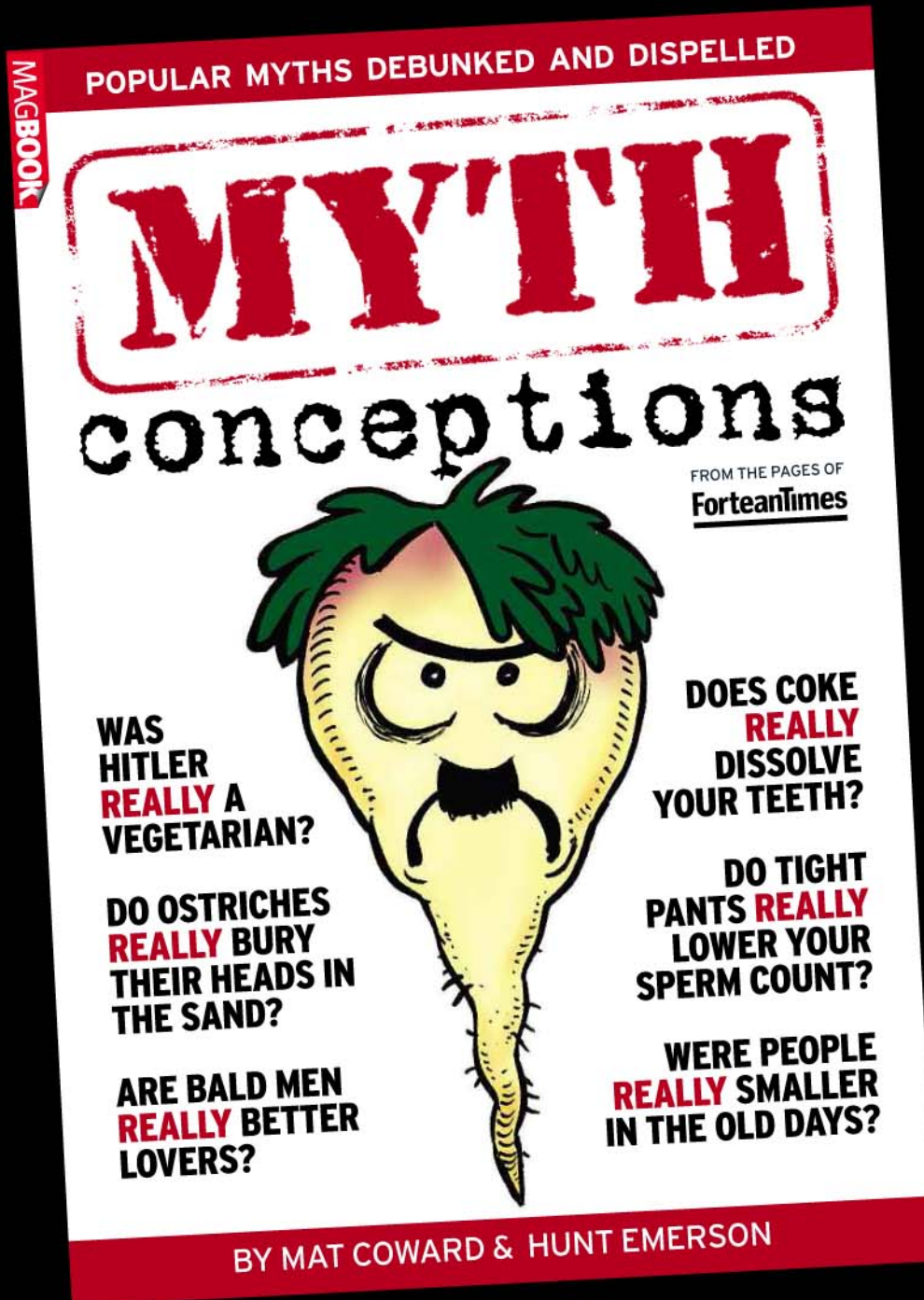
Lovecraft took an astronomer's view of the Universe, dealing in millions of years. Humanity was one of many transient intelligent species to inhabit the Earth, our era just another undistinguished layer of geological time. In his universe there are no such things as good, evil or morality, which he dismisses, in Michel Houellebecq's words, as "Victorian Fictions".

Lovecraft believed in science, but little else. There are explanations for all weird happenings. There may be Things Man Was Not Meant To Know, but they are discoverable – at a price. Unexplained phenomena are real and have a scientific basis, and if we investigate with enough determination we can find out what that is.

Of course the scientific answer may be a giant, malignant alien who will one day wake up and exterminate the human race. But you'd still want to find out... FT

*Shadows From Norwood* by David Hambling is a new collection of weird tales set mainly in the 1920s and 30s and drawing on the darker side of south London history. The seven interlocking stories of mystery and horror, including two novellas, are all part of a single narrative of cosmic proportions. The background is the Cthulhu Mythos, given a new and disturbing vitality with infusions of the very latest science. Available now for Amazon Kindle, Kobo and other e-readers.

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# reviews



## How to explode your tomato

A rant from the man who publicly (and understandably) blew up at his Scientology 'minders', a distressing childhood in the church and a benchmark reissued book on it

### The Church of Fear

Inside the Weird World of  
Scientology

John Sweeney

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and My Harrowing Escape

Jenna Miscavige Hill with Liza Pulitzer

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### Let's Sell These People A Piece of Blue Sky

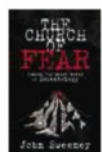
Hubbard, Dianetics and  
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Jon Attack

Richard Woods 2013; <https://www.createspace.com/4138771>

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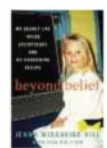
It may be necessary to remind any staff of the Church of Scientology (CoS) who happen to read *Fortean Times*, or their lawyers, that book reviews are classed as Fair Comment and are protected from libel action. Whether the criticisms of the Church in these books are accurate or not is for the books' authors to prove or the Church to disprove, and not for this reviewer to resolve. But you can take it as a given that CoS tends to deny just about every criticism made about it.

BBC *Panorama* journalist John Sweeney's "exploding tomato" incident is a salutary object lesson to any reporter. In 2007, while speaking to a senior CoS spokesman, he lost it completely and began bellowing at him,

spittle flying from his mouth. Caught on film by both *Panorama* and CoS, the incident could very easily have lost Sweeney his broadcasting career – but as he recounts in *The Church of Fear*, senior staff at the BBC watched the hours of footage leading up to his explosion and were able to see exactly how he was pushed to this point.

The two senior Scientologists who were his 'minders' (one of whom has now left the Church) knew exactly what buttons they were pressing. Part of their training is how to take control of any social interaction, how to manipulate the language that is used, and even how to not react when someone is screaming abuse at them.

*The Church of Fear* is a bit of a rant, but that's okay; Sweeney's simply telling the story that led up to his infamous TV moment. By his account it was the almost inevitable result of the amount of petty intimidation that he and his film crew had been subjected to, with CoS heavies turning up the moment he began interviewing former members, with detailed biographies of their 'crimes' and personal failings. CoS are quick to attack, it seems, but bridle the moment anyone turns even a candle's worth of spotlight on their own possible misdemeanours.



*Beyond Belief*, another very personal account, is completely different in tone and subject matter. Jenna Hill Miscavige is the niece of David Miscavige, the head of CoS. Her book tells the story of growing up in the movement, of seeing her parents for just a

### "Aged seven, Jenna signed a billion-year contract pledging her commitment to the Sea Org"

few hours every week when she was a young child, of the many courses, long hours of physical work and the responsibilities and the stresses she endured over the years. At the age of seven, she signed the billion-year contract pledging her commitment to the Sea Org, the inner core of full-time officers who run the Church.

The book documents her life from childhood through her teens in the intense atmosphere of major Scientology centres, her struggles to work through the endless courses, her problems with authority. Scientology is a very exacting religion; to progress you have to follow the 'Tech' exactly as prescribed by founder L Ron Hubbard and enforced by his successor, David Miscavige. There's no concept of grace or forgiveness; if you fail at anything, whether a course or your daily work, you've failed the Church, and you've also shown there's something at fault with you: you're covering something up, you're hiding resentment or rebellion against the Church. And if you step out of line in any way – including having a sexual relationship with your boyfriend – expect to be publicly shamed and punished.

*Beyond Belief* is a rare and often emotionally harrowing view of growing from childhood to adulthood within the Church of

Scientology. Eventually Jenna had had enough and left the Church, in itself a long and difficult process.



For years *A Piece of Blue Sky* has been the benchmark by which all other books on Scientology must be judged, but

because the author Jon Attack was prosecuted (and bankrupted) for one statement in the book, it's been out of print for years. Now Attack has reissued it with the one offending paragraph removed, but with all the cuts made to the original edition, some 60 important passages plus detailed source notes, restored.

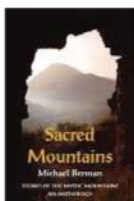
Attack was a member of the Church from 1974 to 1983. He tells his own story succinctly in the first 30-odd pages; the rest of the book is a detailed and thoroughly documented account of the life and career of Hubbard (especially the many disparities between CoS's hagiographic accounts of his life and the far less exciting reality, going from previously-unpublished extracts from his teenage diaries) and the development of the Church, especially its confrontations with the law. There's a thoroughly detailed account of the infiltration of US government offices and the theft of thousands of documents from them by the Church's intelligence branch, the Guardian's Office, culminating in the imprisonment of 11 Scientologists including Hubbard's own wife.

Two tactics appear over and over again in CoS's dealings with its perceived enemies. First, using

*Continued on page 60*

# Axis mundi and you

Mountains – long part of shamanic traditions – have figured in recent end-of-the-world cultist and UFO contactee narratives



## Sacred Mountains

Michael Berman

Mandrake of Oxford 2013

Pb, 240pp, £11.99, illus, ISBN 9781906958220

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £11.99

Somewhere in Fort's writings is a wry comment on the various values given by supposedly scientific measurement of the height above sea level of Mount Ararat. The big question is how the variations arose. In asking a similar question about reported variations of the speed of light in a vacuum – one of the key 'constants' in physics – Rupert Sheldrake (in his TED lecture; see FT302:14–15) gave a likely explanation. The differences arise because there are two methods involved: in the one most science is based upon, the value is fixed by definition; in the other, the value is derived from measurements and observations which, try as one might, cannot be guaranteed to be free of environmental variables however small.

My point is one also made by many quotations from mountaineers, artists, poets, folklorists, etc, used in this delightful book: that there are always two mountains, the one you can measure and the other, immeasurably more interesting and important, that has an impact upon your experience of it, mentally, spiritually, mystically and imaginatively. Those who face a mountain, in real life as well as in their imagination, speak of awe, fear, excitement, anticipation, inspiration, and even enlightenment. There is no escaping a direct relationship; the climb is as much an emotional

and spiritual journey as it is one of physical exertion. To see a mountain is to feel its call as your eye is inevitably drawn to its peak. It is a universal symbol of the *axis mundi*, linking Heaven and Earth.

Berman (1952–2013) was a teacher and writer mainly on folklore and shamanism, with a particular interest in those from the former Soviet state of Georgia – the ancient land of the Prometheus, Colchis and the Argonauts – famed for its mountain ranges with their own legends about Noah's Ark. It is perhaps inevitable then that Berman begins by stating that all his stories about sacred mountains "contain shamanistic elements".

The first 'typical' example he gives is from Armenia – on the southern border of Georgia – the oldest Christian country, where the indigenous people believe they are descendants of Noah's tribe – where there is a revival of Arardi shamanism. It was here, in 1921, that the nationalist hero Nzhdeh, who defended southern Armenia against invading Turks, was inspired by a vision of Vahagn, one of the most important deities in the pre-Christian Armenian pagan pantheon. Now, "Every year, a certain number of arordis," the folklorist Y Antonian tells him, "climb Mount Khustup to spend the night there in the hope of having a vision of Vahagn." This is significant, says Berman, because modern poets, artists and epic-singers are introducing such elements into their work. "Climbing Khustup," said Antonian, "is not just getting close to the centre of the Universe but also a reiteration of the First Contact with the Ancient Gods". What began as a neo-pagan movement expressing ethnic nationalism "seems to be developing into something quite different," notes Berman.

The towering peaks that feature in the stories anthologised here include Mt Elbrus in the Russian

Caucasus; Mt Sinai and other biblical mounts; Ararat in Turkey and several others in Armenia; Glastonbury Tor, Kanlaon in the Philippines, and the mountain under which the Pied Piper imprisoned the children of Hameln in mediæval lore. Other stories come from the folklore of China, Japan, Georgia, and the Plains Indians of North America; and all are supplemented with notes, commentary and references.

The lengthy closing example is about the founder of Hasidic Judaism, Rabbi Israel (1698–1760), also known as Baal Shem Tov (the 'Master of Good Name'), about whom there are many wondrous legends. Berman argues that Rabbi Israel's wonder-working, his naturalistic wisdom and simplicity and his withdrawal from society (from a small village in central Poland to the Carpathian mountains) put him squarely in the tradition of shamanic anchorites.

There can't be many countries, cultures or religions without a sacred mountain of their own. Much as I enjoyed Berman's selection – it is only a very small sample – I was left wanting to know much more. Besides all those who have, in ages past, gone up a mountain (even a symbolic one) for divination, prophecy, healing, or illumination, I was put in mind of the mountains that figure in many accounts of today's end-of-the-world cultists, millennialists, and UFO contactees and abductees. That surely puts them also in the general shamanic tradition – not just because they desire comfort and wisdom from their celestial deities, but because they also seek a magical transport for their ascent, the UFO.

Bob Rickard

## Fortean Times Verdict

INTRIGUING AND FASCINATING  
LOOK AT MYTHIC PEAKS

9

Continued from page 59

the law against them; Hubbard wrote back in the 1950s: "The purpose of the [law]suit is to harass and discourage rather than to win." Second, attack is the best form of defence. CoS rarely responds directly to any criticism; in Attack's words, "divert the critic, attack the source not the information". I've lost count of how many times CoS has told me that a particular critic (including Attack) has a criminal record so is untrustworthy; the fact that the criminal record comes from CoS pursuing them in court is ignored.

It's a shame that Attack didn't add a final chapter bringing this splendid book up to date. It would also have benefited from an index, which the original book had. But both criticisms are minor in comparison with the value of having this classic text available.

David V Barrett

## Fortean Times Verdict

CHURCH OF FEAR: HOW THE CoS  
EXPLODED A TOMATO

6

BEYOND BELIEF: THE HARDSHIPS OF  
A SCIENTOLOGY CHILDHOOD

9

BLUE SKY: CLASSIC WORK ON  
HUBBARD AND CoS BACK IN PRINT

9

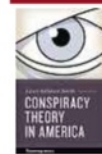
## Conspiracy Theory in America

Lance deHaven-Smith

University of Texas Press 2013

Hb, 204pp, illus, \$20, hard back

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £13.99



Glenn Beck, perhaps the best known American conservative conspiracy theorist, writes books, runs a national radio

programme and used to have a Fox TV show. Beck recently announced that there is a conspiracy to label him a conspiracy theorist. It is that use of the terms conspiracy theory and theorist as denigration, as a means of dismissing almost anything or anyone challenging the political and intellectual status quo, which interests Professor deHaven-Smith, not the wacky stuff which people like Beck believe.

He traces the use of the expression 'conspiracy theorist' back to a 1967 memorandum issued by the CIA to all its agents and assets with advice on how to

respond to critics of the Warren Commission's verdict on the assassination of JFK: namely that those criticising the Commission's conclusion should be described as 'conspiracy theorists'. (Another road that leads to or from that day in Dallas.) DeHaven-Smith notes that this turned out to be "one of the most successful propaganda initiatives of all time"; the "conspiracy-theory label has become a powerful smear that, in the name of reason, civility, and democracy, pre-empts public discourse, reinforces rather than dissolves disagreements, and undermines popular vigilance against abuses of power."

Professor deHaven-Smith argues that the authors of the American constitution and its subsequent amendments were well aware of the possibility of political conspiracy and created a political system of checks and balances in the hope of preventing it. Thus, he claims, "conspiracy beliefs about public officials constitute a separate and distinct strand of political thought that has been part of American public discourse throughout its history"; and so "the post-WWII literature disparaging the popularity of 'conspiracy theories' and linking them to 19th-century ethnocentrism and bigotry is an inaccurate and misleading account of American history."

So far so good and interesting. The problem is that he thinks "conspiracy theories are essentially 'faction theories'"; but this is only true of what are now thought of as event conspiracy theories, such as those which emerged after the bombing of the Boston marathon. The new term he proposes to neutralise the chilling effects of the label conspiracy theory, the SCAD, or state crime against democracy, even if widely adopted, has nothing to say about some of the most powerful and persistent conspiracy theories – most obviously those about the Jews – which are not event conspiracy theories, or 'faction theories'.

Robin Ramsay

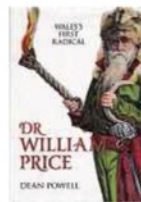
### Fortean Times Verdict

STARTS WELL, BUT THE AUTHOR'S TERM 'SCAD' IS PROBLEMATIC

8

# A litigious radical life

A surfeit of irrelevant detail and a lack of fact-checking spoil a biography of a Welsh arch-druid and advocate of cremation



## Dr William Price

Wales's First Radical

Dean Powell

Amberley Publishing 2012

Hb, 411pp, illus, notes, £25.00, ISBN 9781445603247

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £22.50

Eccentrics are great for anecdotes or maybe to share a pint with, but don't necessarily make the best neighbours. Judging from Dean Powell's latest book, Dr William Price proves this rule: with his wandering herd of goats and litigious nature, Dr Price was not someone with whom it was easy to share a common boundary. Yet there is so much more to him than this. Self-declared Arch-druid, Chartist, accomplished surgeon, vegetarian and pioneer of cremation, Price took many roles in his 92 years. Biographies are hard to write well; it takes a good eye to tease out the character of the subject and avoid overwhelming the story with too much information. Unfortunately, this is where Powell's book, in my opinion, falls down.

Powell undoubtedly has an in-depth knowledge of Price, yet he seems to want to show how much he knows not only about the doctor, but also about adjacent topics. In the chapter discussing the future doctor's apprenticeship with Dr Evan Edwards, Powell outlines the history of Edwards's grandfather, uncle and brothers, which add nothing to the story of Dr William Price, but disrupt the flow of the narrative. If this detour had been a one-off, it would probably not have merited a mention, but they occur throughout the book. Price's life was complicated; adding further complexity was unnecessary.

Powell is not a bad writer and does well in the passages concentrating on the character of Price the Doctor. If the chapters had been arranged thematically rather than chronologically, these other discussions might not have jarred so much.

There are other problems. On page 66, during a discussion about the Celts, Powell states: "When the Roman armies invaded, the sophisticated tribal Celtic societies that had been the predominant civilisation of northern Europe had survived attacks by the Jutes, Angles and Saxons. Those on the isles of Britain began to migrate to Ireland, Scotland, Wales and Cornwall." Wrong. The Jutes, Angles and Saxons did not exist as recognised groups until the 5th century AD, certainly not prior to the Roman invasion. This may be seen as nitpicking, but I have a serious concern as a reviewer, in this case with nearly 20 years' experience in archaeology: if this simple fact is wrong, can I trust the other evidence that Powell presents about Dr Price's life? A mistake such as this also suggests a lack of fact-checking and proof-reading, especially disappointing as Amberley is a specialist publisher of history books.

Dr Price's various court cases are well referenced, but other elements of Powell's discussion are uneven. On page 159 he asserts that "Litigation is frequently associated with schizophrenia, and in it Doctor Price may have found the means to express his paranoia." This is a dubious claim to make without

supporting evidence.

The main focus of the book is the year 1884 and Dr Price's attempts to cremate his dead baby son, Iesu Grist. This chapter provides an insight into changing attitudes toward the disposal of the dead and the legal process surrounding it. Powell suggests that the octogenarian Dr Price had not intended to be a trailblazer for a change in funerary practices. Rather, he was doing what he always did, which was whatever he thought fitted best with his own world view. (It is interesting to note that even in the 19th century juries delivered verdicts that led to the validity of trial by jury being questioned.)

I've argued that large sections of the book obscure Dr Price by diverging from his story. To contradict myself for a moment, the discussion would have benefited from the reaction of the crowds, gathered at East Caerlan, to the sight of Price's partially cremated son being put into the context of wider Victorian attitudes to dead children.

For his 92 years, whether wearing his distinctive Druidic outfits and fox skin hat, as a trusted surgeon or a serial plaintiff, Dr William Price cut a formidable figure throughout 19th century Wales.

I can't help feeling that his story would have benefited from a more focused book and a good proof-read.

Steve Toase

### Fortean Times Verdict

YOU CAN'T SEE THE WOOD FOR THE TREES IN THIS OVER-DETAILED BIO

5

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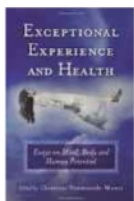
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# Good for you!

## Clinical parapsychologists are needed for people with exceptional experiences



### Exceptional Experience and Health

Essays on Mind, Body and Human Potential

Ed: Christine Simmonds-Moore

McFarland & Company 2012

Pb, 312pp, illus, notes, bib, ind, \$55.00, ISBN 9780786459667

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKCLUB PRICE £49.50

In this age of allergies, superbugs and chronic stress, one may be forgiven for thinking that health is an 'exceptional experience'. However, Christine Simmonds-Moore of the University of Georgia means something different – the levitating woman on the cover is a hint. In this collection of 11 papers, she brings together research to investigate the proposition that anomalous, paranormal, possibly even fortean, experience can have a positive effect on individual health.

This pushes the limits of the health profession's ideas about the mind and body, and challenges the dominant biomedical model of disease. Despite a growing body of research into the therapeutic value of spirituality, religion and alternative therapies, clinicians still largely categorise exceptional experiences as pathological. One of the many aims of this book is to change that situation.

The first part deals with 'Belief, Mind and Body'; the second with 'Exceptional Experiences and Mental Health'. In the first part we find chapters on the mind-body connection, altered states of consciousness, energy healing such as Johrei and Reiki, and the role of religious beliefs in coping with traumatic events. Professor John Gruzelier,

a pioneer in psychophysiology, reports on his experiments using hypnosis, self-hypnosis and energy healing in cases of exam stress, breast cancer and HIV. He found all of these interventions to be beneficial, with Johrei being the most effective overall. He concludes that: "A growing body of validation studies is being published on a range of healing methods, not all of which can be accounted for by Western neurobiology and cannot easily be dismissed by skeptics". And Gruzelier is there at the forefront.

The second part looks at the developing field of clinical parapsychology, although contributors often shy away from the term because of New Age connotations. As universities establish centres for research into parapsychology, academics increasingly find themselves called on to advise people who come to them with experiences of the paranormal. Think Dr Douglas Monaghan in the BBC series *Sea of Souls*. The foremost real-life equivalent is Germany's Institut für Grenzgebiete der Psychologie und Psychohygiene (Institute for Frontier Areas of Psychology and Mental Health). Edinburgh University's Koestler Parapsychology Unit is often called upon to perform the same function. The parapsychologists are under pressure to develop clinical skills as they, and not the psychiatrists, become the first point of contact for people having exceptional experiences.

It is encouraging to see such breadth of research into this field of research brought together in one volume. It is scholarly and not an easy read, and why should it be? But for anyone wanting to stay abreast of this exciting new research area it is indispensable.

Leo Ruickbie

### Fortean Times Verdict

DECENT GUIDE TO A FASCINATING NEW FIELD OF RESEARCH

9

## UFOs and Government

A Historical Inquiry

Michael Swords & Robert Powell

Anomalist Books 2012

Pb, 580pp, notes, illus, \$29.95, ISBN 1933665580

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKCLUB PRICE £22.00



*UFOs and Government* comes out of an effort headed by Michael Swords, former editor of CUFOS's *Journal of*

*UFO Studies*, and Robert Powell, MUFON's investigations director. Other contributors include Clas Svahn, Vicente-Juan Ballester Olmos, Bill Chalker, Barry Greenwood, and Jan Aldrich – cautious, critically-minded fellows all, and surely none more learned in the arcana of official UFO history. (Full disclosure: I contributed the foreword but did not otherwise participate in the project.)

Perhaps two-thirds of the book addresses the US government's response – mostly blinkered and blundering – to the phenomenon. The text sticks closely to what can be demonstrated empirically through declassified documents, public records and interviews with participants. When speculation is inescapable, it is identified as such. This is not an exercise in conspiracy theory, which alone renders it something of a novelty. The very first UFO books, published in 1950, grew out of the notion – at the time not inherently unreasonable – of a cover-up. Thousands of volumes would follow suit in varying shades of paranoia. Eventually, through the Freedom of Information Act and other sources, a more nuanced understanding of official policy emerged, not so melodramatic but more reflective of urgent, complicated strategic priorities in which UFOs played little role.

In unpacking that reality, *UFOs and Government* shows that the US military and intelligence community soon came to see UFO reports as a distraction from its main business – the Cold War – and sought to discredit them by any means necessary, which meant via tossed-off prosaic explanations and concentrated

ridicule, aided and abetted by credulous, incurious press elites. There are few heroes in this story next to numerous villains, most prominently two bullying blowhards, astronomer Donald Menzel and physicist Edward Condon, who sought to discourage unofficial inquiries by colleagues who might have provided a compelling counter-narrative. With the closing of Project Blue Book in 1969, no official agency in America deals with sightings.

What, however, of the Roswell incident? The book handles the question as cogently as any treatment could: with a proper dose of agnosticism. It notes the implausibilities of the official explanation – a weather balloon employed in secret intelligence surveillance – while stressing the absence of any evidence that the alleged recovery of an alien spacecraft affected official policy, which it would have pushed in a wholly different direction from the one it took. While interesting questions remain, for all practical purposes the Roswell event, whatever its nature, vanished into invisibility and, except as a free-floating curiosity, plays no detectable role in history, ufological or mainstream.

Elsewhere, chapters consider official ufology in Australia, France, Spain and Sweden, with briefer treatments of the story in Belgium, the Soviet Union and Brazil. The most sophisticated and productive project was conducted in France, where UFOs were treated as a scientific, not a national security, issue.

This is a work of scholarship, and it reads like one: the pages do not always turn quickly. It's intended for educated readers looking for a credible source of information on a matter ordinarily filtered through extremes of belief and disbelief. It exposes an odd and troubled relationship, one characterised more by frustration and irresolution than by secret knowledge. *UFOs and Government* is, no doubt about it, a seminal volume in the UFO literature.

Jerome Clark

### Fortean Times Verdict

NOT AN EASY READ, BUT GRIPPING AND WELL WORTH THE EFFORT

9



# ALSO RECEIVED

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

## Making Sense of Near-Death Experiences

*Eds. Mahendra Perera, Karuppiah Jagadheesan & Anthony Peake*

Jessica Kingsley 2012

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

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 as “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.

## Those Amazing Newfoundland Dogs

*Jan Bondeson*

CFZ Press 2012

Pb, 252pp, illus, refs, £14.99, ISBN 9781905723966

Regular *FT* contributor Jan Bondeson has revealed himself as something of a dog fancier in his recent articles, and following books on canine curiosities and Greyfriars Bobby comes a further volume with a doggy theme. Promising to “resurrect the forgotten history of the Newfoundland dog”, this is of less obvious interest to fortians than its two predecessors; but while its primary readership will most likely be the proud owners of these magnifi-

cent animals, there’s plenty here to detain those whose interests tend more to historical oddities than doggy doings. Given the breed’s reputation for bravery and intelligence, it’s not surprising to find a wealth of material devoted to the many remarkable deeds performed by Newfoundlands down the centuries – particularly rescues from seas and rivers of drowning humans (and sometimes other dogs). Nowadays, such reports would make the Strange Days section of *FT*. With his usual diligence, Bondeson has combed newspapers from the mid-18th century onwards in search of such tales, and (as with his treatment of Greyfriars Bobby) is alert to the ways in which the 19th-century ‘cult’ of the Newfoundland (fuelled by famous owners like Lord Byron, who built a notably elaborate memorial to his deceased dog ‘Boatswain’) sometimes tended to embroider, or even invent, sensational stories. There are chapters, too, on acting Newfoundlands (including the celebrated Carlo) and spectral dogs, some of which share interesting characteristics with the ‘Black Dogs’ of East Anglian lore. One’s only quibbles would be the poor reproduction of some fascinating historical material and some slapdash subbing and proofing.

## A Slap in the Face

**Why Insults Hurt – And Why They Shouldn’t**

*William B Irvine*

Oxford University Press 2013

Hb, 253pp, refs, bib, ind, £21.95, ISBN 9780199934454

The idea for this book about – not of – insults arose when William B Irvine, a professor of philosophy, was researching the Stoic philosophers. He suggests that their philosophy conferred a high level of self-esteem, a secure self-image and hence an immunity to insults: they responded with “insult pacifism”. Others took different tacks: the Cynic philosopher Diogenes was, apparently, a master of the chiasmic counterinsult – turning the

insult back on the aggressor – and Rostand’s *Cyrano de Bergerac* provides a list of glittering self-directed insults against which the original barb pales. In Turkey, eight–14-year-old lads play a game in which all the responses have to rhyme with the original insult, and the Eskimos of the Central Arctic have duels, in which two people exchange humorous sung insults. Inability to respond amusingly (or

at all), in both cases, diminishes the loser’s masculinity. American teenagers in the 1960s played a game in which they insulted their opponent’s mother. Samuel Johnson understood it perfectly: to insult is “to treat with insolence or contempt; [...] to triumph over.” The Stoics’ insult pacifism is hugely appealing, as is the author’s description of his attempt to become more Stoical.

## FORTEAN FICTION

### Whitstable

*Stephen Volk*

Spectral Press (spectralpress.wordpress.com), 2013

Pb, 144pp, £12.99, ISBN 9780957392729



It’s 1971, and British actor Peter Cushing sits in his cottage on the seafront at Whitstable, curtains drawn against the winter light, unable to face the simplest of everyday tasks. His existence has been shattered by the death of his beloved wife and soul mate Helen; as the phone rings unanswered and unread film scripts pile up around him, the usually fastidious Cushing is unshaven and unkempt, looking more like the lonely old widower Grimmsdyke he would later play in the Amicus *Tales from the Crypt* than the elegant Baron Frankenstein of his earlier Hammer films. He has considered suicide, but his faith, and Helen’s wishes, rule it out; like the narrator of Beckett’s *Unnameable*, he can’t go on, but he must go on, no matter how meaningless and agonising it may be.

Help, of an unexpected sort, arrives in the form of a chance meeting with a young boy called Carl who believes Cushing to be the vampire hunter Van Helsing. For the boy, there is no split between film and reality, and Cushing in real life is indistinguishable from his heroic screen alter ego. For the actor, the disjunction is total, the impossibility of living up to the demands of fiction a torment. But Carl needs his expertise; convinced his mother’s boyfriend, who ‘visits him at night’, is a vampire, he attempts to enlist an initially reluctant and then appalled Cushing to slay the monster.

Stephen Volk will be best known to *FT* readers for the classic mockumentary *Ghostwatch* and his other screen work. His first novella is equally unconventional; while it has its chilling moments, it’s less a horror story than a moving meditation on loss and heroism, and the ways in which the illusions of cinema can act both as an ironic counterpoint to ‘real life’ and a set of sustaining myths in the midst of its trials. The touching portrait Volk draws of Cushing – a genuine hero to his legions of fans – rings completely true, as does the evocation of a vanished age of scares (choice details include Denis Gifford books and Roger Delgado’s Master on the front of the *Radio Times*). Horror aficionados will enjoy the film references and the vintage local colour will please Whitstable residents past and present, but it’s the warmth and humanity at the heart of this dark tale that really count. Highly recommended.

David Sutton

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



### The Act of Killing

Dir Joshua Oppenheimer, Denmark/Norway/UK 2012  
On UK release from 28 June

*The Act of Killing* is one of the most astonishing documentaries I've ever seen. Directed by Texan filmmaker Joshua Oppenheimer, it tells the story of a group of Indonesian gangsters and their slaughter of Communists, ethnic Chinese and intellectuals during a shockingly bloody period of Indonesian history. Between the years 1965-68, anywhere between 500,000 and one million people were murdered by beheading, strangulation by wire, beatings and many other, more inventive, methods, at the behest of the ruling military leaders.

The killers are asked to recount what happened, using whatever style of film they like; the result is a series of mesmerising, and at times surreal, scenes that run the gamut from educative, moving, depressing, terrifying to, surprisingly, at times comical. Film noir, fantasy and horror are some of the different generic modes used to show the torture and execution of the victims, while images of a hefty gangster in flamboyant dancing girl garb are particularly striking.

The most interesting character in the film is Anwar Congo, the leader of a death squad who personally killed 1,000 people and looks disconcertingly like Nelson Mandela. A slim, dapper man, we hear how he has been affected both physically and mentally by

what he did, and he has a key role in the startling ending of the film (which I won't give away). A particularly affecting scene features him playing the part of a victim being tortured and having a wire wrapped around his neck and pulled, execution style. He's visibly broken by it.

The banality, boasting, crudeness and misogyny of these men – feared as well as admired on the streets and in the media – and the fact that the families of the murdered are still unable to make much of a protest, speaks mountains about the contemporary political climate in the country. The perpetrators have no fear they will be prosecuted and the crimes are largely glossed over to this day.

People speak of man's inhumanity to man: unfortunately, this film shows that the reasons we find for carrying out murderous acts – whether in the form of wars, uprisings or coups – are all too human. As is the suffering inflicted on the victims, their families and even some of the murderers themselves. When you leave the cinema after watching this film, the world will look a little darker than it was before you went in; but it's a film that everyone should see. And hopefully it will help create some change in attitudes in Indonesia.

Julie McNamee

#### Fortean Times Verdict

SURREAL, SHOCKING AND ALSO TRUE – SEE IT!

9

### The ABCs of Death

Dir various, US 2013  
Monster Pictures, £12.99 (DVD)

This might be, as has been claimed, the most ambitious horror anthology ever made; on the other hand, if one wished to produce a film that was fragmentary, diffuse and without any sign of governing intelligence, then there might be no better way (though probably some easier ones) than to give 26 different directors from 15 different countries a letter of the alphabet and invite each of them to make a short film with complete artistic freedom, the only conditions being that the film's title begins with the letter assigned and that the subject is death.

The results are predictably unpredictable, taking in near-traditional genre fare, handheld mockumentary, artsy slow-burners (if anything can be said to burn slowly in five minutes) and various styles of animation. Some films tell a straightforward story, some are oblique experiments. Some films work, some don't. Nearly all tend toward the set-up/punchline structure of the (sick) joke. As you'd expect, there are gems and clunkers, although the latter outweigh the former. Offerings from the Americas are numerous but forgettable, with below-par efforts from Mexico, Chile, the US and Canada. Jon Schnepf's *WTF!* is an honourable and truly bonkers exception that lives up to its name,

and Marcel Samiento's *Dogfight* (though it teeters right on the edge of looking like an expensive Guinness advert) is visually arresting. Europe provides lame entries from Spain, Serbia and the UK (Ben Wheatley, Simon Rumley and Jake West all disappoint) and only Lee Hardcastle's brilliant *Toilet*, a gleefully gory claymation nightmare, lingers in the memory. Toilets figure a lot, in fact, revealing a scatological undercurrent running through the film; Ti West's *Miscarriage* is pointless, Anders Morgenthaller's *Klutz* (about an unflushable sort of brilliant.

Turning East, one is reminded (no less than three times) that the Japanese sense of humour is not as that of other nations (Noburu Iguchi's *Fart* plumbs, as it were, the depths) but we also get Thai whimsy (a parrot that spills the beans on an unfaithful lover) and a disturbing oddity from Indonesia, Timo Tjahjanto's *Libido*.

This is perfect film festival fare – it reputedly went down a treat with fans at Frightfest – but makes for somewhat wearing viewing at home, where the stop-start structure becomes enervating, the persistently jokey tone wears thin and the attempts of 26 different directors to evade the real subject starts to feel, oddly, a bit samey.

David Sutton

#### Fortean Times Verdict

A CURATE'S EGG OF A FILM FOR INDIE HORROR FANS

5

**Journeyman**

Dir various, US 2007  
 Mediumrare, £29.99 (DVD)

San Francisco newspaper reporter Dan Vasser (Kevin McKidd) suddenly finds himself thrown into the past – five, 10, 15 years earlier. He encounters someone who, he discovers when he gets back to the present, had died or disappeared or got involved in crime. On successive visits to different years in the past, each time meeting the same person, he is able to change something in their life so that by the present day they are alive and well and useful members of society. For everyone else, the new history is what happened; only Dan remembers the earlier version, before he intervened.

Dan's wife Kate (Gretchen Egolf) becomes suspicious of his vanishings and reappearances, but eventually accepts what is happening to him – though she's not happy when she discovers he's meeting his former fiancée Livia (Moon Bloodgood), who they'd all thought was killed in a plane crash 10 years earlier; it turns out that she's a time traveller as well. To add to the relationship tangle, back when Dan had been engaged to Livia his detective brother Jack (Reed Diamond) was going out with Kate; he still feels protective of her, and suspects that Dan's increasingly erratic behaviour means he's becoming mentally unbalanced. Meanwhile, Dan's job as a journalist is at risk because he's spending more time tracking down people he's met in the past than meeting deadlines.

And that's the story of *Journeyman* – not just of the first episode, but of the whole series, which aired in 2007. It slowly begins to ask questions and develop possibilities somewhere after the halfway point, but it's only in the last two or three episodes that the story even begins to think about starting to get going – and then it comes to an end. One wonders whether, if the axe hadn't fallen at episode 13 and it had been granted a full season of 22 episodes, the series's story might still have been fumbling around by episode 19 or 20.

Even one of the writers, in a documentary on the DVD, accepts

**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](http://www.theflicksthatchurchforgot.com))

**SPIDER BABY**

Dir Jack Hill, US 1968  
 Arrow Films, £15.99 (Blu-ray)

**POSSESSION**

Dir Andrzej Zulawski, W Germany 1981  
 Second Sight, £15.99 (Blu-ray)

The horror genre is often accused of being a bit, well, generic. Yet every now and again, it really does throw out the proverbial curveball. This month, we look at two examples of horror from left-field.

First up: *Spider Baby* – a wonderfully unhinged, gothic curio from cult director Jack Hill. Made in 1968, the film was stupidly shelved and largely ignored until given a new life during the Home Video boom. Lon Chaney Jr (in one of his last ever roles) plays Bruno, the kindly guardian of three orphaned siblings. They're suffering from "Merrye Syndrome" – a condition which causes the evolutionary process to reverse. It's a disease that will eventually kill them, but not before turning them completely nuts. Their mental state isn't helped by some distant relatives turning up with their lawyer to stake a claim on the Merrye estate.

It's not the easiest of films to describe. But if you mash

up *The Munsters* with the (as then unmade) *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, you're almost there. But it's more than that. It's funny and creepy and altogether kooky (I snorted with laughter when one character asked, "Are you really a Wolf-Man fan, Anne?"). But just when I least expected it, I was moved to tears. I'm thinking particularly of a scene with Lon Chaney Jr as he comforts the murderous daughters. Despite the things they do they are, after all, suffering from a disease and are hardly evil. Early in the film Chaney assures them: "Just because something isn't good, doesn't make it bad." How profound is that?

Oddly enough, the idea of sticking in a relationship with someone who insists on doing 'very bad things' is also the central idea of Andrzej Zulawski's *Possession*, also released on Blu-ray. But you probably won't be chuckling through this one. This is arthouse horror at its scary, baffling and repulsive best. Faced with his wife's infidelity, Sam Neil fights to save his marriage. But in the process they both tumble into a psychotic nightmare. What I love about *Possession* is its intensity, most clearly



communicated through Isabelle Adjani's astonishing, exhausting performance as Anna, the 'troubled' wife.

Set against the unusual backdrop of the Berlin Wall, *Possession* is a film about divides and how we long to break through them, but often can't. Absurdly finding itself listed as a 'Video Nasty', the film itself became a line not many viewers were willing to cross. But if you have the emotional stomach for it, throw yourself in – because there are dark and thoughtful riches to be found here.

Both films are released on Blu-ray in cracking transfers and with a raft of absorbing extras.

**Fortean Times Verdict**  
 TWO VERY DIFFERENT  
 HORROR CURVEBALLS **9/9**



that things don't get going until the eighth episode: "For me that's when the show starts to kick off." But that's far too late. Creator/producer Kevin Falls (*The West Wing*) seems to think it was an advantage that he had no background whatsoever in science fiction when a network told him they'd like a time travel show – but if he had, he might have realised that if you want to keep your audience interested, both writers and characters need to start asking questions when things first start getting weird, not wait till over halfway through the series.

The biggest question is barely even raised: who or what is responsible for Dan's time travelling, with his "mission" to save or sort out the lives of specific individuals? God? Aliens? The Universe needing to rebalance itself? Someone from the future wanting to change the past? Why single out these particular people to help rather than others? How come both Dan and his former fiancée are time travellers? Why does she keep appearing at the same times and places that he does? Why does he only travel backwards from his present day, while she travels forward from hers? Why does Dan only travel within his own lifetime, and within San Francisco, where he lives and works?

But one of the biggest questions of all is one that beggars viewer credulity. How is time-travelling Dan able to meet people close to him – Kate, Jack and others – in the past, on one occasion moments after they've been speaking to the Dan of their own time, without them noticing that he's suddenly 10 years older? This is symptomatic of the whole series: it just hasn't been thought through.

Even as a love triangle with a twist, which (from the documentary) is how it seems the creator, producers and writers originally saw the show, it fails to satisfy because the main characters rarely rise above the one-dimensional. In a story which focuses almost entirely on one man you need a strong, interesting lead character, and Dan isn't, particularly. Nor are the four or five people immediately around him. There's little to care about with any of them, or their relationship with each other.

A shame. An interesting premise gone to waste through unimaginative handling, s-l-o-w plot development and a failure to ask some very basic questions.

David V Barrett

### Fortean Times Verdict

ROUTINE TIME TRAVEL STORY FAILS TO CHALLENGE

5

## Dead End Drive-In

Dir Trenchard-Smith, Australia 1986

Arrow Video £15.99 (DVD)

Just because a film is endorsed by Quentin Tarantino doesn't necessarily mean it's any good; does he even believe it? Who knows?

In this case, the Tarantino 'brand name' is slapped on a cheap *Mad Max*-meets-*Grease* rip-off that never even got a UK release. Ned Manning (an actor so esoteric he doesn't have an IMDB page) plays the unfortunately named Crabs, while his beautiful girlfriend Carmen is Natalie McCurry, a girl self-aware enough to jack in this difficult acting lark not long after to take up modelling, becoming Miss Australia in 1989.

The film is set in a post-apocalyptic future (which, for the record, looks exactly like 1980s Sydney), where aspiring big-haired actors drive '56 Chevys to a thumping soundtrack of dated drum machines in a futile hunt for a decent script. Some of them end-up stuck in a drive-in movie theatre, which turns out to be a sort of concentration camp for society's undesirables; it looks just like the hippy village on Ibiza to me.

While it would like to be *A Clockwork Orange* (or even *The Great Escape*), the film's greatest debt is to the *Mad Max* trilogy (1979-1985), then recently completed; it's not often that you can say that a film needs Mel Gibson to elevate it from the level of a crap B-movie, but this cult turkey suggests that indeed might be the case.

The press release informs us that *Dead End Drive-In* has been "ignored, misunderstood and reviled by virtually everyone." There is a reason for this.

Tim Weinberg

### Fortean Times Verdict

CULT DOESN'T NECESSARILY MEAN GOOD...

4

## GAMES

### BIOSHOCK INFINITE

Irrational Games/2K Games, £34.99 (PC, Xbox360, PS3)



In development, *BioShock Infinite* was known as 'Project Icarus', and once the game's prologue is concluded it's easy to see why: Columbia, the city in the air with its massive dirigibles, vertiginous rail rides and gorgeous Steampunk environments, is stunning to look at. What will be familiar to players of the previous two games are its core elements of wacky weaponry, pick-me-up utilities and psychokinetic powers. As disgraced former Pinkerton man Booker DeWitt, much fun is to be had chopping and changing those powers and weaponry to combat the assorted AI hurled at you. But what really grabs the attention is the sophistication of the storyline, taking in xenophobia, racial segregation, sexism, the rebellious Vox Populi and Father Zerkow Comstock, beloved Founding Father of this dystopian city in the sky. Comstock claims to have founded Columbia in the spirit of 'exceptionalism' as a result of a vision given to him by an archangel. Thus, Columbia floats with its mad figurehead in the clouds, a world unto itself, where Lincoln is reviled and John Wilkes Booth hailed as a hero by at least one cult group. Booker's task is to rescue Elizabeth, held captive her whole life by Comstock; well, it's all rather more complicated than that, to say the least, as you jaunt from one alternative reality to the next through time-space fabric tears which Elizabeth can channel, leaving hordes of eviscerated AI baddies in your wake. The ending is a killer, too. Irrational's Ken Levine has drawn upon his former experience in the classic *System Shock*; only, this time around, the psychological nightmare is experienced in garishly beautiful daylight. Perhaps it doesn't add much to the previous two outings, but a combination of tactical shooter and compelling storyline keeps the fun and fascination quota as high as the game's beautiful, nightmarish city in the sky. **Nick Cirkovic 9/10**

### METRO: LAST LIGHT

4A Games/Deep Silver, £24.99 (PC), £34.99 (Xbox360, PS3)



This highly anticipated sequel to 2010's splendidly atmospheric, challenging and sometimes downright scary *Metro: 2033* picks up the post-apocalyptic story precisely where the first game left it: Artyom has saved the subterranean survivors hanging on in Moscow's labyrinthine Metro system from the mysterious menace of the Dark Ones but now becomes embroiled in an all too human conflict as the underground's rival factions jostle for position before a full-scale war kicks off. There are still monsters and mutants galore – especially whenever the game takes you to the inhospitable, blasted city surface – but much of your time is taken up with sneaking into, or fighting your way out of, the strongholds of the various Communist or Fascist groups seeking to dominate the Metro. This makes for a strong, if sometimes confusing, storyline connecting the game's various levels and offers bags of opportunity for conjuring the kind of supremely atmospheric and detailed environments that made the original such a stand-out. If there's a sense of disappointment, it's that the game (antithesis of the equally bleak but free-roaming *S.T.A.L.K.E.R* series) is (literally, at times) a shooter-on-rails, so linear that you sometimes feel more like a passive observer than an active participant in events. Nevertheless, this is a hugely accomplished, beautifully paced roller-coaster ride through the decaying stations and tunnels of a nightmare world – one evoked with such skill that you'll want to return. **DS 8/10**

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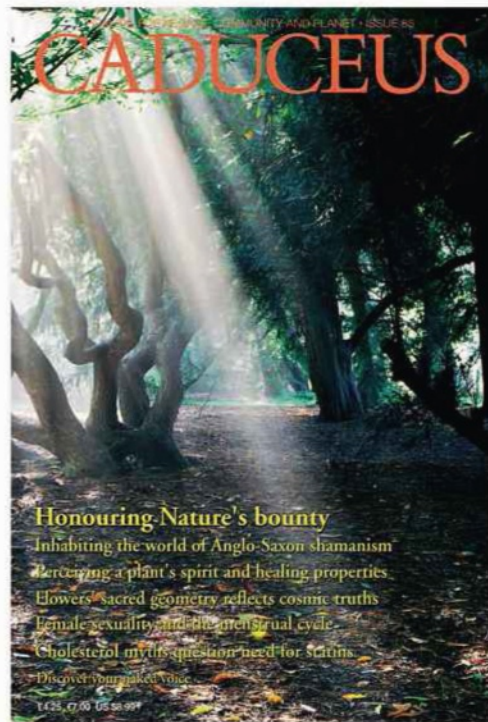
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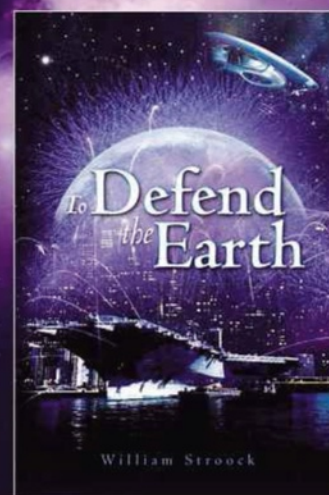
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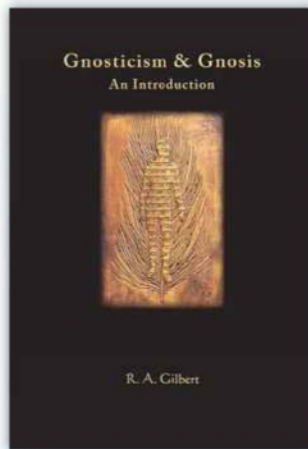
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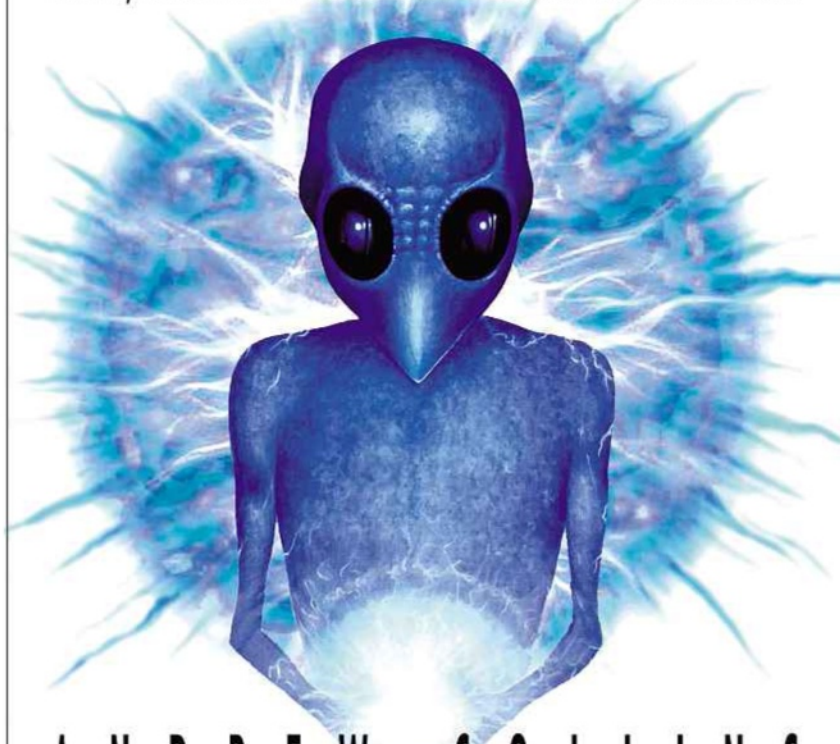
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Dear FT...

# letters



## Superstorm

I see from Richard Porter's letter that Whitley Strieber once wrote a book warning us about *The Coming Global Superstore* [FT300:74]. As an Amazon customer I can confidently say that we should have been a lot more terrified. Make that *Superstorm*.

**James Wright**  
By email

## Fnords

You rightly castigated TEDx ["Technology, Entertainment, Design" science forum] for its treatment of Rupert Sheldrake and Graham Hancock [FT302:14-16]. Not only did they originally censor the pair's talks, but statements made later still poured scorn on their ideas. Many of the tricks used by any orthodoxy against a perceived heresy were in play, from damning with faint praise to *ad hominem* attacks. I don't necessarily agree with either Hancock or Sheldrake, but that's my right.

It's also my right to think very little indeed of Derek Acorah, but the description of him in the same issue's Ghostwatch [FT302:20] as a "self-proclaimed medium" begs the question: "As opposed to what?" True, there are organisations such as the Spiritualist Association of Great Britain that train mediums, but they wouldn't claim that only their trainees should be considered genuine. In this case the use of the phrase "self-proclaimed" is clearly an attempt to belittle the man without providing justification. Whatever the rest of the article says, Ghostwatch has already put the boot in.

The late great Robert Anton Wilson described such words as "fnords" and they litter the orthodox media enough as it is – such as in descriptions of industrial disputes in which management are invariably reported as "stating" or "saying" while Union representatives only "claim" – without FT joining in. After all, you are just a self-proclaimed fortean publication, not recognised by any established fortean

## Simulacra corner



Gary Stocker photographed this rock formation – known locally as "the Sphinx" – on a walking holiday in the Brucegi Mountains, Transylvania, last September. He says that, "according to one local legend, the people who built the Sphinx in Egypt were inspired by this rock."

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society or institution, all of which is true regardless of the fact that no such organisations exist to recognise you.

**Steve Wilson**  
*Self-proclaimed chairman of The Moot with No Name: fortnightly pub talks on esoteric matters in central London. By email*

## Elder god attributes

- Regarding HP Lovecraft's statement that "To me, there is nothing but puerility in a tale in which the human form – and the local human passions and conditions and standards – are depicted as native to other worlds or universes" [FT301:67], it has to be remembered that Lovecraft's boogies also trafficked in and adopted "human conditions and standards" of various kinds. For example, in *At The Mountains of Madness* (1931),

the 'Elder Things' build a vast city in Antarctica and also create a slave race to do their heavy lifting. As we know from many other Lovecraft stories, his 'elder gods' also reproduce, interbreed with humans on various levels, travel, and even attempt to imitate humans and pass as human ("The Whisperer in Darkness", 1931). Some or all also certainly have 'organic life'.

- Regarding Greg May's letter about 'frogman' [FT302:69], readers might be interested to know that Jeremy Wade, host of the television programme 'River Monsters', recently devoted an episode to speculation that the living creature behind the mythical Japanese Kappa might be the giant Japanese salamander, which grow to 5ft (1.5m), can live for 70 years or more, and which has a large, wide mouth like the Kappa.

Incidentally, Wade also spent two hours attempting to prove that the Loch Ness Monster is actually the Greenland Shark, which live in coastal waters and may have entered the loch through the River Ness while young, the result being a small breeding population which still exists there.

- Lastly, the photo in 'Simulacra Corner' [FT302:69] may or may not look like "a zombie Maggie Thatcher", but it does look remarkably like popular images of West Virginia's Flatwoods Monster of 1952, right down to the ace-shaped head and primitive facial features.

**Joseph Barnes**  
By email

*Editor's note: FT correspondent Richard George also recognised the rug face as the Flatwoods Monster.*

## Berlin 'ghost'

This intriguing image was captured in September 2010 at Berlin's World War II bullet-scarred graveyard 'Friedhof I der Georgen-Parochialgemeinde'. To obtain a clear shot of the stonework I had pulled open the tomb's iron gate. Several pictures were taken from the same angle, though this is the only one graced by an otherworldly model. Obviously, such misty formations can be interpreted in various ways, but I see the face and upper torso of a hat-wearing figure glaring into my lens. Considering its central location, the cemetery evokes a secluded atmosphere and contains graves from as early as 1814. After surviving two world wars, it has fallen victim to Berlin's current overhaul and is due to be partly redeveloped into a playground. From this evidence, however, I'd say at least one long-term resident is poised to scare away the children.

**Mark Fernyhough**  
Berlin



it is best to consider the findings of all three before trying to work out what is actually going on. It had already been shown that if we are watching an arrow spinning and a tight flash of light happens just outside of the arrow's arc but exactly where the arrow is pointing to, then what we see isn't the arrow and flash in complete alignment but instead the arrow having gone a short distance past the flash of light. (It's as if there is some form of prediction going on by the brain and our processing is future-looking in nature – i.e. extrapolating). But if we stop the arrow moving at the exact moment of the flash of light, then surprisingly no lag happens; the arrow and flash are seen in alignment. (The notion of the brain predicting now begins to crumble).

Even more strangely, if the arrows are initially static and we then begin to move them left or right immediately after the flash of light, then we actually perceive them as moving in those directions before the flash happens. Combined, these findings allow us to argue that we do not predict the arrows' movements at all and our perception is not a future-looking process; if we did, then an arrow that stops as the light flashes should still be perceived as having gone further (the second experiment) and one has to ask: How can the brain predict movement if there is no movement to guide that prediction (as in the last experiment)?

The only way of explaining all three findings is to say that our brain is interpolating events in the past and building a story and our perception is very much the telling of that story. So when we literally see ourselves doing the impossible – for example “predicting correctly where to move the arrow before we see the flash” – then we have to be aware that this is a case of *post facto* story-telling and not a case of predicting or being influenced by the actual future. As Randles said, “We are the past when seen from the future”; but more precisely our world-view, our self-perception, is a construct based on what has already happened. There is a time warp – but para-

## First bigfoot report

In “Was Bigfoot an Ancient Lemurian?” [FT298:28-29], Ulrich Magin states that the so-called earliest specific “Big Foot” reference was in the *San Francisco Examiner* on 30 October 1955. However, librarian Jude Baldwin found that the *Examiner* article, “Giant Footprint Found On Mount Shasta,” was a reprint from another California newspaper, the *Siskiyou News*. This he tried to locate on microfilm, without success. It may well be a real article, but no one can find it in the actual newspaper from which it is said to originate.

**Daniel Perez**  
*Bigfoot Times, Los Angeles, California.*

## Mermaid correction

I enjoyed Matt Salusbury's report on the recent London Cryptozoology mini conference [FT302:22], but one of the elements of my talk was misconstrued slightly and thus misreported. The

Blomhoff specimen in Leiden is the only 'mermaid' specimen with good provenance linking it to Japan, but it is not a specimen created using a monkey. The only historic specimen that I've seen that has contained monkey parts is reported to be from India. I think Matt must have conflated those two pieces of information.

**Paolo Viscardi**  
*By email*

## Tricks of perception

Jenny Randles wrote about how future quantum states can effect past ones and that UFOs are some form of quantum artefact [FT301:27]. She also referred to situations where people seem to be aware of a presence before they actually see anything. Could this be us seeing photonic states because of future quantum physics research that synchronises future and past photons – or is there a much more personal explanation?

I would like to offer a more subjective alternative. Time is

relative and so are we. In fact, many psychologists are now asking not only “Who are we?” but also “When are we?” Some new research (summarised below) seems to be hinting that we are in fact not in the present at all but our self-awareness experiences are in the past. Because of this we can have the experience of a type of time-warp (like photons) wherein “perceived present events” seem to have been influenced by things that are perceived later. But because our present is actually the past and the things that have actually influenced that present have also already happened (but have not yet been seen), the deception is very convincing. Let me try and explain.

David Bagleman of Baylor College of Medicine in Houston, Texas, and Terence Sejnowski of the Salk Institute for Biological Studies in La Jolla, California, performed variants on an experiment into visual processing (see *New Scientist*, Feb 2013 pg 32-43). There are three experiments and

doxically it is a reverse of what has been speculated; and perhaps it also explains our “sensing before actually seeing”.

**Dr David Bellamy**

*By email*

Over the years I have been reading *FT* I have come to realise that the word “quantum” is a reliable indication that I am about to read some pseudo-scientific gibberish which stretches some poorly understood aspect – usually superposition/uncertainty – to breaking point, applies it to the human scale and then uses it to justify some utter horseshit. I was therefore disappointed to read the normally sensible Jenny Randles’s ‘UFO Casebook’ [FT301:27] in which she takes quantum entanglement of particles and then extrapolates bizarrely to justify everything from telepathy to UFOs and various other “woo”. I expect better from *FT*.

**Tim Greening-Jackson**

*Manchester*

## Clown in both senses

My word! Kevin Henderson’s unhinged rant [FT302:70] generated by my Jim Moseley obituary [FT297:28] manages to insult me repeatedly with every unflattering adjective and adverb in a spittle-flecked vocabulary, but without making any point more substantive than that he doesn’t approve of me or my assessment of Moseley’s career. I am relieved that my colleagues in ufology, anomalistics, and these pages [FT296:63, for example] fail to share his judgment of my life as a fortean researcher and writer.

My remarks, in fact, were inspired only by an effort to be reasonably objective. To do so, I had to deflate the sort of bloated hyperbole that the thought of Moseley tends to excite among the Kevin Hendersons of the planet. Especially in his last years, Jim Moseley and I were close. We remained in communication until about two weeks before he died, by which time his illness had overtaken him. I liked him, and I miss him, and I treasured his frequent, confiding letters. I do not, however, harbour any sentimental illusions that he was a saint or a genius.

While Henderson manages to resurrect every bubble-headed cliché about Moseley’s allegedly profound philosophical powers, the reality is that Moseley functioned as a clown, in both the good and bad senses of the word. He was intelligent without being intellectual, and he could be startlingly obtuse about what was going on around him. He was unread, even in UFO literature, to the point of near-cultural illiteracy. These failings were evident to all but the most adoring acolytes. Moseley and I have longtime friends and associates in common, and those who knew him far better than Henderson have not quarrelled with my assessment. The Moseley I wrote about was one they recognised.

For a full critique of Moseley’s not very satisfying memoir, *Shockingly Close to the Truth*, see my essay “The Trivialist” (*International UFO Reporter* 27:1, 2002: 15-19, 29-30), which outlines the book’s shortcomings, inaccuracies and contradictions, citing chapter and verse. (Moseley didn’t get me right either, but I decided that wasn’t worth going into.) Moseley, who was understandably unhappy with the piece, did not attempt a rejoinder, even privately; indeed, how could he? Among much else, Henderson would learn – no doubt to his astonishment – that, Moseley’s slanderous charge notwithstanding, the late contactee George Hunt Williamson, for whom Moseley harboured an obsessive, never fully explained antipathy, did not in fact murder his wife. As I document, that wasn’t the only thing Moseley got wrong, but a false accusation of homicide is surely unique in the history of ufology.

**Jerome Clark**

*Canby, Minnesota*

## Apocalypse Not

I enjoyed your survey of the 2012 Apocalypse that wasn’t [FT300:33-43]. Aren’t the believers and arch-sceptics really two sides of the same coin? Both deal in telling everyone else what to think or what not to think, both dream of being the one person that everyone listens to. After the non-event of 2012 inevitably follows the great “I told you so” of 2013. The believers

egotistically want the “big event” with whatever answers it brings within their own lifetime, whereas the sceptics with equal egotism want to have the definitive, final word on the matter within their own lifetime. Both are equally futile and both are arguably just coping strategies for dealing with the great uncertainty that envelops both collective and individual human existence.

Believers want the End Times to come now so we can all get it over and done with; sceptics prefer to leave such matters to scientific ‘others’ and project the End Times comfortably outside their own lifetimes, conveniently giving themselves licence to global-warm and litter their days away without responsibility!

**Mark Graham**

*Huddersfield, West Yorkshire*

“Apocalypse Not” raises some interesting questions. Instead of being “taken in” by unconscious forces we might instead take some time to really reflect on their meaning. The Apocalypse could be pointing to the destruction of redundant inner and cultural attitudes rather than the literal destruction of the Earth. Our attitude of thinking we can fix everything rationally without reference to the ‘heart’ requires compensation and the archetype may be letting us know. Actual physical destruction can of course occur when unconsciously driven by such a force, such as happened in the case of the Heaven’s Gate cult. All the more reason to reflect on the real meaning of Apocalypse and give it some room to see where it points.

**Bill Clark**

*London*

## Bedtime stories

In just one night of reading before bedtime I learned of strange mixed-breed beings described in *Jewish Tales of the Ancient Times* that included “having a human head and the body of a lion” as

well as “beings with human faces and horses’ feet” that supposedly existed before the Deluge, according to von Daniken’s *The Return of the Gods*. Then I read an account in William J Birnes’s *The Everything UFO Book* of retired New Mexico State Police Officer Gabe Valdez coming upon a mutilated cow with a black unmarked helicopter hovering overhead. According to Valdez – whose police unit frightened away the helicopter – the mutilated cow was found to be pregnant with the foetus still in the womb. When a veterinarian opened the womb, he found a calf foetus with the body of a cow and the head of a human being! This prompted US Senators Mitch McConnell, Lindsey Graham and Charles Grassley to introduce a bill in the Senate making it a crime to interbreed humans and animals.

**Greg May**

*Orlando, Florida*

## Isle of the dead

I was interested to read about the vampires of Santorini called vrykolakes [FT299:72-74]. I have a 1945 film called *Isle of the Dead* starring the great Boris Karloff that deals with the same subject. People confined to an island are dying – is it due to the plague, or something else that visits them during the night? You’ll have to get the film to find out.

**Jim Price**

*Liverpool, Merseyside*



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

## Kentish haunt

The following experiences took place around 10 years ago now and span around five years.

When I first met him, my husband rented the top part of an amazing 14th century manor house in rural Kent. The house was the site of a well-documented unsolved murder in the 1980s and perhaps this was why it was heavily alarmed with movement sensors and had steel bars on all the windows.

Clearly, with a house of this age there were quite a few creaks and groans from the old central heating system, wooden beams and floors, squirrels in the walls and even a resident deathwatch beetle, but the following events are less explicable.

The young woman who rented our flat previously had left in a hurry due to supposed strange phenomena and refused ever to return. On setting foot in the place, a thick, heavy, otherworldly feeling was immediately experienced.

Early in his occupancy, my husband was woken in the middle of the night by the heavy wooden bedroom door banging open. A white mist floated momentarily at the top of the door-frame and as it dispersed it left behind a tangible drop in temperature and a build-up of static electricity so strong that it made his hair stand on end.

Whilst living there we had an immense number of electrical disturbances. Lights switched themselves on and off and so did our television, which we still use and has never behaved oddly since. Our answer phone (which also still works perfectly) developed an eccentric habit of ringing the previous caller back to play them their own message. We once sat, dumbstruck, listening to this happen.

Of all the rooms, I always found the bathroom/toilet the creepiest; one often had the sense of not being alone there. Guests would comment that they did not feel comfortable there with the feeling of someone looking over their shoulder.

One night, a few months after I had moved in, I got up in the night to go to the toilet and while washing my hands I felt a build up of static prickling on my neck and shoulders, along with that feeling of being watched. I finished, walked to the door, and

glanced back before I opened it to see the room inexplicably bathed in an intense red glow. It was also suddenly very hot and the white plastic clothes rack that stood in the middle of the room was rocking violently from side to side. Fumbling with the door, I got out into the corridor, which felt cold in comparison, and ran back to the bedroom.

It was a terrifying experience even though nothing awful actually happened, but I was also puzzled by the apparent rise in temperature when accounts like this are normally accompanied by a drop in temperature.

The owners used to go abroad for long periods and leave us

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**“My husband returned to what looked like a scene from a horror film”**

to look after the house. During these periods we regularly heard the sound of the heavy oak doors downstairs, which we left latched, banging open and shut during the night, and footsteps running along the corridor beneath us. These were so apparently ‘real’ that we could feel the vibration along our floor. We went to investigate every time, shutting off the active movement sensors and punching in the alarm code as we did so, but we never found anything, and the doors were sometimes wide open, despite the movement sensors not being activated.

It is not for me to comment on the experiences of the owners of the house, but I do know that their children were scared and used to pile in to sleep together wherever possible.

On one occasion, shortly before we moved from the flat, my husband returned from work to what looked like a scene from a horror film, with crimson splatter marks all over the kitchen floor and ceiling. It looked like a murder scene – but it turned out to be

tomato ketchup! The remains of the glass bottle covered the floor, but none of the bottles next to or in front of it on the shelf had been damaged or even displaced. No one was in the flat at the time (as far as we know) and the ketchup radius spanned the entire kitchen, some 12ft (3.6m), with the stains on the ceiling 5ft (1.5m) or so from where the bulk of the bottle lay. It was as if the bottle had somersaulted out of its place on the shelf and exploded with force in mid-air.

Despite it being at times an unnerving house, it was also quite a magical place. My husband has never forgotten waking one night and looking out of the leaded windows at the lawn, which was bathed in bright moonlight. In the middle of a circle of seemingly attendant rabbits sat an enormous hare. Not a paranormal sight, but nonetheless a surreal one.

We do miss the house, but we're pleased to have been a only a small, brief part of its long and strange history.

**Name on file**  
*By email*



## Invisible guide

In the early 1990s when I was a 20-something student, I had an early-morning cleaning job at St Andrews University. I was working as holiday cover over the end of the Christmas break, so when I arrived I'd be the first – and only – person in the building.

It was in the School of Divinity. I had my own set of keys and would let myself in at the back of the building, through what I remember as being a relatively modern extension, ('relative modern' for this part of St Andrews probably means 'built in the 1800s' or something like that) with a kitchen and staffroom and so on. From there you accessed the older part of the premises (dating from the 16th century, I see from the Internet), which had a more unusual layout. At the front there was a large open hall that ran the height of the building, and opening onto this space were partly enclosed corridors with staff offices running off from them, as well as the staircases between floors, all forming a mezzanine.

On my first morning at this job, I started off cleaning the staff room, without incident. Going through to the older part of the hall, at 7am in the middle of a Scottish winter, it was still dark – it seemed almost pitch black, in fact, but I started up the mezzanine stairs, confident that I would soon find a light switch. However, the further up I went the darker it got, and it wasn't long before I could no longer see the way. As I backtracked, searching for some lights but unable to find them, it occurred to me that I was all alone in a dark and unknown place, with unseen stairs and who knows what other obstacles surrounding me, and I began to feel afraid. The atmosphere in that building – when the lights were on – was actually very restful and unusually pleasant; but even now, 20 years later, I can remember the smell of the old wood panels and dust and the feeling of cold sweat and claustrophobia as I stood there, almost panicking.

At this point I heard, quite clearly, a voice in my head that said: "It's just behind you". I blundered backwards and yes, there in a side corridor off the main stairwell was a light switch. I turned it on and hurried further upstairs aiming, I think, to get as

much illumination into the place as I could. On the next level up, however, I was back in the dark. I hadn't put on the lights in the main hall space, just the ones for the (covered) corridor below, and not much light reached the next floor. Upstairs it was almost as dark as it had been lower down, and for some reason – perhaps because it's such an old building – the position of the light switch on the upper floor didn't quite correspond with the one on the level below.

I was thoroughly spooked by now, and not just because of the dark. Again I heard the same voice saying: "I think you'll find it's a little to your left," and once again, he was absolutely right. (I say 'he' because this was not my usual internal dialogue speaking; the voice was that of a pleasantly cultured, soft-spoken, middle-aged to elderly man.) And that was it, really. I'm aware that hearing voices isn't a particularly good sign of anything, but nothing like this had happened to me before and it hasn't happened again since. I'm not saying it was a ghost, but whoever was speaking did give me some pretty specific (and time-specific!), useful information, and was quite undeterred by not actually being there, in any corporeal sense.

**Kaye Spence**  
*By email*

## Shining graves

Regarding the photograph by Daz Marks of a shaft of light, not visible at the time, appearing in a photo of a grave [FT21:72], I would like to document a similar experience. In 1971 I moved to Lower Hutt in New Zealand's North Island to attend Theology College. The college was located in an old complex built some time in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century by a bizarre Christian fundamentalist sect known as the Commonwealth Covenant Church. The College I was to attend was part of the Assemblies of God Church, which then owned the complex.

Soon after arriving in Lower Hutt, I met a group of young men living in nearby Wellington. They were 'heavy' dudes fooling around with 'black magic' and listening to heavy metal music. One night we visited the cemetery situated across the road from the Theology College complex. This was very old and held the remains of members of the Commonwealth Covenant

Church who had gone on to Glory. One of my new acquaintances had a simple instamatic camera, a fairly new photographic innovation at the time. The guys lined up, each behind a tombstone, and asked me to take some photos of them. When the photos were developed, a ray of light was seen emanating from behind each headstone. These rays were certainly not visible that night and I doubt very much that the young man who owned the camera had the know-how or the intelligence to tamper with the film. Also it was an instamatic camera, which I understood to be tamper-proof.

I have no explanation for these mysterious rays of light emanating from graves but the photographic evidence is undeniable.

**Jonathon Midgley**  
*Brisbane, Australia*

Editor's note: though Daz Marks's photograph was probably the result of a stray hair or fibre [see FT224:73], this has no bearing on the photograph described here.

## Future message

Back in the mid-Eighties I settled down one Sunday afternoon to watch a Bond film on telly. During an ad break one of the adverts suddenly stopped mid-flow and was replaced by what claimed to be a message from the future. The transmission lasted around three minutes and used amazing visuals (similar to modern CGI and morphing effects). I can't remember the details, but it spoke of breakthroughs in medicine and technology, and I'm sure the Internet. I'm sure the message also spoke of the environment and the problems that the future might hold. The general feel was that things would be fine in the years to come. I thought it might

be some kind of ad campaign, but the Bond film came back on a few minutes further on than it should have been, as if the message had generally interrupted the transmission.

Next day I spoke of this to my schoolmates who all had watched the film, but none had seen what I had witnessed, and even claimed that the film restarted when it was meant to after the ads, with no interruptions. I am sure I didn't fall asleep or daydream it. Has anyone else experienced anything similar?

**Ben Torgersen**  
*Oxfordshire*

## Aerial Feathers

Back in 1974 I was captain of an oil tanker. One time, we were drifting in the eastern Mediterranean while tank-cleaning. In order to release an officer to supervise this operation, for a few days I took over the bridge at 0600 hours. Dawn was just breaking and the sky was beautifully clear and with the beginnings of a pale light in which most of the stars could still be seen. The eye-catching thing was a group of 'feathers' at about 80 degrees altitude. Not just ordinary feathers but plumes, like stylised ostrich feathers, together like a Fleur de Lys. It was there in the same part of the sky each morning when I was on the bridge at that time, for about three or four days. After that we moved and I had more important things to occupy me. Although I spent much of my working life watching the sky I have never seen anything like it, nor have I ever found reference to such a phenomenon. I wonder if anybody else has had a similar experience. I was under rather a lot of pressure at the time and was very worried; I always wondered if there was a connection.

**Doug Hall**  
*Knaresborough, North Yorkshire*

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# POLICE

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

## 23. THE THIEVES' SUPPER

Ned Wright, a young London hooligan, was quite incorrigible at school, and imprisoned for theft not long after. He became a prize-fighter, and later a sailor, but his nautical career did not last long: he was severely flogged and imprisoned for some misdemeanour. Ned married a young woman named Maria Beard, but he remained a drunkard and treated her cruelly. Although Ned still occasionally fought in the ring, his main source of income came from burglary.

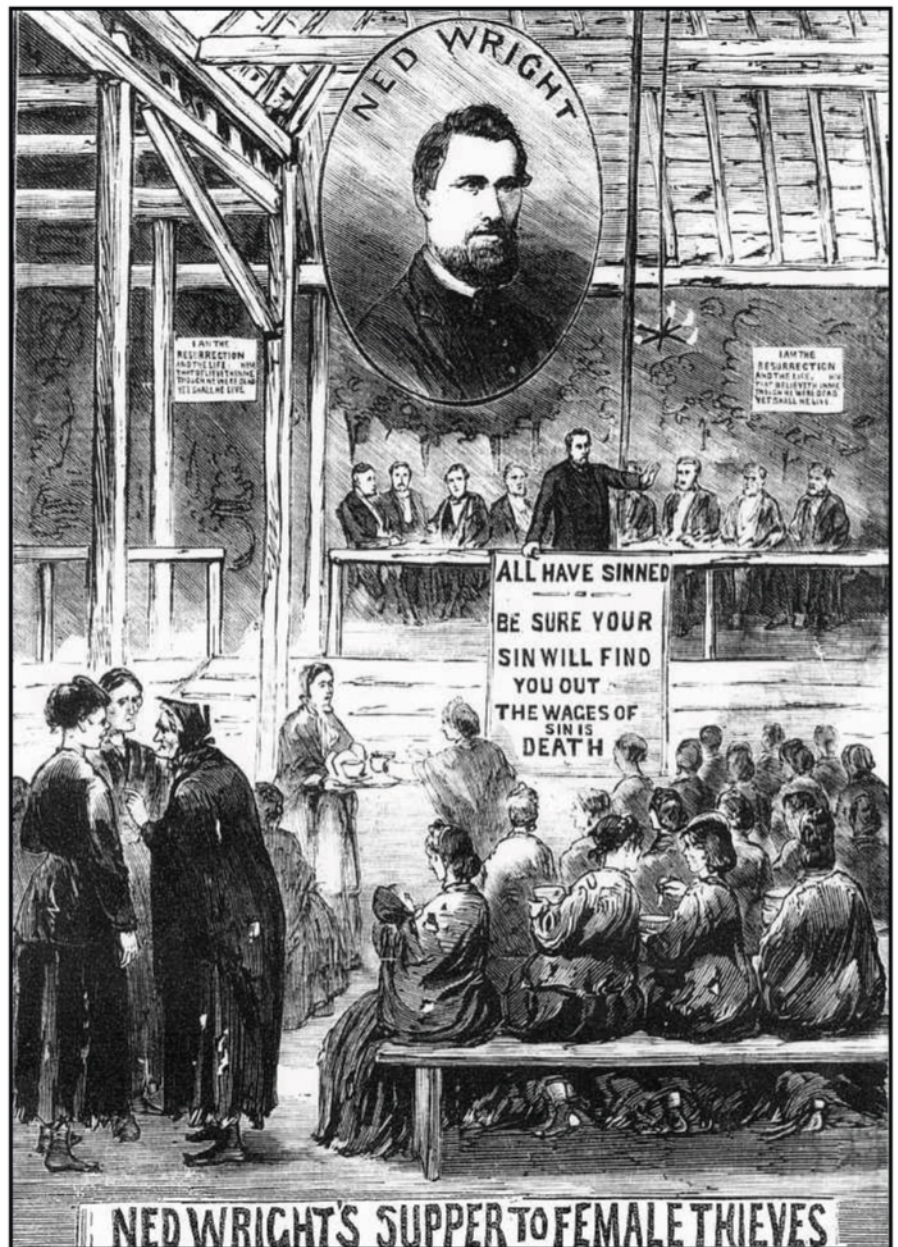
One day, Ned attended a street prayer-meeting, an experience that made this London street rough think about religion, probably for the first time. He brought Maria to another meeting, where they both became converted Christians. But although Ned now had religion, he could not find a job. Nobody wanted to employ a former thief and drunkard. When Ned had spent 13 weeks searching for work, he and his wife prayed for food, and Lo! they found a penny loaf in the cupboard. This was clearly Divine intervention, and Ned decided to spend the remainder of his life in the service of the Lord. In spite of being quite uneducated, he began preaching in the streets, and no amount of derision could distract this singular lay preacher from his mission. There were already churches and cathedrals for the wealthy, Ned reasoned, but what God wanted him to do was to convert London's thieves and vagabonds to the Christian faith.

Despairing of persuading the London thieves to attend his sermons, Ned invented the "Thieves' Supper". At these extraordinary religious meetings, convicted thieves were invited to a supper of strong pea soup and loaves of bread. In January 1870, the first recorded Thieves' Supper was held at Ned Wright's Gospel Hall in the New Cut, Lambeth. No less than 220 thieves sat at table, eagerly awaiting the soup and bread. As Ned was overseeing proceedings, he received a fair

bit of 'chaff' from his dinner guests, which he put a stop to by saying: "You're going to have a clinking clump of bread each, and if you make your jaws ache now, they'll be no use when you get the tommy [bread]." When Ned gave the sign, the bread and soup were devoured with the rapidity of extreme hunger.

When the thieves had cleared the table, the sturdy, muscular Ned Wright began his sermon. For nearly an hour, he kept his

audience spellbound with his adventurous religious parallels, using anecdotes from his own career. When he had been a pugilist, a boxing promoter had offered him £1,000 to throw a fight, but Ned smote the Philistine and threw him out of the house. Another time, Ned had rescued a boy from drowning in the Thames; were the thieves in the audience not as helpless as the drowning lad, and as dependent on him for their salvation? He told



ABOVE: Ned Wright's Supper for Female Thieves, from the *Illustrated Police News*, 5 February 1870.

STRATED  
 WEEKLY RECORD  
**NEWS**



ABOVE: A Thieves' Supper, from the *Illustrated Police News*, 13 December 1884.

them how the loaf had miraculously appeared in his cupboard, and how his first-born son had been taken from him to test his faith. After some rousing hymns had been sung, the slack-jawed thieves trudged away into the night, their bellies full of soup and bread, and their minds equally saturated with Ned's odd religious ideas.

Ned Wright was the man of the day. Many journalists praised him for his practical Christianity, and he found sponsors for further Thieves' Suppers at the Gospel Hall. Female thieves and juvenile delinquents got suppers of their own, so that they would not have to consort with the more hardened wretches. Although the thieves were keen to get their hands on some more promising food, Ned strictly adhered to his 'bread and soup' formula, with which he was able to nourish large congregations at very little cost. Ned was also praised for his philanthropy. Through one of his sponsors, he purchased 30 costermongers' barrows, and tried to recruit as many thieves to pull them. Each thief would be given a shilling each to begin business for himself: "Many a thriving salesman has risen from so small a capital to independence".

Another of his schemes, outlined in a remarkable advertisement, was even more

adventurous:

**HONEST EMPLOYMENT FOR THIEVES**

*Sir - Permit me to solicit your helping hand to temporarily rescue poor thieves from their miserable position, hundreds of whom are at this moment ready to work at carrying advertisement boards in the streets, also delivering circulars &c &c at a small return.*

*Apply to Edward Wright. Boards and men always in readiness.*

But as Wright became something of a London celebrity, there was a media backlash against 'the converted burglar' and his bizarre activities. Was it not counterproductive to nourish the criminal classes, so that they emerged from the Gospel Hall sturdy and well fed, ready for burglary and murder? "Supper for thieves indeed! The only proper meal is what our forefathers would have given them - Old English whipping-cheer!" exclaimed *Punch*. The clergy found Ned's liberal use of Cockney rhyming slang in his sermons more than a little unsettling. And, they reasoned, his religious oratory was quite blasphemous. Once, he claimed that after his conversion, the bruiser Mike Madden had tried to break his jaw for refusing to fight him in the ring, but Mike's clenched fist had been averted by the hand of Providence. Through the same

means, Ned had been saved from a large stone that an evil-minded person had directed against his head during one of his sermons. In another sermon, he described how a kind ship's corporal had once comforted him with some water after he had received two dozen lashes. Foaming at the mouth, the evangelist continued: "Yes, he pitied me, and gave me to drink; but when He was dying on the Cross and cried out, 'I thirst!', what did they give Him? Vinegar and gall on a sponge! And yet He forgave His enemies and saved the world!"

Ned Wright remained active throughout the 1870s and 1880s, holding many Thieves' Suppers in London and the provinces. In 1873, he published his autobiography *The Story of My Life*. In 1876, work was begun on his new Mission Hall, in George Street, Clerkenwell. In 1886, he advertised a Free Tea for Rogues, Thieves, and Vagabonds, at the Lillie Road Mission Hall, West Brompton. Not less than 150 thieves enjoyed a hearty meal, and were afterwards treated to Wright's exhortations. But in the 1890s, Ned gradually sunk into obscurity. The more positive of his ideas were absorbed by charities controlled by the mainstream clergy; they held the last recorded Thieves' Supper at the St Giles' Christian Mission in December 1891.

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# Why Fortean?



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

FT toes no party line.

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# PHENOMENOMIX

ARTHUR MACHEN  
PART 1

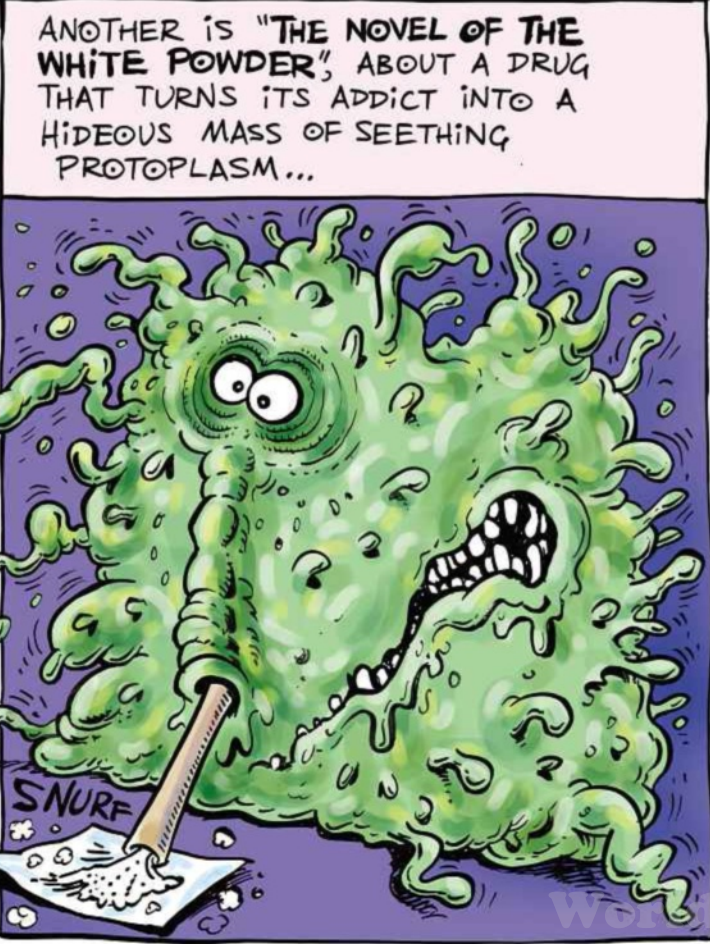
HUNT EMERSON & KEVIN JACKSON



LARGELY FORGOTTEN SINCE THE 1920s, THE WEIRD FICTION OF ARTHUR MACHEN HAS RECENTLY BEEN REDISCOVERED IN A BIG WAY! HE HAS SOME IMPRESSIVE FANS...



MACHEN WROTE MANY CLASSICS OF SPOOKY FICTION, INCLUDING "THE INMOST LIGHT," ABOUT A MAD SCIENTIST WHO EXTRACTS THE SOUL FROM HIS BEAUTIFUL WIFE, SO THAT SHE BECOMES POSSESSED BY A DEMON!

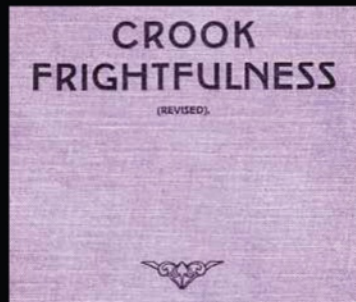


BUT MACHEN'S INVOLVEMENT WITH THE OCCULT AND SUPERNATURAL WASN'T JUST A MATTER OF WEIRD FICTION...



NEXT TIME: HORRIBLE VISIONS! THE GREAT GOD PAN! AND (INEVITABLY...) ME AGAIN!

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# FORTEAN TIMES 305

ON SALE 15 AUG 2013



HUGO PIETTE

## TALES FROM THE VAULT

EACH MONTH WE SEND *FORTEAN TIMES* FOUNDER BOB RICKARD DOWN INTO THE DARKEST, COBWEB-RIDDEN DEPTHS OF THE VAULTS OF FORTEAN TOWERS IN SEARCH OF STORIES FROM *FT*'S PAST.

### AUGUST 1973

This month, a decomposed body of a young man was found on a beach at Crackington Haven, Cornwall. A week later "a human leg joint" washed up on the same beach. No clarification followed as to whether that was a knee or ankle, or left or right leg... but that's a minor issue. A county pathologist, Mr FDM Hocking, said they failed to make a connection between the body and the joint – presumably that included checking whether the body was obviously missing any lower limbs – and so both 'finds' were given a burial. This odd little story stuck in my memory because 'hock' refers to an animal's lower leg joint... and the beach was called Strangles Beach. **FT25:45**

From lexilinks to coincidences: here's another little story from the same month that stretches credibility. Alan Bricknell broke into a factory at Castle Vale near Birmingham and had to be rescued from the blazing building. In court later, he pleaded guilty to the charge of burglary, but not guilty to the arson to which the prosecution said he resorted when he couldn't find keys to the safe. A patrolling policeman spotted the smoke in the early hours of the morning, but it was not until several hours later that they saw a man on the first floor break a window and call for help. However, the court heard evidence that the main seat of the fire was on the floor below where the hapless burglar was trapped... and that there were other fires "independent of the main seat". I was put in mind of a story (possibly in Fort somewhere) of a thief pursued into a hardware store where he 'just happened' to pass under a scythe as it fell. Inept criminals, divine retribution or coincidence? Why not all three? **FT2:7**

### AUGUST 1983

When I was writing up my reports on the 'greasy devils' panics in Sri Lanka (August 2011), and later in Malaysia (December 2011), I overlooked a similar event that happened this month in north-west India, which may have been a precursor.

The devils – 'grease yakas' in Sinhalese, and 'orang minyak' in Malay – range from local sex pests, thieves and secret service operatives (all rumoured to coat themselves in grease) to demons and black magicians who are equally uncatchable. In several Punjabi villages not far from Amritsar, a

disturbing crime wave was blamed upon oil-coated fiends they called "black underwear wallahs" (*kale kachche wale*). No perpetrators were ever caught, but such was the civil panic that the state had to mount rescue operations to recover policemen taken hostage by frightened communities. **FT73:11, 281:46-49, 287:16-17**

### AUGUST 1993

Rows about what food is kosher or not are nothing new. One of the oddest broke out in Israel this month over "dinosaur milk" following the claim by the Tara dairy chain that sales of normal cows' milk had tripled since they featured an image of a dinosaur on the cartons (as part of *Jurassic Park* media fever). The ultra-orthodox Agudat organisation which regulates the official kosher certification – without which no food can be declared fit for Jews to consume – ordered Tara to remove the dinosaur "or lose your Glatt Kosher certification".

Speaking for the Aguda Religious High Court, Rabbi Zvi Gefner declared: "This is seeing sacrilege [...] Dinosaurs symbolise a heresy of the creation of the world because they reflect Darwinistic theories. We, as observant Jews, count the beginning of the world from 5,753 years ago." The Tara dairy – a cooperative that produces 15 per cent of Israel's milk – declined to comment. Usually, we hear about Christian Creationists, so this is doubly interesting. Gefner went on proudly to claim: "In our community, when someone buys an encyclopedia, the first thing he does is take out anything that is against our religion." **FT71:7**

### AUGUST 2003

As August closed, archaeologists announced that Britain had a new Celtic deity, originally reported in *FT* and elsewhere as Senua. This previously unknown goddess was first revealed in 2002, when a cache of votive offerings and gold coins was found beside a third century AD midden near Baldock, in Hertfordshire. Since then, study by experts in the British Museum of the severely eroded plaques and jewellery – some silver with gold inscriptions – showed she was probably a variation of the Romano-British Minerva worshipped at Bath. By the time the hoard was exhibited (in November), her name was also recorded as Senuna or Sena. **FT178:20**

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